FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE RACE:
THE ITALIAN RACIAL LAWS
AND THE PERSECUTION OF THE
JEWS UNDER FASCISM

Edward Grodin

1746-7995
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“I have been a racist since 1921. I do not know how they can think that I imitate Hitler, he was not born yet. They make me laugh. The race must be defended…We need to give a sense of the race to Italians, so that they do not create mixed races, so that they do not spoil that which is good in us.”

- Benito Mussolini to his mistress, Clara Petacci, on August 4, 1938

*Introduction*

The story of the Jews in Fascist Italy can be best understood as a tragedy in three acts. In the first act (*ab initio*), the Jews found themselves as equal participants in the emergence of a new political phenomenon, Fascism, whereby Benito Mussolini (*Il Duce*) ruled as the face of a triumphant return to the grandeur of the Roman Empire. Since the birth of the Italian nation-state, Jews had enjoyed a political atmosphere that emphasized patriotism over all other considerations. As subjects in the thickening plot of twentieth-century totalitarianism, Italian Jews had no reason to fear disproportionate subordination before the law. Even the rise of a regime nearby dead set on anti-Semitic persecution did not faze Italian Jewry. However, the more Italy’s foreign policy necessitated comment on racial issues, as was the case especially in Ethiopia, the more precarious the situation of Italian Jewry became. After the publication of the Manifesto of Racial Scientists in mid-1938, Italy’s Jews could no longer remain sure of their positions in Italian society.

That all changed within a matter of weeks. In the second act of the tragedy, the Jews of Italy were legally subjugated to the lowest rung of Italian social standing. Many historians have attempted to take on the question: Why did Mussolini’s Fascist regime suddenly turn on the Jews? The most obvious response for many was to blame it on the Nazis. However, the role of the Germans in the promulgation of Italian racial laws (*le

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(leggi razziali) remained minimal. Without a doubt, concerns regarding the strength of the Rome-Berlin Axis accentuated the distinction between the regimes’ divergent racial policies. Yet, the laws themselves do not entirely match those of Nazi Germany. The answer to this discrepancy lies in Mussolini’s Italy itself. For five years, between mid-1938 and mid-1943, Mussolini’s Fascist regime constructed and implemented the framework and specific policies towards its own Jewish population. It systematically deprived Italy’s Jews of their most basic rights as citizens while allowing for select “discriminated” Jews to avoid some aspects of the persecution. At times, Italy’s racial laws surpassed even those in Germany. This attests to the best explanation of the sudden anti-Semitic turn in Italy: Mussolini and the Fascist government actively and independently made the decision to oppress the Jews and pursued the legal action necessary to execute their plans.

In the third and final act, persecution gave way to elimination. The five-year crescendo of the racial laws led up to the collapse of Fascist Italy in July 1943. Far from signaling the end of their suffering, the Jews of Italy were fast approaching the climax of the tragedy. The Germans filled the power vacuum, bringing with them the European nightmare of the Götterdämmerung (twilight of the gods). With the Italian Social Republic established in Northern Italy as a German puppet government with Mussolini as its figurehead, the Holocaust found its way into Italy. No Italian Jew living in the area under German control was immune from the deportations. The war in Europe ultimately ended in May 1945, taking with it the system of concentration and extermination camps that systematically murdered approximately six million European Jews. Nearly nine
thousand were Italian Jews who had suffered unconscionable treatment at the hands of Mussolini’s Fascist regime.

Thus, the Italian Jews experienced a three-act tragedy under Fascism that began with hope, transcended into chaos and ended, like every epic tragedy, with death. Up to 1938, they had lived unperturbed in Fascist Italy. Most preferred to consider themselves Italians first and Jews second. As such, the sudden promulgation of laws ‘for the defense of the race’ did not correlate to the self-perception of the Jewish community within Italy. Reflections on these laws in Italy have been slow to materialize, but recent publications indicate that Italian Jews are beginning to recount their encounter with Fascism. While the language of the laws themselves remains crucial to understanding Fascist anti-Semitism, scholars must now expand their research to embrace emerging social histories. In combining the primary sources of Italian Jews and the main proponents of Fascist anti-Semitism with the laws themselves, the racial laws of 1938 seem far more independently envisioned and actively supported by the Fascist regime than previously assumed.

A Brief Historiography

For over fifteen years after the end of World War II, the subject of Italy’s persecution of its Jewish population remained outside of the annals of historical research. Then, in 1961, Renzo de Felice dropped his “intellectual bombshell,” blowing the blast doors containing this history wide open.3 *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo,* known in its English translation as *The Jews in Fascist Italy,* covers the entirety of Jewish

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2 Most of the sources I have come across were published in the 1990’s including: *Beyond Imagination* (1995), *Child of the Ghetto* (1995), *Uncertain Refuge* (1995), *The Neppi Modona Diaries* (1997), *Bad Times, Good People* (1999). Victoria Ancona-Vincent’s perspective reveals some of the underlying issues: “It has taken many years for me even to contemplate writing my testimony, partly because I was afraid to relive what happened, and partly because I was concerned that I may not be understood or believed.” (Victoria Ancona-Vincent, *Beyond Imagination* (Nottinghamshire: Beth Shalom Ltd.,1995), ix)

existence under Fascism. In it, De Felice presents his thesis on Fascist anti-Semitism which has withstood the test of time, with some tweaking: in his view, state-sponsored anti-Semitism in Italy represented “a willful choice Mussolini made…external pressures had only an added, but secondary, importance.”

This willful choice, according to De Felice, “stemmed from the belief that, in order to give credibility to the Axis, it was necessary to eliminate the most glaring difference in the policies of the two regimes.”

For its time, such an argument suggested far greater historical culpability for Italy and overturned the common mythology that the Nazis imposed their ideology on the Fascist regime. The book was destined to court controversy, and its publication unleashed a firestorm within Italy. In spite of the debate, De Felice’s study remains to this day the seminal work on Italian Jewry under Fascism.

For a long time, De Felice constituted the lone voice on the matter. No work since has contained the breadth and depth of historical fact-finding. Other scholars began to chime in, but they did not adhere to the focus on domestic issues in De Felice’s work. Meir Michaelis published Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945 in 1978, but the focus rested upon foreign relations and military developments, not on domestic policy. Michaelis reached the same basic conclusion as De Felice, that “Mussolini’s anti-Semitic legislation, though undoubtedly an Italian variant of Hitler’s Nuremberg laws and a demonstration of ideological and political solidarity with the Third Reich, was not the result of direct German interference.”

To De Felice’s analysis, Michaelis added an enhanced dimension of the

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5 Ibid.
external forces which he argued had affected the internal situation of Fascist Italy. Some
time later, in The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue and Survival (1987),
Susan Zuccotti discussed the racial laws but solely in terms of their relationship with the
Holocaust, devoting a single chapter to their impact.

Most recently, Michele Sarfatti has addressed the shortcomings of De Felice’s
watershed study. In The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy (2006), he contends that “Mussolini
and his regime bear greater responsibility than is often asserted.”7 Moreover, for a few
weeks in 1938, “Italian anti-Jewish laws were more drastic and oppressive than the
contemporary German legislation.”8 Both arguments attest to the agency of the Fascist
regime within the context of racial policy, a fact that has been underemphasized in the
preceding historiography. These two assertions will also be the most pertinent for the
argument laid out in the following pages of this paper. To Sarfatti’s conclusions, this
study will add the significant work of Liliana Picciotto Fargion’s Il libro della memoria
(2002) that documents the most up-to-date numbers of Italian-Jewish victims of the
Holocaust. Additionally, it will address the growing amount of memoirs, diaries and
other primary sources that have been published generally within the past twenty years.
As such, the racial laws will be dealt with alongside the testimony of Italian Jews affected
by them. Above all, this paper will reveal the vastness of Fascism’s active and
independent undertaking in racial policy from 1938 to 1943, broadening the scope of
legal, social and political factors which up to now have been somewhat limited.

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7 Michele Sarfatti, The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Madison: University of
Wisconsin Press, 2006), xi.
8 Sarfatti, x.
Act I: *Ab initio* (In the Beginning)

The Situation before 1938

The Jews of Italy represent one of Italy’s oldest and most assimilated minorities. Stanislao Pugliese notes the etymological root of Italy in Hebrew as ‘I-tal-Jah’ or “island of divine dew,” emphasizing the desirability of Italy for Jews in search of a homeland. They have maintained a presence in Italy since the Roman period, acting as ambassadors to Rome in the signing of the Roman-Jewish Treaty of 161 BCE. The 313 Edict of Milan establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire for the first time relegated Jews to the second tier. In addition, the first Jewish ghetto in Europe was constructed in Venice in 1516. Up to the Napoleonic emancipation of the Jews in 1809, Italian Jewry suffered legal persecution at various points. The 1555 papal bull entitled “Cum nimis absurdum” and Pope Pius VI’s Edict on the Jews (1775) represented the most horrendous examples of religious persecution as exacted by the Papacy, imposing strict limitations on the participation of Jews in Italian society. However, the unification of Italy (*il Risorgimento*) in 1871 brought state tolerance and legal protections to the Jews, beginning the process of assimilation.

