



# HITLER'S SHADOW WAR

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# HITLER'S SHADOW WAR

**THE HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II**

**DONALD M. McKALE**

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# PREFACE

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**THIS BOOK SURVEYS** the history of the Holocaust in World War II. I have attempted to show how the concept of racial war had an overwhelming influence on Adolf Hitler's thinking and actions, both before and during the war, and how, in his view, the Holocaust and the war were closely connected. Hopefully this will provide readers with a greater understanding of both the Holocaust and the war and why and how each happened. Often histories of both events treat them separately or as barely related.

The intended audience for the book is the general reader or nonspecialist, including the college and university student. Since most general readers will not find them crucial and specialists on the Holocaust will not need them, endnotes have been kept to a minimum. Normally only direct quotations from original documents or from works of other writers receive a citation.

There are numerous scholars whose studies I have used or from whom I have learned much at professional meetings and discussions over the years about the Holocaust and Nazi Germany. Some of their work is cited in the notes and reading list at the end of this study.

For much of my inspiration to write this book, I wish to thank the numerous students who have enrolled in my college and university classes during the past thirty years. Based on their interest and my discussions with many of them about the Holocaust and World War II, I have tried in the following pages to address their most frequent questions as well as those of other nonspecialists.

I am very grateful for the financial and other support for this book from Clemson University where I have taught since 1979, and from the Class of 1941 Memorial Endowment. The latter was made possible by a generous gift to the university from its Class of 1941, in memory of fifty-seven of its members who died in World War II. Similar to most other young men of their generation, the vast majority of the class were destined for duty in the war and served their nation with extraordinary bravery and distinction. I am most appreciative of the support for my work from class members Roy Pearce, P. W. McAlister, Richard B. Caughman, and the late H. Betts Wilson.

I owe the greatest appreciation and thank you to my wife Janna, a wonderful and lovely person to whom this book is dedicated and without whose assistance, patience, and encouragement it would not have been completed.

Donald M. McKa  
February 2002

# ABBREVIATIONS AND SPECIAL TERMS

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<b>AJC</b>	American Jewish Congress
<b><i>Aktion</i></b>	Literally “action”; a euphemism used by the Nazis to describe terror operations of the Germans and their foreign collaborators that included the roundup, mass shootings, and/or deportations of Jews.
<b><i>Armia Krajowa</i></b>	Polish underground army
<b>Aryanization</b>	Nazi term for the German takeover of Jewish property
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>Bund</b>	Jewish Workers’ or Socialist party
<b>deportation</b>	Mass roundup and transport by SS and German police of primarily Jews—but also occasionally of other peoples such as Gypsies—from Germany and much of the rest of Europe to death camps or other facilities in the East where they were murdered.
<b>DP</b>	Displaced Person; a description of the millions of refugees or deportees at the end of World War II, who found themselves displaced as a result of the war and usually unable to return to their homes.
<b><i>Einsatzgruppen</i></b>	Mobile and armed formations of primarily SS and German police; used to hunt down and kill Jews and other perceived enemies in the territories conquered by Nazi Germany.
<b>ERR</b>	<i>Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg</i> ; special staff of Reich leader Alfred Rosenberg; a German agency that specialized in plundering art treasures of Jews and others in the German-occupied countries of Europe.
<b>Euthanasia</b>	Term used by the Nazis as a euphemism to disguise their murder of the handicapped during World War II.
<b>Final Solution</b>	<i>Endlösung</i> , from the Nazi phrase “Final Solution of the Jewish question”; euphemism for the program developed during 1941 to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

