

The Jewish Holocaust: Ordinary Germans Made Killers By The Third Reich

by Fergus Tuohy

I Introduction

Of the major political, social, and cultural events which took place in the twentieth century, certainly one of the most sensitive and heatedly debated is the Jewish Holocaust, which claimed the lives of some six million European Jews. During the mid 1980s, a significant debate among respected German scholars (named the Historikerstreit, or Historians' War) attempted to deal with this issue. On one end, participants argued the Holocaust was an anomaly, without place in the progression of "normal" history. On the other end were the so-called "revisionist historians," who sought to tie this horrific event into a history based on causality. What the scholars in the latter category attempted to show was that the destruction of the European Jewry was a reactionary measure spawned by German fears of Bolshevism and Soviet hegemony. This position was somewhat weak in that these scholars failed to demonstrate effectively, a concrete relationship between a Bolshevik threat and the European Jewry. The revisionists, already on the defensive, were without much ammunition.

While the arguments of such men as Ernst Nolte and other revisionists were flawed, their fundamental intent (to connect the Holocaust to a historical progression of causal relationships) was important. This study will find that the Jewish Holocaust was in fact the culmination of an increasing and evolving, carefully planned assault on European Jews. Moreover, this assault was based in the Nazi Party and the Third Reich's need for a scapegoat and a common enemy. Indeed, before the Third Reich, there was an existing anti-Semitism among many Germans. With this in place, the Nazis were able to exploit such sentiments in order to instill a fear in the German people which would render the Nazi Party virtually omnipotent as saviors of the German Volk. Because of the onslaught of propaganda which established the Führer and the Reich as the objects of German devotion, a widespread and distorted thought process developed and Germans became less likely to question orders or policy which came from such a high authority. After all, according to the Reich, it was the Führer who delivered the German people from their misery spawned by Versailles.

So while exploiting pre-existing anti-Semitism in large segments of the German population created fear and strengthened the regime, it was precisely this overarching, mindless appeal of the Führer and the Reich which enabled action against the Jews. It is obvious that the higher-ups in the Nazi government did not execute all aspects of the destruction of the European Jewry themselves, without instrument. For this, they relied on the Reich's subjects, ordinary Germans. While the higher authority clearly developed the plan for this "Final Solution to the Jewish Question," it was certainly the German people who executed it. And because so many of these executors were of "ordinary" backgrounds and considered "normal" people, some accounts of their horrific deeds should be examined as we seek to ascertain the degree of control the Reich possessed over such "ordinary" Germans, a control which would enable these men to murder.

II

Massacre at Józefów

Very early, on the morning of July 13, 1942, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were assembled outside their barracks in the town of Bilgoraj near the Lublin ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland. These men, mostly married and in their thirties were predominately of working, or lower-middle class background from Hamburg, and had arrived in Poland three weeks before as a security unit to enforce order in the occupied territory. From their barracks, the men loaded onto transport trucks and were given extra ammunition before they embarked on a bumpy two-hour trip eastward to the small Polish village of Józefów. The battalion stopped just outside the quiet town at daybreak and the men unloaded from the trucks, assembling attentively around their commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp. At this point, the Major addressed his men: They were instructed that there were some 1,800 Jews living in the village and that there was heavy partisan activity as a result. The task of the battalion was to surround the village, while specified platoons would round up all the Jews and assemble them at the marketplace. The elderly, infants, and the infirm--anyone who might impede the progress of this immense task were to be shot on the spot. From the marketplace, male Jews able for work were taken to a work camp at Lublin, while the remaining Jews would be taken outside the city where they would be met by men of the First Company. They would be led to specific locations and shot.¹

Trapp felt that this gruesome order was a large task for his men to accept so suddenly. Many in the battalion were raw recruits with little training and had only been in Poland three weeks. For this reason he reminded the men (most of whom had families) that the enemy was bombing German cities and that German women and children were often killed as a result. He told them that these Jews were supporters of these actions and that on orders from the highest Reich authority, they should be eliminated for the safety of the German people. And finally, just before the action commenced, the Major ordered that any man who did not feel comfortable with the assignment would be allowed to take on other duties, away from the operation. Around twelve of the nearly five hundred men assembled stepped out.²

By this point, the sun was beginning to rise, and the officers were anxious to get their operations underway. Of the three Companies, two platoons of Third Company cordoned off the town with orders to shoot anyone trying to escape. The remaining platoon, along with First and Second Companies, began to go door to door, rounding up all the Jewish residents of Józefów.³ As this was an immense undertaking, the officers (especially Captain Hoffmann of Third Company) frequently yelled at their men to work faster in order to expedite the initial phase of getting the Jews to the assembly point at the market square.⁴ For this, slowness on the part of the displaced was not tolerated and myriad older Jewish men and women were shot in their beds or in the street as they struggled to hurry.

By mid-morning, corpses were everywhere, in the “front yards, doorways, and streets all the way to the market square,” recalled one policeman. One man from Third Company later recalled, “as I walked through the Jewish district during the evacuation, I saw dead old people and infants. I also know that during the evacuation, all patients of a Jewish hospital were shot by the troops combing the district.”⁵

After the preliminary round-up, most of the Jósefów Jews had assembled at the marketplace; however some platoons were sent back into the district to search for Jews who had created hiding places in their homes in anticipation of such an action (by mid 1942, many Polish Jews had developed an astute and accurate idea of what their German occupiers had in store for them). With local Poles as guides, these units turned every house upside down in search of Jews who had escaped detection in the initial phase. When these secret alcoves or subterranean hideouts were uncovered, the Jews inside promptly received their ultimate fate.[6](#)

Meanwhile at the marketplace, First Company was withdrawn from the roundup and assembled away from the action with the battalion officers and the battalion physician, Dr. Schoenfelder, who would give them a brief lesson in efficient killing, before they were dispatched with further orders. Dr. Schoenfelder drew an outline of a human head and torso on the ground, and showed the Company where on the victim the barrel of the carbine should be placed in order to ensure instant death. Following this instruction, the men of First Company were dispatched to a wooded area outside of town where they would await the first wave of victims. [7](#)

By about 10:00 a.m., once First Company had been sent off, Major Trapp's adjutant Hagen began the selection of the "work Jews." Trapp had already approved a local sawmill owner's request that a certain twenty-five Jews be left with him for work. These Jews were separated from the rest, as were about three hundred Jewish men whom Hagen deemed fit for work and would send to a work camp in Lublin.[8](#)

While the work selection was taking place, Jewish women and children were already being loaded on trucks and taken out to First Company's position about two kilometers outside the town. The first group of thirty-five or forty Jews arrived at the base of the wooded path which became the unloading point, and were paired off one-by-one with policemen. They were led down the path by First Sargent Kammer to an area Captain Wohlauf designated and were then told to lie face down. As Dr. Schoenfelder had taught, the Germans positioned their carbines and fired.