Even the rise of Mussolini in October 1922 did not bring about an immediate change in the situation of the Jews. In fact, Jews held positions in the “highest levels of the fascist regime, as evidenced by Aldo Finzi (undersecretary of the Interior) and Guido Jung (finance minister).” Jews supported the Fascists no more or less than their other

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11 Pugliese, 3.
Italian counterparts, with six hundred party members before the March on Rome.\textsuperscript{12} However, the coming-to-power of the Fascist regime placed expectations on Jews to trade the visibility of their religious practice for the secular religion of nationalism.\textsuperscript{13} For the most part, Italian Jews had already done so. The large percentage of intermarriage combined with low birth rates and conversions together produced a relatively invisible minority. Italian Jews had quickly become “fully enmeshed in Italian political, commercial, academic, and social life.”\textsuperscript{14} Mussolini presented himself as unconcerned with the ‘Jewish question,’ stating that “there are no pure races left” and that “[a]ntisemitism does not exist in Italy.”\textsuperscript{15} However, Giorgio Fabre argues that “Mussolini’s racism existed before the rise to power of Hitler” thereby attesting to a private anti-Semitism predating Nazism.\textsuperscript{16}

With the accession of Hitler in Germany in 1933, Italian Jewry began to have reason to worry about the possibility of state-sponsored anti-Semitism. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 set a precedent for other European powers that wanted to pursue racial policies. Additionally, foreign policy considerations began to adjust the context of Fascist racism. In particular, the conquest of Ethiopia during the 1935-1936 Second Italo-Abyssinian War underlined the racial distinctions between the African natives and the white Italian soldiers. The inception of the Rome-Berlin Axis in late October 1936 established a connection between the two regimes, including the potential for cooperation

\textsuperscript{12} Sarfatti, 16.
\textsuperscript{13} See Sarfatti, 16 and Pugliese, 4.
\textsuperscript{15} Emil Ludwig, \textit{Talks with Mussolini} trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (Boston: Little, Brown, 1933), 73-74.
\textsuperscript{16} Giorgio Fabre, \textit{Mussolini razzista: dal socialismo al fascismo, la formazione di un antisemita} (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), 9 (my translation).
in areas of racial policy. As Fascist Italy became increasingly attached to Nazi Germany in diplomatic and policy terms, cohesion on racial matters seemed to be imminent.

Inklings of the growing anti-Semitism started to surface in press campaigns as early as 1935. The main line of attack conflated Jews and Bolshevism. More timeless depictions of Jews as wealthy, greedy schemers with pronounced noses, inflated lips, curly hair and beards harkened to “entrenched caricatures in the popular imagination.”

In *Il Mito di Sangue* (*The Blood Myth* - 1937), Julius Evola, a noted intellectual leader for Fascism, criticized the ‘Jewish spirit’ for its destructive effect on the ‘Nordic’ race (which Evola equated with ‘Aryan’), accentuating the spiritual rather than the biological essence of Judaism. Simultaneously, the publication of Paolo Orano’s *Gli Ebrei in Italia* in 1937 created an ideological source from which Fascism could draw anti-Semitic inspiration. Orano’s conclusion that Zionists and even Fascist Jews could not be trusted in regards to their loyalty to Italy sparked a frenzy of press reviews and responses which saw virulent anti-Semites emerge from the woodwork, including the writers for Mussolini’s own newspaper, *Il Giornale d’Italia*. However, the Italian people generally reacted unfavorably towards the attacks, finding it difficult to connect their personal relationships with Jews to the press’ characterization. The Fascist regime thus decided that anti-Semitism had to be pursued on racial, not social or economic, grounds as “racism had the advantage of being much more impersonal and totalitarian.”

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17 De Felice, 192.
20 De Felice, 201.
21 De Felice, 206.
Selection of Pre-1938 Propaganda

1) “Distrust: -What is distrust? – What you need to have when someone offers you an orangeade instead of a San Pellegrino.”

2) “At the Jewish bank: -If this war breaks out, how much can we earn? – Half a billion. – And how many men will die? – Five million. – One hundred lira per man? It seems to me that’s not enough!”

3) “Abraham’s house: -Dad, if one has 10,000 lira and lends it at three percent, what does he make? – A great foolishness, my son!”

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22 Centro Furio Jesi, 149-150. Translations: 1) “Distrust: -What is distrust? – What you need to have when someone offers you an orangeade instead of a San Pellegrino.”; 2) “At the Jewish bank: -If this war breaks out, how much can we earn? – Half a billion. – And how many men will die? – Five million. – One hundred lira per man? It seems to me that’s not enough!”; 3) “Abraham’s house: -Dad, if one has 10,000 lira and lends it at three percent, what does he make? – A great foolishness, my son!”
Mussolini broke his silence on racial matters on February 16, 1938 when he issued his first direct public statement on the ‘Jewish question’ in Italy. In it, he decried the “impression that the Fascist government is in the process of inaugurating a political anti-Semitism.” He affirmed the desirability of the creation of a Jewish state outside of Palestine as the solution to the ‘Jewish problem.’ Moreover, he acknowledged the minuscule proportion of Jews within Italian society. He maintained that the regulation of the Jewish community would remain unaltered, and no laws would be promulgated to deny the Jews of their political, moral and economic rights. However, the Fascist regime reserved “the right to keep watch on the activities of Jews who have recently come to our country and to ensure that the role of Jews in the total life of the nation is not disproportionate to the intrinsic merits of individuals and to the numerical importance of their community.” In this first comment on the possibility of state-sponsored anti-Semitism, Mussolini remained on the one hand insistent on the good nature of his regime and on the other notably ambiguous in relation to the future.

Renzo de Felice contends that the communiqué served as an attempt to “prepare public opinion” for the forthcoming racial laws in spite of its denial of impending action. Furthermore, in his diary entry of February 15, Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano recounts his discussion with Mussolini about the publication of the document during which Mussolini himself described the communiqué as “a masterpiece of anti-

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23 “La situazione degli ebrei in Italia in una precisazione dall’<<Informazione Diplomatica>>,” Corriere della Sera, February 16, 1938, Front page, second edition (my translation). Other translations can be found at De Felice, 261; Michaelis, 141-142; and partially at Sarfatti, 122.

24 De Felice, 260.
Semitic propaganda.” Clara Petacci’s diary entry on April 18, 1938 also attests to Mussolini’s personal anti-Semitism even preceding the racial laws: “These Jewish swines, a people destined to be slain completely...I detest them.” In addition, the allusion to a resettlement plan outside of Palestine indicated Mussolini’s “clear position...against Zionism.” Clearly, the concluding remarks left open the possibility of an adjustment of the status of Italian Jewry to be subjectively determined by the government, a foreboding vagueness that ultimately translated into the racial laws. The lasting legacy of Informazione Diplomatica n. 14 lies in its relative isolation, as the Fascist government did not address the issue again until the publication of the Manifesto of Racial Scientists in July. In the absence of official statements on the subject, the “preparation of the measures was in full swing” within the Fascist government.

The “Manifesto of Racial Scientists”

The five month lapse ended on July 14 with the publication of the Manifesto of Racial Scientists. In many ways, the document was a bombshell and represented a watershed moment in the development of Italian anti-Semitism. It signified the sudden introduction of racism to the Italian public which had beforehand been unaffected by a racialized worldview. Though the manifesto appeared anonymously in newspapers, the PNF released the names of the signatories eleven days later. The list consisted of ten university professors under the guise of the Ministry of Popular Culture. Sarfatti places the authorship with Guido Landra, one of the professors who signed onto the document.

26 Petacci, 299 (my translation).
27 Michaelis, 142. De Felice points out, on page 261 of his book, that the inclusion of this specific language was at the urging of Foreign Minister Ciano, which Ciano himself claims in his 15 February 1938 diary entry was intended to “save our relations with the Arabs.”
28 De Felice, 263.
29 Sarfatti, 128.
According to Ciano, Mussolini “practically wrote it all himself.” In fact, de Felice notes that the “original text was broadly edited” not only by Mussolini but also by “functionaries of the [Ministry of] Popular Culture and the secretariat of the PNF.”

*Il Giornale d’Italia* printed the ten-point ‘manifesto’ under the title “Il Fascismo e la Razza (Fascism and Race)” on July 14. The content clearly adhered to the racial theories in Nazi Germany while maintaining some distinct qualities. It is necessary here to quote the ‘Decalogue’ in full:

1. Human races exist.
2. Large races and small races exist.
3. The concept of race is a purely biological concept.
4. The actual population of Italy is of Aryan origin and its culture is Aryan.
5. The contribution of great masses of men in historical times is a legend.
6. A pure “Italian race” exists at this point.
7. The time has come for Italians to openly proclaim themselves racists.
8. A clear distinction must be made between the Mediterranean people of Europe (Occidentals) on one side, the Orientals and Africans on the other.
10. The purely European physical and psychological characteristics of the Italians must not be altered in any way.

The notion of biological racism had been largely absent from Italian thought prior to the publication of the manifesto. The conflation of ‘Italian’ and ‘Aryan’ further echoed the German belief in a pure race. However, the commentary that accompanied

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30 Ciano, 109.
31 De Felice, 264-265.
32 Here I quote the translated text from De Felice, 679-680. The text is widely available online and in print, in English and in Italian (for example, see Italy, *La persecuzione degli ebrei durante il fascismo: le leggi del 1938*, Ricerche e convegni (Roma: Camera dei deputati, 1998), 111-113; Giovanni Codovini and Dino Renato Nardelli, eds., *Le leggi razziali in Italia*, Materiali per la memoria, 1 (Foligno: Editoriale Umbra, 2003), 108-110; Alberto Cavaglione and Gian Paolo Romagnani, *Le interdizioni del Duce: le leggi razziali in Italia*, Libertà e giustizia, 2 (Torino: Claudiana, 2002), 70-75; “Il Fascismo e la Razza,” *Il Giornale d’Italia*, July 14, 1938, Front page). It is interesting to note the use of the ‘Decalogue’ theme, one with obvious biblical overtones that was used quite often in Germany as well. For example, the Nazis promulgated Decalogues such as a “Ten Commandments for Choosing a Spouse” (Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien, *Nazi Cinema As Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 163) and a “Ten Commandments of the German Soldier” (Jewish Virtual Library, “The German Soldier’s Ten Commandments,” [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/ww2/soldiercommand.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/ww2/soldiercommand.html) (accessed March 24, 2010)).
the first point departed from Nazi beliefs in the superiority of certain races over others. The only point to deal directly with the Jews, point nine, does not explicitly call for the marginalization or persecution of the Jews nor does it assert their inferiority in comparison to ‘Italians.’ Points seven and ten undoubtedly act together as a call-to-arms for Italians to take the statements of the manifesto to heart. In this way, the regime could implicitly construct a hostile atmosphere for ‘non-Italians.’

As the dawn of an era of Italian racism, the document served to “create an ideological and scientific platform for state-sponsored anti-Semitism.” Around this time, Ciano outlined Mussolini’s position on the racial question, one which “does not mean persecution, but discrimination.” This phrase suggested that Mussolini did not want to pursue outright violence against the Jews in Italy as had been done in Germany. However, domestic policy did not completely drive the publication of the ‘Decalogue.’ This move also reflected the changing landscape of Italian foreign policy which increasingly acted in accordance with the interests of the Rome-Berlin partnership. Michaelis argues that Mussolini “judged the time ripe for a racial gesture which would convince both the Germans and the Anglo-French of his unshakable loyalty to the Axis.” Regardless of the timing, such a “racial gesture” in foreign affairs remained of secondary concern to Italy’s domestic situation.

