

The Effectiveness of Anti-Semitic Propaganda and  
Rhetoric: Public Opinion in Nazi Germany

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## ABSTRACT

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Several attempts have been made by scholars to document public opinion during the Third Reich; even more research has surrounded the various forms of propaganda in Nazi Germany. Few sources, however, have explored the effects of anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric on promoting the genocidal involvement of Germans under Hitler and the Nazi Regime. This thesis provides such material, presenting a broad spectrum of anti-Semitic views through propagandistic speeches, newspaper articles, and secret police reports. More importantly, I have attempted to gauge the effectiveness of propaganda on influencing German involvement in the genocide carried out against European Jewry through the examination of public opinion reports such as those collected by the *Sicherheitsdienst*, which aimed to monitor public mood and morale in Germany. I have concluded that anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric undoubtedly played a vital role in creating rampant indifference in Germany, the trumpeting of anti-Jewish feelings, and consequently, widespread participation of German citizens in the Holocaust.

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## 1. Introduction

Through the exploration of Nazi rhetoric, personal memoirs and diaries, secret police reports, and newspaper articles, I have attempted to investigate what motivated Germans to become complicit in the genocide carried out against European Jewry. Christopher Browning has demonstrated that a unique mindset was not inherent in the men and women who carried out the policy of mass murder. But the impact of anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric on German public opinion is less clearly understood. By extension, the influence that anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric had on passive complicity in the Holocaust among the Germans of the Third Reich will form the foundation of this thesis. For the purpose of this study I have distinguished between a perpetrator and a ‘bystander,’ or more simply, those who pulled the trigger or implemented policies of mass murder, and those who acquiesced. More often than not, those who identified themselves as ‘bystanders’ were in fact perpetrators.

Perhaps Adolf Eichmann never pulled the trigger, but, to be sure, he was a perpetrator who played a vital role in the implementation of genocide against the Jews. Additionally, he fostered the annihilation of Jews through facilitating their deportation to ghettos and concentration camps for their eventual extirpation. ‘Jew Baiter Number One,’ Julius Streicher did not play a role in the implementation and adoption of genocide in 1941, nor was he a member of the SS, yet Streicher was found guilty and tried by the International Military Tribunal for inciting the public in his anti-Semitic newspaper, *Der Stürmer*. Eichmann and Streicher are just two examples of the *Schreibtischtäter* during the Third Reich, the desk murderers were fully aware of the extreme measures being taken against the Jewish population in Europe. Many of those in Nazi Germany who did

not directly carry out policies of extermination were perpetrators through acts of acquiescence; those who silently condoned the extermination and other brutal actions carried out against the Jews made up the majority of the population in Germany.

The propaganda machine is a vital tool in fostering the creation of mythological and fallacious beliefs, and in the case of Nazi Germany, propaganda resulted in pervasive complicity and rampant acquiescence on the part of German citizens. How propaganda influenced public opinion in Germany, that of perpetrators and ‘bystanders’ will be examined through a multiplicity of sources including *Lageberichte* (situation reports) and *Stimmungsberichte* (reports on public mood and morale).

## **2. Essential Scholarly Works**

Subsequent scholarship has effectively dealt with questions and the importance of propaganda in the context of the Third Reich; however, my niche on this topic will have a slightly different approach. Ian Kershaw’s *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* is a heuristic piece of work that examines the extent to which popular opinion and opposition influenced Nazi policy in Germany under the Third Reich. Kershaw analyzes everyday life and attitudes of “ordinary Germans.” Kershaw presents a study that measures German reaction to propaganda through the examination of opinion polls, voting figures, and secret police reports. Richard Evans’ equally important comprehensive study of the history of the Third Reich describes Germans under Nazism as having been intimidated into acquiescence. Importance, therefore, is placed on the effectiveness of the propaganda machine in molding popular opinion into optimistic and enthusiastic support for the regime. Marlis Steinert’s important study regarding public opinion in *Hitler’s War and the Germans: Public Mood*

*and Attitude During the Second World War* is essential to investigating the extent to which reporting of public opinion in Germany was genuine and independent, manipulated and controlled, and to examining specific factors that influenced public opinion under Nazism.

Jeffrey Herf and Randall L. Bytwerk's works are also crucial to understanding the role of propaganda and rhetoric in the case of the Holocaust. Herf deals with demonization and the ideological legitimization of murder in German society under Nazism. Bytwerk focuses on both the success and failure of Nazi propaganda in his scholarly study *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic*. Bytwerk pays particular attention to Julius Streicher, the "world's number one Jew-baiter,"<sup>1</sup> who is known for his vicious and prolific anti-Semitic views, specifically for his weekly anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, devoted to raising racial hatred. These works, although masterfully laid out, fail to address the question of compliance in Nazi Germany, more specifically, the impact of propaganda on German public opinion and its influence on German collaboration. In the modern era, genocide can only be carried out when there is societal complicity. The Holocaust could not have taken place without the involvement of substantial segments of the German population.

The position I take in this essay will place more of an emphasis on the effectiveness of propaganda on influencing Germans to become complicit in the genocide carried out against European Jewry. Moreover, it will deal with the question of public opinion among the German population in Nazi Germany. *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) reports have been an important source for scholars in the investigation of public mood and opinion under the Third Reich, collected, for example, in the eleven volume collection

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<sup>1</sup> Bytwerk, Randall. *Julius Streicher*, (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1983), 1.

edited by Heinz Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheimen Lageberichte Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945*, which will also be analyzed throughout this thesis.

### **3. Sicherheitsdienst-SD Reports**

*Meldungen aus dem Reich*, captured records of the Third Reich, contain secret status reports from the *Sicherheitsdienst* with the help of the *Reichsführung* (SS). (The SD reports will hereafter be referred to as *Meldungen aus dem Reich* or *MadR.*). SD intelligence units were not unique to the Third Reich; in fact, they were established at the end of the Weimar Republic where they were initially designed to operate in conjunction with the Gestapo. However, at the end of 1934, Himmler decided to differentiate the function of the Gestapo from that of the SD. The primary objectives for both units were to suppress opposition to the regime. The SD's main responsibility was to obtain and compile systematic summaries that monitored and analyzed public opinion and morale among the civilian population in Nazi Germany. In order to accurately measure German mood and to suppress opposition, the SD worked together with the SS under five categories of reliability:

*V-Leute (Vertrauensleute)* Reliable party members

*A-Leute (Agenten)* Reliable informers, not necessarily party members

*Z-Leute (Zubringer)* Paid informers on contract

*H-Leute (Helfer)* Informers with personal motives

*U-Leute (Unzuverlässige)* Unreliable collaborators, ex-convicts<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Zipfel, Friedrich. *Gestapo und Sicherheitsdienst*. (Berlin-Grunewald: Arani Verlags-GmbH, 1960), 18.

In addition to monitoring public mood and suppressing opposition, the SD examined the cultural, political, and economic situation in Germany. *Meldungen aus dem Reich* comprises: *Allgemeine Stimmung und Lage* (public opinion), *Gegener* (opposition), *Kulturelle Gebiete* (cultural areas), *Recht und Verwaltung* (law and administration), *Wirtschaft* (economy), and *Volkstum und Volksgesundheit* (national identity and public health).

The assessment of propaganda under the Reich was monitored very closely. Reports portrayed the success of local propaganda activities, ‘reviews’ of films, broadcasts, newspaper articles, etc. with particular emphasis on their “propaganda effectiveness.”<sup>3</sup> Goebbels believed that Nazi propaganda would be unsuccessful in mobilizing Germans if the reports lacked an accurate and reliable account regarding public responses to mass media. Goebbels believed that mass media were highly efficient in propagating the objectives and demands of the regime, and the “organs of coercion, notably the secret police, are equally efficient in enforcing their fulfillment.”<sup>4</sup> The Propaganda Minister insisted that distorted and superficial reporting was detrimental to the propaganda machine and ultimately to propagating the regime’s policies.<sup>5</sup> Goebbels sought monopolistic control over public opinion and popular mood in Germany.

However, in October 1942, he realized he could not achieve it and war would only foster

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<sup>3</sup> Unger, Aryeh, L. *The Totalitarian Party: Party and People in Nazi Germany & Soviet Russia*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 228.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Bankier, David, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 11.

the diminution of his power.<sup>6</sup> He therefore declined to accept any further responsibility for the public mood.<sup>7</sup>

Reinhard Heydrich was therefore made responsible for ensuring that Reports of the Reich accurately gauged the prevailing opinion in the German Reich and that they were promptly sent to the Nazi state and distributed to the appropriate district leaders. Initially, reporting occurred three times a week and by May 1940 it was reduced to twice a week. Reports consisted of information gathered by Nazi police, informers, and other government agents. By 1944, reporting was significantly reduced to just a few regions in Germany, and by the end of the war, coverage of the *Standardberichte* (standard reports) came to a natural halt.

#### **4. Limitations of Public Opinion Reports**

Yet an important caveat must be added regarding public opinion reports. As with all public opinion reports under a terroristic dictatorship, these meticulous accounts were unquestionably biased and manipulated by district leaders as well as strictly monitored and circumscribed. Germans under the Nazis were not at liberty to express any opposition to the regime without harsh consequences; public opinion as laid forth in Reich reports was manufactured and manipulated. Serious repercussions for opposition resulted in the reluctance on the part of German citizens to openly state their opinion, causing the authenticity of opinion to be questionable.

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<sup>6</sup> Steinert, M.G., *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude During the Second World War*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Boelcke, Willi A., *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War, 1939-43*. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1970), 289.

