
IDEOLOGY OF DEATH

*Why the Holocaust
Happened in Germany*

JOHN WEISS



ELEPHANT PAPERBACKS
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22: THE IDEOLOGY OF DEATH

Look, you can see for yourself. They are not like you and me. They do not behave like human beings. They are here to die.

—Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz

I don't feel the slightest stir of pity. That's how it is. . . .

—Sergeant Felix Landau,
 after helping to shoot hundreds of Jews

THE Holocaust was not simply a consequence of the war. For the Nazis, the destruction of the Jews was itself a war aim of the highest priority. Just as the Nazi revolution was a racial revolution, so also the war was a racial war. In a war to secure the future of the Germanic race, the Jews, symbol of all the humane values the Nazis opposed, could not be allowed to live. The SS began to organize special killing units in 1938, and with army help they killed Jewish and Polish civilians in the first weeks of the war, hanging them in public squares for all to see. As Martin Gilbert has pointed out in his excellent work on the Holocaust, within two weeks noncombatant Jews as well as Poles were murdered in "a hundred towns and villages." Within eight weeks "five thousand Jews were murdered behind the lines." In October 1939 Hitler decreed that Jewish property be distributed among ethnic Germans. As Hans Frank, governor general of eastern Poland, said to his officials in December 1941: "We cannot shoot 2,500,000 Jews, neither can we poison them. We will have to take steps, however, designed to extirpate them in some way—and this will be done."² Crematorium ovens were ordered in 1940.

The murder of the Jews could not wait. Despite their small numbers, they had survived centuries of persecution and subverted whole civilizations. Millions of Slavs would also die, but one could safely work them to death and allow millions to live as slave laborers, bereft of independence, literacy, leaders, and cultural memory. By November 1939 the Racial Political Office had plans for the destruction of all Poles except slave laborers and children of Aryan physical type, whom Himmler planned to place in German homes to be reared. To tolerate the pres-

ence of any Jews, however, was to risk their ultimate victory. Communists might cease to be communists, homosexuals might quit their behavior, but Jewish blood could never change. In October 1940 the German government of occupied Poland forbade exit visas to Polish Jews, insisting that if they emigrated overseas they would simply have another base from which to subvert Germany.

Even when the Germans were losing the war, materials, transport, and energies were diverted from the front to complete the slaughter of the eternal enemy. In the last two weeks of the war, on the very eve of the surrender of May 8, 1945, Hitler was dead, many army units had surrendered, and all knew the war was lost, yet thousands of Jews were shot, burned to death, or sent on forced death marches to avoid Allied liberators. Truly, as has been said, the Holocaust was the greatest single battle of the war. The day Hitler killed himself, in the final sentence of his Last Testament he wrote: "Above all I charge the leaders of the nation . . . to uphold at all costs the racial laws and the merciless resistance against the world poisoners of all peoples, international Jewry." That was the army the Nazis feared the most.

Racial purification was as necessary to the regime as the conquest of land. As one academic enthusiast exclaimed, the new regime was "biology in action." Even some Germans had to be killed, those deemed "useless mouths" or threats to the racial stock—the mentally ill, carriers of hereditary illnesses, and "asocial types." Homosexuals were high on the list. Himmler called homosexuality "an error of degenerate individualism that is contrary to nature." In 1939 he demanded extermination. An Office for Combating Abortion and Homosexuality was established, but only for Aryans. Lesser peoples should be encouraged to decrease their numbers. If not already named in police or SS files, it was possible for a German homosexual to survive by abstaining or avoiding denunciation.

The Nazi attack on the gay community (though lesbianism was never listed as a crime) was, like all Nazi policies, an extreme version of older attitudes. In the eighteenth century, Prussia had more punitive laws against homosexuals than any Western nation. Long before the Nazis, anti-Semites routinely insisted that homosexuality was the result of degenerate Jewish blood, the "Jewish disease." The penal code of the Second Reich mandated jail for "criminally indecent acts" between males, and only the Social Democrats consistently supported petitions and Reichstag motions to revoke these laws. Marxists believed homosexuality was socially conditioned and should not be penalized. Racial nationalists claimed socialists really wanted to protect the carriers of the "Jewish" disease, though they were embarrassed by some spectacular homosexual scandals at the Hohenzollern and Hapsburg courts. Conservatives noted that the French revolutionaries of 1789 not only liberated Jews but also

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removed homosexuality as a crime from the French penal code, and the Bolsheviks had abolished tsarist laws against homosexuals. As noted earlier, the most prominent advocate of gay rights in Germany, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, was severely beaten because he was a defender of homosexuals, a socialist, and a Jew. In May 1933 Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Research was stormed by the SA; from then on homosexuals were routinely arrested.

Nazi ideologists held that "Jewish" socialists supported homosexual rights in order to destroy the reproductive ability and warrior spirit of the Germanic peoples. Believing the still common notion that homosexuals make bad soldiers, Goebbels argued they were a threat to Germanic blood. The shameless result of promiscuous Weimar culture and its corruption of all sexual norms, homosexuals must be banished or hung. Himmler believed that homosexuality was unknown in rural areas because there German blood was most pure—an idea not based on experience. In the early 1930s he collected the names of "socio-sexual criminals" to be killed because they were a threat to the *Volk*. "We must exterminate these people root and branch."⁴ He noted approvingly that the ancient Teutons had drowned homosexuals in bogs.