On the 25th, the Partito Nationale Fascista (PNF) issued a press release responding to the manifesto. The bulletin disclosed the ten professors involved in the

33 De Felice, 264.
34 Ciano, 109. The phrase “to discriminate is not to persecute” entered official record on August 6, 1938, with the publication of Mussolini’s Informazione Diplomatica n. 18 in newspapers across Italy. An English translation of I.D. n. 18 can be found at De Felice, 682-683 (Document 18) and at Jewish Virtual Library, “Informazione Diplomatica 18,” http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/defendrace_italy.html (accessed January 31, 2010).
35 Michaelis, 176.
drafting of the document and reaffirmed the Fascist regime’s long-term pursuit of racist policies. Additionally, it accused Jews of composing “the general staff of anti-Fascism” and promised the “elaboration and dissemination of Fascist principles on the issue of race” in the year ahead.\footnote{De Felice, 681-682 (Document 17).} Ciano’s diary reveals that already by July 24 the racial laws were “eagerly expected” and that the PNF bulletin was “in reality written by the Duce.”\footnote{Ciano, 112.} Indeed, the language was ominous, and after the bulletin’s transmission “the persecution machine began to function openly.”\footnote{De Felice, 265.} The previously secure Jewish community now found itself face to face with impending Fascist anti-Semitism and exclusion from Italian society.
Act II: *Le leggi razziali* (The Racial Laws)

**Institutionalized Racism**

Four days after the publication of the manifesto, a major shift occurred in the bureaucratic recognition of racial issues. The Central Demographic Office of the Ministry of the Interior became the notorious General Directorate for Demography and Race (DEMORAZZA), an office that would “decide the fate of tens of thousands of foreign and Italian Jews for the next five years.”

This bureau would be aided by a High Council for Demography and Race. A second office at the Ministry of Popular Culture, the *Ufficio Studi e Propaganda sulla Razza* also known as the Race Office, came into being in August to supplement DEMORAZZA with “information, propaganda, and documentation” related to the racial policies.

The creation of the biweekly *La Difesa della Razza* magazine on August 5 complemented these two institutions with “a remarkable chronicle of Italian and fascist racism and xenophobia” and “influenced – and reflected – Italian government policy and thinking.”

With DEMORAZZA under the control of the infamous anti-Semite Antonio Le Pera, the Race Office headed by Guido Landra and Telesio Interlandi (director of the Fascist Federation of the Italian Press) at the helm of *La Difesa della Razza*, these establishments acted as a “sure sign that the practical corollaries of the racist Decalogue were at hand.” In rapid succession, the Fascist regime created an institutional basis from which to launch its legal attack against the Jews.

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39 De Felice, 265.
40 Sarfatti, 126. Also see Michaelis, 176.
42 Michaelis, 165.
Alas, the Fascist government did not rest on its laurels in the development of state anti-Semitism. As the main arbiter of racial policy, DEMORAZZA needed to collect statistics from which to direct the course of legislative efforts. On August 22, it carried out a “de facto census of all Jews present in Italy.”\textsuperscript{43} The final count ended on October 24 after which 58,412 people in the Kingdom of Italy were identified as a Jew to some degree.\textsuperscript{44} Of these, 48,032 were considered ‘Italian Jews’ while 10,380 had resided within Italian territory for six months or more and were therefore ‘foreign Jews.’ Furthermore, the census categorized 46,656 people as ‘actual Jews,’ a conglomerate of ‘declared’ Jews and those who enrolled in a Jewish Community (local religious organizations which were keeping active records of Jews since November 1931). Only 37,241 of these ‘actual Jews’ held Italian citizenship. Italian Jews thus “represented somewhat less than 1.1 per thousand” of Italy’s total population.”\textsuperscript{45}

In the midst of the census, King Vittorio Emanuele declared that DEMORAZZA and the High Council would become official organs of the regime. Two royal legal decrees (regio decreto-legge, abbreviated as RDL) issued on September 5, RDL n. 1531 and RDL n. 1539, established these institutions as the vanguard of Italian racism. Henceforth, they were tasked with tracking “all the inherent attributes of the study and implementation of measures for demography and race” with the High Council.


\textsuperscript{44} All statistical information used regarding the August 22, 1938 racial census was taken from Michele Sarfatti’s calculations. The numbers can be found at Sarfatti, 24 (Table 2). Liliana Picciotto Fargion gives further support for the number being 58,412 at Liliana Picciotto Fargion, Il libro della memoria: Gli Ebrei deportati dall’Italia 1943-1945 (Milano: Mursia, 1991), 793. Jonathan Steinberg notes the exceedingly high percentage of intermarriage unveiled in the census, placing the rate at around 43.7 percent. For further discussion, see Jonathan Steinberg, All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-1943 (New York: Routledge, 1990), 223.

\textsuperscript{45} Sarfatti, 25.
definitively answering “questions of the interesting general character of demography and race.” These governmental bodies together defined the status of the Jews under Mussolini throughout the remainder of his regime’s existence.

**Measures against Jews in Schools and Foreign Jews**

The first set of racial laws came to fruition after a meeting of the Grand Council on September 1, 1938. As stated earlier, the institutions of Fascist racism were formally integrated into the government on September 5. That same day, RDL n.1390 aimed to ‘Aryanize’ all levels of Italy’s public schools. The decree forbade the hiring of Jewish teachers and professors, consideration for tenure and admission of Jewish students “even if they were included in the lists of competition prior to the present decree.” Furthermore, it suspended the service of current teachers, staff, and assistant or tenured professors. Jews could no longer hold membership in professional organizations as well. Students who had already matriculated were permitted to complete their education.

On September 23, RDL n. 1630 expanded the operation of Aryanization within elementary schools. The main effect of this additional decree was to allow the construction of Jewish-only, private primary schools with Jewish teachers who would instruct students using state textbooks. The responsibility of funding of such schools, however, fell upon the local Jewish communities. Additionally, the law established special sections of elementary schools in localities where more than ten Jewish children lived. Teachers in these special sections could belong to the Jewish race. Lastly, the legislation tasked the Ministry of Education, as led by the vehemently anti-Semitic

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46 Codovini and Nardelli, 74-75 (my translation).
47 Camera dei Deputati, 121. See also Codovini and Nardelli, 67-68; Cavaglion and Romagnani, 75-77; Valerio Di Porto, *Le leggi della vergogna: norme contro gli ebrei in Italia e Germania* (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 2000), 164-166.
48 Codovini and Nardelli, 68-69. See also Di Porto, 166-167.
Giuseppe Bottai, with overseeing the entire process and approving the construction of the Jewish private schools. ⁴⁹

Through these two decrees, the regime reserved public education in Fascist Italy for pure ‘Italians.’ ⁵⁰ Mussolini expressed this aspiration for the social separation of ‘Italians’ and ‘non-Italians’ on September 2, 1938, stating, “No bad things will be done to [the Jews] but they must not take our bread. They must live their lives…without invading our camp.” ⁵¹ As a highly assimilated group, Italian Jews, young children in particular, had difficulty separating from the social ties they had developed in the public schools. The forced expulsion from school constituted a “cold shower” for many Jewish students whose assimilation meant that religious and racial factors had not been considered important in forming friendships. ⁵² Victoria Ancona-Vincent and Piera Sonnino both recount attending all-Jewish schools, the only option for Jewish children after the decree, until June 1939 when the government closed down the Jewish schools. ⁵³

In fact, the restrictions on education appeared “the most calamitous and able to arouse the most intense emotional reactions…[sparking] the most visible protest against the

⁴⁹ De Felice notes the particular zeal with which Bottai directed the Ministry of Education’s racial efforts, even before the promulgation of the racial laws. His actions included conducting an internal census of its Jewish employees as well as a push for the distribution of the anti-Semitic periodical, La Difesa della Razza, in schools. See De Felice, 267-269.

⁵⁰ Foreign university students were hit especially hard with the effects of the legislation. Gian Paolo Brizzi outlines the fate of some 436 foreign students attending the University of Bologna, the Italian university with the largest population of foreign students at the time. Most had come as a result of Italy’s relatively lax immigration policies as well as “anti-semitism which had begun to emerge in the aftermath of the First World War.” Nearly all were medical students. Of course, the irony of fleeing persecution only to have one’s studies cut short by Italy’s persecutory legislation represents the innate cruelty of these laws. For the complete story of these students, see Gian Paolo Brizzi, Bologna 1938: Silence and Remembering: The Racial Laws and the Foreign Jewish Students at the University of Bologna, Pubblicazioni dell’Archivio storico, 5 (Bologna: CLUEB, 2002), 11-27.

⁵¹ Petacci, 404 (my translation).


initiation of the legislative racial campaign.\textsuperscript{54} With the focus on education, the Fascist government legalized Jewish exclusion from a prominent aspect of the public sphere and attempted to sever long-term Jewish participation in the life of the nation.

Furthermore, the timing revealed a critical point regarding Fascist racial policy: “a measure on the generalized expulsion of the foreign Jews like the Italian one in September 1938 did not exist in Germany; analogously the expulsion of Jews from schools in Germany followed a path much more gradual than in Italy.”\textsuperscript{55} While the decree calling for the expulsion of all foreign Jews from Italy was promulgated on September 5, 1938, similar (though not nearly as sweeping) action in Germany did not occur until late October 1938 with the expulsion of 17,000 Polish Jews.\textsuperscript{56} Following Kristallnacht in Germany on November 9, 1938, the Nazi regime caught up to its Italian counterpart regarding the legal developments for public schools. Jewish children in Germany were banned from public schools on November 15, 1938, over two months after the corresponding action in Italy.\textsuperscript{57} Additionally, Michele Sarfatti notes that the same lag occurred when dealing with the limitations on ownership.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, at certain

\textsuperscript{55} I quote here Enzo Collotti’s summation of Valerie Di Porto’s findings which can be found at Enzo Collotti, \textit{Il fascismo e gli ebrei}, 2nd ed. (Roma: Editori Laterza, 2004), 77. For Di Porto’s fuller explanation of the comparison, see Di Porto, 164.
\textsuperscript{58} Michele Sarfatti, “Characteristics and Objectives of the Anti-Jewish Racial Laws in Fascist Italy, 1938-1943,” in \textit{Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-1945}, ed. Joshua Zimmerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74. Italy’s first economic measures were introduced in the Declaration on Race on October 6, 1938. At a meeting on November 12, 1938, Goering and other high-ranking Nazis decided to impose harsh economic conditions on the Jews under the pretext of Kristallnacht. For a longer discussion of the meeting and its consequences, see Yad Vashem, “November 12: Harsh anti-Jewish measures,” \url{http://www1.yadvashem.org/about_holocaust/chronology/1933-1938/1938/chronology_1938_17.html} (accessed March 25, 2010).
points, Italy’s racial laws came before those of its German ally, reinforcing the notion that Italy operated actively and independently in the realm of anti-Semitic policy.