Most of the reports revealed a general consensus of unwavering loyalty and conformity to Hitler and the regime. Reports generally reflected unanimous optimism and support. Under the category *Allgemeine Stimmung und Lage*, concerning the general opinion of the people, the most common reaction indicated an overall positive perception of the regime's policies and rhetoric. For example, on the evening of Hitler's birthday in 1942, Joseph Goebbels delivered a speech. SD reports gauged the effectiveness among those on the receiving end. The *Allgemeine Stimmung und Lage* reported as follows, "die Rede Dr. Goebbels am vorabend des Geburtstages des Führers hat überall eine gute Aufnahme gefunden." [Dr. Goebbel's speech on the evening of Hitler's birthday was overall well received.]<sup>8</sup>

Hitler made it evident that Party leaders were entrusted with maintaining positive and optimistic morale within Germany and to remedy any indication of public life that threatened to impair or damage popular morale,<sup>9</sup> stating, "[L]et no one come and report to me that morale in his region, his district, his group or his cell could ever be bad. You are the bearers, the responsible bearers of morale."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, "functionaries of the party were seldom in a position to produce 'original' adverse public opinion information, whether true or false, for the simple reason that their access to critical and therefore privately held opinion was limited and known to be so."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, all modes of media including newspapers, radio, and other statements made by the press were

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<sup>8</sup> Boberach, Heinz, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Auswahl aus den geheimen Lagesberichten des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1939-1944*. (Berlin, Germany: Manfred Pawlak Verlagsgesellschaft: 1984), (Nr. 278) 23. April 1942, seiten 3659-3671, Band 10.

<sup>9</sup> Unger, 227.

<sup>10</sup> Aryeh L. Unger, "Public Opinion Reports of the Nazi Party," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Winter, 1965-1966): 574.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

subjected to government censorship from the years 1939 to 1945 and therefore proved to be an unreliable source for surveying public opinion in Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Like Goebbels, Himmler took the SD reports very seriously, though he refused to believe the reality of the evidence, choosing instead to fabricate the truth, skewing the results to make them appear more positive and in alignment with Nazi objectives. Like Hitler, Himmler refused to believe in the existence of any opposition or hostile public attitudes since “the reality stood in opposition to the myth of national unity so cherished by the Nazis. Thus, reports from all over the Reich detected harsh criticism of a speech delivered by Hitler. Himmler, as usual, refused to believe this, claiming that the writers of the reports were exploiting them to voice their own defeatist attitudes and lack of faith.”<sup>13</sup> To be sure, public opinion reports by the *Sicherheitsdienst* were undeniably manipulated and altered in order to conform to Hitler’s utopian desires and his apparent inability to face any resistance to the regime.

Hitler demanded an optimistic and enthusiastic Germany that presented an unwavering devotion to the Nazi Regime; Hitler’s demands were stressed in a speech given on 1 February 1945:

Dispatches and reports should give a sober, truthful picture of the situation. Every embellishment and every concealment of important facts is just as basically wrong as the frivolous passing on of negative rumors which for the most part do not relate to the true state of affairs, but are the products of fantasies of anxious minds.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Steinert, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Bankier, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Unger, *The Totalitarian Party*, 233.

Ultimately, demands made by Hitler resulted in the falsification of public opinion in Germany: “special mention should be made of the ideological and propagandistic techniques employed by the regime to create opinions. It was the task of propaganda to produce the unity of the Volk and leadership postulated by National Socialism, to preserve it and extend it to ever larger circles.”<sup>15</sup> Initial SD reports demonstrated evidence of an increasing number of German citizens subscribing to foreign newspapers, listening to foreign radio stations, and an overall decline in adherence to the regime. Hitler sought to mitigate apathy among German citizens by intensifying propaganda, which would attempt to restore their faith in the regime by proving its stability. Hitler’s September 1936 rally speech was an attempt to boost party morale:

Above all, the Party must embody the optimism we National Socialists know so well. Every fault can be overcome, and its manifestations are easier to eliminate than pessimism and its consequences. Let him beware who has no faith [in Adolf Hitler]. He is committing a sin against the meaning of life as a whole. He is of no use for anything, and his existence will be nothing but a burden to his Volk. In the course of my political struggle—and unfortunately I must stress this again—it was particularly in bourgeois circles that I encountered these sorry pessimists who, in their pitiful state, are incapable of any faith whatsoever and hence could not be used for any redeeming action.<sup>16</sup>

Hitler’s 1936 speech was an effort to prove Nazi vitality and *joie de vivre*; there was no room for pessimism or apathy under the Third Reich. What National Socialist documents avoid saying is perhaps more important than what was said. The exploitation and disputed legitimacy of these reports does not diminish their importance; rather, one must read these reports with caution and assume that the truth lies somewhere between the lines.

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<sup>15</sup> Steinert, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Domarus, Max. *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932-1945*. vol. 2 (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1997), 841.

## 5. Perpetrators and Bystanders

It is problematic to fuse perpetrators and bystanders when discussing public opinion and complicity. Collusion will be defined as the participation of those such as high ranking military and government officials including the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) officers, directly associated with carrying out and or laying the foundation for the implementation of anti-Semitic measures. Raul Hilberg, however, argued that the implementation of the final solution was ultimately dependent upon bystanders as well as perpetrators. He asserted that occasionally bystanders became perpetrators themselves. Sometimes bystanders participated as informants or by profiting from Jewish spoliation.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas many Germans walked away from the Jews, they were eager enough to acquire some Jewish property... Virtually everything was sold. All over Germany, tens of thousands of Jewish apartments were taken over; furniture from Jewish homes in Germany and western countries graced German offices and private German residences; and smaller objects were distributed to the needy, sometimes from the killing centers where they had been collected. The recipients did not ask many questions.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps destitute German citizens who accepted former Jewish possessions without asking questions were not necessarily perpetrators but, rather, somewhere in a continuum, yet were not in much of a position to refuse. Therefore, using the terms ‘perpetrator’ and ‘bystander’ is intrinsically problematic and therefore, it is crucial to employ these terms with vigilance.

Those members of a genocidal society who acquiesced and who did not directly participate in massacres, or actively oppose the genocidal regime, will also be classified as perpetrators. Dirk Moses, an expert in genocide studies had the following to say about

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<sup>17</sup> Hilberg, Raul. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers: 1992), xi-xii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-197.

bystanders: “where genocide was not consciously willed, then it was implicitly intended in the sense of the silent condoning, sometimes agonized acceptance, of a chain of events for which they were co-responsible and were not prepared to rupture.”<sup>19</sup> German citizens had known as much or as little as they wanted to know regarding the Holocaust and the actions taken against the Jews.<sup>20</sup>

## **I. Rationalization**

According to Hilberg, “those who lived in Adolf Hitler’s Europe would have described themselves, with few exceptions, as bystanders. They were not ‘involved,’ not willing to hurt the victims and not wishing to be hurt by the perpetrators. Yet the reality was not always so uncomplicated.”<sup>21</sup> Rudolf Hoess was no exception to the long list of complicit perpetrators, one who believed he had merely followed orders. Therefore, the actions carried out under his command were not his burden to bear:

I did not have the slightest idea of their scale of consequences. It was certainly an extraordinary and monstrous order. Nevertheless the reasons behind the extermination program seemed to be right. I did not reflect on it at the time. I had been given an order, and I had to carry it out. Whether this mass extermination of the Jews was necessary or not was something on which I could not allow myself to form an opinion.<sup>22</sup>

Hoess is the archetypal perpetrator acting out of mindless obedience and is an example of how one may become loyal to a genocidal regimes policy.

The case of Adolf Eichmann provides additional support to the claim of a traditionally high authoritarian obedience in German culture. “All my life I have been accustomed to obedience, from early childhood...used to being led, in business and in

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<sup>19</sup> Moses, Dirk A. *Genocide and Settlers Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*. (New York, NY: Verso Books, 2003), 30.

<sup>20</sup> Bytwerk, Randall: *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic*. (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 157-158.

<sup>21</sup> Hilberg, xi.

<sup>22</sup> Hoess, 160.

everything else... That's how it has always been. Little by little, we were taught all these things. We grew into them, all we knew was obedience to orders."<sup>23</sup> The German legacy of strong authority orientation was the primary teaching used to indoctrinate Nazi youth and likely assisted in the Nazi establishment's rise to power.<sup>24</sup> The example of Hoess and Eichmann lends credence to strong values of authoritarian obedience in German culture in the nineteenth-century.

Hilberg's model of perpetrator rationalization is subdivided into five categories of "self-deception" and may be useful for understanding the legitimization of killing: first, the doctrine of superior orders, second, impersonal duty, third, shifting moral standards, fourth, powerlessness and diffusion of responsibility, and finally, the combative reality of nature.<sup>25</sup> This type of rationalization occurring among complicit Germans was a result of Nazi rhetoric. Hitler was a misanthropic demagogue and gave fiercely passionate, charismatic speeches. The credulous men who became perpetrators were swayed by invidious arguments delivered by Hitler and their more immediate superiors who convinced them that they would be exonerated of all responsibility; therefore experiencing a diffusion of responsibility.

Contrary to the popular opinion and public mood reports, there was not a uniform public opinion indicating strong and optimistic adherence to the Nazi regime. Additionally, the majority of Germans were not at all enthusiastic about the possibility of war. "Ultimately, therefore, dynamic hatred of the masses was unnecessary. Their latent anti-Semitism and apathy sufficed to allow the increasingly criminal 'dynamic' hatred of

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<sup>23</sup> Waller, 181.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 188.

the Nazi regime the autonomy it needed to set in motion the Holocaust.”<sup>26</sup> German acquiescence was likely a consequence of a prevailing fear, the fear of war, and general anxieties swirling around a totalitarian state based on terror. Moreover, Germans were simply “yearning for peace” and stability.<sup>27</sup> Lieutenants and other high officers gave impassioned speeches in an attempt to convince the men that the actions they were being ordered to carry out were in fact justified. Many men were persuaded by this type of powerful rhetoric, and, therefore, felt their participation in the mass execution of Jews was warranted.

