No Respite from Racism: 1936 in the Evolution of German Racial Politics

by

Lawrence Baron

On August 1st 1936, the day the Summer Olympic Games opened in Berlin, an An reporter for the liberal magazine *The Nation* conveyed his impression of conditions in Gerlinon Sees no Jewish heads being chopped off, or even roundly cudgeled.

The people smile, are polite and sing with gusto in beer gardens. Board and lodging are cheap, and abundant, and no one is swindled by grasping hotel and shop proprietors. Everyt terrifyingly clean and the visitor likes it all." $\frac{1}{2}$

To the outside world, it appeared that Germany had resolved its "Jewish problem" by peaceful means. Compared to the sporadic acts of violence perpetrated against Jews to Stormtroopers during the first two years of Hitler's rule. the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 so "moderate" by merely stripping German Jews of their citizenship. severely restricting Jewish-economic and social interactions, and defining who was considered Jewish by a more standard than had been employed in the 1933 Civil Service Law,-namely, designating Jews as with three rather than just one Jewish grandparent. Hitler arrogantly declared that with this secular solution it may be possible still to create a level ground on which the German people mean a tolerable relation towards the Jewish people. Although describing the laws as "the heav blows for the Jews in Germany," the leadership of the *Reichsvertretung*, the official organ representing German Jewry, hoped that the legislation would "create a basis on which a to relationship becomes possible between the German and the Jewish people."

Indeed, a rational political analyst could conclude that there was no significant rea persecute the Jews by 1936. After all, many people believed that the level of anti-Semitism ro fell with the health of the German economy. In 1933 unemployment had reached its zenith, t increasing the demagogic appeal of Hitler's call for the Aryanization of Jewish property. Three

later, the remilitarization of Germany and massive public works projects like the building *Autobahn* had eliminated unemployment and restored Germany's international stature. Mol Hitler's Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht was hesitant to Aryanize larger Jewish compan fear of hurting German commerce by losing the expertise and international connections cowners. The goal of German anti-Semitic policies in this period was to encourage German Jemigrate, but the numbers of German Jews fleeing the country dropped to a low of 21,000 in after peaking at 37,000 in 1933. The staging of the Olympics in Germany also augured well Jews. In June of 1935 the Ministry of Propaganda ordered that anti-Semitic signs be remove major German roads to avoid offending foreign visitors in 1936. When Count Baillet-Latour International Olympic Committee noticed such signs on the road to Garmisch-Partenkirchen before the opening of the Winter Olympics, he demanded that Hitler personally order that the be taken down as a gesture "of the most elementary courtesy." Hitler grudgingly complied even prohibited Germans from engaging in acts of collective retaliation against Jews followi assassination of a Nazi party official in Switzerland by a Jewish medical student the day before Winter Games began on February 6, 1936.

The problem was that Hitler did not make traditional diplomatic, economic, or political considerations his major priority. Instead, he viewed the state as the instrument tl which the Aryan race would enlarge its population and territory, genetically purify its own enslave inferior races like the Poles and Russians, and segregate, deport, or eventually lic asocial and dangerous rival racial groups like the Gypsies and Jews respectively. To be sudelayed the pace and scope of achieving these goals as he consolidated Germany's eco military, and political power between 1933 and 1936. He gladly reaped the international relations benefits of hosting the 1936 Olympics. Nevertheless, the same year marks establishment of institutions and the implementation of policies which signified the escalation military and racial aims which would culminate in the outbreak of World War Two in 1939 a systematic genocide of European Jewry in 1941.