<b>FPO</b>	<i>Fareinikte Partisaner Organisatzije</i> , “United Partisan Organization”; the principal anti-Nazi resistance organization in the Vilna ghetto.
<b>genocide</b>	A term first used by Raphael Lemkin, a refugee Polish-Jewish lawyer in the United States, in late 1942 or early 1943 to describe the deliberate and systematic destruction of an ethnic or national group. At the time, the word referred directly to Nazi racial policies then being carried out. The word appeared in the indictments of German officers in postwar trials of war criminals. In 1948 the United Nations adopted the “Genocide Convention” which made genocide a crime in international law. It explicitly bans killing, causing grievous bodily or spiritual harm, preventing births, or transferring children from a targeted group to some other group with genocidal intent. According to <i>The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust</i> (see “Suggestions for Further Reading”): “Hence the meaning of the word is somewhat fluid. It is sometimes used to refer to the actual physical annihilation of all members of an ethnic or national group. At other times it is employed to mean the killing of large numbers of such group members or to ‘spiritual’ or ‘cultural’ destruction.”
<b>Gestapo</b>	<i>Geheime Staatspolizei</i> , “Secret State Police”; the political police in Nazi Germany.
<b>Hiwis</b>	<i>Hilfswillige</i> , “volunteers”; auxiliary units and collaborators of the German army, especially the SS and police, recruited from among East European and Soviet peoples.
<b>Holocaust</b>	Term, widely used since the 1960s, to denote the systematic mass murder of European Jewry by the Nazis during World War II. The word has generally served to separate this particular massacre from other historical instances of genocide. Sometimes the term includes other victims of the Nazis as well.
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross; headquartered in Switzerland.
<b>IMT</b>	International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, which tried the major Nazi war criminals in 1945–1946.
<b>JRC</b>	Jewish Rescue Committee
<b>Judenräte</b>	“Jewish Councils.” Throughout Nazi-dominated Europe the Germans ordered the Jewish communities to establish such councils to act as intermediaries between the Jews and officials of the Third Reich. A Jewish Council ( <i>Judenrat</i> ) might govern a single ghetto or cluster of ghettos, as in the case of most of Eastern Europe. Or it might be held responsible for the Jews of entire countries, as in Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Slovakia.

Whether elected by the Jewish communities or appointed by the German council members usually were prominent figures in prewar Jewish political and religious affairs and hence enjoyed popular confidence, at least initially.

<b>KdF</b>	<i>Kanzlei des Führers</i> , Hitler's personal chancellery; a Nazi party agency that handled his personal affairs, interests, and a number of specially assigned policies. It implemented at his directive the program termed euphemistically "euthanasia," the mass murder of handicapped persons.
<b>Kristallnacht</b>	Literally "night of broken or shattered glass"; the name for the pogrom throughout Germany organized by the Nazis and that began on 9–10 November 1938.
<b>Mischlinge</b>	Part-Jews or Jews of "mixed ancestry"
<b>NSDStB</b>	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund</i> , "National Socialist German Students' Association"
<b>OKW</b>	<i>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</i> , "Supreme Command of the Armed Forces"
<b>OSI</b>	Office of Special Investigations; an agency established in 1979 in the U.S. Justice Department to denaturalize former Nazis or East European and Soviet auxiliaries of the Nazis found in the United States.
<b>OSS</b>	Office of Strategic Services, United States
<b>RKFDV</b>	<i>Reichskommission für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums</i> , "Reich Commission for the Strengthening of the German People"; a German agency headed by Heinrich Himmler for developing and coordinating the settlement in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia of persons of German blood.
<b>RKPA</b>	<i>Reichskriminalpolizeiamt</i> , "Reich Criminal Police Office"
<b>RSHA</b>	<i>Reichssicherheitshauptamt</i> , "Reich Security Main Office"; a government-Security agency established in September 1939 that included the Gestapo, criminal police, and SD; although officially responsible to Heinrich Himmler, it was run by Reinhard Heydrich.
<b>SA</b>	<i>Sturmabteilung</i> , "storm troopers"; the first Nazi paramilitary organization.
<b>SD</b>	<i>Sicherheitsdienst</i> , "security service"; the intelligence arm of the SS, run by Heydrich.
<b>SIS</b>	Secret Intelligence Service, Great Britain