Since 1945 the myth that homosexuality was common among the Nazis has often been repeated. Hitler unwittingly encouraged the idea by claiming the SA leadership shot in 1934 was riddled with homosexuals, but this was his bid for public approval. There is no evidence that homosexuals were overrepresented in the movement. In accord with a 1933 Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health, the Nazis persecuted, silenced, or imprisoned homosexuals, including those among their party, declaring they "must be entirely eliminated." In 1934 Himmler announced a return to the "Nordic principle that degenerates should be exterminated" for "Germany stands or falls with the purity of its race."⁵ If they were caught attempting seduction more than once, death in the camps was the usual outcome. Richard Plant estimates that more than fifty thousand gay men were arrested and convicted, and between five thousand and fifteen thousand perished in the camps. No one was ever punished for these murders, and until very recently no one outside the gay community was concerned about them. After 1945 the German establishment did not consider it worth discussion, and in this it had widespread support among Germans—and, one suspects, not only them.

Gypsies have always been subject to hostile myths and persecuted by both Christians and Moslems. In medieval Europe they were thought to be a race formed by the intermarriage of Jews and non-Jewish vagabonds, a mongrel people sharing responsibility for the death of Christ. Like Jews, Gypsies were shunned as homeless wanderers and possessors of satanic and occult powers. In modern times Gypsies were thought to be racially

impure, unnatural kidnapers and disease-carriers, even cannibals. Hunted like game in Eastern Europe, they were often hanged simply because they were Gypsies. But because most were usually poor metal workers, blacksmiths, or producers of costume jewelry, they never attracted the complex of ideological antagonisms used to explain away Jewish success in the modern world.

The Nazis believed that Gypsies would introduce contaminated blood into Aryan racial stock. The Nuremberg Laws state, "In Europe only Jews and Gypsies are of foreign blood." Consequently Gypsies were sterilized in 1934, and in 1939 Heydrich sent Gypsies to Poland. In the occupied territories of the east, the army and local civilian administrators, non-Nazi as well as Nazi, killed Gypsies almost casually, though some of the more "correct" bureaucrats petitioned for permission. Polish Gypsies were shot in the first weeks of the war; the notorious killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) and German army units slaughtered them with or without orders, knowing their superiors would approve. Gypsies were killed at Babi Yar and used for medical experiments and slave labor at Auschwitz. By 1942 death was the penalty for anyone known to have Gypsy blood, and even some found serving in the army were sent to the death camps. The policy was approved and supervised by the academics and physicians of the Reich Department of Health. The title of Himmler's office reveals the attitude—Central Office for Fighting the Gypsy Nuisance. Ukrainians, Rumanians, and Croatian fascists (Ustashi) slaughtered Gypsies wholesale, and a well-known Hungarian slogan read, "After the Jews, the Gypsies." In 1942 German diplomats and bureaucrats were told that Himmler had ordered all Gypsies killed; there are no recorded objections. Perhaps a half-million Gypsies died in the Holocaust. No one was ever tried for the murders until 1991. No reparations to Gypsies have ever been paid. No serious international concern has been shown for the Gypsies; they are still persecuted in Rumania, Slovakia, Austria, and Hungary, discriminated against in Germany, and unwelcome everywhere.

In 1933 Jews comprised fewer than 1 percent of the German population, slightly more than a half-million in a nation of just over sixty million. Although 30 percent were in commerce, Jewish bankers and stockbrokers comprised only 2 percent of the total, while 16 percent were lawyers, 10 percent physicians, and 5 percent journalists and writers. Given these numbers, it is obvious they could dominate nothing even if they agreed to try. Such statistics did not deter anti-Semites, of course, who refused to believe them or spoke of the mysterious power of so few Jews to control so much.

Once the Nazis were in power, the rest followed from the logic of their ideology and their victories in the east. There is no need to look for a specific time of decision for the Holocaust, nor to write as if all depended

on Hitler. Until 1945, the mass emigration without compensation of over 100,000 eastern Jews. The plans for the "resettlement" of eastern Jews to discuss public relations endangered both. Transporting the Jews to Africa, Madagascar, or other islands was the purpose after the war was defeated, because of the huge resettlement of the forgotten when it was not available. Some were not at first planned for camps. Moreover, the century anti-Semitic there and pay for Semites, they were some suggested wanted yellow fever in February and in a news column "island" with itself isolated in death."⁶

Too much had happened in the prewar years. The anti-Semite and, incapable of commercial development for a brief time, the development declared it wrong man and Austria the mufti of Jerusalem. Primarily, it concludes the fight.

