

Nuremberg and the Time of National Socialism

The National Socialists used the historical legacy of “the emperor’s little treasure chest” and hosted their party rallies in Nuremberg starting in 1927. After the so-called “seizure of power” in 1933, Adolf Hitler named the town the “City of the Party Rallies”. Monumental structures based on plans from Albert Speer were created in the southeast of the city in the Volkspark Dutzendteich and large area nearby. Today, they show the megalomania of the leadership of the Third Reich. “Frankenführer” Julius Streicher spread antisemitic hatred from Nuremberg. In 1935, the inhuman Race Laws of the Nazis were proclaimed. In the pogrom night of 9/10 November 1938, there were more victims than elsewhere: 26 Jews did not survive “Kristall Night” boasted Nazi-Mayor Willy Liebel. Nuremberg also was a sad exception when it came to “Aryanization” of Jewish property: More than 150 companies and about 570 properties changed hands in this enforced sale of Jewish possessions. For Jews who did not emigrate, deportations began in the Autumn of 1941: 1,631 Jewish citizens were transported to concentration camps from then until January 1944 – only 76 survived the mass murder.

In January 1945, the city was almost completely destroyed. The Palace of Justice and its prison was spared from the bombing. That made the city a suitable place for the legal confrontation with National Socialism: At the end of World War II, the “Nuremberg Trials” took place here. Beginning on November 20, 1945, the main Nazi war criminals had to answer for their war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace in front of an international military tribunal. This became the basis of the Nuremberg Principles, which created the foundation of a new international criminal law and the criminal prosecution of human rights violations: For the first time, those responsible for war and the suffering of millions had to answer personally for their deeds. In twelve subsequent trials between 1946 and 1949, other responsible Nazis and their helpers were prosecuted, including doctors, judges and leading German industrialists.

The reconstruction of the city took place in a careful synthesis of old and new, in which the traditional street pattern and shape of buildings was retained. Important structures such as the Imperial Castle, the churches of St. Lawrence and Sebald, the Church of Our Lady and the City Hall were rebuilt in their previous forms. Outside of the Old Town, new living space was created. In the modern metropolitan center of today, the history of Nuremberg remains visible in its cityscape.