Though the site Captain Wohlauf had found was removed from the village, the shots were audible to those left at the marketplace, and caused great alarm, especially among the Jewish men who were being separated from their families.

Before they had been marched out of Józefów on foot, the first shots from the woods were heard. "After the first salvos a great unrest grew among these craftsmen, and some of the men threw themselves upon the ground weeping.... It had to have become clear to them that the families they had left behind were being shot."[9](#)

Those salvos would continue all day as the Jews of that little town were exterminated. First Company developed a pendulum process of execution, where after one group finished an execution, another would take its victims to another nearby site, as the first group went to meet its next Jews at the unloading point. This process went on all day and was supplemented by contingents from Second Company, as Major Trapp was concerned that the operation would not be completed that day. The executioners were becoming tired and needed breaks, as their task became exhausting and gruesome work.[10](#)

These killers indeed had to manage the psychological stress of crying children and people pleading for their lives. Moreover, the actual physical results of the killing disgusted some killers as pieces of bone, brain, and blood splattered on their clothes and faces with each exploding skullcap. One policeman recalled suffering this grisly annoyance:

Next to me was the Policeman Koch.... He had to shoot a small boy of perhaps twelve years. We had been expressly told that we should hold the gun's barrel eight inches from the head. Koch had apparently not done this, because while leaving the execution site, the other comrades laughed at me, because pieces of the child's brains had splattered onto my sidearm and had stuck there. I first asked, why are you laughing, whereupon Koch, pointing to the brains on my sidearm, said: "That's from mine, he has stopped twitching." He said this in an obviously boastful tone...[11](#)

For the men of Second Company such gruesome results were even more frequent, as they were added to the operation of execution as an expedient to its completion, and had not received the helpful instructions from Dr. Schoenfelder. One member of Second Company noted that there was

"a considerable number of missed shots" that "led to the unnecessary wounding of the victims"... "At first we shot freehand. When one aimed too high, the entire skull exploded. As a result, brains and bones flew everywhere. Thus we were instructed to place the bayonet point on the neck"... "Through the point-blank shot that was thus required, the bullet struck the head of the victim at such a trajectory that often the entire skull or at least the entire rear skullcap was torn off, and blood, bone splinters, and brains sprayed everywhere and besmirched the shooters."[12](#)

But despite the difficulties faced by the shooters, the operation was completed by nightfall and the men reconvened at the marketplace where they loaded onto the trucks and returned to Bilgoraj. That night, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 received extra rations of alcohol to help them cope with the actions they performed that day. In some seventeen hours, these men had successfully murdered an estimated fifteen hundred men, women, and children, leaving their lifeless corpses behind them to be disposed of by the local Polish authority. [13](#)

III

An Increase of German Anti-Semitic Action under the Nazis

As noted before, this study rejects the idea that events occur without some causality which would tie them to some sequential course of history. For this, one must understand that the incident at Józefów on July 13, 1942 was not simply a sudden attack on the Jewish people. Rather, over the preceding decade, an increasing assault on Jews in the Reich had culminated in an official decision to exterminate all of the European Jewry.

This section will survey the course of these increasing anti-Jewish actions and the next will study their nature and purpose as well as what institutions enabled ordinary German individuals to take part in their execution.

The German scholar Klaus P. Fischer notes that there were “four distinct phases of Hitler’s war against the Jews: (1) legalized discrimination, (2) forced emigration, (3) resettlement and forced ghettoization, and (4) annihilation.”¹ In January 1933, Hitler came to power and on April 1 of that year, his minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels organized a boycott of all Jewish businesses in the Reich. SA brownshirts were stationed around Jewish owned shops and stores to intimidate anyone who tried to enter. Many Jewish businesses had already been defaced with graffiti reading things such as *Juden sind hier unerwünscht* (Jews are not wanted here)² and *Juden Raus*, (Jews Get Out)³, but these were state-sanctioned actions, the first of myriad to follow.

Six days later, “The Law of the Restoration of the Civil Service” was promulgated. This declared “Aryanism” as a prerequisite for holding civil service positions and forced the dismissal or retirement of all Jews holding such positions (this also included the expulsion of Jews from state legal and medical entities). What followed over the next five years was the exclusion of Jews from most of the professions such as law, medicine, and dentistry, and also from participating in the arts. On April 25, 1933, a law was issued which sought to curb the over-crowding of German schools, and many Jewish students had to withdraw. In the universities, many Jewish professors were forced out, though some who were regarded with great respect were temporarily allowed keep their positions.⁴ To add insult to injury, another law was passed in 1933 which forbade the kosher slaughter of animals, an offense which greatly concerned the Orthodox community.

One consequence of all the new anti-Jewish legislation was the gradual elimination of competition for German, non-Jewish businessmen and professionals who necessarily profited from their former colleagues and competitors’ exclusion. One of the foremost Holocaust experts, Raul Hilberg, notes that

From the first days of the Nazi regime, members of the medical and legal professions were preoccupied with the ouster of their Jewish colleagues. As of 1933, there were quite a few Jews in

these occupations, and all the evidence indicates that their expulsion, which began almost immediately, was strongly supported by Germany’s medical and legal establishments ... German physicians were highly Nazified, compared to other professionals, in terms of party membership, and the prevalent thought that there was a doctor surplus facilitated the ejection of Jewish practitioners, albeit in stages, from 1933 to 1938.⁵

But what was a more visible result of the new laws was a growing violence against the Jews in public. Despite the ubiquitous anti-Semitic graffiti, before 1933 there were few physical attacks on non-partisan Jews in the streets. But now that anti-Semitism had become a state-sanctioned ideology, SA men often took the initiative to beat and humiliate Jews in open view of passersby. One Berliner remembers seeing a Jewish rabbi in a hospital in 1933, who reported being assaulted by two uniformed men in the street.

They had evidently stopped him and cut off his beard violently, removing several pieces of skin in the process. When asked by the doctor what the men had said to him, he replied, "I don't know. He screamed at me: Death to the Jews!"⁶ Other actions were also widespread throughout the country. There are several reports of SA men defacing Jewish cemeteries and overturning gravestones. In many cases, such men were seen forcing groups of Jews to clean the sidewalks with toothbrushes. What is even more shocking is the increase in physical violence which occurred. The daughter of an East Prussian cattle herder recalled being attacked by five armed SA men in 1933:

The "SA man first beat my father, then my mother, and finally myself with a rubber truncheon. My mother received a deep cut on her head, and my head was also lacerated.... Outside the front door all my father's competitors had gathered, and they behaved in such an indecent manner that I, as a young girl, cannot relate of this to you..."⁷

It will be proven later that such blatant acts of violence and hatred were undoubtedly the result of Nazi-sponsored anti-Semitism, but for now it is important to examine how the German campaign against the Jews gradually became more intense and well-organized. Following the restrictive laws of 1933, the Nazi Party generally refrained from issuing any anti-Semitic legislation throughout the next year as Hitler concentrated on other affairs. But by 1935, Hitler recognized the need to develop more structured guidelines for his oppression of the Jewish race. At a massive party rally in Nuremberg in September of that year, a series of "race laws" were announced which were designed to define precisely who was a Jew so as to curb their few remaining rights.