## **II. Enthusiastic Participants?**

The perpetrators were not driven by a conscious desire to participate in the eradication of European Jews as Daniel Goldhagen proposes, nor were they inherently evil by nature or birth and many of the men probably did not share the regime’s ideology. In 1936, the Gestapo merged with the SS under the command of Heinrich Himmler; the SS were the most responsible for carrying out the implementation of mass extermination. Those who carried out anti-Semitic measures under Himmler both intended to do so and were among the most zealous of the SS. Jeffrey Herf expresses the importance of anti-Semitism in the implementation of Nazi policy but also recognizes that genocide was not the traditional norm: “radical anti-Semitism had been preceded by a despicable but nongenocidal traditional anti-Semitism that had largely shaped Nazi policies of anti-Jewish persecution from 1933 to 1941.”<sup>28</sup> Goldhagen’s argument is quite problematic as it assumes an “eliminationist anti-Semitism” and “exclusionist” cultural model within

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<sup>26</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 372.

<sup>27</sup> Steinert, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Herf, Jeffrey, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 256-66.

German society during the Holocaust. In Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, he definitively concludes:

When given the opportunity by the Nazi state, ordinary Germans, inspired by a genocidal ideology that played upon preexisting and highly motivating anti-Semitic values and beliefs, willingly and enthusiastically participated in the 'extermination' of millions of dehumanized Jews.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, Goldhagen's argument of an inherently anti-Semitic Germany is not only irrational but upon detailed analysis it is seemingly false, rather, "German citizens had been indoctrinated by Nazi propaganda into becoming ideological antisemites."<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, when Germans claimed that they had known nothing about the Holocaust, they were engaging in what Randall Bytwerk called "a mixture of truth and self-deception" and what Ian Kershaw explains as the Jews being "out of sight and literally out of mind."<sup>31</sup> Not wanting to know meant knowing enough to know that one does not want to know more.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, German citizens who acted as bystanders did not classify themselves as such, in fact, they were themselves afraid of what they called "perpetrators"<sup>33</sup> and the ramifications that would follow if they were to rebel against established orders. Participants including perpetrators and bystanders coalesced into a group of men who adopted the Nazi vision of race and hate as their newly legitimate belief. These issues will be explored through the examination of various scholarly works including those aforementioned, emphasizing propaganda and more specifically, Nazi rhetoric when referencing the Holocaust.

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<sup>29</sup> Hinton, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Kershaw, xxi.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>32</sup> Bytwerk, Randall: *Bending Spines*, 157-158.

<sup>33</sup> Hilberg, xi.

### III. Diffusion of Responsibility

Ordinary people obey authority as long as responsibility is “free-floating”<sup>34</sup> and justified. This is the phenomenon of diffusion of responsibility, which resulted in regular Germans becoming ordinary killers. Similarly, Hilberg suggests that the role of the perpetrator played a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of anti-Jewish measures. Furthermore, he argues that complicity among perpetrators had its foundation in the belief that what he was doing was impersonal. The perpetrator contended that he was merely acting in accordance with his position and duties; he was simply following orders and, therefore, not directly involved.<sup>35</sup> Diffusion of responsibility may be defined as “the phenomenon in which the presence of other people leads to a diminished sense of personal responsibility to act;”<sup>36</sup> it allowed perpetrators of the Holocaust to feel less responsible for the events and situations in which they were involved.

Authoritarian obedience is key in understanding genocidal collaboration: “For most people, killing is easier when it is authorized by another person or institution. Responsibility is displaced onto that authority and moral inhibitions that might apply are mitigated by the authorization.”<sup>37</sup> Auschwitz Commander Rudolf Hoess’ autobiography, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, declares his loyalty to Hitler and to the Nazi regime. Moreover, Hoess illustrates an exemplary example of a man strictly following orders, thus, adhering to authoritarian obedience and the Nazi cause:

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<sup>34</sup> Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Hilberg, ix-xi.

<sup>36</sup> Western, Drew. *Psychology: Mind, Brain, & Culture*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999), 714.

<sup>37</sup> Hinton, 279.

If the Führer had himself given the order for the ‘final solution of the Jewish question,’ then, for a veteran National Socialist and even more so for an SS officer there could be no question of considering its merits. ‘The Führer commands, we follow’ was never a mere phrase or slogan. It was meant in bitter earnest.<sup>38</sup>

Professor of psychiatry, Dr. Robert J. Lifton declares in his work *Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide: The Nazi Doctors* that “one either adheres to the sacred community or is seen, and sees oneself as a murderous, cowardly traitor.”<sup>39</sup> Lifton explains that the SS was the elite community and its members were required to take the SS oath to Hitler and become what he terms “ideological fighters:” “I swear to you, Adolf Hitler-as the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich-loyalty and bravery. I pledge to you and to my superiors, appointed by you, obedience unto death, so help me God.”<sup>40</sup>

Robert J. Lifton argues that “doubling” is the psychological means by which one summons the evil potential of the self and refers to a sort of “healing-killing” paradox.<sup>41</sup> Lifton deduces that Nazi doctors made a “Faustian choice for evil: in the process of doubling, in fact, lies an overall key to human evil.”<sup>42</sup> Nazi doctors had convinced themselves that it was their duty to kill the Jews in an effort to heal the Nordic race. It was in their mind, a movement toward a so-called noble “organic renewal.”<sup>43</sup>

The Germans of the Nazi era came to epitomize the process of numbing and derealization not because they were inherently more evil than other people, but because they succeeded in making use of this form of doubling for tapping the general human moral and psychological potential for mobilizing evil on a vast scale and channeling it into systematic killing.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hoess, Rudolf. *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess*. (Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 160.

<sup>39</sup> Lifton, Robert J. *Medical Killing & the Psychology of Genocide: The Nazi Doctors*, 434.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

Lifton argues that this “healing-killing” paradox was widely practiced, especially among Nazi doctors, exemplifying the overall function of the Nazi regime.<sup>45</sup> Many perpetrators of genocide are convinced that their complicity in mass murder is justified as long as they are following direct orders. The conduct of perpetrators is “legitimized by the conviction that killing, or being willing to kill, members of another group of people is necessary for the safety and security of one’s own group.”<sup>46</sup> “One must kill the enemy in order to preserve or heal one’s people, military, unit, oneself.”<sup>47</sup>

## **6. Collaboration**

### **I. Indifference**

The cataclysms of the Second World War bred indifference and self-interest among German citizens. The majority of collaborators were, therefore, made up of those who were apathetic towards outside life and occurrences, namely, brutal measures ensuing the Jewish population in Europe. In the words of Ian Kershaw: “The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference.” Popular opinion, largely indifferent and imbued with anti-Jewish feeling was “further bolstered by propaganda, provided the climate within which spiraling Nazi aggression towards Jews could take place unchallenged. But it did not provoke radicalization in the first place.”<sup>48</sup> Most Germans under the Third Reich considered their own pressing livelihood to be of utmost importance; the Jewish ‘situation’ ranked seemingly low on their list of priorities, especially in the midst of war when people faced heightened anxiety and hardships:<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>46</sup> Waller, 186.

<sup>47</sup> Lifton, 431.

<sup>48</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent*, 277.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., xxi.

The depersonalization of the Jew had been the real area of success of Nazi policy and propaganda on the Jewish Question. Coupled with the inevitable concern for matters only of immediate and personal importance, mainly the routine day-to-day economic worries, and the undoubted further weakening that the war brought in questions of moral principle, it ensures that the fate of the Jews would be far from the forefront of the people's minds during the war years.<sup>50</sup>

Pervasive intimidation in conjunction with indifference towards the remaining Jewish minority in Germany may explain the lack of involvement and the widespread passivity toward Jewish deportations in the fall of 1941. Most Reich Reports, however, fail to mention any sort of public reaction to the deportations, “confining their comments to a cold, factual account of the ‘evacuations’.”<sup>51</sup> Interest in the Jewish ‘situation’ was for the most part out of self-interest and material advantages accompanied by a widespread “emotionless acceptance.”<sup>52</sup>

In a study done by former psychologist Michael Müller-Claudius, Party members who joined either the NSDAP or the Hitler Youth before 1933 were asked their opinion regarding their direct involvement in the Holocaust. The study revealed that five-percent approved of the necessity to exterminate Jews; making remarks such as: “The Führer has decided upon the extermination of Jewry and promised it. He will carry it out.” Twenty-one percent of those participating in the study believed the Nazi claim that the Jews were a danger to Germany and responsible for German cataclysm; they rejected responsibility for their own involvement in the ‘Final Solution.’ And finally, sixty-two percent of those studied gave testimonies indicative of indifference, suggesting that, “there’s no point in thinking about it. The decision lies with Hitler alone,” and “I prefer not to speak of it. It’s

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 362-63.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 363.

simply not possible to form an opinion on it.”<sup>53</sup> The interviews conducted by Müller-Claudius are significant in that they show a pattern indicative of a belief in the Nazi cause and ideology, and more importantly, the majority of the participants of the study admitted to their feelings of indifference and submission to Nazi policies.

## **II. Self-Interest**

Few Germans proved to be rebellious. They continued to acquiesce or carried out orders to kill. For the majority of the German population, the ‘Jewish Question’ was hardly a fundamental concern during the war years. Indifference and self-interest on the part of Germans during the war period likely played a significant contributing role to the lack of resistance against Nazi policy. Most Germans were probably opposed to the Jews during the Third Reich, welcoming “their exclusion from economy and society” since they viewed them as a dangerous minority of the German state.<sup>54</sup>

Far from objecting to the police and SS taking offenders out of the judicial system, or complaining about the Gestapo’s habit of arresting prisoners on their release from custody and putting them straight into concentration camps, the judiciary and legal and penal administrators were happy to cooperate in this whole process of subversion of the rule of law.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps fear and a profound “sense of hopelessness at crossing the Nazis”<sup>56</sup> resulted in the lack of significant expressions of opposition and heightened indifference regarding the actions being carried out against their Jewish neighbors, “there is a marked, remarkable indifference to death, which no longer presses. One walks past corpses with

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<sup>53</sup> Kershaw, Ian, *The ‘Hitler Myth:’ Image and Reality in the Third Reich*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 243.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>55</sup> Evans, Richard. *The Third Reich in Power: 1933-1939*. (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2005), 73.