Hitler's movement. In 1931, death and hel

on Hitler. Until 1938 the officially stated policy of the Nazis was forced emigration without property, but the regime knew no nation would accept hundreds of thousands of impoverished Jews, let alone millions of eastern Jews. The regime did not want the West to know of its ultimate plans for the "resolution" of the Jewish problem, anymore than it wished to discuss publicly the true goals of its foreign policy. To do either endangered both. The German Foreign Office, not the Nazis, first proposed shipping the Jews to Madagascar, then a French colony off the coast of Africa. Madagascar was to be turned over to Himmler and the SS for this purpose after the defeat of France. But first England would have to be defeated, because during wartime the British fleet would likely prevent any huge resettlement by stopping German ships. Hence the plan was forgotten when the invasion of England was postponed and the east was available. Some assume the Madagascar proposal indicates the Nazis did not at first plan mass murder, but there is no reason to assume the SS would have behaved any differently in Madagascar than in the death camps. Moreover, the Madagascar plan was a familiar idea to nineteenth-century anti-Semites, who had suggested that European Jewry be shipped there and pay for the privilege. Once there, according to pre-Nazi anti-Semites, they were to be surrounded with naval forces to prevent escape; some suggested that any Jews found in Europe afterward be shot; others wanted yellow fever introduced to hasten their demise. In a news conference in February 1939, Rosenberg suggested the Jews be sent there, and in a news conference that summer, not secret, said that in the "wild island" with its "deadly climate" . . . "the obnoxious Jewish race will find itself isolated in a reservation . . . from where there is but one exit—death."⁶

Too much has been made of the Nazi encouragement of Zionists during the prewar years. Hitler never desired an independent Israel; he did not want international Jewry to have a national base. The Nazis, like prewar anti-Semites, held that in Palestine the Jews would exploit the Arabs, and, incapable of building a nation, would continue their international commercial domination and subversion. Eichmann worked with Zionists for a brief time, but, as he said, "The policy of the Reich is . . . to hinder the development of a Jewish state in Palestine."⁷ In 1937 Eichmann declared it wrong to place Jews in nations abroad, although until 1940 German and Austrian Jews were pressured to emigrate. But as Hitler said to the mufti of Jerusalem in November 1941, "The objectives of my fight are clear. Primarily I am fighting the Jews without respite, and this fight includes the fight against the so-called Jewish home in Palestine."⁸

Hitler's moves toward war and his Jewish policies were inextricably connected. In 1936 he made economic sabotage a war crime punishable by death and held the Jewish community collectively responsible for such

crimes. After rearmament and his march into the Rhineland, Hitler knew that Western leaders would not risk war over actions seemingly meant only to redress what was generally regarded as a vengeful treaty. The French huddled behind the Maginot Line, making it clear they would not fight to save their allies in the east. In November 1937 Hitler instructed his military and foreign policy officials to plan for the conquest of *lebensraum*. When Hitler invaded Austria in March 1938, the League of Nations did not even meet to consider condemning Germany. Austrians brutalized the Jews of Vienna to such an extent that the occupying Germans had to restrain mobs of civilians. Although Austrian leftists and many older Catholics did not wish to merge with Germany, Hitler did not invade a free Austria, he invaded a fascist Austria ruled by the heirs of Lueger and threatened by those of Schoenerer. The government of the Christian Social party was as anti-Semitic as the Nazis. Lueger's Catholic anti-Semitism seems to have had the same terrible potential as the secular racism of the Nazis. As the Bishop of Linz wrote in a pastoral letter about "degenerate Judaism" in 1932: "It is not only the undisputed right, but the strict and conscientious duty of every devout Christian to fight the harmful influence of Judaism, and it is much to be desired that the dangers and damages arising from the Jewish spirit should be ever more strongly combated by the Aryan and Christian side." Austria was far too weak to conquer the Slavs and murder the Jews of the east, but given the chance, thousands eagerly helped to do both.

Step by step, the war against the Jews accompanied military aggression. Two weeks after Austria was invaded, the government made it clear there would be no Jewish community in Germany. Eighty percent of the forty thousand Jewish businesses still existing, once deemed necessary for rearmament or essential services, were liquidated. After July 1938 no credit was extended to Jewish businessmen. Gentiles and bankers eagerly competed to buy out Jewish enterprises at extortionate rates, often blackmailing Jewish businessmen with the threat of outright expropriation. Jewish welfare agencies were shut down, and many Jews arrested for minor offenses, even traffic violations, were sent to prison or the camps. Goering and Martin Bormann, chief of staff to deputy *Fuehrer* Rudolf Hess, assured their impatient followers that the regime was about to "settle accounts with the Jews," and many were publicly taunted with their forthcoming fate. "Perish Judah" rang throughout Germany and Austria.

In May 1938 Hitler told his generals he would soon smash Czechoslovakia. As he had predicted, in September at Munich the West showed him they would not try to save the Czechs. In the same year the West also showed it would do nothing to save the Jews. The terrible scenes of the beating and humiliation of Jews in Vienna had been widely reported in the international press and in newsreels. William L. Shirer had de-

scribed Vienna more than anything else. Roosevelt could not do anything for the Jews. Although he urged the Jews to the East, before the war, with the approval of the American people, he did not approve such a move in Germany. In the other part of the world, thousands of Jewish refugees were being sent to the East and later to the United States. He smirked and later exulted. He accepted the fact that the requested comment for a wicked comment "a few many's people be beaten that."