The first two of these laws were drawn up by Bernard Lösener, head of the "Jewish Office" in the Ministry of the Interior, and two of his colleagues, Hans Pfundtner and Wilhelm Stuckart, all of whom had been sent to Nuremberg by Hitler to develop a law dealing with mixed marriages. These men began their work on September 14 and continued into the early morning hours after Hitler asked for another law regarding citizenship.⁸ The first law was entitled "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor", and banned all marriages and sexual activity between Jews and Germans. Moreover, Jewish employers were forbidden to employ female Germans under forty five years of age. The Nazis regarded intimacy between Germans and Jews as Rassenverrat (betrayal of race) and Rassenschande (dishonor to race) and gave these ideas legitimacy by making them law. Though this law intended to "protect" the German race from contamination by the "lustful Jews," for good measure, an addendum prohibited Jews from displaying the national flag. Severe punishments such as hard labor and imprisonment in camps were also prescribed for violations of the law.⁹

The second of the Nuremberg laws dealt with citizenship. Only those of German blood could now enjoy political rights and citizenship. The rest of the population (particularly the Jews) were now considered subjects of the state who were granted "protection," but no real rights. Stuckart gave as the basis of his law, the following:

National Socialism opposes to the theories of the equality of all men and of the fundamentally unlimited freedom of the individual vis-á-vis the State, the harsh but necessary recognition of the inequality of men and of the differences between them based on the laws of nature. Inevitably, differences in the rights and duties of the individual derive from the differences in character between races, nations, and people.[10](#)

In order to implement this law so as to achieve its purpose, the Nazi leadership needed to develop a strict racial classification system. Legal experts included in the Nuremberg Laws, an arbitrary set of criteria for defining an actual Jew. From that point, anyone with three or more Jewish grandparents was considered a “full Jew” and was deprived of rights. Persons with two or one Jewish grandparents were considered Mischlinge (half-breed), of first or second degree respectfully. Though the Mischlinge of both degrees enjoyed more rights than their fully Jewish counterparts, they could still fall into that fateful category should they participate in the Jewish community or be married to a Jew.[11](#)

The necessary result of these classifications was the extension of a massive bureaucracy whose function was to determine who in the Reich fit into which category. Birth records and family histories had to be studied ad nauseam in order to segregate the poor souls who would eventually be removed to ghettos from where they would ultimately be transferred to death camps.[12](#)

The function of the German medical establishment was also expanded as a result of a third law passed in October 1935. This “Law for the Protection of the Genetic Health of the German People” mandated the medical examination of couples before marriage. This too was designed to promote German racial purity by refusing to allow persons with any hereditary diseases to marry and procreate.[13](#) This new system indeed supplemented the Nuremberg marriage law by further screening the marriage of Germans to Jews.

Interesting enough, widespread violence against Jews in Germany over the next two years slowed down significantly. This was in part because Hitler wanted to make a good impression upon the international community when Berlin hosted the summer Olympics in 1936, but also perhaps because many Germans embraced the systematic and structured oppression of the Jewry characterized by the Nuremberg Laws as opposed to the more brutal actions of 1933. A Gestapo report from Magdeburg stated that “the population regards the regulation of the relationships of the Jews as an emancipatory act, which brings clarity and simultaneously greater firmness in the protection of the racial interests of the German people.”[14](#) But however much the violence may have decreased, the German will to make the Reich Judenrein, or “Free of Jews” remained. Many cities and towns donned signs at their borders which stated things such as “Jews Not Wanted Here,” or “Entry Forbidden to Jews.”[15](#) One German recalled:

Where formal decrees [banning Jews from a locale] are lacking, placards on the highways leading to the towns have the desired effect. ‘Jews Enter This Place at Their Risk,’ ‘Jews strictly forbidden in this Town,’ ‘Warning to Pickpockets and Jews’ are favorites. Poets have been encouraged to make these announcements rhyme with ‘sow,’ ‘garlic,’ and ‘stink.’ Artists have been given an opportunity to depict on the placard the fate of any

Jews incautious enough to disregard the warning. These placards are universal throughout Hesse, East Prussia, Pomerania, and Mecklenburg, and can be found in about one-half of the towns elsewhere. (None, however, will be found in such tourist resorts as Baden-Baden, Kissingen, or Nauheim.) Railway stations, government buildings and all important highways take up the refrain. In the neighborhood of Ludwigshaven, a dangerous bend in the road bears the following advice to motorists: 'Drive Carefully, Sharp Curve- Jews, 75 miles an hour!' [16](#)

Such racist warnings were ubiquitous by 1938, a year when the Nazi leadership would resume its organized assault against the Jews via legal conduits.

That year, a series of new legislation was issued. The government required all Jews to carry identification cards, or Kennkarte, which contained the individual's fingerprints and picture. In addition, each Jewish male was required to assume the middle name "Israel" while his female counterparts had to attach "Sara" to their first name. Hitler's Reich minister, Hermann Göring had initiated these requirements in an effort to identify the Reich's "enemies."[17](#) As the plenipotentiary of the "Four Year Plan," Göring had been given the task of preparing Germany for its war of expansion. This office gave him immense and widespread power over the myriad state entities which he used quite effectively in oppressing the Jewish population. Declaring the Jews enemies of the Reich, Göring's assault intensified.