<sup>56</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent*, 377-78.

indifference.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the majority of Germans had no part in the functioning of the death camps. Nevertheless, they were well aware of the intensifying persecution of Jews yet were disinterested in knowing their fate.<sup>58</sup> For relatively few Germans, the ‘Jewish Question’ as a dominant concern during the Second World War was not important.<sup>59</sup>

## 7. Ideological Indoctrination

Ideological indoctrination transmitted through forms of propaganda persuaded Germans to become complicit Nazis. Anti-Semitism in and of itself is neither a sufficient explanation nor a sound one. Lifton dedicates part of his research to the “ethos and deadly logic” surrounding the Nazi regime. He argues that “Nazi ethos was the claim to logic, rationality and science” and was crucial to Nazi society.<sup>60</sup> Killing the Jews and their threat was necessary in order to hold together the individual self as well as for the greater good of German society. Within virtually every social collective, the dominant group sets the moral norms, and therefore every society can potentially become complicit in mass murder if faced with similar circumstances to those of the Holocaust. These were men who were influenced by an atmosphere of genocide and came to recognize killing as the only solution. Lifton discusses the significance of the role of educated professionals in genocidal involvement. Physicians, scientists, engineers, university professors and even lawyers created the technology of genocide and its ideological rationale.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ringelblum, Emmanuel, ed., Jacob Sloan. *Notes From the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1958), 194.

<sup>58</sup> Bytwerk, Randall, Preface.

<sup>59</sup> Kershaw, 368.

<sup>60</sup> Lifton, 434.

<sup>61</sup> Lifton, 490.

Men are drawn to these groups of professional killers by destructive psychological traits that can be considered psychopathic, but also by omnipotence and sadism, aggressiveness and violence, and inclinations toward numbing and doubling that are within ordinary social range.<sup>62</sup>

Lifton argues that it was the combined elements of military discipline and ideology that formed efficient killing units. Under the Nazis' genocidal regime, cultural norms were transformed and became wide spread under the Reich Citizenship Laws of 1935.

### **I. Ethnic Virtue**

On January 30, 1937, Hitler presented a speech on Racial Policy in Berlin. Hitler preached a racial way of thinking. It was an idea that fundamentally transformed the culture of Germany. The racial view was based on National Socialist views of inheritance and the "inequality of the races:"

I speak prophetically. Just as the discovery that the earth moved around the sun led to a complete transformation of the way people looked at the world, so too the blood and racial teachings of National Socialism will change our understanding of mankind's past and its future... Humanity is not equal. Just as plants and animals are of different types, so too are people.<sup>63</sup>

The Third Reich led its followers to presume that its values were based on long standing ethnic German traditions, and that the regime held the welfare of the German people in its best interest. Through propaganda and indoctrination, the Nazi regime sought the support of the German people and Nazi law aimed to regulate human activities with the goal of introducing rationality and predictability into social relationships.<sup>64</sup> Preexisting values such as national pride and a strong sense of ethnic virtue were distorted by their connection to new ideologies that included theories of so-called "organic German blood"

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<sup>62</sup> Lifton, 492.

<sup>63</sup> Bytwerk, Randall, "Rassenpolitik." <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/rassenpo.htm>.>

<sup>64</sup> Noakes, J. and Pridham, G. *Nazism: 1919-1945, State, Economy and Society 1933-1939*. (Great Britain: Short Run Press Ltd, Exeter, 1984), 277.

and a racial notion of citizenship.<sup>65</sup> Nazism presented a convincing and appealing ideology for citizens of Germany to adopt. Hitler justified the killing of the with science and logic: “he was relentlessly logical and in this way derived the conclusion that he who loves the human race must destroy the Jews.”<sup>66</sup>

## II. Nazi Ideology

The “Nazi conscience” contains important newly integrated values that established a new set of societal behavioral norms. The “Nazi conscience” is described by Claudia Koonz as “a secular ethos that extended reciprocity only to members of the Aryan community...Guided by the virulent racism expressed in *Mein Kampf*, the Nazi state removed entire categories of people from most Germans’ moral map.”<sup>67</sup> Several new behavioral codes were integrated into German life under the “Nazi Conscience.” For example, the denial of human rights of racial groups deemed inferior and a newly adopted set of values to abide by. Although anti-Semitism may have been present in German culture, it was not previously the societal norm to eradicate an entire population of people solely based on ethnic difference. In fact, Jews had been widely tolerated in Germany before Hitler’s rise to power.

These newly adopted values were “relative, contingent upon time and place.”<sup>68</sup> One aspect of the Nazi conscience is the legitimization of outright violence against ‘undesirable’ populations living under Nazi territory: “It could be morally acceptable—especially in wartime—to extinguish ‘lower’ civilizations that stood in the way of

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<sup>65</sup> Hinton, Alexander. *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*. (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 230.

<sup>66</sup> Lifton, Robert 439.

<sup>67</sup> Koonz, Claudia, *The Nazi Conscience*. (Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

‘progress’.<sup>69</sup> “Ethnic Fundamentalism”<sup>70</sup> under Nazism encouraged Germans to seek retribution for past wrongs and to create a utopian future cleansed of ethnic impurity:

Ethnic fundamentalism claims to defend an ancient spiritual heritage against the corrosive values of industrialized, urban society... ethnic fundamentalism summons its followers to seek vengeance for past wrongs and to forge a glorious future cleansed of ethnic aliens. Its leaders, often endowed with a charismatic aura, mobilize followers to participate in a moral universe that is accessible only to those who share a language, religion, culture, or homeland.<sup>71</sup>

This sort of ethnic fundamentalism that became a major part of Nazi ideology and was largely intensified by anti-Semitic propaganda persuaded many Germans to become both complicit and indifferent towards actions taken against Jews in Germany.<sup>72</sup> Propaganda played a crucial role in transmitting these ideologies and therefore, Germans were undoubtedly swayed by factors additional to anti-Semitism.

The “Nazi conscience” was the driving ideological force of perpetrator complicity in Nazi Germany; it was an ethos that denied universal human rights to those it deemed unworthy. This concept became widely accepted and internalized among German citizens under the Nazi establishment.<sup>73</sup> According to Lifton, logical extremities resulted in paranoia in order to hold together the individual self. He identifies paranoia as a form of “a disease of logic, of logic gone mad.” As a part of Hitler’s Racial Policy speech, he declared the following:

The environment does not form people... People form the environment... The investigations are at an early stage, but we already know that there is hardly a nation in North Africa, the Near East, Iran, India and as far as Turkestan that does not show wonderful evidence of Nordic culture. It must fill us with pride that in our own homeland, in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>72</sup> Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth,’* 277.

<sup>73</sup> Koonz, 3-4.

Germany, culture has blossomed in unbroken lines for more than 5000 years, created by people of our blood, our nature, our ancestry.<sup>74</sup>

Nazism promised to emancipate ancient values of honor and dignity from materialism and inferiority, and it offered comfort. Koonz describes this need for a prophetic ‘savior,’ “Hitler heard Germans’ hunger for a government they could trust and a national purpose they could believe in...Hitler promised to rescue old-fashioned values of honor and dignity from the materialism, degeneracy, and cosmopolitanism of modern life.”<sup>75</sup> Hitler’s promises of a new and racially pure Germany assisted in the abandonment of typical societal norms and the adoption of a pure and ‘organic’ racial ideology.

### **III. Racial Utopia**

One of the first forms of exclusion Jews faced was from the German economy. They were prohibited from owning shops, markets, factories, stocks, and property since they were believed to be responsible for controlling the government, the press, the economic life, the arts, and worst of all, the corruption of the biological purity of the Aryan race through intermarriage.<sup>76</sup> These beliefs included laws excluding Jews from the economy and later from the cultural arena as well. Jews were prohibited from attending German theatres, concerts, and German schools. They became restricted to their own cultural activities and were therefore prohibited from any involvement in German society under the Reich Citizenship Laws of 1935. These laws determined the rights of the Jewish population; they redefined the culture of Germany and who was included within it. Following the newly implemented laws came the official outbreak of war in 1939 with Germany’s invasion of Poland. Not only did this signify a major turning point in Nazi

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<sup>74</sup> Lifton, 440.

<sup>75</sup> Koonz, 2.

<sup>76</sup> Schleunes, Karl A. *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews, 1933-1939*. (USA: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1970), 4.

policies, but it also proved to be the beginning of publicly blaming Jews for the war, hence, defining them as the enemy.

On 30 January 1939, the anniversary of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of the Third Reich, Hitler stated in a speech to the Reichstag in regards to the prevailing Jewish

Question:

German culture is exclusively German; it is not Jewish...I believe the earlier this problem is resolved, the better. For Europe cannot find peace before it has dealt properly with the Jewish question. There is more than enough room for settlement on this earth. All we need to do is put an end to the prevailing assumption that the Dear Lord chose the Jewish people to be the beneficiaries...Either the Jews will have to adjust to constructive, respectable activities, such as other people are already engaged in, or sooner or later, they will succumb to a crisis of yet inconceivable proportions.<sup>77</sup>

Not only did Hitler internalize and legitimize Jews as the enemy, the speech of 30 January 1939 marked a watershed for what would appear to be a prophecy of what was to come. The perception of Jews as the other and as the enemy became widespread throughout Germany and was transmitted through propaganda in the form of films, speeches, and newspapers. Consequently, it altered behavioral norms and the legal culture of the society resulting in the further complicity that concluded in the near total extermination of Jews from Europe.

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<sup>77</sup> Domarus, Max, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932-1945*. vol. 3 (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1997), 1448-49.