Even though Hitler outlawed reprisals against the Jews in the wake of the assassina Switzerland, he blamed the murder on "the hate inspired influence of our Jewish foes" and a them of trying to dominate the German people. $\frac{12}{12}$ In August, the month when the Summer C games began in Berlin, Hitler issued a Memorandum for a Four Year Economic Plan to Germany to wage war against Bolshevism and International Jewry. He concluded his p recommending that the *Reichstag* pass two laws: " (1) a law providing the death pena economic sabotage, and (2) A law making the whole of Jewry liable for all damage inflic individual specimens of this community of criminals upon the German economy and thus up German people." $\frac{13}{10}$ The dire consequences of the Plan for the Jews emerged quickly with Go appointment as the head of the Four Year Plan. Unlike Schacht who valued the role of foreign in Germany's economic recovery, Goering sought a German economy that was independent world commerce and could rely on its own resources to prepare for war. This allowed Goe Aryanize larger Jewish companies without worrying about the repercussions such a chaownership might have on foreign trade. Moreover, Hitler's legal recommendations becan subsequent basis for the economic reprisals exacted against German Jewry in the wa Kristallnacht. One decree promulgated on November 12, 1938 effectively eliminated the Jew the German economy by banning Jewish ownership of retail stores, Jewish sales of goods at "n of all sorts, fairs, or exhibitions," and Jewish management of most enterprises. The san Goering assessed a one billion *Reichsmark* "atonement fine" against the German Jewish com for allegedly instigating the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by a young Polish Je incident which Hitler cited as the catalyst for the widespread arson and pillaging of businesses, homes, and synagogues which has become known as Kristallnacht. 91 Jews had killed in the rampage; hundreds of synagogues had been burned; and, thousands of Jewish had been destroyed. In reality the pogrom had been requested by Goebbels, approved by Hitle carried out by members of the SA and the SS. $\frac{14}{}$

The leading role of the SS in what were supposedly spontaneous outbursts of mob vene indicated that the riots and the subsequent internment of nearly 30,000 German Jewish mer legally sanctioned actions. The foundations for this policy had been laid in June of 1936, 2 r

before the opening of the Berlin Olympics, when the *Reichsfuehrer* of the SS Heinrich Himml been appointed the chief of all German Police Forces. As Saul Friedlander has noted, the me the police and the SS "signaled an unmistakable step toward the ever increasing intervention (Nazi) party in the state's sphere of competence and a shift in power from the traditiona structure to the party." Earlier in 1936, the Security Service of the SS had established an off Internal Intelligence which housed a subsection to monitor the activities of secular, religiou Zionist Jews for evidence of subversive activities. One of the functions of the Subsection II 1 it was officially designated, was to compile a card index to identify every Jew residing in Ger During the *Kristallnacht* riots, this data bank facilitated the targeting of Jewish businesse residences, as well as the temporary internment of 30,000 Jewish men in concentration cal serve as a not so subtle warning that it was time for Jews to emigrate. In this way Hitler train his perception of Jews into reality. He had castigated the Jews as a "community of criminals" in and now the SS had taken the next logical step by placing tens of thousands of Jewish males preventive detention. 15

The most immediate repercussion of holding the Summer Olympic Games in Germany w internment of Sinti and Roma gypsies living in the vicinity of Berlin. Popular prejudice a Gypsies, whom most Europeans, let alone Germans, stereotyped as disreputable fortune-pickpockets, scam artists, and troublesome vagrants, was probably more virulent than Germa Semitism because the majority of German Jews had acculturated and achieved considerable acconomic mobility in the previous century. Nazi racial anthropologists classified Gypsies as Aryans whose racial purity had been contaminated through miscegenation with the diverse groups they had encountered during centuries of nomadic wandering. Although not spece mentioned in the July 1933, "Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Defect Hitler's 1934 order to terminate the pregnancies of "hereditarily ill women, or women whose pregnant by a hereditarily ill partner," Gypsies confined in hospitals and mental instituter or routinely forced to undergo sterilization operations or abortions to prevent the births of combine whom Hereditary Health Courts decided were genetically destined to become unproductive withe state. In November of 1933, many Gypsies were arrested as "asocials" under the provision

recently adopted "Law Against Dangerous Habitual Criminals." In a commentary on the Nure Laws of 1935, "Gypsies, Negroes, and their bastards" were classified as non-Aryans and subject the same kinds of discrimination applicable to Jews. In May of1936, the "Central Office to Central Office to Central Office" was opened in Munich. Its primary task was to compile a list of Central of Central Office in Germany. In June and July of that year, the Berlin police apprehended 600 Sir Roma and interned them in a camp located near a sewage dump and cemetery in the subtemporary. The reason behind this mass arrest was to remove the Gypsies from the streets of where it was feared they might attract negative publicity from the foreign press during the Central Office to Cen