The second provision arising from the September 1 Grand Council meeting dealt with foreign nationals. On September 7, RDL n. 1381 called for the expulsion of foreign Jews from the Kingdom of Italy, Libya and the territorial possessions of Italy (i.e. the Dodecanese Islands in Greece).\(^{59}\) Moreover, it broadened the definition of ‘foreign Jew’ to anybody who acquired Italian citizenship after January 1, 1919, thereafter revoking their citizenship rights. The decree gave foreign Jews six months to vacate the aforementioned territories. In anticipation of “the controversies that could arise in the application of the present legal decree,” those affected could appeal their case to the Ministry of the Interior.

**Declaration on Race**

A month after the proclamation of the first tangible forms of Fascist anti-Semitism, the PNF made its stance on the matter public. De Felice outlines the editing process leading up the meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism during which the *Dichiarazione sulla Razza* (Declaration on Race) was finalized. He claims that Mussolini tried to “avoid expressions that gave the impression of persecution” so as not to stray from the oft-repeated saying ‘discriminate, but do not persecute.’\(^{60}\) Yet, in private, Ciano quoted Mussolini as saying, “Anti-Semitism is now inoculated in the blood of the Italians. It will continue to circulate and develop on its own….even if I am accommodating this evening, I will be very harsh in the preparation of the laws.”\(^{61}\)

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\(^{59}\) Codovini and Nardelli, 25-26. See also Cavaglion and Romagnani, 77-78.

\(^{60}\) De Felice, 284. For three different versions of the Declaration throughout the editing process, including Mussolini’s first draft, see De Felice, 690-700 (Document 22).

\(^{61}\) Ciano, 139.
Further support for Mussolini’s unforgiving private view of the Jews emerged later at a secret speech he gave in front of the Grand Council of Fascism on October 25, stating that “they maintained purity throughout the centuries, since religion coincides with race and race with religion…they were never able to assimilate.”\(^{62}\) In addition, Clara Petacci quoted Mussolini as saying on October 4, 1938, “These days, every Italian has their Jew to defend…Abroad it will be a huge scandal but so huge that it will astound these defenders of a despicable race.”\(^{63}\) Five days later, he proclaimed, “Damn Jews, I will kill them all!”\(^{64}\) As can be seen, the rabid Mussolini behind these quotations does not match the historical impression of a passive Nazi puppet who simply copied Germany’s racial laws.

The Declaration on Race of October 6, 1938 contained a number of provisions that for the first time defined ‘Jewishness’ and addressed the status of those who fit into the category. According to the document, one belonged to the Jewish race if: 1) both parents belonged to the Jewish race, 2) one’s father was Jewish and mother was a foreigner, or 3) one practiced Judaism even if born of a mixed marriage.\(^{65}\) Children of mixed marriages who professed a religion other than Judaism were not considered of the Jewish race. Jews of unaddressed categories could not hold membership in the PNF, own large businesses, own large plots of land, or serve in the military. The so-called *discriminazioni* (discriminations) created exceptions to persecution for families of


\(^{63}\) Petacci, 420 (my translation).

\(^{64}\) Petacci, 422 (my translation).

\(^{65}\) I quote here the finalized version of the Declaration on Race as found in De Felice, 697-700 (Document 22(III)). The text of this particular version was the agreed-upon language at the conclusion of the meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism. De Felice also provides two earlier versions of the document: one prepared by Mussolini himself (Document 22 (I)), and one presented to the Grand Council of Fascism (Document 22 (II)). See also Cavaglion and Romagnani, 78-82.
veterans of foreign wars and “the Fascist cause” as well as “families holding exceptional titles of merit.” The Grand Council granted pensions to dismissed Jews who worked for “public positions,” freedom of religion, and the creation of private Jewish high schools.

Moreover, the Grand Council accused worldwide Jewry of hostility toward Fascism and blamed the influx of “foreign elements” for the “worsening frame of mind of Italian Jews.” Foreign Jews could no longer enter Italy, and those who were younger than sixty five or had not married an ‘Italian’ before October 1, 1938 were forced to leave (as had been enunciated in RDL n. 1381). Regarding marriages, ‘Italians’ were henceforth forbidden from marrying those of “Hamite, Semite, and other non-Aryan races.” Employees of public institutions and Fascist bureaucrats could not marry foreign women regardless of race. On the subject of the ‘Jewish question,’ the document left open the possibility of a future “controlled immigration of European Jews” to Ethiopia.

A number of points regarding the implications of the Declaration on Race must be addressed. First, views did not coalesce on approaches to the ‘Jewish problem.’ De Felice points out the likely intervention of Italo Balbo (often a pro-Jewish voice within the Fascist regime) on behalf of the Jews as evidenced by the inclusion of secondary education. Other Fascist functionaries amended the text as well in order to “inject statements reflecting their own political views or, in some cases, give it a more or less oppressive tone.” In addition, O’Reilly notes the paradox inherent in the statement’s unification of earlier discriminatory legislation with promises of pensions for dismissed

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66 De Felice, 290. Ciano notes on October 6 that “Balbo, De Bono, and Federzoni” spoke in favor of the Jews during the Grand Council meeting while the other attendees favored harsher treatment (Ciano, 139).
67 De Felice, 285. RDL n. 1630 of September 23, 1938, had only allowed for the creation of private Jewish primary schools.
Jews and free practice of the Jewish faith.\textsuperscript{68} For Sarfatti, the publication of this document exposed “a policy of international blackmail.”\textsuperscript{69} It did not limit its discussion to Italy but instead attacked worldwide Jewry and international Zionism. The blend of anti-Semitism and xenophobia reflected the regime’s particularly harsh view of foreign Jews.

\textit{Measures for the Defense of the Italian Race}

As much as the Manifesto of Racial Scientists represented a bombshell in the development of Italian racism, the Measures for the Defense of the Italian Race obliterated any doubts about a formal anti-Semitic policy under Mussolini. On its most basic level, RDL n. 1728 of November 17, 1938, translated the decisions of the Declaration on Race into the canon of Italian law. Yet, it embodied the regime’s holistic approach to racial affairs in Italy. On a deeper level, the law was anything but a defensive maneuver. The language of the text signified active persecution that, while not inciting state-sponsored violence against the Jewish community, sought to conclusively demote the Jews in Italy to second-class citizenry.

The decree was divided into three sections: “Measures relating to marriage,” “On those belonging to the Jewish race,” and “Temporary and final regulations.”\textsuperscript{70} According to the marriage provisions, ‘Aryan’ Italians could not marry or remain married to a person of another race on threat of a fine and jail time. Likewise, public servants, military personnel, and party members could not marry a foreign national. The state imposed harsh financial penalties on violators, even the religious representative

\textsuperscript{69} Sarfatti, \textit{The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy}, 129.
\textsuperscript{70} As RDL n. 1728 represents such an important document in the study of Fascist anti-Semitism, it has been reproduced extensively in Italian and English. My main source of quotation is De Felice’s English version found at De Felice, 700-705 (Document 23). For the Italian, see Codovini and Nardelli, 14-17; Camera dei Deputati, 122-124; Di Porto, 172-183. Di Porto’s \textit{Le Leggi Della Vergogna} is particularly useful here as it presents a side by side comparison of the Italian and German measures.
performing the ceremony. As can be seen, the measures relating to marriage exceeded the original scope of the Grand Council in their Declaration on Race.

In the second section, the law defined ‘Jewishness’ then proceeded to severely limit the participation of Jews in Italian society. The definition as enunciated in the Declaration on Race was expanded. The regime would henceforth consider one Jewish if: 1) one’s parents both belonged to the Jewish race (regardless of religious affiliation), 2) one parent was Jewish and the other a foreigner, 3) one’s mother was Jewish but father was unknown, or 4) even one parent of Italian nationality was of the Jewish race, Jewish religion, registered in a Jewish community, or gave “indications of Judaism.” The law made an exception for mixed marriages where the Jewish parent followed a religion other than Judaism by October 1, 1938.

Italian Jews as defined by Article 8 of the decree could not: 1) serve in the military, 2) maintain rights of guardianship for non-Jewish minors or the disabled, 3) own or manage businesses employing over one hundred people or vital to the “interest of the defense of the Nation,” 4) own land valued at over five thousand lire, and 5) own urban buildings with an assessable tax value of over twenty thousand lire. Parents could be stripped of their parental rights in relation to a non-Jewish child if they instilled values counter to the child’s religious beliefs or the Fascist cause. Jews could no longer employ Aryan domestic workers. Furthermore, Jews were barred (by Article 13) from employment in the civil and military administrations, PNF, institutions related to state, local and municipal administration, banks and private insurance firms. Claims for the non-application of Article 13, or ‘discriminations,’ could only be made by family members of veterans of foreign wars or the Fascist cause or those who were hurt and/or
decorated in a foreign war or in defense of the Fascist cause, PNF members between 1919 and 1922 and the second half of 1924 (after the murder of Socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti), Legionnaires in Fiume, or those who had “acquired exceptional merit.”

The third section tied up loose ends regarding the situation of Italian and foreign Jews. The Ministry of Internal Affairs could grant exceptions for mixed marriages only in the case of foreigners of the Aryan race. Jews who did not register themselves with the regime were subject to arrest and fines. Affected employees were given three months to resign their posts. Article 20 granted pensions to dismissed state employees as well as those who fell into the categories of Article 13. Articles 23 to 25 restated the conclusion of RDL n. 1381 regarding the expulsion of foreign Jews. Finally, the document ended with an ironic twist whereby the Fascist regime committed itself to maintaining the status quo regarding Jewish religious administration.