## 8. The Dangers of Propaganda and Nazi Rhetoric

Propaganda fostered retaliation against Jews, especially in Germany. This was largely a result of the cliché “The Jews are guilty.” In 1940, Joseph Goebbels established a weekly newspaper, *Das Reich*, the official anti-Semitic newspaper of the Third Reich. In an article dated 16 November 1941, Goebbels placed blame on the Jews for the outbreak of war. Goebbels’ essay, *Die Juden sind Schuld*, [the Jews are guilty] explains the importance of the destruction of European Jewry and the necessity to carry out the Führer’s prophecy made on 30 January 1939:

Die historische Schuld des Weltjudentums am Ausbruch und an der Ausweitung dieses Krieges ist so hinreichend erwiesen, daß darüber keine Worte mehr zu verlieren sind. Die Juden wollten ihren Krieg, und sie haben ihn nun. Aber es bewahrheitet sich an ihnen auch die Prophezeiung, die der Führer am 30. Januar 1939 im Deutschen Reichstag aussprach, daß, wenn es dem internationalen Finanzjudentum gelingen sollte, die Völker noch einmal in einen Weltkrieg zu stürzen, das Ergebnis nicht die Bolschewisierung der Erde und damit der Sieg des Judentums sein werde, sondern die Vernichtung der jüdischen Rasse in Europa.<sup>78</sup>

[The historic responsibility of world Jewry for the outbreak and widening of this war has been proven so clearly that it does not need to be talked about any further. The Jews wanted war, and now they have it. But the Führer's prophecy of 30 January 1939 to the German Reichstag is also being fulfilled: If international finance Jewry should succeed in plunging the world into war once again, the result will be not the Bolshevization of the world and thereby the victory of the Jews, but rather the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe.]

Goebbels stressed the danger of Jews to German *Volk* by laying forth a caveat:

Die Juden sind unser Verderb. Sie haben diesen Krieg angezettelt und herbeigeführt. Sie wollen mit ihm das Deutsche Reich und unser Volk vernichten. Dieser Plan muß zuschanden gemacht werden. Jeder deutsche Soldat, der in diesem Kriege fällt, geht auf das Schuldkonto der Juden. Sie

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<sup>78</sup> Goebbels, Joseph. *Das eherne Herz: Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1941-42*. (München: Zentral Verlag Der NSDAP./ Franz Eher Nachf., 1943), 85.

haben ihn auf dem Gewissen, und sie müssen deshalb auch dafür bezahlen.<sup>79</sup>  
Die Juden sind schuld am Kriege. Sie erleiden durch die Behandlung, die wir ihnen angedeihnen lassen, kein Unrecht. Sie haben sie mehr als verdient.<sup>80</sup>

[The Jews are our destruction. They started this war and direct it. They want to destroy the German Reich and our people. This plan must be blocked. The Jews are to blame for every German soldier who falls in this war. They have him on their conscience and must also pay for it. The Jews are responsible for the war. The treatment they receive from us is hardly unjust. They have deserved it all].

*Sicherheitsdienst* reports from 20 November 1941 indicate the success of Nazi propaganda. Anxiety and apprehension among the German public followed Joseph Goebbels' essay, *Die Juden sind Schuld*. According to the Nazi SD reports on German public response to the essay, it was well received, although the reports failed to go into much detail.<sup>81</sup>

Jeffrey Herf contends that this sort of anti-Semitic logic resulted in direct emotional significance for millions of Germans owing to the increasing number of German casualties during the war. Jewish hatred deepened and Nazi propaganda emerged in full force, "The more the *Allies* turned the tide against the German armed forces, the more Nazi propagandists asserted that the Jews were guilty and would pay for it."<sup>82</sup> Once again, Hitler was declared a prophet who was able to predict Germany's future. Germany was therefore at war as a result of an international Jewish conspiracy. At a gathering for influential Nazi political leaders Hitler expressed the importance of Jewish extermination, "Der Weltkrieg ist da. Die Vernichtung des Judentums muß die notwendige Folge sein."  
[The world war is here. The extermination of Jews must be its necessary consequence.]

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>81</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 20 Nov 1941.

<sup>82</sup> Herf, Jeffrey, 133.

Hitler ordered Germans to express sympathy only for Germans and to abandon any sympathy for Jews.<sup>83</sup> With an increasing number of German fatalities, the pinnacle of Nazi propaganda transpired; it transmitted messages to the German people of the urgency and necessity to carry out Hitler's prophecy.

Hans Frank, head of the Nazi Lawyers' League, devoted follower of Hitler, and believer in Nazi ideology delivered a speech nearly one month after Hitler's 'prophetic' proclamation indicating the necessity of Jewish annihilation. On 16 December 1941 Frank had the following to say regarding the 'Jewish Question' and plans for the extermination of Jews:

...One way or another-I will tell you that quite openly—we must finish off the Jews. The Führer put into words once: should united Jewry again succeed in setting off a world war, then the blood sacrifice shall not be made only by the peoples driven into war, but then the Jew of Europe will have met his end. I know that there is criticism of many of the measures now applied to the Jews in the Reich. There are always deliberate attempts to speak again and again of cruelty, harshness, etc.; this emerges from the reports on the popular mood...we will have pity, on principle, only for the German people, and for nobody else in the world. The others had no pity for us either...I will therefore, on principle, approach Jewish affairs in the expectation that the Jews will disappear. They must go. We cannot poison them [Jews], but we will be able to take measures that will lead somehow to successful destruction.<sup>84</sup>

Frank's speech continues on to ensure German citizens that he is personally overseeing Jewish deportations to the East and alludes to the coming Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1941 where the Final Solution (Endlösung) would be discussed. It is quite evident from Frank's speech that he was influenced by

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>84</sup> Arad, Yitzhak, Gutman, Israel and Margalit, Abraham, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 247-248.

Hitler's anti-Semitic rhetoric blaming the Jews for Germany's misfortune and their dangerous involvement in a conspiracy against the German 'race.'

## **I. Propaganda Through Film**

*Triumph of the Will* is a quintessential example of a powerful form of propaganda. The film was released in 1935 and was presented as a documentary with intentions of convincing German citizens and the rest of the world of German power and strength under Hitler's leadership. Joseph Goebbels, head of the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, was in charge of the "spiritual mobilization" of German citizens. Goebbels believed that propaganda was most effective when it was inconspicuous. On 28 March 1933, Goebbels addressed the representatives of the film industry regarding *Triumph of the Will* and his disappointment, "that is the secret of propaganda: to permeate the person it aims to grasp, without his even noticing that he is being permeated. Of course propaganda has a purpose, but the purpose must be concealed with such cleverness and virtuosity that the person on whom this purpose is to be carried out doesn't notice it at all."<sup>85</sup>

Goebbels was displeased with the film as he felt it targeted Germans who had already converted to the Nazi cause. Goebbels believed propaganda to be a vital component to the Nazi party and state. He gave the following speech to the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally:

It is difficult to define the concept of propaganda thoroughly and precisely... The concept of propaganda has undergone a fundamental transformation, particularly as the result of political practice in Germany. It is not only a matter of doing the right thing; the people must understand that the right thing is the right thing. Propaganda is a means to an end. Its purpose is to lead the people to an understanding that will allow it to

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<sup>85</sup> Evans, 127.

willingly and without internal resistance devote itself to the tasks and goals of the leadership. If propaganda is to succeed, it must know what it wants. It must keep a clear and firm goal in mind, and seek the appropriate means and methods to reach that goal. Propaganda as such is neither good nor evil. Its moral value is determined by the goals it seeks.<sup>86</sup>

Joseph Goebbels argued that the methods of propaganda were “morally neutral,” and therefore, propaganda was neither inherently good nor bad. Ultimately for Goebbels, the main gauge of propaganda was whether or not it is used for good ends.<sup>87</sup>

The film *I Accuse [Ich klage an]*, a propagandistic attempt on the part of the Nazi Party to vindicate the euthanasia program, was met with polarizing reactions including widespread acceptance as well as criticism and protests on the part of the Church. According to SD reports<sup>88</sup>, the film was overall “enthusiastically” and well received, even by some within the church society. Moreover, reports suggest that the film provoked a widespread discussion regarding *Ich klage an*; *Meldungen aus dem Reich* reports suggest that the majority of Germans reacted in favor to the euthanasia program as it offered a solution to those chronically suffering. SD surveys of German opinion towards the film only faced minor censure by relatively few Germans and primarily by the church clergy, both Protestant and Catholic. The only hostile comments were directed at ensuring that the euthanasia policy would end with the decision of the doctor since the patient should not be entrusted to make their own decision on the matter.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Bytwerk, Randall L. *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*. (United States of America: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 42-43.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>88</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*. vol. 9, 3175.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 3175.

Yet again, a pattern can be deduced from the Reports from the Reich, one that suggests an overall positive reaction to the propaganda the German public was presented with. However, in reality, the act of forcible sterilization of those with disabilities, including children and those deemed racially and mentally unfit, prompted prevalent reaction by the German public, primarily the Catholic Church demanding that the T-4 Program be put to an end in 1941.