By early 1938 Blumberg reported the Sudetenland to escalate the pogroms in the synagogues. Thousands of Jews were reported, 'tinction. But the sanctions were being

On 11 November 1938 a cruel tragedy was taking place in the town of Kristallnacht. It was the first time that Jews were being attacked in their homes.

scribed Vienna at *Anschluss* as an anti-Semitic "orgy of sadism" worse than anything he had seen in Berlin. Consequently President Franklin Roosevelt called for the Evian Conference to discuss ways to help the Jews. Although he was annoyed at this interference, Hitler offered "his" Jews to the international community. He knew the offer would be refused. Before the conference, as Hitler was aware, the U.S. State Department, with the approval of Congress, failed to follow even existing U.S. law and approve sufficient visa applicants to fill the already established quota for Germany. Moreover, assurances had been given by the United States to the other powers that they would not be forced to accept tens of thousands of Jews. In fact, FDR called the conference as a substitute for action. He feared he would risk his popularity if he accepted Jewish refugees. He was probably right. At Evian the Germans duly offered the Jews to the assembled thirty-two nations; only the Dominican Republic and later Costa Rica increased their quotas. International opinion smirked at the hypocritical posturing of the Anglo-Americans. Goebbels exulted. Had he not known all along that no civilized nation would accept the accursed race? Indeed, Poland, Hungary, and Rumania requested they too be relieved of their Jews! As a German newspaper commented, "One likes to pity the Jews as long as one can use this pity for a wicked agitation against Germany, but no state is prepared" to accept "a few thousand Jews. Thus the conference serves to justify Germany's policy against Jewry."¹⁰ Jewish property could be stolen; Jews could be beaten and killed. There would be little but talk, and not much of that.

By early 1938 Hitler forced the resignation of Generals Fritsch and Blomberg to assure Nazi control of the army. In March he demanded the Sudetenland from the Czechs. Ready to march, he allowed the SA to escalate violence against the Jewish community. In the summer of 1938 synagogues were burned and more Jews were beaten and killed. Two thousand Jews were sent to the camps. In July a Belgian newspaper reported, "What is going on now in Greater Germany is the systematic extinction of a given race, a sort of biological war of extermination. . . ."¹¹ But the Nazi leaders and their conservative allies were still wary of unsanctioned violence. Goering told the SA to hold back; stronger measures were being prepared.

On November 9 a Jewish youth, Herschel Grynszpan, bitter at the cruel treatment of his parents when the government drove out Polish Jews residing in Germany, assassinated a German official in Paris. November 9 was the anniversary of the Munich *putsch*; it was an opportunity not to be ignored. Goebbels and Hitler agreed there should be a short, violent attack on the Jewish community. On the night of November 9, 1938, *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass—so called because of the shards

of glass from Jewish shop windows lying in the streets—close to 200 synagogues and 7,000 Jewish businesses were destroyed, and some 200 Jews were murdered. The SS arrested about 35,000 Jews and sent them to concentration camps, where about a thousand died within three months. Although presented as a spontaneous outburst of ordinary Germans outraged at the assassination, *Kristallnacht* was party controlled. There was extensive looting by civilians but no attempt to create mass rioting. The Nazis and their conservative allies still wanted the punishment of the Jews to be legal, orderly, and final. In Hitler's words:

Anti-Semitism based on purely emotional grounds will always find its ultimate expression in the form of pogroms. A rational anti-Semitism, however, must lead to the systematic legal fight against and the elimination of the prerogatives which he alone possesses in contradistinction to all other aliens living among us. . . . Its ultimate goal, however, must unalterably be the elimination of the Jews altogether.¹²

Two days later, top Nazi leaders and representatives of different ministries met to consider the next steps. Ribbentrop and Minister of Economics Walter Funk feared an international boycott. Goering believed the American government, which he assumed to be Jewish-dominated, would seize German assets, and he was upset that German overseas investments were not withdrawn before the pogrom. He was also angry with the destruction of property, shouting at Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the security service (SD), "I wish you had killed two hundred Jews instead of destroying such valuables!" Heydrich replied apologetically (and with an underestimate), "Well, there were thirty-five killed."¹³ Goering complained that *Kristallnacht* would cost valuable foreign exchange because the insurance companies had reinsured abroad. Ironically, the insurers had to inform Goering that most of the damaged businesses were Aryan-owned and only rented by Jews. Moreover, German insurance companies would have to pay the Belgian glass industry for half its total yearly production just to pay for the broken windows. And most of the looted or destroyed goods were not Jewish-owned but had been taken on consignment from Gentile suppliers. Insurers were obligated to pay for these as well. The government also stood to lose many thousands of marks in taxes by business loss write-offs. Goering plaintively asked if there were some way to retrieve the looted goods for the government, but there was none. Evidently only the government, the banks, and selected German businessmen should be allowed to loot the Jews, not ordinary Germans. Goering sought a legal way to enable the insurance companies to avoid compensating Jews. Insurance companies, though they wanted the money extorted from Jews, would have to pay Gentiles, but they would not have to compensate Jews. The Jews themselves would have to make

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Kristallnacht solved nothing. The leadership wanted a legal and truly "final solution" to solve the "Jewish Question" once and for all time. At the post-*Kristallnacht* meeting, Goering announced that Hitler had written a letter stating, "From now on the Jewish question must be treated . . . with a view to a final resolution." Goebbels ordered an end to pogroms: "The final reply to the Jewish outrage in Paris will be given by legal means, i.e., by decree."¹⁴ Three days later Bormann chaired a committee of representatives of the Foreign Office, the Economics Ministry, and party leaders to decide how to remove the Jews from the economy by legislation. The committee decided to speed up the Aryanization of Jewish property, block Jewish capital from moving abroad, and complete the takeover of all Jewish businesses and investments. No Jew should be a member of a business corporation. Once again, the Austrians were ahead. They already had a plan, they merely requested a decree. All necessary decrees were issued the same day, including one forbidding Jews to claim any damages from pogroms. All measures were to take effect January 1, 1939. In Hitler's mind this was the year hostilities would commence.

