

Mapping under the Third Reich: Nazi Restrictions on map Content and Distribution

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A 99-page 1947 State Department report discovered in the NOAA Central Library summarized sixty map-related regulations issued by the German government between July 1934 and June 1944. Although the Third Reich pursued cartographic unification and uniformity more vigorously than earlier central governments, regional diversity and the distractions of a multi-front war hindered attempts to standardize map series and develop a national base map at 1:5,000. Pragmatism trumped propaganda when Nazi rule-makers decided to retain Latin lettering for maps, rather than require the more ornate German script used in official government publications and strongly promoted for books and newspapers. Official mapmaking had numerous niches in diverse government departments. As examples, the Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, headed by Joseph Goebbels, shared responsibility for “colonial maps” with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Führer for Prehistory was in charge of “maps of prehistory,” and the Agency for Racial Policy and the Party Examination Board for Protection of National Socialist Literature produced “racial maps.” In restricting distribution of detailed maps to the public, Nazi cartographic policy recognized the importance of scale by drawing a sharp line at 1:300,000. Covering both large- and small-scale products, a 1937 law gave the Ministry of the Interior authority over private mapmakers, who now had to conform to official policy on geographic names as well as the colors used on political maps.

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