In the 20 January 1944 weekly edition of *Der Stürmer*, the headline article was entitled: “Die jüdische Kriegsschuld.” The article illustrated a German soldier facing his Jewish enemy, whom he contends should be held responsible for the war. Furthermore, the article discusses the problem of the *Judenfrage* in Nazi occupied territory:

# Der Stürmer

Deutsches Wochenblatt zum Kampfe um die Wahrheit

HERAUSGEBER: JULIUS STREICHER

Nummer <b>3</b>	Preis: 1. Jahrgang: 12 Mark; 6 Monate: 7 Mark; 3 Monate: 4 Mark. Einzelhefte: 1 Mark. Adressänderung: 2 Mark. Abbestellung: 1 Mark.	Nürnberg, 20. Januar 1944	22. Jahr <b>1944</b>
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## Die jüdische Kriegsschuld

Der gegenwärtige Krieg und seine Ausweitung zum zweiten Weltbrand geht zurück auf die Missetat der Juden. Doch allerdings die antisemitische Haltung eines beträchtlichen Teiles des englischen Volkes nicht völlig ausgeschaltet werden konnte, beweist ein Artikel, der im Juli 1939, also kurz vor dem Beginn des Krieges, in der Zeitung „News Chronicle“ erschien und den Brief eines Engländers an Chamberlain anführte, der den einseitigen Schuldweisens für die Kriegsschuld der Juden in England erbringt. Es liest darin:

„Millionen von Engländern und Engländerinnen in diesem Lande sind erstaunt darüber, daß Sie und andere Männer von Bedeutung die Aufnahme von Churchill und Eden, beides Propheten, ins Kabinett befehlen. Es sind schon viel zu viel Juden im Parlament und in Stellungen von erheblichem Ansehen. Wir haben einen jüdischen Kriegsminister (Hoare Belisha). Wir haben einen jüdischen Konzern, der die Armee mit Nahrungsmitteln versorgt (Hoos and Co. mit den Juden Salmon and Giffelman). Jüdische Schneider stellen die Uniformen her (Konzern des Juden Sir Montague Karlen). Wir haben die Kollonien und die Hochschulen, die die Mitglieder unserer Regierung in ihren Ländern gottlich bewahren. In welchem Lande? Fragen viele! Dieses Land heißt England, und wir wünschen daß Männer aus Preußen, die nichts als Engländer sind, die Geschichte unseres Landes befehlen. Wenn Sie für die Aufnahme von

Churchill und Eden in die Regierung eintraten, spielen Sie nur das Spiel der Juden. Das ist ein Verbrechen an England und an seinem Volke. Es sind die Juden und niemand anderes als die Juden, die nicht gestatten wollen, daß wir mit Deutschland friedlich zusammenleben.“

Der Ausbruch des Krieges wurde vom Weltjudentum mit lächerlichen Redensarten brüchig begründet. Zehn Tage nach der britischen Kriegserklärung gab bereits das „Central-Blad voor Israelieten“ in Amsterdam das jüdische Kriegsgesetz bekannt:

„Die Millionen Juden in USA, England, Frankreich, Südamerika und nicht zu vergessen in Palästina, sind entschlossen, den Vernichtungskrieg gegen Deutschland bis zum Ende zu führen.“

Gleichgültig aber war das Judentum in der Welt eifrig bemüht, ein Land nach dem anderen in den Krieg hineinzuziehen. Vor allem in den USA wurde eine ungeheure Hege entfesselt. Das wichtigste Werkzeug der Juden war der USA-Präsident Roosevelt selbst. Seine Rolle als Kriegsurheber im Auftrag Judas wird bezeugt durch die vertraulichen Berichte, die der ehemalige polnische Botschafter in Washington, Graf Potocki, nach Warschau sandte, und die nach der Kapitulation dieses Stabts in deutsche Hände fielen. Potocki schreibt am 12. 1. 1939:

„Die Stimmung in den Vereinigten Staaten scheint sich durch einen immer zunehmenden Haß aus gegen alles, was mit dem Nationalsozialismus zusammenhängt. Die Propaganda ist vor allem in jüdischen

### Profile des Krieges



#### Aus dem Inhalt:

Der schicksalhafte Judenhaß in den USA.  
Die Judenfrage in Frankreich  
Der Judenkontroll in Telex

Der Nord in Rom  
Jüdische Abenteurer  
Das ghetto

Es war noch nie der Sinn des Krieges klar.  
Was einmal kaum noch zu erkennen war,  
Wird durch den Krieg erst recht herausgestellt.  
Der Jude ist der Teufel in der Welt.

## Die Juden sind unser Unglück!







Goebbels and Dr. Ley, head of the party organization in Munich (former editor of the highly anti-Semitic Nazi Newspaper, *Westdeutsche Beobachter* and head of the Labor Front), address and instruct the NSDAP on their responsibilities and on propaganda<sup>93</sup>



Goebbels gives a speech at a workshop seminar in 1942. He provides an overview of military and political attitudes and developments in hopes of bringing up pessimistic views following British success in the North African campaign<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Das Reich*, 5.8.1942, *Institute für Zeitgeschichte*.

<sup>94</sup> *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*. 14.7.1942, *Institute für Zeitgeschichte*.

## II. Manipulation Through Propaganda and Rhetoric

The issue of complicity requires an examination of specific conditions that caused Germans to pursue immoral ends. German submission to the Nazi regime alone does not elucidate the integrated and internalized indifference and lack of sympathy regarding the Jews during the Third Reich. Nazism introduced newly manipulated principles of ethnic virtue and purity within German society, which were permeated through Nazi propaganda and rhetoric. The Nazi regime attempted to manipulate and control the masses through propaganda in order to keep up with their changing policies. Their objective was “mobilization for action” or “the preparation of political activities.”<sup>95</sup> “The masses are not expected to know the ideological scriptures, but to obey their commandments as interpreted and transmitted by the leadership. It is this purpose that the propaganda machine is intended to serve.”<sup>96</sup>

Furthermore, the Nazi Regime was to some extent reluctant to disclose and inform the German population its ideological motives, fearing “conflict between loyalty to the cause and loyalty to the leadership.”<sup>97</sup> To draw further upon this point, Ringelblum disclosed in his journal on 25 June 1942 the following: “[T]hough Hitler promised on several occasions to exterminate the Jewish people, they’re doing everything in the world now to keep the Germans from finding out what is happening to the Jews...[I]f the German populace knew about it, they would probably not be able to execute the mass murder.”

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<sup>95</sup> Unger, Aryeh, L. *The Totalitarian Party*, 35.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

In order for Hitler and other high ranking leaders such as Goebbels and Himmler to make Nazi ideology appealing and logical to their followers, they had to first convince them that their philosophies contain local and long standing values that link to the society's preexisting cultural knowledge.

Genocidal regimes usually co-opt preexisting cultural knowledge, dressing it up in new ideological guises that maintain familiar and compelling resonances while legitimating new structures of domination and violence against victim groups...By linking their lethal ideologies to preexisting cultural knowledge, genocidal states provide perpetrators with an array of compelling discourses that may be used, consciously, or unconsciously, in their genocidal bricolage.”<sup>98</sup>

According to Richard Evans, Goebbels openly acknowledged that the popular legitimization of the Third Reich, which the Propaganda Ministry sought, was manipulated by the regime.<sup>99</sup> Propaganda, therefore, should not be mistaken for truth; truth did not matter to the National Socialists. What they did value was the myth it transmitted as a lever to encourage men to comply with Nazi ideology.<sup>100</sup> Rarely has a dictatorial government placed such grave emphasis on the manipulation of public opinion and morale than during the Third Reich; propaganda was largely responsible for this ‘success.’<sup>101</sup>

### **III. Fear and Hate**

Nazism spread images of a racially pure Germany that was in danger of extinction; Hitler feared the defeat of Germany, a repeat of 1918. His paranoia resulted in an intensified hatred of Jews, and pretended ‘clairvoyance,’ working to protect the Germans against Jewish bacilli. In the eerie prophetic speech Hitler made at the

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<sup>98</sup> Hinton, 29-30.

<sup>99</sup> Evans, 121.

<sup>100</sup> Unger, *Totalitarian Party*, 39.

<sup>101</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent*, 378.

Reichstag on 30 January 1939, Hitler proclaimed himself a mere prophet of which the Jews made a mockery:

One thing I should like to say on this day which may be memorable for others as well as for us Germans. In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet, and have usually been ridiculed for it. During my time of my struggle for power it was in the first instance only the Jewish race that received my prophecies with laughter when I said that I would one day take over the leadership of the State, and with it that of the whole nation, and that I would then among other things settle the Jewish problem. Their laughter was uproarious, but I think that for some time now they have been laughing on the other side of their face. Today I will once more be a prophet: if the international Jewish financiers (*Finanzjudentum*) in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation (*Vernichtung*) of the Jewish race in Europe!<sup>102</sup>

Following Hitler's speech on 30 January 1939, Nazi propagandists presented a turning point in the war. Hitler and Goebbels' propagandistic warnings that the Jews were conspiring to exterminate the Germans became a reality to those on the receiving end of Nazi propaganda. The Nazi regime's main objective was to cultivate mass hysteria among German society. It became standard procedure for the regime to convince Germans that their only chance for survival against the Jewish enemy was to fight against them.<sup>103</sup>

Two months after the German invasion of Russia, Julius Streicher published an article in *Der Stürmer* entitled *Der Kampf gegen den Teufel: Alljuda offenbart seinen Vernichtungsplan* [The Battle with the Devil: Pan-Jewry Reveals its Destructive Plan]. When the article was published in 1941, the Nazi regime was in the midst of initiating a major anti-Semitic campaign. Goebbels stated in his diary on 1943 September 8:

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<sup>102</sup> Domarus, Max, *Vol. 3*, 1449.

<sup>103</sup> Herf, 230.

The East will forever regard Europe as an attractive jewel. The East will again and again try to break into this continent in order to dominate it. Our constant, untiring effort must therefore center upon taking the necessary measures for our security. If it be true today that the Bolshevism of the East is mainly under Jewish leadership and that the Jews are also the dominant influence in the Western plutocracies, then our anti-Semitic propaganda must begin at this point. The Jews must therefore be through out of Europe.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps Goebbels' diary entry fueled the massive campaign that planned to spread propagandistic accusations of a Jewish conspiracy to eradicate the German people.

Furthermore, the Nazi regime 'proved' an anti-German conspiracy based on the work of an American Jew named Theodore N. Kaufman, who proposed the sterilization of all male Germans in his book, *Germany Must Perish*. Goebbels translated the book in 1941 into German and had it published in order to persuade Hitler and German troops to take immediate action against the 'Jewish problem.'