As a result, the Jews' economic suffering increased exponentially in 1938 as they were banned from participation in all professional areas. Following the 1933 laws, Jews had continued to practice law and medicine privately, but now they were banned from the legal profession, and Jewish doctors were only allowed to practice on Jewish patients, and were termed "orderlies."[18](#) Says Klaus Fischer of the new resurgence of the increasing German attack on Jews: "German Jews were being transported into a frightening and shadowy no-man's-land of great vulnerability; they could be arrested without due process and imprisoned in concentration camps. Their property could be seized and confiscated for the flimsiest of reasons. They had no legal recourse."[19](#)

At this stage of the increasing assault on the Jews, the intent of the Nazi leaders was to encourage Jewish emigration. But by this time, only one-third (150,000-170,000) of Germany's Jews had left. Göring realized that a more powerful catalyst must be used, so he intensified the Reich's assault on Jewish businessmen. Many such businessmen were forced to sell their land and stores to Germans at a fraction of the value, in a process called "Aryanization." At the same time, Göring vociferously urged Jewish emigration, but the disenfranchised had poor luck in finding asylum in other countries. Foreign Embassies in German cities were surrounded by multitudes of German Jews seeking escape, but foreign fears of unemployment in their own countries kept their doors shut to most of these poor souls.[20](#)

Frustrated by the slowness of this "Jewish Exodus," and with the war approaching, the Nazi leadership organized more forceful means of exporting their unwanted Jews, an action which would eventually result in an entirely new treatment of the Jews by Germans. In October 1938, the Gestapo ordered that all Jews born in Poland be shipped back to that country. But the Polish government feared the return of the some 50,000 Jewish Polish nationals living in Germany and sought to prevent their return through a

law promulgated in March 1938 which aimed to denaturalize Polish citizens living abroad. When the sealed train cars carrying thousands of Jews rounded up by German authorities reached the border, they were denied entry. While the Nazi officials tried to coerce the Polish authorities to capitulate, the Jewish exiles were forced to live in deplorable border camps; they had become stateless and unwanted.²¹

News of these developments quickly drew international attention. A seventeen-year-old Polish student living in Paris was particularly concerned. Awaiting emigration to Palestine, Herschel Grynszpan learned that his family had been forcibly removed from its long-time home in Hannover by the Nazis. On November 7, 1938, Grynszpan retaliated by obtaining a pistol and assassinating Ernst vom Rath, a secretary at the German embassy in Paris. The young Pole did not evidently have any idea what his action would herald, but the Nazi leadership took complete advantage of his deed and unleashed an unprecedented fury on its Jews.²²

Indeed this event ushered in a new era in the Nazi assault on German Jews. Two days after the assassination, the Nazi leadership was in Munich to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the failed “Beerhall Putsch.” There Hitler gave Goebbels his approval to launch a massive nationwide attack on all Jewish communities in the Reich. Party leaders hurried to the phones and ordered their officers across Germany to plan their attacks. What resulted was a massive pogrom on the night of November 9-10 in which rowdy SA brownshirts set synagogues ablaze, invaded Jewish homes, beating their inhabitants mercilessly, shattered shop windows, and created a state of utter mayhem where the smell of smoke, the noise of shattering glass, and the cries of the victims dominated the senses. By morning, some one hundred Jews lay dead, hundreds of synagogues were destroyed, and store-front windows of around 7,500 Jewish businesses had been broken, their contents littering the streets.²³ For this reason, the pogrom of November 9-10, 1938 was dubbed Kristallnacht, or “Night of the Broken Glass.” That day, approximately 30,000 Jewish men between the ages of 16-60 were rounded up and sent to the concentration camp at Dachau “for their own protection” against a possible aftershock of the violence.²⁴ There they would labor under hellish conditions; the assault had indeed heightened to a greater degree.

Noting the Polish expulsion in October and the exportation to Dachau which followed Kristallnacht, it is evident that the Nazi assault on the European Jewry had entered what Fischer describes as “phase two”: forced evacuation. This process greatly accelerated after Kristallnacht. One of the key players in the rapidly-improving success of this process was Adolf Eichmann, who had joined the SD, or the intelligence service of the SS and was sent to Vienna in 1938 to head a department for Jewish emigration from Austria, which had already been annexed. Eichmann secured the forced emigration of some 100,000 Austrian Jews to countries around the globe. His success was so large and so fast, that in less than a year, he was brought to Berlin to serve in the office of Jewish deportation in the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA).²⁵ By this point, however, The direction of forced emigration had changed. Despite Eichmann’s success in Austria, the Nazis faced great difficulties in exporting Jews because other nations were often reluctant to take them. But with the quick defeat of Poland at the end of 1939, the Nazis found plenty of space to relocate their unwanted Jews. Initially, Jews were coerced to board sealed trains and were sent to various settlements in German-occupied Poland. Eichmann’s job was to negotiate with the Department of Transportation and secure the

rolling stock necessary for the deportations, organize temporary camps along the route, and coordinate the various government entities involved.²⁶ The displaced Jews would remain in these settlements until they would be relocated elsewhere.

But Himmler was not satisfied by this constant shifting. At this point in the progression, he was frustrated with the slow approach to making Germany Judenrein. The Nazis were anxious for a solution to the “Jewish Problem,” and until it could be solved, it was decided that all Polish Jews be confined to ghettos in the largest cities. By 1940, German Jews were transported there, and with the German hegemony over Western and South Eastern Europe, Jews from all over Europe would find themselves living in strange ghettos in Warsaw, Lublin, Lvov, and Cracow.²⁷ The progression had reached phase three.

But this was only a temporary stage in the rapidly increasing German assault on the European Jewry. The Nazis were desperate for a solution, and when a plan to ship Europe’s Jews to Madagascar was nixed out of fear of attacks by Allied ships, the Nazi leadership developed its fateful solution. By early 1942, divisions of SS Einsatzgruppen security units were accompanying the divisions of the Wehrmacht in operation Barbarossa, as the Germans advanced on the Soviet Union. As we will see later, in the fifth chapter, these Einsatzgruppen were massacring thousands of Jews in this “security mission.” Also by this time, Himmler had instructed Rudolph Hoess, Commandant of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, that he must begin the construction of gas chambers and crematoria that would be capable of eliminating thousands of Jews every day. The Führer had already decided what to do with the Jews, but the bureaucracy had to be informed and organized to make it possible. So on January 20, 1942, Nazi leaders involved in the “Jewish Problem” met in a villa outside Berlin to discuss the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” Reinhard Heydrich, head of the intelligence division of the SS, chaired the so-called Wansee Conference as plenipotentiary of the Final Solution. With the various authorities assembled, Heydrich reviewed aloud which steps had been taken to make Germany Judenrein and how each had failed. Rita Botwinick notes that Heydrich related to those assembled that: “The Führer had authorized the evacuation of all Jews to Poland where they would be used as slave laborers. Heydrich then reverted to the official double talk when he stated that it was expected that many would die of natural causes. If the survivors tried to rebuild Jewish life, they would be dealt with accordingly. The assembled delegates knew the true meaning of these words—they were a death sentence for millions.”²⁸

Those words were indeed a death sentence. The SS quickly mobilized the conversion of concentration camps in Poland such as Auschwitz into death camps while building new ones as well. Moreover, the assembled authorities hastened to consult heads of the other various bureaucratic offices which would become involved in the immense task of exterminating European Jewry. So from the relatively harmless restrictive laws of 1933, to the race defining Nuremberg, to the forced emigration, to relocation and ghettoization, the Nazi assault on Europe’s Jews culminated into the agreement of just over a dozen officials at Wansee to the Führer’s will that Jew would be destroyed. Though a small number orchestrated the Final Solution, thousands would be needed to carry out the millions of executions. How this diverse multitude of “ordinary” Germans was convinced to murder the helpless will be examined in the next section.

