

We must expect Jewish Influence via the Dining Table”: How German Authorities Redefined Businesses of Intermarried Gentiles as “Jewish Spaces”

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During the early stages of the Third Reich, businesses were an important room for maneuver for intermarried families and a space where they could spend most of their daytime together. Due to restrictions on the job market and the increasing boycott of Jewish entrepreneurs, Jewish partners and their “half-Jewish” children often found no other work than in shops and companies owned by their gentile family members and friends. Using the example of the Munich municipality, I will examine how Nazi officials redefined businesses as “Jewish Spaces.” The major role that intermarried gentiles played in this process has been neglected in historiography. By creating the paradigm of “Jewish influence,” from 1937 on German authorities abused spatial proximity in order to force gentiles to break their ties with Jews. Arguing that the private relations of gentiles in mixed marriages always implied Jewish influence on their businesses, the Munich trade department forced over 60,000 craftspeople to declare that they were neither Jewish nor married to a Jew. This inquiry established for the first time the basis for an index both of Jews and intermarried men and women. Starting in 1938 all intermarried gentile women were automatically regarded as being influenced by their Jewish men and therefore had to shut down their businesses nationwide. This practice resulted in a rising divorce rate as well as in an extensive spatial segregation. Jews were forbidden to enter the business rooms of their gentile partners, while their gentile partners were not allowed to run their business from their private residences. Since these spaces were thenceforth closed for personal contacts and social interaction, Jews were cut off from essential social spheres and isolated dramatically