In November 1941 a memorandum prepared by the Foreign Office for the Political Intelligence Department in Germany reported on the public reaction to Kaufman's book. The report indicated a widespread fear among Germans who feared a Jewish reprisal:

The letter states that the population was convinced that the Jews had started the war and were therefore responsible for the suffering it inflicted. Everyone, including those who did not sympathize with Nazism agreed that the Jewish revenge left no alternative but victory.<sup>105</sup>

According to Randall Bytwerk, Kaufman's radical proposal was only taken seriously by the Nazis who utilized it to propagate further Jewish hatred. Kaufman's proposal paved the way for significant consequences imposed upon European Jewry. Without hesitation, Goebbels went directly to the Führer with Kaufman's book in order to reemphasize the

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<sup>104</sup>Goebbels, ed. Louis P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943*. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1948), 359.

<sup>105</sup>Bankier, 148-49.

lingering Jewish problem needing immediate action. Hitler assured him that his promise in his speech in January 1939 to annihilate the Jewish race was underway. Kaufman's proposal marked a watershed in Nazi policy and brought about an unrelenting future for German Jews.

Goebbels confided in his diary, "the Jews are having to foot the bill; they have already paid it in part in Germany."<sup>106</sup> Goebbels and other members of the Nazi regime utilized any means possible to spread the warning of global Jewish intent to eradicate German civilization. Hence, the Nazi regime declared they were facing a war against the devil.<sup>107</sup> Vexed by Kaufman's book, Hitler gave Goebbels permission in 1941 to implement the infamous yellow cloth star with the word *Jude* emblazoned across it, "I issue orders that Jews in Berlin must wear a distinctive badge. Otherwise they are constantly mixing with our people, pretending to be harmless, and making trouble,"<sup>108</sup>

At the end of 1941 Goebbels, after a visit to the Führer's headquarters, noted in his diary that he was starting at once to bestir himself to the Jewish question, for Hitler had authorized him to introduce a badge for Jews, This was to be a large yellow star of David, but its wearing was not to be made obligatory by way of public decree.<sup>109</sup>

SD reports from 9 October 1941 recount public reaction to the newly implemented 'Yellow Star' imposed upon Jews. Unsurprisingly, they indicate that the majority of Germans welcomed the obligatory badge with enthusiasm, which tended to be the theme of most reports.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1939-1941*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), 328.

<sup>107</sup> "Der Kampf gegen den Teufel: Alljuda offenbart seinen Vernichtungsplan," *Der Stürmer*, #37/1941, 1-2.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>109</sup> Boelcke, 149-50.

<sup>110</sup> Steinert, M.G., 239.

Accepting the narrative of SD accounts is again problematic. The attitude of the accounts remains “redolent only of the overtly Nazi element of the population, and is more than likely that the SD was in this case as in other instances repeating comments made by Party members as general popular opinion.”<sup>111</sup> It is only natural that opinions representing a negative or opposing view would either be kept to the individual or suppressed in reporting. Those who openly condemned the ‘Yellow Star’ were the minority as were those publicly praising the public decree of branding Jews. The majority, however, remained indifferent to the mandate of 1941.<sup>112</sup>

#### **IV. Defining the ‘Other’**

Rudolph Hoess’ autobiography illustrates evidence of the effectiveness of propaganda; “In order to disguise a policy of force it is necessary to use propaganda so that a clever distortion of all the facts, the policies, and measures of the rulers of the state can be made palatable. Terrorism must be used from the outset, to stifle all doubt and opposition.”<sup>113</sup> Several more men partook in mass executions once they could justify to themselves the killing of Jews. Many men were similar to Hoess in that they learned to numb their emotions and continue to carry out orders to conduct mass killings: “I had to go on with this process of extermination. I had to continue this mass murder and coldly watch it, without regard for the doubts that were seething deep inside me. I had to observe everything happening with a cold indifference.”<sup>114</sup> Habituation played a role in

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<sup>111</sup> Kershaw, 362.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>113</sup> Hoess, 196.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 172.

justifying the action of mass killers. Having killed once already, the men did not experience such a traumatic shock the second time.<sup>115</sup>

In the case of most twentieth-century genocides, propaganda is an essential element in defining who the ‘other’ is through forms of art, music, newspaper articles, and theatre. Jews were consistently portrayed as a dangerous alien; they were the instigators and cause of Germany’s defeat in World War One and thus of the depression that followed. Herf describes the importance of propaganda on German public opinion, both perpetrators and bystanders; it was utilized by the Nazis to justify genocide against European Jewry, “a blend of hatred, self-righteous indignation, and paranoia was at the core of the Nazi justification of genocide. Nazi propaganda presented Germany’s war against the Allies and its intention to ‘exterminate’ the Jews of Europe as part of one overarching war of retaliation and defense.”<sup>116</sup> Through Nazi propaganda, Germany was depicted as an innocent victim of international Jewish threat. German citizens were led to believe that Jews were “guilty” of starting the war and were responsible for a conspiracy to exterminate Germany and the Germans. Hitler and his leading propagandists were able to present Nazism in two ways: Germans as a master race with its grandiose visions of world domination, and Germany as the self-pitying, innocent, beleaguered victim.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>116</sup> Herf, 1.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 5.

## 9. The Power of Myth

“Ordinary Germans” had read a great deal of Julius Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*. He was infamous for his insidious weekly newspaper publication. Streicher was also Gauleiter, or regional leader of the Nuremberg district under Nazi rule until 1938. Before 1933, *Der Stürmer* was mainly confined to Bavaria but eventually would become widely distributed throughout Germany. *Der Stürmer* was first published in 1923 and continued until the end of the war in 1945. Streicher’s view of Jews as the root of an international conspiracy to dominate the world was not only made evident in his newspaper publication but also in his speeches.

Following *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, Streicher delivered a speech praising those who participated in the destruction of Jewish property and religious symbols and he condemned anyone who showed sympathy for the Jews. It was published in the *Fränkische Tageszeitung* on 11 November 1938 titled “*Einmal wird das Hochgericht kommen für das jüdische Volk:*”

You want to and shall hear the truth, and from those who have preached it for twenty years...For twenty years, I have told the citizens of Nuremberg and Franconia that he who has gone to a rabbinical school has been educated not to the good, but to criminality. From his earliest childhood, the Jew is taught different things than we are taught. No, he is not taught “Love your neighbor as yourself” or “If someone strikes you on your cheek, turn also your left cheek to him.” Instead, he is taught: “You may do whatever you wish to a Gentile.” He is even taught to see the execution of a Gentile as a deed that pleases God. We have been writing that in *Der Stürmer* for twenty years, we have been preaching it to the whole world for twenty years, and we have brought an understanding of the Jewish Question to millions...we have done what we once said and prophesied that we would do. As I said to you twenty years ago, the time will come when Germans no longer live in barracks, but rather the Jews... Our hope

is that the Jewish people will one day receive the penalty they deserve for all the sorrow, misery, and trouble they have brought the peoples.<sup>118</sup>

Streicher asserted that the anti-Jewish pogrom in November 1938 was a justified form of self-defense. Streicher's career as a Gauleiter, ended with the aftermath of *Kristallnacht* since it resulted in a vast financial cataclysm in German economy.<sup>119</sup>

Hitler, however, permitted Streicher to continue his weekly publication of *Der Stürmer* until Germany's defeat in 1945. Streicher's work was crucial in persuading the German public that Jews were the root of everything evil and were largely responsible for the economic crisis Germany was facing after World War One. Streicher's publications in *Der Stürmer* had a strong effect on Germany's citizens and assisted in the future extermination of European Jewry. Streicher was also the author of the popular 1938 children's book, *Der Giftpilz* (The Poison Mushroom). *Der Giftpilz* taught German children from a young age how to identify a Jew and how to view him as a venomous creature. In 1937, a year before the publication of *Der Giftpilz*, Streicher published a manual for teachers explaining how children were to be taught to hate Jews:

Our children must know that Jews remain Jews, despite baptism, despite the fact that they have lived in Germany for hundreds of years, despite the fact that they dress as we do and have given themselves German names. They never take on our way of thinking. They remain Jews, hucksters, usurers, swindlers, criminals, because language, baptism, and domicile do not change the blood.<sup>120</sup>

Streicher's relentless efforts to produce a notion of a malicious Jew, who was vastly different than Germans, had an immense impact on German public opinion. The high levels of the adoption of Streicher's messages by the public demonstrate this. Teachers'

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<sup>118</sup> Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, 87-92: Source from: "Einmal wird das Hochgericht komen für das jüdische Volk," *Fränkische Tageszeitung*, 11 November 1938, 2-3

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>120</sup> Bytwerk, Randall L. *Julius Streicher*. (Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day Publishers, 1983), 101.

manuals, numerous German citizens subscribing to his insidious weekly publication, *Der Stürmer*, and his various other methods of spreading messages of Jewish hatred proved to be highly influential on German public perception of Jews.

Streicher targeted Germans of all ages and preached Nazi ideology; his propagandistic efforts fostered national Jewish hatred and widespread anti-Semitism. For example, in a 1933 *Der Stürmer* publication titled, *Die Geheimpläne gegen Deutschland enthüllt* [Secret Plans against Germany Revealed], he wrote:

World Jewry faces Adolf Hitler. World Jewry faces Germany. The Jews will fight without pity. We must also fight without pity against Pan-Jewry. The Jewish people is the people of the Devil. It is a people of criminals and murderers. The Jewish people must be exterminated from the face of the earth.<sup>121</sup>

Such nauseating forms of rhetoric eventually allowed the adoption of new legal measures to “solve the Jewish problem,” and became integrated into German society under Nazism. Nazi ideology transmitted through forms of propaganda and Hitler’s promises were appealing to many Germans who longed for national pride, vitality, and comfort. According to Noakes and Pridham, Streicher and his publication were the most “extreme and the most degrading examples of Nazi antisemitism,” so much so that even high ranking officers of the regime found Streicher’s work to be revolting. Furthermore, in gauging the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda such as *Der Stürmer*, Noakes and Pridham maintain that anti-Semitic propaganda was successful insofar that it reinforced the “existing generally negative image of the Jews, which produce a widespread passive antisemitism, without, however, succeeding in winning over many Germans to the

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<sup>121</sup> Bytwerk, Randall, “Secret Plans against Germany Revealed.”  
<<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/ww2era.htm#Speech>.>

dynamic racism characteristic of Nazi Ideology.”<sup>122</sup> Rather, evidence as outlined in Nazi agency reports demonstrates that the impact of propaganda was limited.