IV

Germans After the First World War: The Appeal and Growth of the Nazi Totalitarian State

As noted in its introduction, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that despite the unprecedented horror of the Jewish Holocaust, there is a definite place for it in the course of normal history. The fact that six million Jewish men, women and children were systematically murdered by a state-sponsored policy and that “ordinary” German people carried out the physical action of killing is indeed shocking, however one must be careful not to set this event aside and call it anomaly. As we saw in the last section, Nazi anti-Jewish policy only resulted in the final decision to exterminate the Jews after an extended progression of policies gradually increasing in severity--it was not an isolated event. A similar development must be acknowledged in regarding the actions of the individual perpetrators. This section will demonstrate how exactly, German people progressively began to accept Nazi racial ideology as they were steadily manipulated by the ever growing totalitarian state. It was, in fact, this mindless seduction which enabled otherwise normal Germans to murder defenseless humans en masse.

In order to understand how it was that the Nazi Party achieved such control over the minds of the German people, one must first be familiar with the circumstances under which the party rose to power, and what means it used to support its claim for the right to power. World War I and the resulting Treaty of Versailles left Germany in a shambles in 1919. At the end of the war, food supplies were low and the Allied blockade continued into 1919. Unemployment rose sharply as soldiers were demobilized. Furthermore, many veterans were reduced to begging because of serious war injuries. Germany had an immense national debt from the sale of war bonds and found itself unable to deliver much of the resources to France which were mandated as reparations by the Versailles Treaty. Because of this French troops occupied the German Ruhr Valley in January 1923 in order to secure the coal deliveries from that industrial zone. This action further wounded the strong sense of national pride which had been so characteristic of the German people. Germans felt as if the treaty had been forced upon them and regarded it with contempt. To make matters worse, the poor economic conditions, the French occupation of the Ruhr, and the disastrous monetary policy of the German government caused inflation to rise exponentially. By the end of 1923, the German mark had sunk to 4,200,000,000,000 marks to the U.S. dollar.¹ As the Center Party-controlled government struggled to improve conditions, the German people were desperate to find a more immediate solution. Frustrated with the government’s inability to fix things, many Germans sought an answer in parties which called for radical change. This led to a rise in the popularity of parties on both of the far ends of the political spectrum. Under these circumstances, the National Socialist German Workers Party, soon be known as the Nazi Party, was founded and grew in strength.

What is fundamental about this right-wing party which would eventually control most of the European continent, is the way in which it sought followers. Its method from the beginning, was to exploit people’s fears, and vow to resolve them. The original party platform of 1920 contained 25 points which were designed specifically for this purpose. Rita Botwinick, in her book, *A History of the Holocaust: From Ideology to Annihilation*

lists some notable examples:

1. We demand on the basis of the right of national self-determination, the union of all Germans in a Greater Germany.
2. We demand equality for the German nation among other nations and the revocation of the peace treaties of Versailles and Saint Germain.
3. Only a racial comrade can be a citizen. Only a person of German blood, irrespective of religious denomination can be a racial comrade. No Jew, therefore can be a racial comrade.
4. Noncitizens shall be able to live in Germany as guests only, and must be placed under alien legislation.
5. We therefore demand that every public office, no matter what kind, and no matter whether it is national, state, or local must be held only by citizens...
6. Any further immigration of non-Germans is to be prevented. We demand that all non-Germans who entered Germany after August 2, 1914, be forced to leave the Reich without delay...
7. It must be the first duty of every citizen to perform mental or physical work. Individual activity must not violate the general interest, but must be exercised within the framework of the community, and must be done for the general good...
8. To implement all these points, we demand the creation of a strong central power in Germany. A central political parliament should possess unconditional authority over the entire Reich [2](#)

In all, these points are geared toward a sense of national German solidarity. This platform seeks to restore the morale of the German people by destroying the documents which declared Germany's responsibility for the First World War. Germany would again have control over her own affairs without foreign intervention. Moreover all non-Germans would become second class citizens, inferior to those of German blood. The platform also promises to end unemployment and have every person of German blood employed in some occupation. Finally, the document presents a structure of government which could effectively implement these desirable changes. With a powerful central parliament, the gridlock of the multi-party system would be eliminated.

This last point was of key importance for Nazism gaining a firm hold in German politics. From its inception, the Party grew steadily in membership, but its representation in the Reichstag throughout the 1920s was weak. In the 1928 elections, the Nazis only received 2.5 percent of the vote and returned only 12 members to the Reichstag.[3](#) The economy's steady improvement under the Weimar government was evidently appreciated by most of the voters who, at this point were not ready for a radical change. Very soon, however, the Great Depression struck and produced a change in the electorate. Hitler argued, on the basis of his platform's 25th point, that the Weimar experiment was a disaster and that only a powerful centralized government could save the country. The Great Depression was Hitler's supreme opportunity to gain widespread support for his party, an opportunity so vital to the Nazis' success, that Klaus Fischer notes, "if economic stability had been restored and maintained during the Weimar Republic, the Nazi movement would have

never amounted to anything more than a small, xenophobic group of unregenerate misfits, but with the economic collapse..., it began to amalgamate misguided sympathizers.”[4](#)

Hitler began to tour the country, giving powerful speeches in which he appealed not to any particular class, but to an entire people filled with fear about the effects of the Depression. Faithfully keeping to his original platform, he swore there would be no unemployment under his party’s leadership and that nationalism would be revived. In addition, Hitler promised stricter criminal control and prosecutions, a strong national army, and a renewed German pride. That these promises appealed to a broad spectrum of classes was evident in the 1930 elections. This time the Nazi Party received 6.4 million votes (18 percent of all votes cast), and sent 107 representatives to the Reichstag, becoming the second largest party. By July 1932, the Nazi Party received 30 percent of the vote, and gained 44 percent in March 1933, demonstrating steadily growing support.