In terms of legal language, RDL n. 1728 closely resembled the Nuremberg Laws promulgated in Nazi Germany on September 15, 1935.71 The first section of both RDL n. 1728 and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor (R.G.Bl., I, 1146) dealt with marriage and explicitly outlawed mixed marriages involving “Jews” (in the Italian case, “Jew” is substituted for the much broader and more ambiguous term “another race”) and those belonging to the “Aryan” race. Likewise, any marriage celebrated in violation of the measures was invalid. Unlike the Italians, the Germans took the restrictions one step further, forbidding extramarital intercourse between Jews

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71 For a side-by-side comparison of RDL n. 1728 and the Nuremberg Laws (as well as other pertinent German laws), see Di Porto, 172-183.
and Aryans. Article 12 of RDL n. 1728 matched §3 of R.G.Bl., I, 1146 prohibiting Jewish employment of an Aryan domestic worker. Regarding the definition of “the Jew,” the Italians and German enforced similar provisions. While RDL n. 1728 did not attempt to define “Italian” as the Reich Citizenship Law did with “German,” the First Regulation of the Reich Citizenship Law (R.G.Bl., I, 1333 of November 14, 1935) and Article 8 of RDL n. 1728 defined who belonged to the Jewish race. Ultimately, two of the most noteworthy differences involved the issue of the Mischlinge (persons of mixed race) which the Italians did not address and the Italian inclusion of discriminazioni.

Renzo De Felice’s original assessment of the document led him to conclude that there was “no doubt that the famous slogan, ‘discriminate, but do not persecute,’ reflected Mussolini’s true intentions” and that “Italian anti-Semitic legislation was, compared to that of other countries, much less personally oppressive.” However, Sarfatti points out that, upon closer examination, discriminated Jews were “exempted from just a few of the persecutory measures.” Likewise, Zuccotti comments on the precarious nature of the discriminations which “were subject to limitations…[and] did not cover all the restrictions defined in the racial laws.” Stille sees the discriminations as “a distinctive feature of Italian anti-Semitism legislation, reflecting the degree of improvisation and opportunism…of the Italian racial persecution.” As a result, the 1938 racial laws as articulated in RDL n. 1728 “were the most draconian, after Germany’s.”

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72 Given Mussolini’s numerous personal indiscretions, including an affair with Margherita Sarfatti (a Jew), it is no surprise that the issue of extramarital relations with Jews did not appear in the Italian racial laws. De Felice, 240.
73 De Felice, 240.
74 Sarfatti in Zimmerman, 72.
77 Sarfatti, The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy, 125.
Moreover, for De Felice, RDL n. 1728 “remained on a somewhat hybrid terrain at once a bit biological, a bit religious, and a bit political.” Sarfatti observes the same trend, asserting that “the primary tendency – biological racism – represented a sort of middle ground between the national-racist tendency, inclined mainly to take into account the eventual national-fascistic “merits” of those one-eighth of Jewish blood, and the esoteric-traditionalist tendency, according to which phobic approach so-called “Jewish blood” constituted an attack on the health of individuals and all of society.” The definition of the Jew remained murky as well. Calendrille notes that “confusion ensued over definitions of who was a Jew, and with Italy’s high rate of intermarriage and religious conversion, the situation was further complicated.” In spite of the ambiguity and Italian-specific nuances (especially the discriminations), RDL n. 1728 ultimately tied the fate of Italian Jews to their unalterable biology.

The propaganda resulting from the racial laws of 1938 expressed the idea that the Italian people were being saved from the Jews who sought to destroy Italy. Like the imagery from the year before, the 1938 propaganda relied heavily on the use of Jewish caricatures and stereotypes to convey their otherness from Italian “Aryans” and drum up support for the racial laws. One picture in particular, shown below, encapsulated the general propaganda campaign in support of the laws. Entitled “The Measures for the Defense of the Race” and released on the same day as the passage of RDL n. 1728, the image shows a firm hand gripping scissors which are being used to cut the nails of a

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78 De Felice, 331.
81 Centro Furio Jesi, 160.
stereotypical Jew who has been imprisoned. The man exhibits all of the common features inherent in anti-Semitic propaganda: large nose, scraggly beard, overweight, hairy, and wearing a suit (to emphasize his assumed wealth). On each of the nails, a particular measure within RDL n. 1728 is written: business, commerce, marriage, “wheeling and dealing,” banks, insurance, industry, the stock market. His cufflinks depict a Star of David and the Masonic Square and Compasses symbol of Freemasonry, and his watch fob contains the Soviet Hammer and Sickle. The inclusion of this iconographic trio, representing the collusion of Bolshevism, Freemasonry and Judaism, became a reoccurring theme in Fascist propaganda throughout the war.

**Expanding Persecution: 1939-1943**

The misery had only begun for Jews in Mussolini’s Italy with the inception of RDL n. 1728. Shortly thereafter, the Fascist government capitalized on the momentum of these measures to expand and enunciate the nature and scope of racial persecution. The first legislative act to follow the November measures was RDL n. 2111 on December 22, 1938 calling for the forcible retirement of all Jews from the Italian armed forces.\(^{82}\) Whereart Article 10 of RDL n. 1728 explicitly forbade military service in peacetime and in wartime, RDL n. 2111 removed all vestiges of the Jewish community within the Italian armed forces. This ‘Aryanization’ of the Italian military did not make exceptions for

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\(^{82}\) Codovini and Nardelli, 54-58; Di Porto 201-207.
“discriminated” Jews as had been done in RDL n. 1728. However, soldiers belonging to the Jewish race could maintain their rank as well as keep their uniform. They were also compensated according to the framework established under Article 21 of RDL n. 1728 concerning pensions of dismissed persons. Regardless, RDL n. 2111 sent the unambiguous signal to Italian Jews that they could not participate in the protection of their homeland. By the close of 1938, the Jews in Fascist Italy were stripped of many of their most basic rights and relegated to the second tier of Italian citizenry.

Up through the summer of 1939, the regime inflicted further legalized suffering upon the Italian Jewish population. RDL n. 126 of February 9, 1939 addressed the implementation of sections C through E of Article 10 of the November legislation. These measures dealt with the restrictions on the possession of real property as well as commercial and industrial activities of Italian Jews. Arguably the most important consequence of RDL n. 126 was the creation of a new government entity known as the Agency of Real Estate Management and Liquidation, or EGELI. The government tasked EGELI with the collection of information related to Jewish real estate holdings. All real estate valued in excess of the total amount set by Art. 10 § D of RDL n. 1728 had to be registered with EGELI for liquidation within ninety days of the passage of RDL n. 126. Ironically, section IV of RDL n. 126 laid out a process of compensation whereby Jewish property owners would receive credit for liquidated real estate. Additionally, this legislation prohibited Jewish ownership of corporations dedicated to national defense or employing over one hundred workers along the lines of Art. 10 § C of RDL n. 1728. These businesses were to be rapidly divested, leaving both the employers and employees without jobs.

83 Codovini and Nardelli, 35-52; Di Porto, 210-232.
Following the passage of the preceding laws, many Italian Jews were faced with the total collapse of their livelihoods. Simultaneously, the Fascist government sought ever more invasive ways to expand their operation of Aryanizing Italian society. The next step in the process emerged in the form of RDL n. 1054 of June 29, 1939 regulating the exercise of certain professions. This law clearly targeted Jews who held positions of high status in Italian society. As in previous legislation, ‘discriminated’ Jews fared comparatively better than their non-discriminated counterparts. Non-discriminated Jews were placed on a “special list” and employers were expected to exhibit favoritism for non-Jews over Jews “save for cases of demonstrable necessity and urgency.” In addition, section IV of the law forbade Jews from participating in their respective professional associations. De Felice asserts that the focal point of the legislation rested on the specific prohibition on notary and journalist positions for Jews. ‘Discriminated’ Jews could be granted an exception for a journalism career but could not be a notary under any circumstances. As notaries serve at the discretion of the state, the Fascist government expressed their unequivocal desire to sever any relationship with Italians Jews. In the end, RDL n. 1054 represented the regime’s most restrictive stance in relation to labor.

In a rather short law, the Fascist government followed their anti-labor activities with an even more personally-invasive stance on family matters. RDL n. 1055 of July 13, 1939 dealt with two main issues: one’s last will and testament and surname. In relation to testamentary and succession concerns, this law nullified the condition whereby

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84 Codovini and Nardelli, 29-33; Di Porto, 233-248.
85 Codovini and Nardelli, 32 (my translation).
86 De Felice, 334.
87 Codovini and Nardelli, 52-53.
the recipient of an inheritance had to affirm their Jewish faith if so directed by the deceased. Regarding surnames, non-discriminated Jews had to change it back if “they had changed their own surname to another that did not reveal their Jewish origins.”

Finally, non-Jews who had “surnames notoriously diffuse among the aforementioned race [i.e. Jewish-sounding surnames]” could apply for a name change. The fact that the issue of surnames even necessitated a legal discussion in the eyes of the Fascists undoubtedly acted as an acknowledgment of broad Jewish assimilation and revealed the inherent difficulties in defining “the Jew.”

On the same day, the Fascist government unveiled “supplementary rules” to the November measures under RDL n. 1024 of July 13, 1939. The law decreed that the Ministry of the Interior held the right to declare someone as “not belonging to the Jewish race even if in conflict with the results of the civil status of record” so long as its judgment was echoed by a special commission. Moreover, the Ministry of the Interior had the power to nominate nearly all of the commission’s membership, and the commission itself worked under the auspices of Ministry of the Interior. In laymen’s terms, this addition to RDL n. 1728 essentially allowed the Ministry of the Interior to declare the racial laws null and void for certain people at its discretion. De Felice argues that this law created an entirely “new category of legal person, those who were

88 Codovini and Nardelli, 53 (my translation).
89 Ibid.
90 Di Porto, 197-198.
91 An extremely similar situation occurred in Germany whereby the Nazi Bureau of Race Research could bestow the title of “honorary Aryan” to those belonging to a non-Aryan race. However, there is a distinction between being given the title of “honorary Aryan” and being considered “not belonging to the Jewish race.” For a longer discussion of the “honorary Aryan” issue, see Bryan Mark Rigg, *Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military*, (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2002).
‘Aryanized.’”92 These individuals undoubtedly held a “privileged status [even] compared to the discriminated persons.”93 Ultimately, the law only served to undermine the regime’s commitment to biological racism, instead symbolizing the inherent political and moral corruption of the Fascists and Fascism as a political system. The law, and even racial doctrine itself, could thus be bent at will to meet the opportunistic needs of those in power.