Step by step the logic of the Ideology of Death unfolded. In their meeting after *Kristallnacht*, Goering, Goebbels, Heydrich, and various non-Nazi bureaucrats considered the fate of the Jews: How can we continue to allow Jews to attend schools or enjoy public parks and places alongside Germans? Why are Jews allowed to own cars, take up space on public transport, or inhabit dwellings with Aryans? Should we not ban the Jews from major cities, deny them valuable hospital space, bar them from good neighborhoods, spas, theatres, film houses, art exhibitions, parks, or restaurants? Why should any Jew live as well as the poorest Aryan, let alone have a better-paying job? Someone suggested limiting Jews to subsistence wages; naturally, forced labor was mentioned; and again, quite naturally, the discussion turned to the creation of ghettos or camps. After all, concentration camps already held thousands of Jews, and eastern territories would soon be available. Mass murder was the obvious, indeed the only "final solution." Many leaders and scientists were already discussing the means to do so, including gassing, as Colonel Victor Brack of the SS, who helped supervise concentration camps, testified after the war.

Shortly thereafter, Jews were excluded from schools and universities, concerts, public baths, theatres, restaurants, sports facilities, and museums, and forbidden to own telephones, radios, automobiles, or precious metals. They were forced to move into special "Jewish houses." Ominously, murdering a Jew was in itself no longer a serious crime. After

Kristallnacht, SA members were punished for theft, a violation of their personal code of honor, and rape was punished as a violation of the laws against interracial intercourse. One man was punished for killing two Jews when ordered not to; another was lightly punished for killing after Hitler had ordered the action halted. But twenty-four SA members who had killed Jews were only reprimanded, and the court itself requested of Hitler that no further action be taken.

In 1927 Hitler had called for the death of "unhealthy racial elements," and in 1933 the Ministry of Justice had proposed death for incurable patients. The regime had dropped the ministry's proposal because of church objections. As a temporary substitute, some 375,000 persons were sterilized. The victims included the feeble-minded and mentally ill, carriers of "hereditary" diseases, alcoholics, rapists, homosexuals, tuberculosis patients, dwarfs, epileptics, and even delinquents and others guilty of "antisocial behavior." Sterilization at the time was public policy in fourteen of the United States, and ultimately claimed some sixty thousand victims from the mentally ill, the feeble-minded, and criminals. But only in Germany was the phrase "the racially undesirable" used to describe potential victims. Moreover, in Germany there was never a distinction between the sterilization and euthanasia programs. For the regime and the thousands of participating judges, physicians, psychiatrists, health workers, and university-trained "racial hygienists" who worked to remove "useless mouths" and "diseased grafts" from the racial stock, sterilization was a prelude to euthanasia, euthanasia a prelude to genocide. In September 1939 war ended compromise; "useless mouths" and "social and racial undesirables" were splintered for death by euthanasia.

Since 1937 German physicians and psychiatrists had prepared for euthanasia. With the invasion of Poland and the start of the war in September 1939, Hitler ordered the murders to start. By December 1939 murders were carried out in asylums, hospitals, and nursing homes. Schoolchildren were given cost-benefit problems to analyze the price of keeping alive those who were a social burden. Never simply "mercy killings," as the West understands euthanasia, the program was meant to purify the race of undesirable "blood" regardless of the disease or will of the victims. To facilitate matters, in October 1939 physicians filled out forms describing the mental and physical disabilities of each of their patients residing in long-term care facilities. Most significant, the form asked the patient's race as well.¹⁵ The way was open for killing Jews regardless of their mental or physical health. By the summer of 1940 Jewish psychiatric patients were being gassed; "in early 1941" the Ministry of the Interior ordered all hospitalized Jews to be killed, "not because they met the criteria for euthanasia but because they were Jews."¹⁶

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lished, and the killings began one month before the war. Physicians and midwives made the selections. Five thousand children were eventually murdered. Dr. Hermann Pfannmueller, one of the killers, "did not hide the fact that among the children murdered . . . were also children who were not mentally ill, namely children of Jewish parents."¹⁷ After all, the most respected German genetics textbook of the 1920s repeated the old notion that certain crimes were the result of inherited Jewish traits, and distorted statistics "proved" the criminal rate highest among Jews. Consequently, "To be Jewish was to be both sick and criminal; Nazi medical science and policy united to help 'solve' this problem."¹⁸ The judiciary cooperated.

