

Heinrich Himmler, “The Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance” (December 14, 1938)

Abstract

Even before Adolf Hitler and the NSDAP’s rise to power many people in Germany and other European countries harbored prejudices towards Europe’s Sinti and Roma populations. “Gypsies,” as this group of people were often derogatorily called, were derided for their seemingly nomadic lifestyle. Roma communities were often found on the outskirts of cities and towns, and their populations were stereotyped as beggars and thieves. After 1933, the Nazi regime viewed the Roma as “racially inferior” people and as a threat to their plans to create a “racial community” for all worthy Germans. This document, a report written in 1938 by Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, outlines the regime’s view of the “Gypsy Nuisance.”

Himmler tries to define the Roma population as a “racial” category. In arguing that there were certain classifications of “Gypsy,” the taxonomy is similar to the one established for Jews under the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. The problem, however, is that the Nazis’ pseudo-biological understanding of race falters as Himmler argues that people who perhaps did not fall under the category of full- or part-Gypsy, but lived the vagrant lifestyle stereotypically associated with Roma populations, could also be persecuted under the same proposed “Gypsy Law.” Thus, this document reveals the difficulty the Nazis faced in their attempts to determine what constituted a “pure race.”

Eventually the regime would follow through on these recommendations. While the exact number of Roma who died in the Holocaust is unknown, estimates reach as high as 220,000 men, women and children. Many were deported to concentration camps, others were shot on the Eastern front, and countless men and women faced other forms of persecution such as forced sterilization.

Source

The Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance

A. General Stipulations

I. Gypsies within Germany

1. (1) Experience gained in the fight against the Gypsy nuisance, and knowledge derived from race-biological research, have shown that the proper method of attacking the Gypsy problem seems to be to treat it as a matter of race. Experience shows that part-Gypsies play the greatest role in Gypsy criminality. On the other hand, it has been shown that efforts to make the Gypsies settle have been unsuccessful, especially in the case of pure Gypsies, on account of their strong compulsion to wander. It has therefore become necessary to distinguish between pure and part-Gypsies in the final solution of the Gypsy question.

(2) To this end, it is necessary to establish the racial affinity of every Gypsy living in Germany and of every vagrant living a Gypsy-like existence.

(3) I therefore decree that all settled and non-settled Gypsies, and also all vagrants living a Gypsy-like existence, are to be registered with the Reich Criminal Police Office-Reich Central Office for the Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance.

(4) The police authorities will report (via the responsible Criminal Police offices and local offices) to the Reich Criminal Police Office-Reich Central Office for the Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance all persons who

by virtue of their looks and appearance, customs or habits, are to be regarded as Gypsies or part-Gypsies.

[...]

E. Measures to be Taken by the Civil Registry Offices

Because a person considered to be a Gypsy or part-Gypsy, or a person living like a Gypsy, as a rule confirms the suspicion that marriage (in accordance with clause 6 of the first decree on the implementation of the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour [...] or on the basis of stipulations in the law on Fitness to Marry) must not be contracted, in all cases the public registry officials must demand a testimony of fitness to marry from those who make such an application [to be married].

[...]

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Source of original German text: “Runderlass des Reichsführers-SS und Chefs der Deutschen Polizei im Reichsministerium des Inneren vom 8. Dezember 1938, betr. ‘Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage’,“ *Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministers des Innern*, 99, no. 51 (1938) December 14, 1938, pp. 2105–2110.

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