As can be seen, Mussolini’s regime sought to micromanage social indicators of race even down to one’s name. Without a doubt, the isolation that the Fascist government imposed upon the Jewish population aimed to gradually erase Judaism from the ranks of Italian society. In fact, on February 9, 1940, shortly before Italy entered the Second World War, Mussolini himself unambiguously declared to the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities that in a matter of time Italy would become like Hitler’s Germany: senza ebrei, judenfrei, without Jews.94 After two tumultuous years with an ever-growing list of restrictions on its Jewish population, Italy entered the Second World War on June 10, 1940 on the side of its Axis partner, Germany.

It is not within the scope of this study to analyze the military developments of Fascist Italy. Suffice it to say that Italy entered a war that it was ill equipped to fight and the machinery of Fascist bureaucracy continued to churn in a persecutory fashion alongside warfare concerns after June 1940. On April 19, 1942, a nearly three year pause in new racial laws came to an abrupt end with the dissemination of RDL n. 517.95 Within the context of the Second World War, this law seemed rather misplaced. However, RDL

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92 De Felice, 335.
93 Ibid.
95 Di Porto, 257-259.
n. 517 translated into law an earlier DEMORAZZA initiative from June 18, 1940. The provisions of the law were rather straightforward: all Jews, discriminated or not, were barred from the show business industry in any way, shape or form. Lists were to be compiled of Jews already in the industry. Also, the title of the law referred to “Jewish elements in show business,” representing a more sinister tone than “citizens of the Jewish race.”

1942 also saw the introduction of mandatory labor service for Italian Jews. The order came directly from DEMORAZZA which “became extremely oppressive” especially in relation to the “more liberal decisions made by many local offices” dealing with the implementation of the laws. In asserting itself as the principal office of anti-Semitic policy, DEMORAZZA imposed physical persecution for the first time in the scope of the Fascist racial laws. On May 6, it disseminated the order to mobilize Jews specifically for manual labor. The order established a ranking of those to be chosen first: Jews who were of legal age for military service between 1910 and 1922 but were barred from service by the racial laws, then manual laborers and the unemployed, then those in commerce, professions, “regular jobs” and students, then finally those who worked in “establishments of national interest.” De Felice contends that the inception of draft labor in Italy transpired for two main reasons: to “use all available manpower to attain victory and to end popular discontent against the ‘favorable status’ the Jews enjoyed

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96 Di Porto, 257. According to Di Porto, DEMORAZZA’s circolare (newsletter) n. 1549 forbade “any activity in the sector of show business.” Even ‘discriminated’ Jews could not participate in such activity. 97 De Felice, 348. 98 A memo dated August 5, 1942, reproduced at De Felice, 722 (Document 30), laid out the structure of the draft labor service. It is interesting to note that Jews were specifically barred from working with non-Jews for any job.
because of the persecution.”99 While these motives may explain the politics behind the decision, draft labor stood as yet another example of the Fascist regime forcing Italian Jews into another scheme aimed at disrupting their freedom and most basic protections.

The last major law to address the rights of Jews conformed to the types of concerns that arose during wartime. In the midst of the North African campaign, specifically the Western Desert campaign that took place in Libya and Egypt between June 1940 and February 1943, Mussolini’s attention was drawn away from domestic affairs towards the international arena. Italo Balbo, the Fascist Governor of Libya and Commander-in-Chief of Italian North Africa who often defended the Jews, had successfully persuaded Mussolini from pursuing harsher measures against Libyan Jews, arguing that “it would be wise…not to engage in a bitter struggle for the defense of the race.”100 Though Balbo died in June 1940, Mussolini acquiesced until reports of Libyan Jews “destroying and looting a few Italian agricultural villages” during the Axis retreat from Cyrenaica emerged in early 1942.101 When the Italian army regained control of the area, “harsh measures were taken…on Mussolini’s orders” resulting in the internment, and sometimes execution, of thousands of Libyan Jews.102 Consequently, Mussolini jumped on the opportunity to extend the racial laws of metropolitan Italy to Libya.

On October 9, 1942, the Fascist government promulgated RDL n. 1420 regarding the Libyan Jews.103 Di Porto contends that RDL n. 1420 was “an ad hoc law that resulted in some more severe clauses and some less rigid clauses than those in force in the

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99 De Felice, 359-360. “Favorable status” here means that Jews were not allowed to serve in the military and therefore did not have to risk their lives in the war. Draft labor would, as the reasoning goes, show that Jews were participating in the hardships of war and ironically quell some level of jealousy.
100 De Felice, 364. A letter from Italo Balbo to Mussolini is reproduced in full, but no citation is given.
101 Giuseppe Gorla, L’Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale, pg. 286, at the date of February 7, 1942, quoted in De Felice, 365.
102 Michaelis, 293.
103 Di Porto, 265-276.
metropolitan territory.”

Fundamentally, this law represented a Libyan version of RDL n. 1728 of November 1938. In its broadest sense, however, RDL n. 1420 symbolized the legal culmination of Fascism’s earlier efforts in racial policy, combining the limitations of nearly all the racial laws up to 1942 into a single text. While its structure and overarching measures mirrored RDL n. 1728, it did maintain elements specific to the Libyan context. Firstly, the law outlined a new definition of those belonging to the Jewish race which did not distinguish between who “is” and who “is considered” Jewish. It stipulated three main categories of Jews: 1) practicing Jews, those registered in a Libyan Jewish community, or those who “showed in any way manifestations of Judaism,” 2) those born to parents or at least a father of the Jewish race, unless the person professed the Islamic faith before January 1, 1942, and 3) those born to a Jewish mother and father of unknown race, unless the person professed the Islamic faith before January 1, 1942. In relative terms, Libyan Jews were thus judged as much, if not more, on religious rather than biological grounds that had been the case in mainland Italy.

The remainder of the law extended to Libya most of the restrictions placed upon Italian Jews. Libyan Jews could not serve in the military, as tutors or as caregivers of the disabled or non-Jewish children. The law placed limitations on the ability of Jews to engage in the economic life of Libya similar to those in RDL n. 1728 and created a Libyan version of the EGELI. Jewish professionals were subject to the provisions in RDL n. 1054, and Libyan schools were “Aryanized” as had been done in Italy in September 1938. In addition to the restrictions on Aryan maids in the November 1938 measures, Libyan Jews could not employ Muslim domestic workers. Regarding names,

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104 Di Porto, 265 (my translation).
105 Ibid.
they had to reassume their Jewish surname if it had been changed and, in an even more limiting twist than in Italy, parents could not “impose non-Jewish names upon their children.” Jews also could not “translate or substitute” their own name for one of “Christian or Muslim appearance.” Furthermore, Jewish publications were essentially forbidden, and no new Jewish communities could be established. Finally, Libyan Jews could apply for discriminations according to the framework instituted in RDL n. 1728 of November 1938.

106 While it required the resumption of a name rather than an insertion, RDL n. 1420’s name provisions resembled the Second Decree for the Implementation of the Law Regarding Changes of Family Names of August 17, 1938 in Nazi Germany forcing Jews to take the middle name Israel or Sara.
Act III: Götterdämmerung (The Twilight of the Gods)

Salò and “I campi di sterminio”

The Western Desert Campaign came to an end in February 1943 with an Allied victory, rendering RDL n. 1420 essentially dead on arrival. The good fortune of Libyan Jews, however, did not carry through for their Italian counterparts. The Allies landed in Sicily during Operation Husky on July 9, 1943, foreshadowing the coming invasion of mainland Italy. In anticipation, both the Italians and the Germans began their preparations. On the German side, the imminent Allied takeover of Italy “aroused Hitler’s suspicions.”¹⁰⁷ The Nazi regime soon had a plan for such a scenario: “Behind the façade of Mussolini’s titular command, [they] intended to occupy and control the defence and domestic politics of the Italian peninsula.”¹⁰⁸ For the Italians, the final meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism on July 24, and the first since the beginning of the war, signified that “Fascism had entered its terminal crisis.”¹⁰⁹ At the meeting, the leading Fascists voted overwhelmingly to restore the King’s full constitutional powers and, in doing so, delivered a vote of no confidence against Mussolini. By then, the King had already made his decision to replace Mussolini with Marshal Pietro Badoglio, signifying the end of Italy’s experiment with Fascism.

The Italians, now led by Badoglio, signed their armistice with the Allies on September 3 and it was officially announced to the public on September 8. With the war still raging, Badoglio “kept the anti-Semitic legislation in place” even after September 8.¹¹⁰ He felt that it was “not possible to abrogate publicly all the racial laws without

¹⁰⁷ Steinberg, 141.
¹⁰⁸ Steinberg, 142.
¹⁰⁹ Steinberg, 145.
¹¹⁰ Sarfatti, The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy, 175.
coming into violent conflict with the Germans….though it was not possible at the moment to revoke the laws, they would not be carried out.”\textsuperscript{111} However, the terms of the Instrument of Surrender stipulated in Article 31 that all “Italian laws involving discrimination on grounds of race, color, creed or political opinions” were to be removed.\textsuperscript{112} Regardless, many Jews understood the likely German invasion and fled southward for Allied-occupied areas. In fact, on September 12, the Germans succeeded in a rescue operation to retrieve Mussolini from a prison in the mountains of Central Italy. On September 23, the infamous Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), also known as the Republic of Salò, was proclaimed, covering Northern and Central Italy and setting the stage for the “final act in the immense tragedy of the Italian Jews.”\textsuperscript{113}

The first of \textit{i convogli} (deportations) did not even wait for the RSI. According to the data compiled by Liliana Picciotto Fargion in her important work on the Italian deportations, \textit{Il Libro della Memoria}, the first train left for \textit{i campi di sterminio} (extermination camps) on September 16, 1943.\textsuperscript{114} Perhaps the best-known transport took place on October 16, 1943 when the Germans rounded up the Jews of Rome. Giacomo Debenedetti’s essay “The Sixteenth of October” expressed how the Italian Jews, when forewarned of their impending deportations, remained “ostentatiously naïve” about German intentions.\textsuperscript{115} However, from the German perspective, the Jews of Italy were “doubly guilty…as Italians for their betrayal of Germany and as Jews on account of

\textsuperscript{112} Yale Law School, “Armistice with Italy,” The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, \url{http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/italy03.asp#art31} (accessed January 29, 2010).
\textsuperscript{113} De Felice, 430.
\textsuperscript{114} Fargion, 42.
\textsuperscript{115} Giacomo Debenedetti, \textit{The Sixteenth of October 1943 and Other Wartime Essays} (Market Harborough, Leics, UK: University Texts, 1996), 9.
belonging to the race of Germany’s eternal enemies.”116 Unlike the discriminazioni of the Fascist racial laws, the deportations contained no exemptions; all Jews who fell into the hands of the Nazis were sent to the camps. Italian racial policy did not retain its nuances and independent nature under the RSI, instead becoming little more than a carbon copy of Nazi Germany.