The inclusion of "Negroes and their bastards" as non-Aryans for the purposes of enforcing Nuremberg Laws foreshadowed the sterilization of members of this highly visible minority in This paralleled the eugenics program introduced in 1933 to prevent "useless eaters" and unde groups from propagating. During the Olympic Year, over 63,000 disabled patients in German asylums and hospitals were sterilized and 127 of these unsuspecting victims died from compliresulting from the surgical procedure. 17 The debate within government circles over whet eradicate the "inferior" gene pool of otherwise healthy children of mixed African and G parentage by extending the sterilization program to them too apparently intensified in 1936 idea of African racial inferiority initially developed as a pseudo-scientific justification for G colonization of parts of Africa in the late 19th Century. The German public had been infuria France's deployment of African Colonial Troops in the post World War One occupation Rhineland. Unsubstantiated reports of numerous rapes of German women by these black s became grist for the propaganda mill of those who hated the Weimar Republic although or such rape was ever documented. Hitler ranted in *Mein Kampf* that it was the Jews who broug Negro to the Rhine" with the intent to bastardize the white race. The African soldiers fa approximately 600 children with German women. The Nazis dubbed these mulatto childre Rhineland Bastards." In 1933 Herman Goering ordered that they be identified, and register racial anthropologist conducted a study of 27 of them and concluded that they exhibited beh and intellectual abnormalities. In 1935 the necessity of sterilizing these otherwise healthy c

was proposed by an Advisory Committee for Population and Racial Policy. The German occupa the Rhineland by German Troops in March of 1936 increased the numbers of Afro-German c under Nazi control. The humiliating victories of African-American athletes in the Summer C Games further exacerbated the animosity Hitler felt towards blacks. Although there w legislation passed concerning the Afro-Germans, the Gestapo rounded-up approximately 400 German children and had them sterilized.

The Third Reich believed homosexual men posed a serious threat to the German body as well. Though Himmler briefly suspended their persecution during the Summer Olympic Ga avert incidents involving foreign visitors, ¹⁹ he founded the Federal Security Office for Com Abortion and Homosexuality" two months later. Sexual relations between men had been pros as a criminal act carrying a maximum of a five-year jail sentence under Paragraph 175 of the C Legal Code since the unification of Germany in 1871. The campaign to decriminalize home acts between consenting adult men had been started by a Jewish doctor named Magnus Hirsch 1897 and Paragraph 175 almost was rescinded in 1929 with the support of Social Democrat Communist delegates in the Reichstag. Consequently, the Nazi racial "expert" Alfred Rose charged that Jews were "forever trying to propagandize sexual relations between siblings, me animals, and men and men."²⁰ The Nazis became the second largest party in the *Reichstag* 1930 elections ending the possibility of revoking Paragraph 175. Hitler initially took no public on the issue because Ernst Roehm, the leader of the SA, was an openly gay man. When Hitl Roehm executed as part of the Night of the Long Knives Purge of 1934, he justified the assass on the grounds that Roehm's homosexuality had corrupted the ranks of the SA. $\frac{21}{1}$ In 1935 the constituting "criminally indecent activities between men" were defined more loosely, an maximum punishment for such activities was increased to 10 years in jail. The legal rationale tougher approach to male homosexual relations was that the new state "must combat all uni instincts with vigor." The linking of the suppression of homosexuality with the campaign to abortions on Aryan women reveals the racist thinking behind these policies. Homosexuali abortion both lowered the Aryan birth rate. Furthermore, Himmler associated homosexualit effeminacy and insisted that it would diminish the military fierceness of German soldiers. 22 All

the witch-hunt for gay men relented during the Summer Olympic Games, 5,320 German men sentenced for committing homosexual acts in 1936 compared to 2,106 convictions in 1935, 1934,