<b>Sonderkommando</b>	Special detachment or detail of (1) concentration camp prisoners or (2) <i>Einsatzgruppen</i> .
<b>SS</b>	<i>Schutzstaffel</i> , “protection squad”; an elite Nazi organization headed by Himmler.
<b>T4</b>	Name frequently used by the Nazis for the euthanasia program, after the address of its Berlin headquarters at Tiergarten Straße number 4.
<b>Third Reich</b>	Nazi term, meaning “Third Empire,” to describe the Nazi regime. The First Reich was supposedly the Holy Roman Empire from Charlemagne to Frederick II; the Second Reich was Germany under the Hohenzollern emperors Wilhelm I and II, 1871–1918.
<b>Trawniki</b>	Member of an armed auxiliary unit of the Germans, composed of Eastern European or Soviet peoples and trained at an SS camp at Trawniki, near Lublin in former Poland.
<b>UNWCC</b>	United Nations War Crimes Commission, established in October 1943 by Great Britain, the United States, and fifteen other Allied nations, to identify and deal with Nazi war criminals.
<b>VoMi</b>	<i>Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle</i> , “Ethnic German Liaison Office”; handled some of the relations of Nazi Germany to ethnic Germans ( <i>Volksdeutsche</i> ) in a number of other European countries. It had competition from other German government and Nazi party agencies and was not originally part of the SS until Himmler gained effective control of it before the start of World War II.
<b>Waffen-SS</b>	Heavily armed units of the SS
<b>Wehrmacht</b>	German armed forces
<b>WJC</b>	World Jewish Congress
<b>WRB</b>	War Refugee Board, a U.S. government agency created in January 1944 by an executive order of President Franklin Roosevelt to rescue and assist the victims of enemy oppression in Europe.
<b>Zegota</b>	Council for Aid to Jews, an underground organization in Poland.
<b>ZOB</b>	<i>Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa</i> , “Jewish Fighting Organization”; the chief anti-Nazi resistance organization in the Warsaw ghetto mainly responsible for the revolt there in 1943. The organization had small branches in other ghettos.





From Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 358–59.

# HITLAR'S SHADOW WAR

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# INTRODUCTION

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“**THE FUEHRER ONCE MORE** expressed his determination to clean up the Jews in Europe pitilessly,” Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary on 14 February 1942. “The Fuehrer,” the Nazi propaganda minister continued, “realizes the full implications of the great opportunities offered by this war.”<sup>1</sup>

During a private meeting with Goebbels that day, held while German armies occupied much of Europe and Russia in World War II, Adolf Hitler unleashed one of his many hate-filled outbursts against the Jews. As he had done often during the war (1939–1945) in both public and private, Hitler discussed the close tie, in his mind, between the massive military struggle and his implementation of what the world would eventually call the Holocaust. The Holocaust was the systematic mass murder of World War II of European Jewry by Nazi Germany.

After the war, another of Hitler’s minions, Robert Ley, the Nazi Labor Front leader, confirmed the Nazis’ association of the war with the Holocaust. Before committing suicide to escape trial as a war criminal at Nuremberg, Ley wrote: “We National Socialists, starting with Hitler, considered the fight which is now behind us a war merely against the Jews—not against the French, English, Americans, or Russians. We believe that they [Frenchmen, etc.] were only instruments of the Jews, and when reading the indictment, I feel inclined to believe that it actually was like that.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Holocaust and the War

Despite the many aspects of the Holocaust that historians and others studying it do not know or comprehend, one thing is clear: The genocide of the Jews cannot be understood apart from the world war, the monstrous struggle initiated by Hitler and National Socialist Germany in September 1939. The leading authority on the diplomacy of the Third Reich and World War II, Gerhard Weinberg, has written on the Holocaust and the war and emphasized about them: “What is needed in our teaching about both subjects is a sense of their connectedness.”<sup>3</sup> The book that follows owes much to his view as well as to his superbly documented studies.

Hitler and his Nazi associates used the war in Europe, with its massive violence, as a cover and camouflage for the real war they meant to fight. This was a “shadow war” in which they would eliminate millions of Jews—a people whom the Nazis hated more than anyone or anything else—throughout Eurasia and eventually elsewhere in the world. Already in the war’s first months, in late 1939 and early 1940, while the Germans searched for a solution to what to do with the vast numbers of Jews falling under their rule, they began killing many Jews at random, and during 1941 they initiated the massive systematic murder of their victims.

Indeed, once they implemented the Holocaust, the Germans utilized huge resources—human, physical, and technological—to carry out the “war against the Jews”<sup>4</sup> that could have been channeled into fighting the military war against the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. Also Hitler planned for his annihilation of Jewry to serve as a prelude to a huge German reorganization of some of Europe’s other peoples and races, which would include their enslavement, expulsion, and extermination and would be completed after the war.