In the fall of 1939 six special killing centers were prepared in Germany. At first medical personnel gave fatal injections. The first collective gassing, by carbon monoxide, occurred in December 1939 at the Brandenburg Killing Center. Bottled gas was used, and contracts were let for the development of gas vans. The bodies were cremated. Showers were used to prevent "difficulties." Gassing patients was called the "definitive solution." The euphemism did not fool the public, who soon knew of the killings, but it enabled health personnel to pretend they were not simply murderers. After the invasion of Poland, the children of Polish, Jewish, and Gypsy slave laborers in Germany were routinely killed, as well as healthy Jewish children. By 1940 some hospitals and long-term care institutions in Germany accepted only Aryans as patients, sending Jewish patients on to the killing centers without worrying about disabilities. Soon healthy Jewish and Gypsy children were routinely killed, as were orphans and inmates of juvenile homes. By August 1941 the program was allegedly ended, though "some 1,200 Jewish slave laborers" were certified insane and gassed at a euthanasia institute near Berlin.¹⁹ By then perhaps 70,000 to 90,000 German hospital patients, among them an undetermined number of Jews, had been shot, fatally injected, or gassed, though some estimate the total victims of euthanasia as high as 275,000. The statistics mean little, for all murders of innocents were seen by the regime as hygienic measures to purify the race or, as Himmler put it, to dispose of "human garbage." As the death camps opened in the east, hundreds of health personnel from the euthanasia program were sent to give technical advice, another sign that few saw any great distinction between the two programs. Dr. Walter Gross, head of the Race Policy Bureau, who had wanted Jews sterilized and had avidly supported euthanasia before the war, publicly announced in March 1941: The definitive solution must comprise the "removal of Jews from Europe."²⁰ By then he was helping to organize the bureaucracy for mass murder in the camps.

After 1937 Hitler's military and civilian elite knew the war in the east would be a race war "without mercy." Given the killing centers in Ger-

many and their selection methods, it seems inconceivable that anyone should have thought the millions of Jews who dwelled in lands destined for the purified Germanic *Volk* would be allowed to live. And all knew after Evian that foreign governments would never accept millions of impoverished eastern Jews, even if the Nazis wanted them to. Hence the move to war and the Holocaust continued on parallel tracks. Dismantling Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Hitler demonstrated conclusively that he sought an empire in the east, not simply the redress of Versailles. With the Nazi-Soviet pact in August 1939, the road to the east was open. War and the destruction of the Jews were both dictated by the logic of Nazi ideology, and both were consistently implemented from the mid-1930s on. Halfway measures would not resolve economic or racial "problems." Long before Hitler, millions had blamed the Jews for the social ills of Germany; once their racism brought them victory, the Nazis could regard the destruction of the Jews as an historic mandate.

By 1939 there were some 300,000 Jews left in Germany, unemployed and destitute; millions waited in the east. In the midst of a savage war for a racial empire, how could those believed to be the most dangerous racial enemy be allowed to survive? On January 30, 1939, Hitler made his famous, public, internationally publicized, and crystal-clear prophecy: "If international finance Jewry inside and outside of Europe should succeed once more in plunging nations into another world war, the consequence will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe." Almost every book and film on the Nazis repeats these words, yet many still do not believe the decision to destroy the Jews was made long before the summer of 1941.

With the invasion of Poland, Goering ordered the exploitation of the eastern territories, and plans were drawn for the seizure of Polish and Jewish properties for resettled Germans. In September 1939 resettlement, concentration camps, and the killing squads were put under Himmler's authority, as Reichs commissar for the "Strengthening of the Germanic Volk." In the same month his deputy Heydrich and General Otto Wagener of the high command agreed that Polish Jews, clergy, intelligentsia, and nobles must be destroyed. Heydrich told the commanders of several operational groups in Poland that the first killings were simply the beginning of the total destruction of Jewry. Shortly thereafter, some of the equipment and personnel of the killing centers of Germany were readied for transfer to the future death camps. The notorious *Einsatzgruppen*, units that eventually shot some two million Jews, were being organized; one was trained before the invasion of Poland. In the first five months of the war, thousands of Jews were murdered and their property confiscated, as were thousands of Polish leaders and intellectuals, and

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hundreds of Polish priests who together might lead a revived Poland. All knew the Polish Catholic church was an historical ally of Polish national liberation movements. Ethnic Germans, the advance guard of the expected millions of settlers, helped kill and loot. The army and the SS discussed mass killing techniques, and half the area of German-conquered Poland was designated as the place for the Final Solution. By then at least thirty thousand Polish Jews had been murdered.

In the fall of 1939 appropriate personnel were told of the decision to move the Jews of Poland into ghettos; in winter the earliest ghettos appeared. In November 1939 expulsions began, and in December the first trains rolled. The ghettos were not to be permanent; they were holding stations until the camps were ready. The Jews of Poland were doomed even if the Soviet Union had never been invaded. The administrator in charge of organizing ghettos in the part of Poland including Lodz said in December 1939: "The creation of the ghetto is, of course, only a transition measure. . . . In any event the final goal must be that we ceaselessly burn out this plague boil."²¹

