

## THIRD REICH AND WOMEN

Hitler had very clear views about the position that women should hold in the Nazi state. Hitler looked back on female emancipation during the Weimar Republic with disfavor. According to Nazi propaganda, the duties of women were as mothers, housewives supporting their husbands, and community organizers.

To encourage motherhood, birth control centers were closed, abortion was made illegal unless necessary for the eradication of '*genetic defects*', and maternity benefits were increased. Income tax allowances for dependent children were raised and large families enjoyed concessions on expenses such as school fees and railway fares. In 1935, the Lebensborn (Spring of Life) project encouraged unmarried women with good racial credentials to become pregnant, with selected SS men as the fathers. '*The Honor Cross of German Motherhood*' or '*Mothers' Cross*' was established in May 1939 to encourage all women to '*bear a child for the Führer*'.

However, only the genetically pure were allowed to procreate. From 1935, couples needed a certificate of '*fitness to marry*' before a marriage license could be issued. From 1938, '*unproductive*' marriages could be ended. After 1941, couples found cohabiting after their marriage had been banned were sent to concentration camps. Mothers who failed in their duty to support their children's education as '*national comrades*', for example attending the Hitler Youth, could also face having their children removed.

To facilitate their role as mothers and alleviate male unemployment, legislation and propaganda were used to remove women from the workplace. By the Law for the Reduction of Unemployment of June 1933, women were encouraged to leave work on marriage with the support of generous loans.

In 1934, all married women were forced out of careers in medicine, the legal profession and the Civil Service. They were even declared ineligible for jury service, supposedly because they could not think logically. Similar beliefs placed politics out of women's reach. In a striking contrast with the 1920s, women were banned from senior positions in the Nazi leadership and there were no female Nazi members of the Reichstag. Education also discriminated against women.

Only 10% of university entrants were female until a shortage of professional and technical experts in the later 1930s led to a relaxation of policy. Similarly, when a labor shortage began to affect rearmament plans in 1936, some women were once more drawn back into factories. Compulsory agricultural labor service was introduced for women under 25 in 1939 and, from January 1943, women aged 16–45 could be conscripted for the war effort.

Speer later wrote of his struggle to get Hitler to agree to the need for female mobilization, but the Nazis got around the apparent contradiction in policies by arguing that in wartime the whole of Germany had become the '*home*' where women were required to serve.

Nazi policies towards women were therefore contradictory. While they claimed to promote the importance of family values, they encouraged an independent youth that placed the party above the family. While they extolled conventional morality and the importance of marriage, they also permitted illegitimate births and easier divorce, and advanced compulsory sterilization for those with genetic defects. While they told women to stay in the home, from 1936 women

were encouraged to return to the factories. While female education was initially discouraged, by the war years women were encouraged to enter universities and train for professional roles.

*“The slogan ‘Emancipation of Women’ was invented by Jewish intellectuals. If the man’s world is said to be the state, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community, then it may perhaps be said that the woman’s is a smaller world. For her world is her husband, her family, her children and her home.”*

From Hitler’s speech to the National Socialist Women’s League, 8 September 1934. Quoted in Noakes, J. and Pridham, G. (eds). 1984. Nazism 1919–1945: Vol. 2, State, Economy and Society 1933–1939: A Documentary Reader. Exeter, UK. University of Exeter Press. p. 449.

**Fact 1:** Marriage loans provided just over half an average year’s earnings. They had a low interest rate of 1% per month over eight and a quarter years. They were reduced by a quarter and repayments delayed by a year on the birth of each healthy child, so after having four children a couple owed nothing. At first, loans were only granted if a wife gave up her job, but the regulations changed in 1937. By 1939, 42% of all marriages were loan assisted.

**Fact 2:** During the years of the Weimar Republic, women had been granted the vote and enjoyed greater equality with men than under the Nazis. They had been encouraged to pursue higher education, to take up professional posts and to participate in politics as members of the Reichstag.

**Fact 3:** Prolific mothers were awarded medals, with the inscription ‘*The child ennobles the mother.*’ These were given annually on 12 August, the birthday of Hitler’s own mother. The recipients had to be ‘*of German blood and hereditarily healthy*’. There were three categories:

- **bronze** – for those who had four or five children
- **silver** – for those who had six or seven children
- **gold** – for those who had eight or more children.