During the Holocaust, the Nazis went to great lengths to conceal the mass killing of the Jews from

both the intended victims and much of the rest of the world, the bystanders, primarily so as not to risk the further alienation of world opinion from Germany. The fanatical anti-Semitism of Hitler and other Nazi leaders had convinced them that the Jews formed a well-organized “racial” group that controlled the seats of global power. Yet during 1942 and thereafter, substantial information about what was happening to the Jews reached the West, especially Britain and the United States.

Nevertheless, neither the Western Allies nor most of the victims of the Holocaust realized what Hitler did about the war: He would use it, as he had threatened publicly before, to destroy the Jews and thereby, in his view, lay the foundation for Germany’s conquest of Eurasia and eventually other portions of the world. Only the physical removal of the Jews from the earth, he had decided, would pave the way for Germany’s defeat of other rival peoples and politico-economic systems. These included Russian Communism, Western liberalism, and “international capital,” all of which he claimed the Jews had invented or used to help them rule the world. “How many diseases have their origin in the Jewish virus!” he declared to aides in February 1942, as the genocide of the Jews he had ordered began in earnest. “We shall regain our health only by eliminating the Jew.”<sup>5</sup>

The German armed forces set the stage for the Holocaust with their conquests first of Poland in 1939, which had three million Jews, and then of much of the western Soviet Union in 1941–1942 where nearly five million Jews lived. One of Hitler’s goals in the war, which he had discussed since his earliest days in the Nazi party in Munich in 1919 and 1920, was to conquer vast new territory and living space (*Lebensraum*) for Germany, principally from the Slavs of Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia.

As part of this objective, the Germans began during the world war (initially in Poland and then in Russia) enslaving, displacing, or murdering indigenous Slavs, whom the Germans counted as racial subhumans. Before the war would end, several million Poles and much larger numbers of Russians would die. Also during the war the Germans murdered many members of other alleged “racial inferior” groups, including the handicapped, Gypsies, and homosexuals.

If the war resulted in the German victory that the National Socialists eagerly expected and assumed would give them world domination, they intended to complete their enormous project of racial purification and reorganization. Through the use of mass sterilization techniques, which they experimented with during the war, or further outright murder, they would eventually put an end—almost nearly so—to racial subhumanity as they defined it. This would include similar persecution of the world’s black population in Africa and America and other non-German racial groups that fell under German rule.

The Holocaust, however, formed the initial and crucial aspect of this planned “demographic reordering” of Eurasia.<sup>6</sup> It did so because the Nazis attempted already *during*—not after—the world war to exterminate *all* Jews in Europe and elsewhere whom the German armed forces could reach. The Nazis termed this the “Final Solution of the Jewish question.” The “question,” posed by anti-Semitism since at least the nineteenth century, revolved around how to deliver mankind from the alleged global domination of the Jews.

Although earlier statements by Hitler made clear that he had thought about killing Jews and using war to do so, he likely issued the directive for the Final Solution verbally to his closest associates. They decided during 1941—while Germany prepared for and began the invasion of the Soviet Union and other conditions in the war no longer restrained their radicalism on the issue—to rid first Russia and Poland of Jews, then the rest of Europe, and, as Weinberg has shown, ultimately the world.

What made the genocide of the Jews different from the persecution by the Germans of their many other victims in the world war? The historian Gordon Craig has provided a conclusive answer:

More Jews were killed [by the Nazis] than [nonmilitary] members of any other national group. The destruction of the Jews was long

premeditated, more systematic and continuous, and accomplished by a more fiendishly ingenious combination of technological and scientific means than was true in the case of other victims. And, above all, no other group (except perhaps the Gypsies, whose extermination the Nazis did not in the end pursue with the assiduity and obsessive thoroughness that characterized their Jewish policy) was condemned to death by definition. In their desire to destroy Poland as a nation, the Nazis set out to kill the elites they might preserve it, but not all Poles were marked for death. The Jews were condemned without regard for their status, occupation, or politics; they were killed because they were Jews.<sup>7</sup>

To borrow from the words of a British writer, Hitler and the Final Solution were inseparable. Already in the first months of the war, during 1939 and 1940, the German leadership had begun at his orders the extensive killing of the handicapped among its own people. In a less systematic way, German armed forces killed large numbers of Polish Jews and Poles. Such killings during the very earliest moments of the war illustrated the willingness of Hitler and his subordinates, especially in the SS (*Schutzstaffeln*, or “protection squads”), the Nazi party’s most powerful armed formation, to use the military struggle to remove Jews and other alleged “racial” enemies of Germany by murdering them.