[5](#)

With this strong foothold in the government, Hitler was able to rise eventually, to the chancellorship and seal his ultimate legal control. The various machinations which led to this are not germane to our study here, but how he continued, throughout his career, to gain the overwhelming support of the German masses is of key importance. This was achieved through a policy of mass seduction, where massive rallies, organized youth groups, and ubiquitous propaganda became the enabling tools. By 1934, Hitler had perfected the art of organizing Germans en masse to witness the Führer give powerful speeches, proclaiming the superiority of the German race, and the successes of the Nazi Party in eliminating unemployment and restoring Germany to its proper place in the world. This is evidenced in Leni Riefenstahl’s documentary on the 1934 Nuremberg party rally where the masses were subsumed by awe and emotion as the Führer spoke. Of Hitler’s technique, Klaus Fischer says:

Hitler was not only a soldier-politician, but also an artist with a keen eye for the aesthetic who knew that persuasion required conversion, and that conversion, at its deepest level, was emotional rather than cerebral. As a passionate Wagnerian, Hitler encouraged mass-produced celebrations of such emotional intensity that those who participated in them would undergo ‘a kind of metamorphosis from a little worm into part of a big dragon,’ feeling revitalized, empowered and redeemed... [At the 1934 party rally at Nuremberg, there were] intense feelings that swept the crowd into wild outbursts of enthusiasm and into a collective, almost religious, adoration of a man who had come to redeem Germany... No politician in Germany, before or after Hitler, has been able to build up such intimate emotional bonds with the people. [6](#)

This technique was of vital importance to the Nazi regime, in that it served as tool by which Hitler could remind the German people how he had saved them from the horrors of an international conspiracy of Jews which sought to destroy Germany during the inter-war period. He repeated that the threat of Bolshevism surrounded the nation and only the Führer could ward it off. The idea of such a conspiracy of Jews was indeed ludicrous, but the majority of German people could not argue that their financial security had indeed

improved because of the Reich. Hitler had revamped the German economy by a tactic of deficit spending. He authorized various public works projects including the building of the Autobahnen, the national freeway system. This put thousands of Germans to work and boosted the automotive and construction industries. Skilled craftsmen who had been out of work were all of a sudden a part of a giant project in the ameliorization of their country and were pleased to be working again. Germans were delighted that these roads were for public use, and were further pleased at the announcement in 1938, that each German family could own an automobile because the government would subsidize the building of Volkswagens which would be sold at low costs.⁷

Moreover, the Reich's excessive defense spending for rearmament further decreased the unemployment rate (public expenditures between 1933 and September, 1939 reached 101.5 billion marks, of which 60 percent were spent on rearmament).⁸ This also pleased big business who received lucrative subsidies. Such businesses as the I.G. Farben chemical company benefited from Hitler's goal of making Germany self-sufficient. Hitler wanted to make the German economy self-sufficient, and gave contracts to such companies for making synthetic materials such as rubber, that would be vital in the rearmament process.⁹

No doubt the conservatives and the army were impressed with Hitler's policies, as the defense budget grew, the army's prestige was restored. Germany was again, a nation to be reckoned with and morale soared. So when Hitler preached to the thousands of Germans assembled, with virile SS men surrounding him, and huge marching columns demonstrating the strength of the Reich, people listened. This was not the Germany of the 1920s. This was something to be proclaimed. From his podium, the Führer had the strictest attention of his subjects as he pontificated the dangers of Bolshevism. Though the Communist Party no longer had a voice, Hitler used it to exploit the fears of the now-prospering population. He relied on these fears for the security of his own power, always referring to an "enemy" that could destroy German lively hood. Hitler also found some strange way to equate Jews with this threatening Bolshevism, and thereby used public forum to proclaim them evil. Many Germans, already hypnotized by the spectacle, never questioned this strange connection. A distorted thought process had been programmed in the German masses. Moreover, Hitler cannot be accredited with creating anti-Semitism in Germany, rather he successfully exploited pre-existing sentiments. Concerning this, the controversial scholar, Daniel Goldhagen argues that:

The widely differing degree of antisemitic expression at different moments in a bounded historical time (of, say, twenty to fifty years) in a particular society is not the result of antisemitism appearing and disappearing, of larger and smaller numbers of people being or becoming antisemites, but of a generally constant antisemitism becoming more or less manifest, owing primarily to altering political and social conditions that encourage or discourage people's expression of their antisemitism.¹⁰

Evidently, the political and social conditions under Nazi leadership greatly encouraged such expression.

Another way Hitler systematically stripped the German people of their freedom of

thought was through film and radio announcements. The Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels brought all radio stations in the Reich under his control and initiated a massive campaign of distributing radios at a low cost to the German people. Radios were set up in factories and stores so that workers and shoppers could stop what they were doing and assemble around a radio to hear the latest propaganda. Goebbels' ministry sponsored a project where six thousand giant loud speakers were set up in public squares around Germany so that no one would miss the announcements.¹¹ With the enormous Nazi flags draped from the sides of buildings and the horn-heralded announcements ringing in their ears, Germans could not escape the omnipresence of the Party. Even German cultural life had been subsumed by the Party message. Strict censorship prevented ideologically threatening movies or plays from being shown, and the Propaganda Ministry sponsored the production of films with the appropriate messages. Anti-Semitic propaganda was widespread in this area as can be seen in the case of one film titled *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew). Klaus Fischer describes this work as, "an obscene hate picture that depicted Jews as cellar rats who scurry out of their holes and proceed to take over the world."¹² Such an obscene example as *Der Ewige Jude* is somewhat of an extreme case, but nevertheless, it is a testament to the powerful Nazi effort to shape German thought and to vilify the Jews.

The Nazi Party also engaged in a large-scale operation to shape the minds of German youth. Massive rallies and a manipulated media were certainly effective in the thought-control effort, but by organizing youth, whether in schools or clubs, the Nazis were able to exert a more controlled, direct, and precise influence over people's thinking.

The German school system was a historically well-organized institution where discipline was rigid, therefore the Nazis did not need to exert much effort in teaching general obedience. Rather it became a matter of teaching the children whom to obey. Thus, the Führerprinzip was incorporated into the curriculum as children learned the proper way to give the Heil!, and perform other Nazified acts of obedience. After role calls, students marched in formations and were taught to assume that anonymous role as one part of a whole body, ultimately loyal to the Führer.

With this system in place, racial doctrine was added to the curriculum in September, 1933. Hitler stated that, "no boy or girl shall leave school without having been fully instructed in the need for and nature of racial purity."¹³ Since there were few texts on racial (or racist) studies, teachers relied on the works of Nazi racial philosophers as their instructional material.¹⁴

Outside of the classrooms and school-yards, the Nazis found another appropriate institution through which to brainwash young Germans. There already existed in Germany by the time the Nazis had seized power, myriad youth clubs which were basically groups of middle class boys or girls who would take hiking and camping trips together, play sports, and discuss things that interested them. The Nazi Party too had a youth group called the Hitler Youth, or HJ. By 1933, this group had 107,956 members, however under the leadership of Baldur von Schirach, the HJ would incorporate all other groups in the Reich. This group differed from many of its counterparts in that it was a highly structured organization in which the boys and girls would engage in activities which were viewed as important to the Party. The children would march in uniforms, engage in military games, learn Nazi doctrine and, of course, loyalty to the Führer.¹⁵