*According to Nazi ideology, a woman’s primary role was as a mother, whose duty was to bear further Aryan*

## HITLER – THIRD REICH - WOMEN

### The impact of policies on women

Hitler's view of the role of women in the Nazi state is often referred to as the attempt to subjugate women – to limit their participation in German life to “*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*” (Children, Kitchen, Church). In 1934 at the annual Nuremberg rally, he declared: “*Man and woman must... mutually value and respect each other when they see that each performs the task which Nature and Providence have ordained*”. The intention was not to make women into second-class citizens, but to rescue them from “*the false paths of the democratic- liberal-international women's movement*” of the Weimar era, which had “*denigrated*” and attempted to destroy the dignity and honor of women through moral corruption. For the regime, although the “*world of a woman is a smaller world... her husband, her family, her children, and her house*”, it complemented the man's world, which consisted of “*the state, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community*”. The relationship between male and female, according to public speeches, was that of a partnership in the service of the nation.

Cleansed of the immorality that Nazis argued pervaded the Weimar years, Hitler claimed that his task was to renew the traditional role of women as mothers, the basis of the family unit and the bearer of children who would ensure the “*national future*” in an age of declining birth rates. Indeed, Germany's birth rate was, with the exception of Austria, the lowest in Europe. For an ideology committed to expansion and anxious at the prospect of being “*swamped by fecund hordes of Slavs from the East*”, in Noakes's words, the necessity of reversing the decline in the birth rate was obvious. As Burleigh noted, in the Nazi state:

*“Out went Weimar tolerance of a plurality of lifestyles, in which no official stigmas [were] attached to being single, childless or homosexual, and in came state-driven pro-natalist policies designed to produce “child-rich...” families.”*

Anti-feminism, in the sense of rejection of liberties for females (including, for example, legal abortion and easy access to contraception) enshrined in the Weimar Constitution, was not peculiar to the Nazis. It was shared by traditionalists, the Churches and the DNVP before 1933. Hitler capitalized on the misgivings of such groups, with his plans to implement what critics have claimed to be a reactionary policy based on male supremacy, despite Nazi claims to the contrary.

### Pro-natalist policies

Pro-natalist policies (policies to encourage growth in the birth rate) were pursued through a mixture of incentives and disincentives. As an incentive, monetary rewards were offered in the form of low-interest loans, introduced in June 1933 as Section 5 of the Law for the Reduction of Unemployment. Married couples would receive a marriage loan of 1000 Reichsmarks, to be repaid at 1 per cent per month, with the amount to be repaid reduced by a quarter for every child produced (provided it was a racially pure child). A condition of the loan was that the woman had to give up employment – leaving positions open for males. An estimated 700 000 couples received such a loan between 1933 and 1937 (a third of all marriages). By 1939, 42 per cent of all marriages received such loans. Marriage rates increased from 516 800 in 1932 (the pre-Nazi period) to 740 200 by 1934, although the birth rate did not increase significantly. Burleigh noted:

*“Although there was an appreciable short-lived increase in the birth of third or fourth children, the absence of a commensurate public housing policy did little to affect the secular drift towards modest nuclear families, with SS members especially distinguished by their failure to go forth and multiply.”*

## HITLER – THIRD REICH - WOMEN

As commentators pointed out, couples preferred to have one or two children, since the expense of having more “*would outweigh the advantage of the cancellation of the remainder of the loan*”.

Further incentives included income- tax reductions for married couples with children (and higher rates of taxation for single people or married couples without children), family allowance (child support) payments, maternity benefits, reduced school fees and railway fares for larger families and the provision of facilities such as birth clinics, advice centers, home help provision, postnatal recuperation homes, and courses on household management, childrearing, and motherhood. As Emilie Müller-Zadow, an official in the National Socialist Women’s Organization, wrote in her article “*Mothers who give us the future*” in 1936:

*“There is a growing recognition that mothers carry the destiny of their people in their hands and that success or ruin of the nation depends on their attitude towards the vocation of motherhood... The place that Adolf Hitler assigns to woman in the Third Reich corresponds to her natural and divine destiny. Limits are being set for her, which earlier she had frequently violated in a barren desire to adopt masculine traits & due respect is now being offered to her vocation as mother of the people, in which she can and should develop her rich emotions and spiritual strengths according to eternal laws.”*

In May 1939 the regime introduced the “*Mothers Cross*” award: gold for women who had given birth to eight children, silver for six and bronze for four – as long as parent and children were of Aryan blood, free from congenital disease, politically reliable and not classed as “*asocial*” in their attitudes or behavior by the Party. The programme was reminiscent of that implemented by the French Superior Council for Natality since 1920. Disincentives, in the sense of denying women control over their own bodies in terms of reproduction, took the form of the illegalization of abortion and the closing down of birth control centers and access to contraceptive devices. Breaches of these regulations resulted in convictions.