With the deportations officially underway in Italy, the issue of Jewish material possessions arose. On January 4, 1944, Mussolini issued his “last spoliation of the Jews” in the form of Decreto Legislativo del Duce (DLD) n. 2.117 The terms of this law presented a much harsher legal and financial landscape for not-yet-detained Jews under the Republic of Salò than they had even faced up through 1943. Jews were strictly forbidden from the ownership of any business, land or building, and could not hold the office of manager or mayor. Furthermore, they had to forfeit any financial securities and could no longer possess titles, assets, debts or rights of partnership. The powers of EGELI, the agency that dealt with the liquidation of real property, were expanded to cover the new confiscations resulting from this law. In the case of indebtedness, a Jewish individual was not allowed to repay the debt if the debtor was Jewish as well. The law also voided any transactions dealing with real property after November 30, 1943. Profits made off of the liquidated holdings were funneled back into the government to cover “expenses incurred for the care, support, and rehabilitation of war damage left after enemy air raids.” Finally, harsh penalties were imposed on not only those who did not declare their debts, property or other assets, but also anybody who conspired to help conceal these facts.

116 Debenedetti, 10.

117 Di Porto, 277-284. The acronym DLD is used here instead of RDL to signify that the law is not a “royal” decree but that solely of Mussolini, now Il Duce of the Italian Social Republic.
Regarding the racial policy of the RSI, Mussolini’s word was not the last. In March 1944, he decided to establish a new agency in the RSI to continue the work of the infamous DEMORAZZA, known as the General Inspectorate for Race and Demography. Giovanni Preziosi, one of Fascism’s most ardent anti-Semites, presided over the General Inspectorate as Chief Inspector for Race and made it his personal mission to instigate “the elaboration of new [racial] laws on the themes that he found very important.” Two of his legal drafts, printed as Documents 37 and 38 in De Felice’s book, aimed to extend the scope of persecution in the RSI. His draft of a legal decree on race represented “in effect an ‘Italian translation’ of the infamous Nazi Nuremberg race laws.” It presented the narrowest possible definition of Jews and pledged to revoke any status that deemed somebody a non-Jew (resulting from RDL n. 1024 of July 13, 1939). Procreating in the case of a mixed-race relationship would constitute a “crime against the race” with punishment to be decided at a later time. The second legal draft specifically regarding the Jews recapitulated the limitations on rights in RDL n. 1728 of November 1938 and augmented them to a more severe level while still maintaining the framework of discriminations. Preziosi hoped to “transform the Inspector’s office into a super-police modeled on the Gestapo” which could then enforce

118 De Felice points out that the decision to create the Inspectorate General for Demography and Race was not made independently by Mussolini. Giovanni Preziosi had issued a memorandum, which he sent to both Mussolini and Hitler, in which he quoted Mein Kampf to say that a constitution for the RSI would not go far enough towards the elimination of the Jews. As a result, Mussolini had to choose between breaking with Hitler and succumbing to an enhanced racial campaign. De Felice argues that Mussolini wanted to “avoid losing complete control of anti-Semitic policy” and thus capitulated to Preziosi. De Felice, 735-744 (Document 36) reproduces the memorandum in full. For more information on the decision, see De Felice, 439-440.


120 De Felice, 441.
his laws. However, Mussolini was not receptive to his propositions, and nothing was made of Preziosi’s recommendations.

On April 25, 1945, the Republic of Salò collapsed under the pressure of Allied advances and the successful tactics of the partigiani. Three days later, Mussolini, his mistress Clara Petacci and a number of Fascist functionaries were captured, killed and hung upside-down outside of a gas station in Milan. Hitler committed suicide on April 30, with the war in Europe ending on May 8. In total, forty-three transports had taken place between September 1943 and February 1945. Most of the deported Jews stopped first in transit camps then were taken to four principle locations: Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, and Flossenbürg. The largest number of deportees from a single city came from Rome (1,680 people) and the overwhelming majority ended up in Auschwitz (5,951 people). In the end, Liliana Fargion places the total number of deaths of Italian Jews and Dodecanesi (people from the Greek archipelago of Dodecaneso which the Italians had occupied since 1912) at 8,869, of which 8,566 resulted from deportations.

**The Persecuted**

In the final judgment of the laws, it is necessary to turn to the voices of the affected. Behind the cold irrationality of Fascism lies a trail of stories waiting to be told. For many decades, Italian Jews, even those who suffered at the hands of the Fascist

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121 De Felice, 442.
122 Fargion, 93.
123 Fargion, 89.
124 For the number of deportations by city, see Fargion, 29. For the ultimate destination of the deportees, see Fargion, 32.
125 Fargion, 26.
government, “kept quiet and tried to forget or ignore what had happened.” However, the racial laws objectified the Jewish population in Italy, and to describe cause (the laws) without effect (suffering) would be tantamount to a historical cover-up. The re-subjectification of Italy’s Jews during the Fascist period is thus long overdue. Iael Nidam-Orvieto argues that two factors have suppressed a greater outpouring of stories: feelings of collective guilt related to early support for Fascism, and lingering problems of comparative suffering (i.e. viewing the racial laws as less impactful when compared to the systematic murder that took place between 1943-1945). Even historians have “assumed that the topic is of minor historical importance” when compared to the genocidal rage of Nazi Germany. Within the past twenty years, as was the case regarding Holocaust testimony in general, there has been a steady growth of publications dealing with the Jewish experience in Fascist Italy. As some of those voices are beginning to be heard again, historians must now integrate them into the overall story of Fascism and the Holocaust.

As stated before, much of the problem underlying recollections of the racial laws stems from the issue of comparative suffering. Walter Wolff’s memoir, Bad Times, Good People, illustrates such concerns but in comparison to the German experience. He grew up in Germany with only his mother, living through the ascendency of Hitler and the Nuremberg Laws. He was imprisoned for a time in Dachau until orders came for his release when he was told to leave Germany within six months. Realizing the ever-

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128 Levi in Cooperman and Gavin, 401.
present danger, he and his mother fled to Italy. They ultimately survived, hiding out in Milan under assumed names during the war.

Despite his good fortune, his discussion of the racial laws remains problematic. First, he makes the claim that Mussolini “was not personally anti-Semitic.”¹²⁹ In fact, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary, most recently, as has been shown, in the diary of Mussolini’s mistress Clara Petacci. Wolff also incorrectly claims that Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Pact of Steel by 1938 when in fact it was signed May 22, 1939. To make matters worse, he contends that aside from having to report one’s whereabouts to the police, there were “some other anti-Jewish laws on the books, but these had mostly been enacted by Mussolini to placate Der Führer, and their enforcement was spotty at best.”¹³⁰ Aside from the insulting understatement, such an apologia for the actions of Mussolini and his regime has been shown to be factually inaccurate. Worst of all, he asserts that even after the inception of the Pact of Steel, “the Italian regime basically left the country’s own Jews alone, and foreigners, including Jews, who had entered Italy from elsewhere were considered ‘free’ prisoners of war.”¹³¹ As has been shown, the Fascist regime passed persecutory legislation well after 1938 and foreign Jews were explicitly forced to leave Italy.

Serving to undercut Wolff’s depiction of Mussolini’s Italy, Alexander Stille’s Benevolence and Betrayal offers five windows into the world of Italian Jewry during Mussolini’s reign that show the enormous consequences of the racial laws. The story of Ettore Ovazza holds a particular resonance for its example of an ardent Fascist Jew who ascribed to the visions of grandeur for a new Roman Empire. A veteran of the First

¹²⁹ Walter Wolff, Bad Times, Good People (Long Beach: Whittier Publications, 1999), 3.
¹³⁰ Wolff, 3.
¹³¹ Ibid.
World War and founder of the newspaper *La Nostra Bandiera*, Ettore used his publication to “make unequivocally clear that the nation’s Jews were among the regime’s most fiercely loyal followers.”\textsuperscript{132} Rather than accuse Mussolini of inciting anti-Semitism, he laid blame on the Zionists, going so far as to burn down one of their offices. This stemmed from his belief that the racial laws were a “mere tactical maneuver that would be revoked” after the war.\textsuperscript{133} In fact, with Jewish membership in the PNF registered at over 10,000 in 1938, he represented a rather large contingent of upper middle-class Italian Jews “for whom patriotism was almost a secular religion.”\textsuperscript{134}

He convinced the Turin Jewish Community to publicly accept the racial laws as a “necessary sacrifice” and even affirm their allegiance to Mussolini. With the Declaration on Race and the allowance of discriminations, Ettore felt optimistic that a distinction had been made at the official level between Fascist and anti-Fascist Jews. However, the November legislation showed that the “category of discriminated Jews had been reduced to little more than symbolism.”\textsuperscript{135} The Ovazzas had to sell their family bank and leave the PNF as well as the army reserve. Most of Ettore’s family ultimately fled Italy while he stayed behind until his death at the hands of the SS in 1943, insistent to the end on his *Italianità*.