Germans were only interested in dealing with Jews if it concerned their own material self-interests and they expressed little sympathy for Jews: “Many Germans arrive with propositions for factories, the Jews are the organizers and administrators of the whole war industry. Some 2,000 Jews or more leave the Ghetto to work outside. They’ve begun getting winter clothing ready, ceaselessly sewing.”<sup>123</sup> According to the journal Emmanuel Ringelblum kept in Warsaw, January was the month of the “fur-coat decree,” which impacted the entire Government General of Poland.<sup>124</sup> Jews in the Warsaw ghetto were ordered to surrender their fur coats; many Christians and policemen flooded the streets wearing the fur coats that once belonged to Jews.

As stated earlier, Hitler’s speeches were widely persuasive and compelling to many Germans. Hitler’s selection as chancellor in 1933, coupled with his strong sense of German nationalism, brought widespread relief and comfort to the German population as he promised to mitigate suffering through the establishment of a re-born Germany. The comfort Hitler promised the German people was alluring and tempted German citizens to comply with Nazism’s ideologies.

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<sup>122</sup> Noakes & Pridham, *Vol. 2*, 350.

<sup>123</sup> Ringelblum, 259.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

## I. The Deception of Nazi Indoctrination

The NSDAP sought to create what Hitler called a *Volksgemeinschaft*; Hitler Youth were among those that Hitler wanted to mobilize and exploit by integrating them into his vision of a united German *Volksgemeinschaft*. In the 1934 Nuremberg rally Hitler gave a speech concerning the recruitment of Hitler Youth:

We wish that you German boys and girls absorb in your minds all that we expect of Germany in times to come. We want to be one people and you, my German youth, are to become this people. In the future, we do not wish to see classes and tribes and you must not allow them to develop among you.<sup>125</sup>

Hitler saw young Aryans of Germany as an important component to his vision of a new German future. The propagandism German youth received by Hitler was incessant.

Omer Bartov chronicles Hitler Youth and other Nazi soldiers' accounts in his work *Hitler's Army* and the way in which National Socialist indoctrination "molded the minds and personalities of German youngsters."<sup>126</sup> Through propaganda and other destructive methods, German soldiers were trained to devote themselves and adhere to Nazi ideology. In what Hitler titled his last "Political Testament" on 29 April 1945, just two days before he would commit suicide, he maintained his belief in the Nazi cause and the need to fight the war against world Jewry in order to prevent the annihilation of the German 'race:'

It is untrue that I or anyone else in Germany wanted the war in 1939. It was desired and instigated exclusively by those international statesmen who were either of Jewish descent or worked for Jewish interests. Centuries will pass away, but out of the ruins of our towns and monuments the hatred against those finally responsible whom we have to thank for everything, International Jewry and its helpers, will grow ... Above all I charge the leaders of the nation and those under them to scrupulous

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<sup>125</sup> Polonsky, Antony. Lecture 2, Week 4. Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Bartov, Omer. *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109.

observance of the laws of race and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry.<sup>127</sup>

To be sure, Hitler was charismatic and enthusiastic about Nazi ideology; furthermore, he was particularly interested in gaining and preserving the trust of Nazi officers and Nazi youth, even until his death. Alfons Heck, a zealous Hitler Youth whose mind was molded by Nazi indoctrination, was deeply impacted by Hitler's suicide in May 1945, as illustrated in his memoir:

These words make me feel sick, as if I would have to vomit. I think that my life has no sense any more. What was this battle for, what were the deaths of so many people for? Life has apparently become worthless, for if Hitler has shot himself, the Russians will have finally won....Has the Führer not betrayed his *Volk* then after all?<sup>128</sup>

According to Bartov, Alfons Heck is an example of a loyal follower of Hitler and the Nazi cause. Heck's greatest goal and desire in life became the sacrifice of himself for the Führer. Despite his lack of knowledge regarding National Socialist theory, Heck continued to be an ideological fighter, embodying the "*Idealtyp* of the regime."<sup>129</sup> Bartov examines the extent Nazi ideology shaped and transformed the Wehrmacht into Hitler's army and accepted its racial creeds:

Dehumanizing the enemy is an inherent element of war; when soldiers attach a particular identity to the individual they confront on the battlefield, pulling the trigger may become all but unbearable. Only in rare cases do soldiers kill out of personal hatred for a specific individual; rather, they may sense hatred or wish to take revenge on a generalized, faceless entity who constitutes the 'enemy.' Most often, soldiers find it easier to kill each other precisely because they do not perceive the enemy as a fellow human being. Indeed, soldiers confronted with the realization that they had actually killed individuals not unlike themselves can be

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<sup>127</sup> Robert G. Moeller. *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents*. (Boston, MA: Bedford, 2010), 182-183.

<sup>128</sup> Bartov, 109-110.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

struck by a sense of personal guilt accompanied by outrage at those who had ordered them to do the killing.<sup>130</sup>

Once again we see an instance where it became standard policy to convince and indoctrinate the soldiers to dehumanize the regime's enemy in order to make killing easier. According to Bartov, this process is an inherent element not only of Nazi propaganda and ideology, but also of war in general. Nazi ideology did not seek to understand why one was deemed an enemy or why they ordered to kill them; Nazism only stressed the propagation of faith in their cause. Hitler realized as early as 1927 that faith was more important than reasoning:

Be assured, we too put *Glauben* (faith) in the first place and not cognition. One has to be able to believe in a cause. Only *Glauben* creates a state. What motivates people to go to battle and to fight and to die for religious ideas? Not cognition, but blind faith.<sup>131</sup>

It was imperative for the Nazis to instill the belief of danger and fear among soldiers in order to obtain their full compliance; this was carried out through forms such as speeches, radio talks, newspaper articles, brochures, leaflets and other forms of propaganda directed at the troops during the war. It is in these sorts of propagandistic measures that one should keep in mind that Hitler was portrayed as similar to God, and that his mission was "emanating from a divine will." This sort of political faith and propaganda directed at the Wehrmacht motivated their concrete compliance.<sup>132</sup>

The following images are from the infamous anti-Semitic children's book *Der Giftpilz* published by Julius Streicher. *Der Giftpilz* was a mode of propaganda that spread images of the Jew as a dangerous and venomous creature:

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 120.



*Der Giftpilz. The Poisonous Mushroom*<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Hiemer, Ernst & Julius Streicher. *Der Giftpilz*: (Nuremberg, Germany: Sturmverlag, 1938), Cover Page. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Visual Collection*.



*“He who fights the Jews battles the Devil” –Julius Streicher<sup>134</sup>*

The above picture is from Julius Streicher’s children’s book *Der Giftpilz*. It depicts an image of a young SS officer, a woman, and a young boy coming together in unison to fight in the war against the Jews.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Visual Collection*.



“Here children, I have some treats for you! In return, you both must come with me...”<sup>135</sup>

Julius Streicher is portraying a Jewish man attempting to lure Aryan children with candy, emphasizing the danger of Jews to both German citizens and the world.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Visual Collection*.



*“The God of the Jews is money. And in order for him to earn money he commits the greatest of crimes. He will not rest until he can sit on a large money sack, until he has become the king of money.”<sup>136</sup>*

German propaganda often characterizes Jews as being selfishly concerned with money and other financial goods. Illustrated here is a Jew sitting upon a bag filled with money in front of the entrance to a stock exchange building.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Visual Collection*.

## 10. Summary

Gauging the effects of anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric on German complicity and public opinion during the Third Reich becomes rather difficult in light of a terroristic dictatorship's natural tendency to distort opinion reports and to suppress and omit opposition to the regime. SD reports and various Reports of the Reich presented no opinions other than those favoring the Nazi regime. The much larger questions then become, did anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric promote the complicity of Germans living under the Nazi Regime in Germany and to what extent did they influence German public opinion? The difficulty in answering this question is that the exploration of reports on public morale in Germany falsely measured and reported public attitudes and opinions concerning Nazi policy. Reports from the Reich and SD surveys did not represent a realistic and unbiased representation of public mood under Nazism. However, the authenticity and reliability of SD reports has not been the central concern of this study. The inevitable bias and manipulation of such reports has already been declared and demonstrated.

As I come to the conclusion of this essay, it has become clear to me that the nature of the evidence available, and that which has been presented thus far, is insufficient in pinpointing the exact extent propaganda and rhetoric influenced widespread complicity of Germans under the Third Reich. However, to be sure, without widespread indifference, which was rampant in German society and was imbued with antisemitism, the Holocaust would never have occurred. Nor would the Holocaust have occurred without the active complicity of large segments of the German population. German society under Nazism was conditioned to adhere and maintain deference to

Hitler and to the Nazi party. Eventually, this cloying lionization grew into a disturbing loyalty to the regime. Germany was affected and persuaded by modern global and regional flow of ideas such as the concept of race and hate, which were trumpeted through anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric taking on various guises. I hope to indicate something of value in this material, such as the importance of anti-Semitic propaganda and rhetoric in the role of German complicity in the Holocaust as well as common patterns and trends evident in public opinion during the Third Reich. That which is deliberately omitted from these reports may be indicative of something more important than what is presented; perhaps a more important dimension to these reports is what is implicit, but not explicitly stated.

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