and 853 in 1933. 23

Similarly, the Nazi suppression of Jehovah's Witnesses also intensified during 1936. [the fact that only about 20,000 Witnesses resided in Germany, they were perceived by the N undermining the spirit of complete subservience to state authority which Hitler expected fr German citizens. Not only were the Witnesses suspect because of their American origins actively opposed the deification of the *Fuehrer* and the nation by refusing to give the Nazi exclaim "Heil Hitler," or serve in the Wehrmacht. They also believed in the unity of huma valued their Jewish Biblical origins, supported Zionism, and openly denounced Nazi racism an Semitism. By the Summer of 1933, the Nazis attempted to ban the missionary activities Jehovah's Witnesses in most German provinces. The Witnesses, however, continued cover disseminate their literature. The reintroduction of military conscription in March of 1935 pro more arrests of male members of the denomination and a national ban on the group the fol month. In June the Ministers of the Interior and Justice Departments authorized the lengther "protective custody" terms for Witnesses who already had served prison sentences. The An leader of the Witnesses, Franklin Rutherford, indignantly labeled Hitler the "Devil's representative on earth."²⁴ In 1936 the Gestapo set up a special branch to compile a registr Witnesses and infiltrate their Bible studies groups with secret agents. During the course of the 400 Jehovah's Witnesses were interned at the recently opened camp of Sachsenhausen. 25 Ba Police records from this period indicate that 7% of those arrested for engaging in "behavior h to the state" were Jehovah's Witnesses. 26

The fanfare surrounding the 1936 Olympics has overshadowed the sinister implications institutional changes and policies adopted in that year to make the persecution of groups d enemies of the state more efficient. Although some historians of the period stress that "anti-discriminatory measures eased during the Olympic Games," others like Saul Friedlaender rec that "by 1936 ideology and policy could increasingly progress along a single track." To be

the number of concentration camp inmates dropped to a low of 7,500 in 1936 and 1937 comprimarily of political opponents, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and Gypsies who were claim with being "habitual criminals" and "asocials." 29

1936 represented a pivotal year for the creation of the agencies in charge of identifying registering Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews and for the imminent steril of the "Rhineland Bastards." With the invasion of Poland in 1939, the eugenics program of ste severely disabled patients in German hospitals was transformed into the euthanasia progra executing "useless eaters" ostensibly to free up hospital beds for wounded German sold Gypsies and Jews in these institutions qualified for "special treatment," a Nazi euphemism for n murder, without the same physician approval required for handicapped Aryans. $\frac{31}{100}$ By 19 emphasis on the expropriation and emigration of German Jewry shifted to the ghettoization of Jewry and the first deportations of groups of German Gypsies and Jews for "labor in the Eas part of the attack on the Soviet Union two years later, special units of the SS rounded-up Gypsi Jews alike and shot and buried them in nearby ditches. By the Summer of 1941, the c procedures developed for the euthanasia program were being tested on Russian Prisoners of The first death camp for Jews and Gypsies opened in December of 1941. Homosexua Jehovah's Witnesses who had the misfortune of being interned in the expanded concentration death camp system suffered high casualty rates 32. The measures taken in 1936 did not inc lead to these events, but they bureaucratically and legally paved the way for them. The har issued to German athletes in 1935 declared, "Athletics and sport are the preparatory sch political driving power in the service of the State."³³ Just as surely as Hitler thought that his r conquests would guarantee that the Olympic Games would be held in Germany forever aff believed that his genocide against the Jews and Gypsies and incarceration and reeducation of undesirable elements would purify the Aryan Race for all time. The Third Reich won the Si Olympic Games in 1936, but failed, albeit barely, to eradicate its ideological, racial, and reenemies.