### Women in the workplace and the public sphere

Laws initially restricted the number of females in higher education and employment in the civil service after the age of 35. Nazi pronouncements and propaganda aimed at discouraging females in the workplace were made partly to fulfil Nazi ideological goals concerning the return to the “*idyllic destiny*” of women and partly to make jobs available for unemployed males. By 1937, though, the appearance of labor shortages in the economy as rearmament programmes aided rapid recovery, meant that the regime compromised its ideological stance and accepted the necessity of female employment. As Geary observed:

*“...ideological purity still had to give some ground to economic necessity: in 1933 almost 5 million women were in paid employment outside the home, whereas the figure had risen to 7.14 million by 1939.”*

The earlier requirement for wives in families who qualified for marriage loans to give up work was dropped. Similarly, women’s access to higher education, restricted in 1933, was now permitted because the economy and the regime required increasing numbers of professionals, in the medical and teaching professions especially. Until the end of the regime, however, Hitler continued to insist women be excluded from participation in the judiciary or in jury service, since he believed them unable to “*think logically or reason objectively, since they are ruled only by emotion*”. While National Socialist attitudes did not change in relation to the role and status of women, there was pragmatic acceptance, given the economic demands of the later 1930s and the Second World War, that female labor was essential.

## HITLER – THIRD REICH - WOMEN

Women's role in the political system was secondary. Although the Party established organizations to promote Nazi-approved values among the female population, such as the German Women's Enterprise (DFW), National Socialist Womanhood (NSF) and the Reich Mothers' Service (RMD), their role was to funnel the decisions and policies of the male dominated regime rather than to actively help in the formation and articulation of such policies. As Koonz commented:

*“For women, belonging to the “master race” opened the option of collaboration in the very Nazi state that exploited them, that denied them access to political status, deprived them of birth control, underpaid them as wage workers, indoctrinated their children, and finally took their sons and husbands to the front.”*



*A recipient of the Mother's Cross, Berlin 1942. Note the older children in the uniform of the Hitlerjugend and the BDM.*

# Hitler's policies towards women

## Political

Women had received greater amounts of rights and freedoms during the rule of the Weimar. However, it ended with Hitler and the Third Reich

Women had no place in politics, according to Hitler. Consequently:

- No women delegates in the Nazi party's Reichstag
- Hitler argued that 'the Emancipation of Women' was invented by the Jews and should therefore not be followed
- Women were to stay at home and nurture the coming generation

## Economy – work

- Goebbels wrote in 1929: "*the mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world.*" Women were not to work
- Employers were encouraged to hire men rather than women
- Due to other policies (economic recovery) there were more women employed in 1939 than in 1933

## Education

- Women were not to be educated – no higher education
- 1934: 10% of the population in higher education could be girls
- Hitler's concept of Lebensraum created the need for people to fill the newly conquered territory, so that became women's priority number one