The overwhelming majority of the Jews Germany killed in the Holocaust, almost all from Europe, including Russia, came under German control as a result of the war. Recently a German historian estimated the total number of those who died in the Holocaust at “not fewer, [and] most probably more” than six million.<sup>9</sup>

But even before the world war, as discussed in the first chapters below, a vital connection existed between the racial and anti-Semitic measures of the National Socialist government and its foreign policy, which its leader used to prepare the country for war. One historian has termed the National Socialists’ creation of a ruthless racist dictatorship in Germany after 1933 the beginning of their “*total war* against the Jews.”<sup>10</sup>

In discussing Germany’s domestic and foreign policy matters, Hitler and his followers used the word *Aryan* repeatedly and erroneously. The term did not in fact refer to anything German, including race; instead, the word meant Indo-Europeans who spoke Sanskrit and related languages and who had invaded India in prehistoric times and dominated its native inhabitants. Thus “Aryans” were Indians and Iranians, not Germans or north Europeans. The Nazis based many of their ideas, including this one, on myths originated by Aryan-racist-occult groups that had emerged in late-nineteenth-century Austria and Germany and introduced the pseudo-religious symbol, the swastika, to denote “Aryan racial supremacy.

## The Holocaust in History<sup>11</sup>

In 1945, with the end of the world war and defeat of Nazi Germany and its allies, the world’s leaders, governments, and public hardly placed the Nazi genocide of the Jews at the center of their attention. For much of the world, torn apart by and suffering from the greatest war yet in history, the fate of Europe’s Jews seemed a very marginal consideration. At the time, the most important Nazis who directed the genocide were either dead—Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich—or missing, or were not viewed as sufficiently important to be tried as major war criminals.

The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945 and 1946, and subsequent war criminal trials, conducted proceedings that included crimes against the Jews, but such crimes did not assume much prominence at the time. Moreover, following World War II, interest in European affairs among the public, especially in the West, drifted quickly from the war and its horrific crimes to the “Cold War” between the West and the Soviet Union.

However, the trial in Jerusalem in 1961 of Adolf Eichmann, a key official in the German

bureaucracy who helped perpetrate the Holocaust, provided for the world the first major summary of what happened during it and helped establish a place for it in history. The trial, along with revelation of subsequent concentration camp trials in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, initiated in Israel, the United States, Britain, and Germany a steadily growing popular interest in and scholarly literature on the subject.

Today Holocaust “consciousness” is widespread. A steady stream of publications as well as film about the Holocaust attracts an enormous public market; hundreds of schools and universities teach classes on the topic. Memorials to the victims abound in Europe, the United States, and Israel; they include museums dedicated to educating the public about the Holocaust. Scholars around the world debate, often with bitter—yet genuine—differences, the origins, nature, and meaning of what happened at places like the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, the ravine at Babi Yar, and the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz and other killing facilities.

The principal controversies center around why the Germans perpetrated the Holocaust; the degree of German planning and improvisation of it; the role Hitler played in the genocide; the attitudes and participation of ordinary Germans in it; how Jews responded to the horrific crisis in which they found themselves; and the world’s knowledge of and general failure to react to the killings.

The most burning question is why and how the Holocaust could have happened. Why and how could the Germans have perpetrated it, and the victims and bystanders allowed it to occur? [Chapter 1](#) examines why, among all the racial, political, and other groups that Hitler despised and persecuted, he singled out the Jews for his greatest hatred. [Chapters 2](#) through [5](#) survey the steadily increasing “twisted road” of Nazi persecution of the German Jews before 1939.<sup>12</sup> The heart of the book, [chapters 6](#) through [14](#), focuses on the war and Holocaust. Subsequent chapters discuss and analyze the world’s problematic reaction to what by 1942 already became a flood of information from Europe about the Holocaust.