- Quoted in Saul Friedlaender, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 180.
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- <u>3"Extracts from Hitler's Speech in the Reichstag on the Nuremberg Laws September 1935,"</u> *Documents on the Holocaust*, Eds. Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), p.81.
- 4"Response of the Reichsvertretung to the Nuremberg Laws," *Ibid*, p.84
- ⁵Sebastian Haffner, *The Meaning of Hitler*, tr. Ewald Osers (New York:Macmillan, 1979), pp.25-45.
- ⁶ Peter Hayes, "Big Business and Aryanization in Germany, 1933-1939," in *Jahrbuch fuer Antisemitismus-forschung*, 3(1994), pp.254ff; Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation: The Economic Struggle of German Jews 1933-1941* (Hanover, N.H: University of New England, 1989).
- ⁷Herbert A. Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I), *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 25(1980), p.326. The reluctance of German Jews to leave Germany and the obstacles to their emigration are highlighted in John V.H. Dippel, *Bound Upon a Wheel of Fire: Why So Many German Jews Made the Tragic Decision to Remain in Nazi Germany* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).
- ⁸Friedlaender, pp.116-117.
- ⁹Richard D. Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp.93-94.
- ¹⁰Friedlaender, p.181
- ¹¹Eberhard Jaeckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power*, tr.Herbert Arnold (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981; Michael R. Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler, and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
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- ¹³Adolf Hitler, "German Economic Goals and the Jewish Question (August 1936), in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, Second Edition, Eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.650.
- 14For the texts of the orders and ensuing policy discussions regarding Kristallnacht, see Documents on the Holocaust (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), pp. 102-117. Also see David Fisher and Anthony Read, Kristallnacht: The Nazi Night of Terror (New York: Random House, 1989); Walter H. Pehle, November 1938: From Kristallnacht to Genocide (New York: Berg, 1991).
- ¹⁵Friedlaender, pp.194-203, 269-305.
- 16 Burleigh and Wippermann, pp.112-182; Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), pp.23-38, 246-262; Ian Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1988); Henry R. Huttenbach, "The Romani Parajmos: The Nazi Genocide of Gypsies in Germany and Eastern Europe," in *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, Eds. David Crowe and John Kosti (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 1991), pp.31-49; Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); Sybil Milton, "Gypsies and the Holocaust," *The History Teacher*, 24:4(August 1991), pp.375-387. For statistical evidence that the extent of popular prejudice against Gypsies was greater than that against the Jews, see Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free

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- 18 Friedlaender, pp.207-208; Tina Campt, Pascal Grosse, and Yara-Colette Lemke-Muniz de Faria, "Blacks, Germans, and the Politics of Imperial Imagination," in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy*, Eds. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1998), pp.205-229; Sally Marks, "Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience," *European Studies Review*, 13(1983), pp. 297-334; May Opitz, "Racism, Sexism, and Precolonial Images of Africa in Germany," in *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, Eds. May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), pp.3-55; Rainer Pommerin, "*Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde*": *Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit, 1918-1937* (Duesseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979).; Susann Samples, "African Germans in the Third Reich," in *The African-German Experience: Critical Essays* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), pp.53-69; Hart-Davis, pp. 173-202; Mandell, pp.221-232;
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- 20 *Ibid*, pp.22-49; James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp.1-101.
- ²¹Plant, pp.54-69
- ²²*Ibid*, pp.72-130; also see Burleigh and Wippermann,, pp.182-193; Hans-Georg Stuemke, "From the People's Consciousness of Right and Wrong to the Healthy Instincts of the Nation: The Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," in *Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History*, Ed.Michael Burleigh (New York, St.Martin's Press, 1996), pp.154-166.
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- 25 "Johovah's Witnesses," (US Holocaust Memorial Museum), pp.7-9.
- ²⁶Helmut Krausnick and Martin Broszat, *Anatomy of the SS State*(Granada: London, 1970), p.169
- ²⁷Ronnie S. Laudau, *The Nazi Holocaust*(Ivan R. Dee: Chicago), p.318.
- ²⁸Friedlaender, p.179.
- ²⁹*Ibid*, pp.203-204.
- ³⁰Friedlander, pp.39-110.
- ³¹*Ibid*, pp.246-283.
- ³²Ibid, pp. 284-302; Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Alfred A. Knop: New York, 1991); Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry 1932-1945*, tr. Ina Friedman and Haya

Galai (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.243-456; Michael Berenbaum, *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York: New York University, 1990).

³³Hart-David, p.71.