## Social

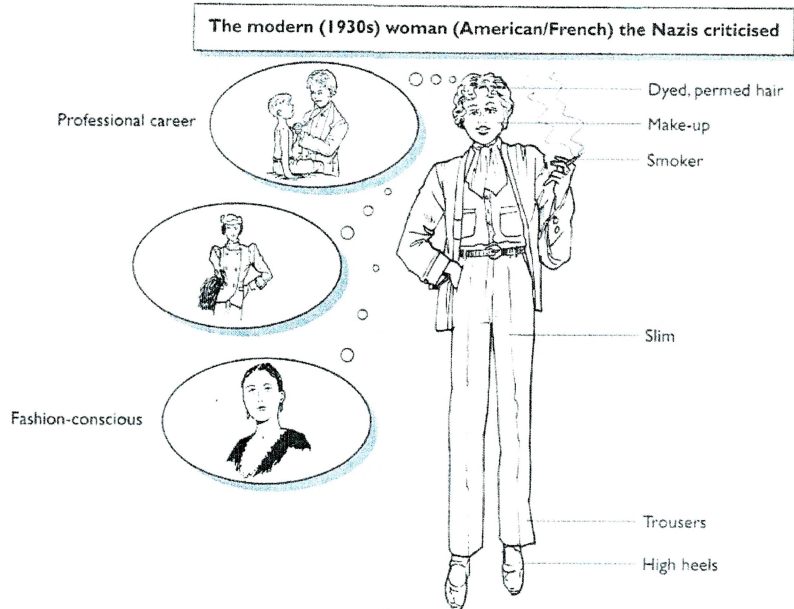
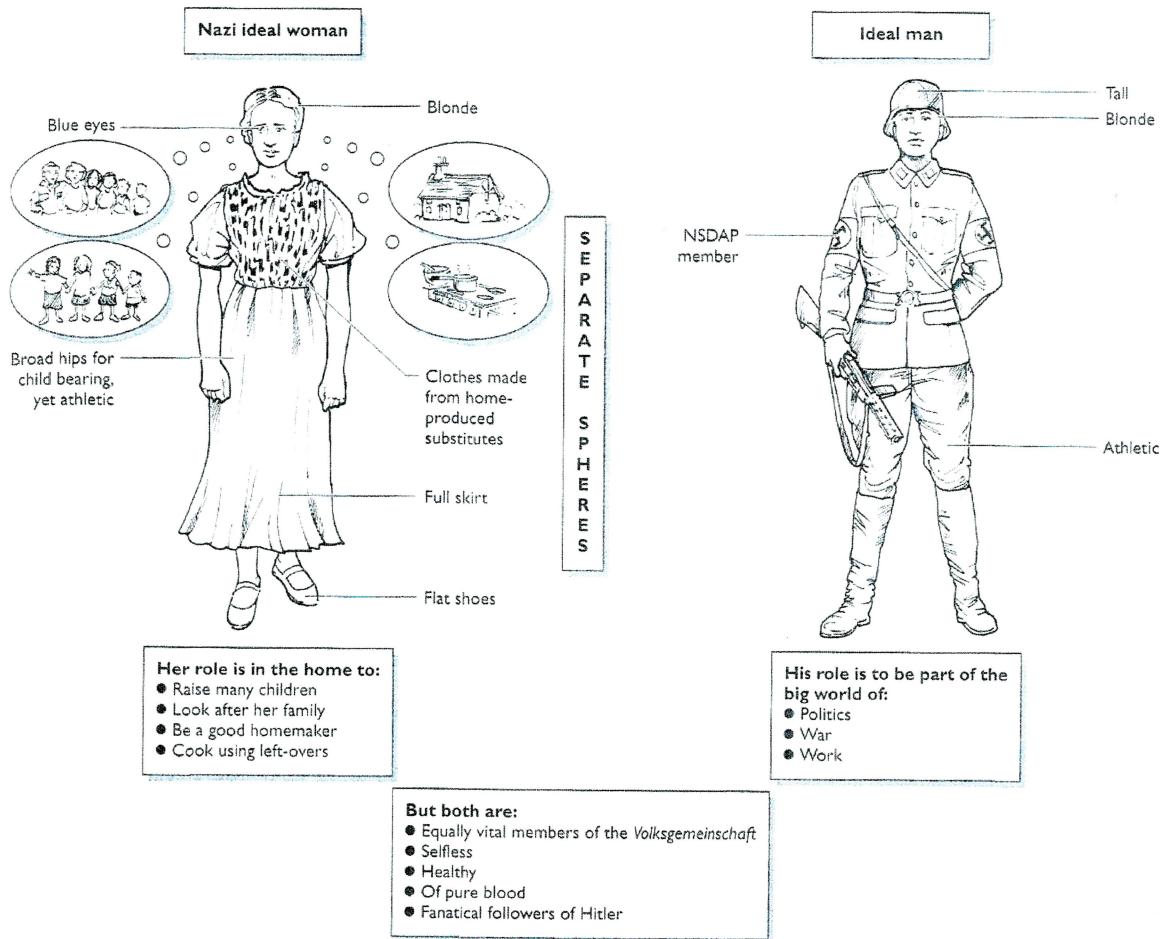
Historian Lisa Pine argues: "*The Nazis systematically reduced the functions of the family to the single task of reproduction. The family as an institution completely in the service of the totalitarian state.*"

- Women were strongly encouraged to marry and have as many children's as possible. Especially women of the Aryan race were encouraged
- KKK – Kinder, Kirche, Kuchen (Children, church, cooking)
- On Hitler's mother's birthday, 12th august, the Motherhood Cross gave out rewards to mothers, Gold for 8 children, silver for 6 and bronze for 4.

