

# Gambling Under the Swastika



# Gambling Under the Swastika

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Casinos, Horse Racing, Lotteries,  
and Other Forms of Betting  
in Nazi Germany

Robert M. Jarvis

PROFESSOR OF LAW

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

SHEPARD BROAD COLLEGE OF LAW



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*[C]asinos 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)



# Contents

<b>List of Illustrations</b>	ix
<b>Preface</b>	xiii
<b>Chapter 1 · Introduction</b>	3
<b>Chapter 2 · Gambling in Germany Before the Nazis</b>	9
Gambling from the Middle Ages to 1872	9
Gambling from 1872 to 1932	20
<b>Chapter 3 · Casino Gambling in Nazi Germany</b>	31
<b>Chapter 4 · Other Forms of Gambling in Nazi Germany</b>	49
Dog Racing	49
Horse Racing	51
Lotteries	55
Shipboard Gambling	61
Sports Betting	63
Gambling Taxes	64
Compulsive Gamblers	66
<b>Chapter 5 · Gambling Elsewhere in the Third Reich</b>	75
Austria	75
Czechoslovakia	77
Poland	79
The Netherlands	88
Other Countries	89
Prisoner of War Camps	98
Concentration Camps	107

<b>Chapter 6 · Gambling in Germany After the Nazis</b>	115
<b>Notes</b>	121
Notes to Chapter 1	121
Notes to Chapter 2	124
Notes to Chapter 3	131
Notes to Chapter 4	137
Notes to Chapter 5	149
Notes to Chapter 6	160
<b>Bibliography</b>	163
Books	163
Chapters	171
Court Cases	173
Government Reports	173
Journals, Magazines, and Newsletters	173
Laws and Legislative Materials	174
Newspapers	175
Screenplays	179
Web Sites	179
Wikipedia Entries	183
YouTube Videos	183
<b>Index</b>	185



# List of Illustrations

1. Adolf Hitler in Berlin surrounded by followers (1933) (courtesy of Erich C. Jochberg / U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum), 4
2. A c. 1912 U.S. poker chip with a swastika design (2018) (from the author's private collection / photograph by Michael Hopkins of Gerlinde), 6
3. The SI-Centrum casino in Stuttgart (2009) (courtesy of Werner Dieterich / Alamy Stock Photo), 7
4. German soldiers, assembled in the "casino" attached to their barracks on Rathenower Street in Berlin, listening to a speech by Adolf Hitler (1936) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 7
5. Frankfurt casino admission card (1816) (courtesy of Amoret Tanner Collection / Alamy Stock Photo), 11
6. Patrons playing roulette at the Baden-Baden casino (1820) (courtesy of Kuhn / FPG / Hulton Archive / Getty Images), 13
7. Woodcut showing Fyodor Dostoevsky, author of the famous novella "The Gambler," at his writing desk (1929) (courtesy of Vladimir Favorskij / Interfoto / Alamy Stock Photo), 18
8. President Woodrow Wilson delivering his "Fourteen Points" speech to Congress (1918) (courtesy of Pictorial Press Ltd. / Alamy Stock Photo), 22
9. Gambling at the Sopot casino (1925) (courtesy of Bettmann / Getty Images), 24
10. Gambling on a Berlin street corner (1919) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 26
11. A scene from the movie "Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler" (1922) (courtesy of Photo 12 / Alamy Stock Photo), 28