Several sections in the volume, including much of [chapter 18](#), examine the response of the Jews to the catastrophe that progressively befell them. The overwhelming majority of the victims, beginning in 1933 with the Nazi regime’s persecution of the German Jews and continuing well into the war and Holocaust, had little or no realization they were destined for mass murder. According to the Israeli scholar, Yehuda Bauer: “The Germans did not know, until sometime in 1941, what they would do with the Jews: the decision to murder them was not taken until then. If the Germans did not know, the Jews cannot be expected to have known either.”<sup>13</sup> Yet the evidence indicates also that numerous Jews, once they learned by the fall of 1942 of what awaited them, attempted in a variety of ways to resist the killers, including engaging in armed revolts. The obstacles faced by the resistance, however, were nearly always overpowering and resulted in the crushing of it.

Today’s preoccupation of Jews and many others with the Holocaust, perhaps more evident than at any other time in the past, is explained in part by the historian Omer Bartov. He has written recently about the Holocaust that “due to the scope of the destruction and the exterminationist aspirations of the Nazis,” more people today realize that “every Jew is a survivor by dint of having been a potential victim, including those born after the event, who would not have seen life had Hitler had his way.”<sup>14</sup>

As this book will emphasize, the racial and other forms of hatred, the traditions of war and violence, and the creation of modern technology and of a powerful nation-state that made the Holocaust possible were products of, and deeply rooted in, Western civilization. The coalescing of such factors helps explain how the Holocaust happened so quickly, once it began in World War I. Christopher Browning, a leading American scholar of the Holocaust, has observed: “In mid-March 1942, some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while some 20 to 25 percent had already perished. Eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the situation was just the

reverse. Some 75 to 80 percent of all Holocaust victims were already dead, and a mere 20 to 25 percent still clung to a precarious existence.”<sup>15</sup>

What led to the German decision to murder all the Jews their armed forces could reach, beginning in 1941 and 1942? Since primarily the 1970s, scholars have debated the origins of National Socialist racial policy and motivations and role of Hitler in the decision. Two schools of thought evolved: the so-called intentionalist and the functionalist (or “structuralist”). More recently, historians have moved away from the monocausal interpretations of each school and placed greater emphasis on elements from both sides to explain why the Holocaust happened.

The intentionalist view maintains that Hitler had planned since the 1920s to kill as many Jews as possible and that he implemented his plans when the opportunity arose during the war. The most extreme form of intentionalism is that of Daniel Goldhagen. In a book published in 1996 that produced both enormous popular interest and widespread controversy over the author’s thesis, research methods, and claims to originality, he asserted that the Holocaust resulted from a pervasive pattern of anti-Semitism peculiar to Germany and already established in the era of the French Revolution. “From the beginning of the nineteenth century,” Goldhagen emphasized, “anti-semitism was ubiquitous in Germany. It was its ‘common sense.’”<sup>16</sup>

But not only was the German variant of anti-Semitism uniquely virulent and comprehensive, it was also implicitly genocidal from the start, what Goldhagen called “eliminationist” or “exterminationist.”<sup>17</sup> While he noted correctly that many of the killers in the Holocaust were “willing executioners,” his assertion that the genocide resulted mainly from the “preexisting, demonological, racially based, eliminationist antisemitism of the German people, which Hitler essentially unleashed” was much too sweeping to substantiate.<sup>18</sup>

Richard Breitman has advanced the most convincing intentionalist argument in his biography of Himmler, the leader of the SS, the Nazi party’s principal military organization after 1934. Breitman calls Himmler the “architect of genocide.”<sup>19</sup> The author demonstrates that ideas and fantasies about ridding German lands of Jews by killing them and using war to do so had circulated among Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, and other key Nazi leaders not only before the war, but especially during 1933 and 1940.

Although the SS developed contingency plans that included the forced emigration or resettlement of Jews, only practical considerations associated with the war limited the means of Hitler and his associates to carry out what they really wanted. During 1941, when such considerations no longer existed, Hitler decided that he need not restrain his radicalism anymore and made the decision for the so-called Final Solution.

