Gambling Under
the Swastika
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Casinos, Horse Racing, Lotteries, and Other Forms of Betting in Nazi Germany

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Casinos are marvelous institutions, and we must say to everyone with too much money: Come on, you people, come and gamble!

— Adolf Hitler (August 25, 1942)
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Preface

The idea for this short study took root while I was finishing a textbook on the Holocaust. In the course of my research, I came across many reports on everyday life in Nazi Germany. Curiously, while alcohol, drug, and tobacco use made, if not frequent, at least occasional appearances in these analyses, gambling almost never came up.

Gambling-specific works likewise have avoided the Nazis. The 2016 book, *Random Riches: Gambling Past and Present*, for example, includes an excellent essay by the noted Vienna University historian Manfred Zollinger. Its title is: “A Brief Survey of German Casinos Before and After World War II.”

As it turns out, the Nazis relied heavily on gambling, using it to fund their social welfare programs, test their genetic theories, and support their war-making efforts. Gambling during the Nazi era (1933–45) occurred in both lavish settings (*e.g.*, Baden-Baden’s spa casino) and makeshift ones (*e.g.*, Allied prisoner of war camps) and included both highly-exclusive games (*e.g.*, roulette) and mass-participation ones (*e.g.*, lotteries). And while certain types of gambling were off-limits (*e.g.*, dog racing), others (*e.g.*, horse racing) were enthusiastically promoted and followed.

The collapse of the Third Reich brought a temporary halt to organized public gambling in Germany. Within just a few years, however, it was back, due in no small part to the efforts of the U.S. Air Force. Today, a reunited Germany offers gamblers an assortment of legal betting options. It also has a growing array of black market games.

As readers will notice, in more than a few instances I have cited sources not normally relied on by academicians. This reflects both the nature of the topic and the fact that previous scholars have not focused on it.
Although I generally have followed The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation (20th ed. 2015), I have deviated from it whenever I felt its rules resulted in a citation (or abbreviation) that readers would find difficult to decipher.

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