12. The steamship CAP ARCONA at dock (1927) (courtesy of Hi-Story / Alamy Stock Photo), 30
13. Workmen carefully unpacking Baden-Baden's new roulette wheel four days before the casino's grand reopening (1933) (courtesy of Keystone-France / Gamma-Rapho / Getty Images), 37
14. The Baden-Baden "counting room" the day after the casino's grand reopening—a delivery of money has just arrived from Deutsche Bank (1933) (courtesy of Robert Sennecke / Ullstein Bild / Getty Images), 38
15. A Baden-Baden travel poster by the noted German Art Deco artist Felix Rinne (the bottom reads: "Spa • Golf • Horse Racing • Casino") (1934) (courtesy of Felix Rinne / Corbis / Getty Images), 42
16. A patron placing her bet at a Baden-Baden roulette table (1935) (courtesy of Ullstein Bild / Granger), 43
17. Hitler playing fetch with his dog Blondi (1935) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 50
18. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels (fourth from right) at the Hamburg horse track (1934) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 52
19. President of the German Riding Stable Owners Christian Weber (far right) awarding the coveted "Brown Band of Germany" to SS Colonel Hermann Fegelein during Munich's annual International Race Week (1938) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 53
20. A sign in Berlin advertising lottery tickets to support the German charity Winter Relief (1934) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 56
21. A so-called "lucky woman" selling Reich Lottery tickets (1940) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 58
22. Musicians playing aboard the KdF ship WILHELM GUSTLOFF on a cruise to Norway (1938) (courtesy of Mauritius Images GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo), 62
23. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels listening to the first Louis-Schmeling fight with his wife Magda and Schmeling's wife, actress Anny Ondra (center) (1936) (courtesy of Ullstein Bild / Getty Images), 64
24. A German deck of playing cards with the Nazi tax stamp on the Ace of Hearts (c. 1936) (from the author's private collection / photograph by Michael Hopkins of Gerlinde), 65

25. Auschwitz concentration camp uniform with an “asocial” black triangle (the letter “P” inside the triangle indicates the prisoner is Polish) (1940) (courtesy of Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy Stock Photo), 68
26. Bridget Hitler with her son William during a tour of Canada (1941) (courtesy of Keystone Pictures USA / Alamy Stock Photo), 69
27. The “Operation Pastorius” saboteurs on trial in Washington, D.C. before a military tribunal (1942) (courtesy of the U.S. Library of Congress), 70
28. A drawing of Elvira Chaudoir playing cards (2016) (courtesy of Quirk Books / Sam Maggs / Sophia Foster-Dimino), 73
29. The casino at Baden bei Wien near Vienna (2016) (courtesy of Luise Berg-Ehlers / Alamy Stock Photo), 78
30. Lída Baarová and Hannes Stelzer in the movie “Der Spieler” (1938) (courtesy of Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 80
31. The Gestapo’s Warsaw headquarters at 25 Szucha Avenue (1939) (courtesy of Wikipedia), 86
32. A Winter Help advertising poster (1942) (courtesy of Historic Collection / Alamy Stock Photo), 90
33. German “Afrika Korps” soldiers playing cards in a foxhole (1942) (courtesy of DPA Picture Alliance / Alamy Stock Photo), 91
34. Humphrey Bogart, Helmut Daine, Joy Page, and Claude Rains (left to right) in the movie “Casablanca” (1942) (courtesy of Ullstein Bild / Getty Images), 94
35. The casino at Monte Carlo with its distinctive Moorish domes roof (2015) (courtesy of “Fruitpunchline” / Wikipedia), 95
36. A drawing by John Worsley showing his fellow Milag Nord prisoners of war playing roulette (1944) (courtesy of John Worsley / Imperial War Museum London), 99
37. An example of German prisoner of war camp money – shown here is a 1 Reichsmark note (c. 1941) (courtesy of Archive PL / Alamy Stock Photo), 100
38. Scottish sailors gambling at a German prisoner of war camp near Bavaria (1940) (courtesy of Fox Photos / Getty Images), 101
39. Corporal Peter Newkirk (Richard Dawson) shuffling cards during the opening credits of the CBS comedy “Hogan’s Heroes” (1967) (courtesy of CBS / Getty Images), 105

40. A replica of the “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign above the main gate at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp (2007) (courtesy of Croft-photo / Alamy Stock Photo), 108
41. Willem Dafoe as Salamo Arouch in a scene from the movie “Triumph of the Spirit” (showing SS guards betting on the fight as Arouch stands over his opponent) (1989) (courtesy of Nova International Films / Photofest Digital), 111
42. One of the Warsaw Ghetto’s many Jewish gambling clubs—the mandatory “Star of David” armband can be seen clearly on the man in the center (1941) (courtesy of Ullstein Bild / Granger), 112
43. The bombed-out city of Nuremberg (1945) (courtesy of Everett Collection Historical / Alamy Stock Photo), 116
44. Patrons at the newly-reopened Wiesbaden casino (1949) (courtesy of Hulton-Deutsch Collection / Corbis / Getty Images), 117
45. A lottery stand in Stüttgart (2012) (courtesy of Siegfried Kramer / imageBROKER / Alamy Stock Photo), 120

# 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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