Hitler's own words highlight clearly, his purpose for the Hitler Youth:

These young people learn nothing else but to think as Germans and to act as Germans; these boys join our organisation [sic] at the age of ten and get a breath of fresh air for the first time, then, four years later, they move from the Jungvolk to the Hitler Youth and here we keep them for another four years. And then we are even less prepared

The Deutsches Jungvolk, or German Young folk, for boys aged 10 to 14, was preliminary to the Hitler Youth. --- (cited from Fischer, p.346)

to give them back into the hands of those who create our class and status barriers; rather we take them immediately into Party, into the Labour Front, into the SA or into the SS, into the NSKK and so on. And if they are there for eighteen months or two years and still have not become real National Socialists, then they go into the Labour Service and are polished there for six or seven months, and all of this is under a single symbol, the German spade. And if, after six or seven months, there are still remnants of class consciousness or pride in status, then the Wehrmacht will take over the further treatment for two years and when they return after two or four years then, to prevent them from slipping back into the old habits once again we take them immediately into SA, SS, etc., and they will not be free again for the rest of their lives.[16](#)

This excerpt is a remarkable testament to the absolute control Hitler wished to command over his subjects' minds. To what degree he was successful is evidenced in the corpses of 6 million Jewish men women and children who were murdered by German men who (for the greater majority at least) led otherwise normal lives.

Another poignant example of the Nazi success in brainwashing the German people is seen in the diary of a young German girl who had recently witnessed Kristallnacht:

For the space of a second I was clearly aware that something terrible had happened there. Something frighteningly brutal. But almost at once I switched over to accepting what had happened as over and done with and avoiding critical reflection. I said to myself. The Jews are the enemies of the New Germany. Last night they had a taste of what this means. Let us hope that World Jewry, which has resolved to hinder Germany's "new steps towards greatness," will take the events of last night as a warning. If the Jews sow hatred for us all over the world, they must learn that we have hostages for them in our hands.[17](#)

Little psychological expertise is required to recognize the thought process the young Melita Maschmann underwent here. Her basic human compassion was alerted by the brutality of the pogrom, but it was technically suppressed by the Nazi rhetoric ingrained

in her cognitive system.

So it is perfectly clear that the Nazi Party was successful in manipulating and distorting the German people's thought processes. Through a massive campaign which included the onslaught of propaganda, the awe-inspiring rallies, and its manipulation of the German youth, this was achieved. Germany did not wake up one morning with a hatred of Jews so intense that ordinary men would choose to murder them. Therefore, it is important to realize the inherent causal relationship. As we have seen, these men's fears and prejudices were exploited. The stage was set, the Jews were despised, now Hitler only had to make the final preparations in this mind game: giving his killing units the opportunity to kill.

V

Organized Departments of Death: The SS and German Police Battalions

Though understanding that the power of the Nazi party over German thought, which was already inclined to anti-Semitism, fostered a widespread hatred of the Jewish race, it would be a mistake to assume that any large number of Germans would willingly choose to murder a Jew. What was needed to achieve this end was instruction from superiors in a structured organization. The SS and various German police battalions were the organizations which executed the Final Solution to the Jewish Question, and they were also the final element in transforming ordinary German men into killers. Achieving the latter required only giving the orders.

Though Heinrich Himmler's SS was originally intended to serve as a small elite organization charged with the protection of the Führer (a sort of Praetorian Guard), by the outbreak of war, it had become an expansive quasi-military body with numerous responsibilities. Himmler's SS was comparable to the Wehrmacht in its hierarchical structure and strict military-style system of subservience, though SS recruits were highly indoctrinated with Nazi ideology. More than any other German men, those who wore the SS double lightning badge, were brainwashed completely by a program of intensive instruction on the Führerprinzip, the superiority of the German Volk, and the evils of the Jews. So completely eliminated was their freedom of thought, that Himmler and the Führer, convinced of their ability to murder, selected the men of the SS to initiate the process of eliminating the Bolshevik-Jewish threat.

Following the invasion of Poland, mobilized SS task forces called Einsatzgruppen were sent in to secure occupied territory by eliminating any possible partisan threat (Jews were automatically considered partisan). These highly murderous squads swept the villages and countryside executing all suspected of partisan activity. When Operation Barbarossa was launched, the Einsatzgruppen's aid was again utilized. Four groups of about 3000 highly trained SD men were sent to the Soviet Union to assist the Wehrmacht. Their task was the same as their counterparts in Poland had been, only these men enhanced the process of mass-executions. Klaus Fischer's description captures well, the brutality of what took place:

Between June 22, 1941, and the end of that year, the Einsatzgruppen went on a bloody rampage hunting down Jews wherever they could find them. Typically, they would round

up Jews in the larger towns, march them outside the town and shoot them alongside ditches or antitank trenches, where they would be buried. In most cases, the Jews had to dig their own graves before they were shot: 'The condemned people were not only brought in trucks but also on foot in groups of 70 and 80 and beaten mercilessly along the way. The 20 to 25 who were to be shot were taken to a spot 50 meters from the execution site, where they were guarded until they were ready to be shot. They undressed near the graves ... Completely undressed, they were driven into the graves and forced to lie face down. The Germans shot them with rifles and machine pistols. In this way, one party after another was driven to their grave and shot, each forced to lie face down on the corpses of those who had already been shot.'¹

This horrific scene was repeated throughout the rest of 1941 when, following a mass shooting of some 30,000 Jews at Babi-Yar near Kiev, the Einsatzgruppen left the Soviet Union. These four units had successfully murdered 700,000 Jews.²

But the murderous operations of the SS were far from over. As early as the summer of 1941, Himmler phoned the Kommandant of the concentration camp at Auschwitz with the news that, 'The Führer has ordered that the Jewish question be solved once and for all and that we, the SS, are to implement that order ... every Jew that we can lay our hands on is to be destroyed now, during the war, without exception' Furthermore, he related that this should be carried out, 'by gassing.'³

The Führer was well aware of the successes of the SS Einsatzgruppen in the East and the men's willingness to kill. Himmler had indeed created a force which would be completely subservient to Hitler's will, and that is why it was trusted to carry out the horrific task of mass extermination.