## On the harsher end of the spectrum:

- The Law for the Encouragement of Marriage – 1933
- A loan program that gave couples 1000 Marks, but depending on the number of children they had, the payback amount would decrease 25% per child
- Abortions were prohibited
- Lebensborn – an SS, state supported, program designed by Heinrich Himmler to produce more Aryan offspring. Aryan race women could go and meet with SS officers who were considered of good genes to have children – outside marriage

Source: <http://ibhailmary.blogspot.com/search?q=Third+Reich>



## ■ 15C Nazi policies towards women

AREA OF LIFE						
	Births	Marriage	Welfare	Education	Employment	Public life
<b>A Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase pure German births</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase suitable marriages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop healthy Germans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare women for their proper role</li> <li>• Restrict opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce female employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise women and incorporate them in the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft</li> </ul>
<b>B Measures</b>						
i) 1933-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial incentives, e.g. marriage loans, birth grants</li> <li>• Improved maternity services</li> <li>• Propaganda to raise status and self-esteem of mothers and housewives; awards, e.g. Mother's Cross</li> <li>• Penalties                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Higher taxes on childless couples</li> <li>– Tighter penalties on abortion</li> <li>– Restrictions on contraception information</li> <li>– Measures introduced for compulsory sterilisation of 'undesirables'</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1933 600 RM marriage loan if unemployed</li> <li>• 1937 Loan extended to women in work</li> <li>• 1935 Marriage Law required certificate of 'fitness to marry' before marriage licence issued</li> <li>• Oct 1935 Blood Protection Law: marriage to Jews, Black people, gypsies forbidden</li> <li>• 1938 Marriage Law extended the grounds for divorce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NS-Volkswohlschaft (NSV), the National Socialist Welfare Organisation, set up</li> <li>• Vast expansion of health offices, especially in rural areas; improved sanitation, preventative medicine, genetic and racial care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited university enrolment of women to 10%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1933 Women in top civil service and medical jobs dismissed</li> <li>• 1936 Banned from being judges, lawyers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No female Nazi members of Reichstag permitted</li> <li>• Two women's organisations created: NSF, DFW</li> </ul>
ii) 1939-45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lebensborn programme extended. Encouragement of births outside marriage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1941 Couples found cohabiting after their marriage had been banned were sent to concentration camps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved childcare facilities, especially for working mothers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictions dropped as great demand for well-educated workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1939 Compulsory agricultural labour service for unmarried women under 25</li> <li>• Women exhorted to help war effort, but only in 1942 were women of 17-45 told to register for work (many exceptions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nazi women's organisations support the war effort (e.g. clothes collections for the Russian Front)</li> </ul>
<b>C Effects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1933-9 Birth rate rose, then slowly declined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1932: 516,000 marriages</li> <li>• 1934: 740,000 marriages</li> <li>• Divorces increased after 1938</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infant mortality dropped: 1933 7.7% 1936 6.6%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drop in numbers of women at university until Second World War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of women in employment rose</li> <li>• Further increase during the war</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased female participation in Nazi bodies</li> </ul>
<b>D Overall assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase may have been due more to economic recovery than to Nazi policies/ measures</li> <li>• Birth rate rose compared to during the Depression; but did not get back to levels of Weimar Germany</li> <li>• Nazi eugenic policies reduced the population potential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in marriages may have been due more to economic optimism than to government policies; e.g. average size of family fell</li> <li>• Divorce was extended to help national objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare closely linked to eugenic policies</li> <li>• NSV largely staffed by women; improved opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictions on opportunities for women were increasingly relaxed as women were needed, since demand for workers and soldiers grew</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nazi policies had marginal effect on overall female employment</li> <li>• Main impact was on the professions</li> <li>• During the war, women were less mobilised than in the UK or the USA</li> <li>• 1943 Speer's proposal to conscript women fully was opposed by Hitler due to the effect he thought it would have on morale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In many ways the Nazis gave increased opportunities for (mainly middle-class) women to become involved in public life, although they were excluded from decision-making</li> </ul>