Likewise, Carla Pekelis outlines her situation as an Italian Jew who grew up more Italian than Jewish but ultimately collided with the fateful racial laws. In *My Version of the Facts*, Carla discusses a childhood of assimilation into predominantly Catholic, Italian society as “more a question of things that I did not do [i.e. religious rituals with


\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134} Stille, 22.

\textsuperscript{135} Stille, 77.
her Christian peers] than things that I had to do.”136 In spite of “an atmosphere of vague identity and comfortable ignorance,” she eventually married a Russian man with a distinctly strong, Jewish identity.137 She continued to live a secular married life with little regard for the Jewish faith and had just begun to establish a home with three children when the Manifesto of Racial Scientists shook the status quo.

According to Carla, the sudden introduction of the racial laws in 1938 was perceived by her Italian-Jewish friends as “concessions by Mussolini to Hitler ‘to keep him happy.’” As for our friends who were not Jews, their attitudes ranged from bewilderment to perplexity to indignation.”138 Furthermore, her Jewish friends looked toward the big picture versus the individual laws, believing that “these deprivations seemed of little account in the light of a general and passionate desire for reassurance.”139 Despite her friends’ optimistic views of the regime, Carla’s life was abruptly interrupted by the laws. In her particular situation, RDL n. 1381 of September 7, 1938 called for the expulsion of foreign Jews residing in Italy, which included her Russian-born husband. At first, Carla stayed with the children in Florence while her husband fled to Paris. However, with the promulgation of more laws and the fear of permanent separation, she left Italy and reunited with her husband in France.140

Edda Servi Machlin’s *Child of the Ghetto* provides a very lucid account of a Jewish childhood under Fascism. She grew up in Pitigliano, a small town in Tuscany known informally as “Little Jerusalem” because of the presence of its vibrant Jewish

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137 Pekelis, 53.
138 Pekelis, 66.
139 Ibid.
140 With the fall of France in June 1940, Carla and her family fled west. They managed to enter Spain and continued to Lisbon, Portugal, where they stayed for many months in a hotel. Ultimately, they were able to immigrate to the United States.
community. In one instance of early anti-Semitism during the summer of 1937, when the Italian press initiated an anti-Semitic campaign, the mother of her piano teacher exclaimed, “I am a respectable person, I am not a child of the ghetto!” Edda used this as an opportunity to understand the historical implications of the term *il ghetto* and gained a newfound appreciation for her heritage. During her *bat mitzvah*, she noted that she had “shed any vestiges of assimilation” as “no kind of socialization was any longer possible” between Jews and Christians.142

With the coming of the racial laws in 1938, the legal and social “status of Jews in Italy suddenly worsened.” “Many Jews gradually left the town” seeking to abandon Pitigliano’s reputation as a Jewish locale. Edda was forbidden from attending public school, and her family could no longer employ their “Aryan” maid of four years. In spite of her initial excitement at the prospect of a perpetual summer vacation, her elation quickly turned to humiliation when her friends returned to school. Moreover, when the discriminations were ultimately ended a few months later, Edda had to essentially become a full-time maid for a local elderly woman, “no life for a pubescent girl.”145 From the perspective of a child, the totality of the laws may not have been completely understood, but they signified a clear rupture between relative assimilation and social isolation.

Similarly, Victoria Ancona-Vincent recounts her teenage years in Milan under the racial laws but with a very different trajectory. In *Beyond Imagination*, Victoria

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142 Machlin, 79-80.
143 Machlin, 83.
145 Machlin, 88
describes her early childhood as one of constant movement: from Jerusalem, to Brussels, to Alexandria, and ultimately to Milan. However, her arrival to Milan in 1938 was met with the sudden introduction of the racial laws. Her family’s passports were confiscated, and she had to leave public school. She attended a private Jewish school until June 1939 when the Fascist regime shut down all Jewish educational institutions. She felt that the racial laws “closed around us like a net…we found ourselves without the possibility of education or work and no form of income.” Moreover, her family “had gone from being comfortably well-off to being without any means of supporting ourselves” with her father unable to operate a business or find employment.

The family’s financial situation continued to deteriorate, leading young Victoria to write a letter to Mussolini pleading for him to revoke the racial laws. In a rather interesting turn of events, she was called down to the local police station where the officers relayed a personal message from Mussolini stating that “there was nothing he could do to help the Jews.” She then managed to acquire an undocumented job at a book store owned by two partigiani for whom she delivered covert messages related to resistance activities until the fall of the Fascist government. She was caught and imprisoned in Milan until May 15, 1944 when she was transferred to the Fossoli transit camp at Modena. The Nazis brought Victoria to Auschwitz where she was forced to perform hard labor until the evacuation of the camp on January 18, 1945. She survived the subsequent death march only to be taken to Ravensbrück a few days later. Between the beginning of February and the end of April, the SS transported her to various minor

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146 Ancona-Vincent, 8.
147 Ibid.
148 Ancona-Vincent, 10.
camps. However, she ultimately escaped and managed to return to Milan with the help of Allied soldiers.

Nicola Caracciolo’s *Uncertain Refuge* represents the Italian equivalent of Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Project. The book is composed entirely of interviews with Italians who lived through the racial laws and ultimately the Nazi occupation of Italy. With nearly seventy different accounts, *Uncertain Refuge* offers as many differing views of Fascism and its encounter with Nazism. As such, Caracciolo’s collection of testimony remains one of the most significant windows into the situation of Italian Jews under Fascist, and later Nazi, rule. The focus of the book remains on the precarious situation of Italy’s Jewish population after the establishment of the Republic of Salò, and many recount stories of protection by individual Italians from the Nazis. However, the subject of the racial laws arises many times during the interviews.

Accordingly, the strength of Caracciolo’s work lies in its ability to convey stories from people of different ages, backgrounds and memories of Fascism. Emilio Foa explains how he suddenly had to leave his school when he was twelve but that he ultimately became closer with his Jewish peers, feeling that he was “made marginal by the regime, but not by the population.”

Guido Lopez and Anna Marcella Tedeschi, both children at the time, remembered being expelled from public school but especially felt the social isolation that resulted from the abandonment of their Christian friends.

Attorney Massimo Ottolenghi tells the story of how he was refused a marriage license with his fiancée because their offspring would be racially inferior (he was half-Jewish

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149 Caracciolo, 70.
150 Caracciolo, 93.
while she was three-quarters Jewish). Attorney Bruno Segre recounts an almost ironic situation whereby his baptized brother was declared Aryan while he, not professing any religion, got labeled as belonging to the Jewish faith. Finally, Elisa Della Pergola details the unraveling of her family’s situation following the racial laws. Her father, a longtime civil servant, was “dismissed without warning” and had to work surreptitiously as a “consulting manager” for a shoe shop until 1943.

These are but a few examples of the stories that have reached the public record. For an audience that has had little exposure to Fascism’s racial campaign other than The Garden of the Finzi-Continis, these narratives elucidate what has been up to now a historical subplot. They illustrate many of the practical effects of the racial legislation on the everyday lives of Italian Jews. As can be seen, most of these memoirs have been written by those who were children at the time and are skewed towards their somewhat limited understanding of Mussolini’s racial campaign. This is not to say that they did not comprehend the consequences of these laws, but merely that firsthand accounts of the effects from the perspective of an adult, those hit hardest by the laws on employment, marriage and other rights, would help historians better understand the totality of Fascist racism. To this end, historians must reconstruct the era of Mussolini with particular care for the people behind the numbers who cannot convey their suffering posthumously.

Perhaps Fabio Levi puts it best: “In the end one was dealing with a true and proper

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151 Caracciolo, 100.
152 Caracciolo, 115.
153 Caracciolo, 129.
unraveling, imposed by Mussolini…that was more and more worsening the range of persecution.”\textsuperscript{154}

\textit{Conclusion}

Italian President Giorgio Napolitano claimed in 2008, “The racial laws prepared the Holocaust.”\textsuperscript{155} In some ways, this statement represented a bit of hyperbole. On the one hand, the Republic of Salò was clearly a puppet government of the Nazi regime, and the deportations that followed its formation were a phenomenon of German occupation. On the other hand, the racial laws stripped Italian Jews of their dignity and many of their most basic human rights. For President Napolitano’s assertion, a discernable link between cause and effect is not appropriate other than to say that for Italian Jews, there was not much else to lose by 1943.

Without a doubt, the years 1938 to 1943 changed the lives of Italian Jewry. The Jews of Italy received a massive, sudden shock to their collective system in the span of only five years. The laws did not represent a simple cosmetic alteration to the status of Jews within Italian society. It relegated them to the tier of second-class citizenry. The Fascist government assembled a bureaucratic machine based on the premise of race that actively sought to ruin the lives of the Jewish population. It decimated marriages, friendships, citizenship, income, businesses, education, land and property ownership, rights of guardianship, and participation in the military, politics, and administration of Italy. The message to Jews was clear: leave Italy or suffer persecution. Though the historiographical focus on the Italian racial laws has tended to rest on the year 1938, the


period between 1939 and 1943 saw a marked decline in the situation of the Jews. Mario Sznajder notes that “antisemitic violence had increased drastically” during this time against individuals and what remained of small Jewish businesses and synagogues.\footnote{Sznajder in Wistrich and Della Pergola, 33.}

After September 1943, the Repubblica Sociale Italiana fell in line with Hitler’s extermination policies. For eighteen months, Mussolini and the Salò government actively presided over efforts to root out and kill Italy’s Jews.

In the aftermath of total war, the paradigm of a war of attrition has tended to underemphasize persecution that did not result directly in death. However, the story of the Italian racial laws is part of the overall Holocaust narrative, and Mussolini’s Fascist regime deserves serious historical culpability. Indeed, Fascism’s ‘defense of the race’ fit into “distinctly Italian scientific and cultural thinking” that did not simply copy Nazi ideology.\footnote{Wiley Feinstein, The Civilization of the Holocaust in Italy (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2003), 11.} There is no doubt that the Jews in Italy suffered less physical violence than their German counterparts up to 1943. However, the Fascist government proved capable of social and political violence on a par with Nazi Germany. At times, it even outshone the zeal exhibited among the Nazi ranks. Ultimately, the racial laws served as the death knell of Mussolini’s totalitarian regime that culminated in the death of nearly nine thousand Italian Jews by the end of the war.
## Appendix:
### Chronological List of Major Fascist Legislation

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<td>RDL n. 1531</td>
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