In February 1940 a German newspaper wrote that the ghettoization of European Jewry was the "purest *temporary* solution to the Jewish question anywhere in Europe."²² Until the death camps were ready, hunger, disease, and murder in the ghettos and the mass shootings of the *Einsatzgruppen* continued. In 1940 Jews in Poland were worked to death in local camps. In the spring of that year the first ghetto, Lodz, was sealed. Jews worked and died there while ever larger numbers were sent to overburdened death camps whose commandants complained of a lack of sufficient facilities. In 1939 Jewish children were starving to death in the ghettos. By the end of 1939 there were 50 to 70 deaths per day in the Warsaw Ghetto, and by March 1942 some 5,000 people a month died there. Before the invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, *Einsatzgruppen* were organized to kill all Germany's enemies; Jews were included whether they acted like enemies or not. In 1941 thousands of Jewish men in Serbia were shot; in the spring of 1942 gas vans killed their women and children. SS and some army units murdered Jews in the Baltic states and White Russia as soon as they found them; by October 1941 some 120,000 Jews had been murdered there. More than 230,000 were murdered in Lithuania between July and November 1941, and at least 20,000 in Russia. In December 1941 gassing began in Chelmno, Poland; soon the police in the village were saying, "One day / one thousand."²³ In the spring of 1941 mass deportations commenced from Austria; in the fall, from Germany. In October 1941 Hitler said the ultimate purpose of sending the Jews east was to exterminate them as punishment for their crimes. In December, Hans Frank, governor general of Poland, declared that "we must annihilate the Jews wherever we encounter them." By Oc-

tober 1941 all the Jews of Estonia were dead, as were all male Jews in Serbia.

In the Berlin suburb of Wannsee, a conference was held in January 1942. Heydrich wished to clarify bureaucratic arrangements for the destruction of the Jews, and to make sure the attending bureaucrats and ministers knew that he and Himmler were in charge of the Final Solution. The Foreign Office representative at the conference, who aggressively helped plan the murder of the Jews, proudly boasted that the "Jewish problem" in Serbia was the first to be solved. An officer of a Baltic killing unit replied that Estonia was actually the first nation to have that honor. Heydrich told attending officials that no Jews who survived forced labor in the east could live, because they "represent a natural selection . . . of the toughest" and would become the "germ cell of a new Jewish reconstruction." The eventual murder of eleven million Jews was discussed, a number including those from all areas to be conquered, England as well. No voices were raised against the plan, but there was disagreement about how much "Jewish blood" qualified one for death.

Millions of propaganda leaflets were dropped by the German air force on the Baltic nations and the western USSR to encourage local support for the killings. Germans, the leaflets read, attacked the "Jewish-Communist government" and the "criminal machinations of the Jewish clique," and hoped to "liberate all the peoples of the Soviet Union from the Communist yoke, the cursed Jew . . ." and "Jewish Communism." Many Soviets needed no encouragement: thousands of Jews were killed by Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Croatians, Hungarians, Ukrainians, White Russians, and Rumanians. As soon as the Germans crossed the border into the Soviet Union, Rumanians shot, bayoneted, tortured, or starved and worked thousands of Rumanian Jews to death, and Rumanian and Hungarian troops, part of the invading force, also killed "Judeo-Bolsheviks."

In Odessa the Rumanians tortured and raped Jews before murdering them, and it has been said even the SS was shocked. But it seems unlikely. Himmler often insisted the Germans sought the most humane way to destroy the Jews, and we are told the death camps were needed in part because the morale of the killers suffered from direct killing in the field. But in fact there is no imaginable horror that was not committed by the SS or the regular army: Jews were drowned in urine, strangled in pools of excrement, forced to dance and then shot. Soldiers competed to see who could throw infants the farthest; children were burned to death and killed in front of their mothers; women were tortured before they were killed, and untold thousands were deliberately buried alive. In one instance German soldiers castrated men and then beat them to death. The German war gave many violent anti-Semites of Eastern Europe the op-

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portunity to massacre the Jews, though millions of them, like millions of Germans, disapproved of the killings. Perhaps the only difference between the German and Eastern European killers was that fewer of the latter saw any world historical significance to their vicious activities, and stopped the murders, as the Germans did not, when they realized the war was lost.

Nevertheless, mass gassing in the camps was supposed to be a legal, systematic, and controlled action, removed from individual brutality, a function and extension of the ideology of race and the consummation of the war. Such high-minded ideological distance was violated more often than not, of course, but it did exist; paradoxically, it was the ultimate denial of humanity, a sickening parody of moral values. Many have commented on the perversity of Himmler for punishing SS troopers who stole the personal effects of those they murdered. But Himmler's attitude was consistent with the myths of the anti-Semites. The Jews, evil by blood, must be disposed of by legal and bureaucratic measures, so that this necessary and noble historical cause would not be sullied by mere selfishness and personal vengeance. Consequently, any SS man caught stealing anything but life from his victims risked punishment. As Himmler said, "We have the right to annihilate this people which wanted to annihilate us," but "We don't want in the end, just because we exterminated a germ, to be infected. . . ." ²⁴

By law, all Jewish property was to be sent to the Reichsbank or other bureaucratic or private institutions for legal disposal by judges, bankers, and lawyers. Camp personnel were taught that the destruction of the Jews was an historical imperative to destroy a race which, down to the last infant, was the blood enemy of the Germanic peoples and of all civilization. SS guards felt inferior to front-line troops but were constantly reminded of their high ideological purpose by Nazi intellectuals, academics, and "racial experts" who provided appropriate lectures and readings. Streicher's *Der Stuermer* was posted in the living quarters of camp guards, and they were repeatedly told they were valuable soldiers, not common murderers, in the crusade against Germany's most dangerous enemy. Visiting the *Einsatzgruppen*, Himmler told them any guilt they felt was because their conscience had been distorted by centuries of Judeo-Christian ethics, but future generations would praise their great sacrifice in cleansing Europe of this plague. If, as is said, Himmler vomited when he witnessed some shootings, and was splattered with brains, that too is consistent. Some of the worst of the bureaucratic SS and army commanders who killed often thought themselves to be "good family men," above personal viciousness. Undoubtedly many were. For that very reason they were corrupt to the core, terrible evidence of the historical power of the ideology of death among the Germans.