And so were born the death camps in the East which housed the giant gas chambers and crematoria which reduced human beings to ashes within hours of their arrival. For this system to work, a massive organization of men was needed. Upon arriving at a camp, the Jews were forced out of their sealed train cars for the selektion. This process involved lining up in a procession and approaching a camp doctor who would wave the prisoners either to the left or to the right. The former category was for those unfit for work, usually the elderly, the sick, and women and children. These Jews were led immediately to the gas chambers, where they would be instructed to undress and shower. The SS men would lead the prisoners into the shower room in which they were sealed by a locked door. Following this, an SS man would drop deadly Zyklon-B gas pellets through a vent. One observer recalled what was to follow:

It could be observed through the peephole in the door that those who were standing nearest to the induction vents were killed at once The remainder staggered about and began to scream and struggle for air. The screaming, however, soon changed to the death rattle and in a few minutes all lay still. After twenty minutes at the latest no movement could be discerned.⁴

The larger camps such as Auschwitz could make this process effective in exterminating

over 1000 Jews a day. But a great amount of assistance was required from the individual SS men. Guards had to escort the doomed Jews to the chambers, and once all were dead and others were arriving, other guards had to supervise the removal of the corpses to the crematoria. In addition, a greater force was needed to run the actual work camp where the Jews fit to work were subjected to slave labor and humiliation. Indeed it took a large number of men to run these death factories, but the blind obedience and enthusiasm of the brainwashed Nazi SS men ensured an efficient job.

German Police Battalions

As we have seen, Nazi Propaganda nurtured a strong anti-Semitic sentiment in many German people. Coupled with the highly structured nature of Himmler's SS, and the ideological indoctrination which accompanied it, German men could be persuaded to kill when ordered. But a look at the far less authoritatively-run, German Police Battalions stationed in occupied territories, suggests that Himmler's strict brainwashing was not always necessary to enable men to kill. Here, it seems, that the Reich had already established its authority and all the policemen needed was an order.

As the war approached, German municipal police battalions witnessed an increase in recruitment. Many German males sought positions there because they could avoid being conscripted by the Wehrmacht. Soon, however, some of these battalions were training with military equipment and were incorporated into the regular army. By 1939, the so-called Order Police was permitted to draft men born between 1901 and 1909, and was later authorized to conscript older men. After 1940, Reserve Police Battalions were formed with large contingents of these older drafted reservists, along with career policemen, pre-war volunteers, and non-commissioned officers.⁵ One such unit was Reserve Police Battalion 101, which was stationed in Poland, where it guarded prisoner of war camps and conducted other such security measures. In December 1939, however, the battalion was sent back to Hamburg where many of the men were sent off to form other units. Their ranks were replenished with these middle-aged drafted reservists who trained over the next few months, before being sent to Poland. There the battalion conducted "resettlement actions," displacing Poles, Jews, and Gypsies so that the region could be "Germanized."⁶

Reserve Police Battalion 101 was later stationed at the Lublin District to guard the ghetto there. But in May 1941, the battalion returned to Hamburg a second time. Again, many of the pre-war volunteers were dispatched elsewhere and more middle-aged reservists took their place, and in June of 1942, the battalion returned to Poland. This time, however, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 would face a more gruesome task. One month after their arrival in Poland, in the early morning hours of July 13, these men would be awakened from their bar-racks, driven to the nearby town of Józefów, and instructed by their superior, Major Trapp, that they were to round up and execute some 1,500 Jews living in the town. When given the opportunity to step out, only 12 out of nearly 500 did so.⁷ The argument that there were men who would have stepped out, but feared being called weak by their comrades is interesting in that it shows that peer pressure can indeed be applied to murder. That is certainly reasonable to believe given the context of the times: the Nazi Party had manipulated German minds, a successful venture which enabled the unthinkable to become reality in the span of a simple distorted thought

process.

The fact that average middle aged businessmen and workers, with no prior records of insanity or violence, could commit the cold-blooded mass murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children is incredible. That some 6 million Jews were systematically murdered under a government-sponsored plan is extremely hard to understand. Indeed these truths seem incomprehensible, but as students of history and sociology, we must be careful not to let our own age and culture be the judge of what came before us, rather we must investigate the context in which historical events took place, and what factors contributed to the existing cultural and political paradigm. The controversial scholar Daniel Jonah Goldhagen states that, “the Holocaust was a radical break with everything known in human history, with all previous forms of political practice”.⁸ Certainly history had never seen such a large-scale program of genocide, but to say that the Holocaust was in any form a “break” from the normal progression of history is absurd. We have seen plainly that the extermination of the European Jewry was the culmination of a series of events: the Jews were gradually transformed into pariah by a series of legal actions over the course of nearly a decade while the German people were being seduced by the Führer, their fears being exploited. The result of the former was the Nazi decision to kill all European Jews, while the latter ended in normal Germans becoming capable of killing the innocent. When these ends were united, the Holocaust became possible.

Notes

II.

1 Browning, Christopher R. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.: 1991.) p. 1-2

2 Ibid p.57

3 Ibid

4 Ibid p.59

5 Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.: 1996.) p.215

6 Ibid p.216

7 Browning p.7

8 Goldhagen p.216-217

9 Browning p.60

10 Ibid p.61

11 Goldhagen p.219

12 Browning p.64

13 Ibid p.69-70

III.

1 Fischer, Klaus P. *Nazi Germany: A New History*. (The Continuum Publishing Company, N.Y., N.Y.: 1995.) p.390

2 Ibid p.392

3 Botwinick, Rita Steinhardt, *A History of the Holocaust: From Ideology to Annihilation*. (Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: 1996.) p. 119

- 4 Fischer p.390-91
- 5 Hilberg, Raul. Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945. (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.: 1992) p.66
- 6 Goldhagen p.93
- 7 Ibid p.94
- 8 Fischer p.385
- 9 Ibid
- 10 Ibid p.386
- 11 Ibid
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Ibid
- 14 Goldhagen p.98
- 15 Ibid p.92
- 16 Ibid p.92-3
- 17 Botwinick p. 120
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Fischer p.392
- 20 Botwinick p. 120
- 21 Fischer p.392
- 22 Ibid
- 23 Goldhagen p. 100
- 24 Botwinick pp. 122-23
- 25 Fischer p.393
- 26 Botwinick p. 160
- 27 Ibid p. 161
- 28 Ibid p. 173

IV.

- 1 Phillips, Roderick. Society, State and Nation in Twentieth Century Europe. (Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: 1996.) p. 167
- 2 Botwinick p.56
- 3 Phillips p. 182
- 4 Fischer p.261
- 5 Ibid p.227
- 6 Ibid p.341
- 7 Ibid p.375
- 8 Ibid p.377
- 9 Ibid p.376
- 10 Goldhagen p.39
- 11 Fischer p. 370-71
- 12 Ibid p.373
- 13 From Fischer p.350
- 14 Ibid
- 15 Ibid p.34546
- 16 Speech by Hitler on December 4, 1938 in Reichenberg, quoted by Fischer p.351
- 17 From Goldhagen p. 103

V.

1 Fischer p. 500-01

2 Ibid p. 501

3 Ibid p.503

4 Ibid p.508

5 Browning p.5-6

6 Ibid p.38-9

7 Ibid p. 1-2, 71

8 Goldhagen p.28

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)