As the war turned against them, Nazi propagandists added new charges to the litany of anti-Semitism. International Jewry was held responsible for the Allied "terror raids." If Germany loses, the public was told, the Jews will annihilate us. They have always known they are in a racial war to the death, and now they have the armed might of the Jew-dominated Allies on their side. Everywhere the valiant German troops have fought, the Jews act as partisans, spies, saboteurs, and assassins behind the lines, enemies to the death of the Reich and all public order. Goebbels told the public that Russian troops were followed by Jewish death squads ready to slaughter all Germans. That was why, army officers declared, it was perfectly appropriate to shoot any Jew as hostage, whether caught in specific anti-German activities or not. Soldiers were told not to give way to the temptation of "Jewish humanitarianism," for the Jews themselves were the original historical murderers of innocents—"ritual murder" materials were sent to SS and army officers and distributed to the troops. To kill any Jew, armed or unarmed, man, woman, or child, was a hygienic measure, a necessary defense of all higher life, a blow at the eternal racial enemy of Christian-Germanic civilization. With some notable exceptions—black Allied troops in the west, many Russians in the east—the Germans allowed enemy soldiers to surrender, for they were not racial enemies. But not even a Jewish infant could be allowed this privilege; by definition no Jew at any age could be innocent. Their guilt was in their blood.

Paradoxically, a sincere anti-Semite frustrates the moral judgment of the liberal and humane mind. We still find it impossible to believe such deeds can be done with a clear conscience, and we seek arcane psychological explanations rather than accept the power of historical anti-Semitism among the Germans. Yet their very sincerity justifies the most extreme punishment for those who murdered in the service of anti-Semitic myths. Precisely because they are not monsters, murderers of good conscience are worse than those who slaughter from some grisly psychological drive. Nor will it do to think of the SS as psychotic killers. The vast majority of psychotics are harmless to others, less violent as a group than the normal population; their demons are within them, their victims are usually themselves. In our disgust at the work of the Nazis and the millions of Germans who believed them, we cannot even discount the youthful idealism often invested in the Nazi movement. Many have noted with puzzled horror the oft-found combination of murder and bourgeois morality, yet it is exactly what one would expect given the dreadful force of anti-Semitic myths among the Germans.

As the Red army approached Hungary in the summer of 1944, the Germans rushed to transport and kill all Hungarian Jews. This "waste" of German military resources has persuaded many that the Nazis were ir-

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rational. For the Nazis, however, the resources were not wasted. Either the Germans or the Jews would survive the war, not both. If the Jews survived, the war was truly lost and Germany doomed; if the Jews were destroyed and Germany defeated, Germany might rise again. The Jew and the armed enemy were one and the same. In 1944 the propaganda ministry spoke of Jewish plutocrats driving on the armies in the west while Jewish Bolsheviks smashed in from the east. Miklós Horthy, a vicious anti-Semite who had ordered the killing of innocent Jewish civilians in the counterrevolution of 1919, tried to prevent his German ally from killing Hungarian Jews when he knew the war was lost, hoping to curry favor with the Allies. Even the Rumanian sadists and killers changed sides as the Russians approached.

But German units kept on killing to the end, as Martin Gilbert has pointed out in his thorough history of the war. As American forces approached Mauthausen on May 5, 1945, three days before the formal German surrender, thirty thousand prisoners were ordered into a tunnel at Ebensee to be murdered with explosives. They refused, and the guards, fearing retribution, gave way. The Gestapo ordered the blowing up of Buchenwald and its inmates, but the guards had fled. An inmate answered the phone and reported it had already been done. A thousand Jews from Buchenwald were shot on April 27, 1945, at Marienbad. On May 3 Hitler Youth and German marines shot five hundred Jews who were trying to get ashore from a boat in Luebeck harbor. On April 5 more than five thousand Jews from Auschwitz were burned to death by Hitler Youth and ordinary police from the town of Gardelegen, who forced them into a barn, poured on gasoline, and watched as they screamed in the raging inferno. Those who ran out were shot.²⁵ As Lucy Dawidowicz has said, it was a war against the Jews.

Hans Huetig, former commandant at Buchenwald, told an interviewer from his comfortable retirement in 1986: "Today it seems so cruel, inhuman, and immoral. It did not seem immoral to me then: I knew very well what I was going to do in the SS. We all knew. It was something in the soul, not the mind. We all knew what we were going to do in the SS. When it comes down to it, it is a very simple story. I was a Nazi."²⁶

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