Breitman places Hitler’s decision as early as March. Hitler left to Himmler, who acted as soon as conditions allowed, the implementation of the mass murder of the Jews. The recent discovery in the Moscow archive of Himmler’s appointments diary lends much credibility to the view of Breitman and other intentionalists in two respects: (1) that Hitler was the decisive factor, though by no means the only one, in perpetrating the Holocaust; and (2) that the Führer was not the weak dictator, much less involved in the Holocaust, that some functionalist historians have claimed.

Functionalists, who include the German scholar Hans Mommsen, argue that the Final Solution arose during 1941 primarily from a slow radicalization of German anti-Jewish policy that resulted when other Nazi plans for eliminating the Jews from Europe—including their evacuation and resettlement—proved untenable. Some functionalists have claimed that Hitler’s previous denunciations of the Jewish “menace” had been only empty rhetoric, until he felt pressures from what to do when confronted with such vast numbers of Jews in the East falling into German hands as well as with a bitter “war-to-the-death” there.

Other functionalists, especially the German historian Götz Aly, tie together “Nazi population policy and the murder of the European Jews.”<sup>20</sup> Aly asserts that the Holocaust, which began in the East, served as a means for Nazi planners, especially middle-level bureaucrats, to solve certain problems developing there. These included alleged overpopulation and “useless eaters” (i.e. impoverished Jews and Poles who blocked economic modernization, resettlement by the SS of ethnic Germans in the region, and expansion of German rule). The least credible interpretation of functionalists is that the decision to kill the Jews resulted from Nazi desperation following the German defeats on the Eastern Front during the winter of 1941–1942.

Still other scholars—most notably Browning, Eric Johnson, the German historians Ulrich Herbert and Christian Gerlach, the Swiss Philippe Burrin, and Ian Kershaw, Hitler’s most important recent biographer—have taken a middle position in the intentionalist-functionalist debate. They maintain that Hitler played a key role in the decision-making process, but not wholly from premeditation. Instead, according to Browning, the German dictator acted from frustration with the failure of previous solutions and decided on the Final Solution during July 1941, amid the Nazi “euphoria” over what appeared to be an impending German military victory in Russia. Burrin places the decision in the fall of 1941; Gerlach maintains that Hitler issued a special directive in December.

Kershaw concludes that Hitler agreed at a meeting with Himmler in mid-September 1941 to deport the German, Austrian, and Czech Jews to the East. Although this “was not tantamount to a decision for the ‘Final Solution,’ ” Hitler’s agreement to the deportations, Kershaw maintains, “opened the door widely to a whole range of new initiatives from numerous local and regional Nazi leaders who seized on the opportunity now to rid themselves of their own ‘Jewish problem,’ to start killing Jews in their own areas.”<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Herbert and a group of young German historians have presented examples from eastern Galicia, Lithuania, Byelorussia, the “General Government” of Poland, and France that illustrate how local German officials initiated mass executions of Jews in late 1941 and early 1942. Johnson, in his study of the “Gestapo, Jews, and ordinary Germans” in the Rhineland, concludes: “The Holocaust was at times a viciously bloody spectacle perpetrated by both trained specialists and fully ordinary human beings who often had considerable decisionmaking latitude.”<sup>22</sup>

Both functionalists and part-functionalists emphasize that the Holocaust derived in no small measure from a “killing machine” produced by twentieth century bureaucratic or industrialized efficiency. To be sure, the Germans produced the machinery of mass murder, but Lawrence Langbein has called it “a mixed tale of ‘inefficient efficiency.’ ” The gassing facilities at the death camps repeatedly malfunctioned, and the SS had the constant problem of disposing and “redisposing” the victims’ bodies. Langer, moreover, observes about viewing the Holocaust as industrial mass killing: “The very image of machinery rather than man as the primary instrument of liquidation tends to absolve individual offenders and obscure the identity *and* the catalyst of the very culprits who initiated and carried out the crime.”<sup>23</sup>

An issue that continues to arouse fierce debate among students of the Holocaust is the role of racial and political ideology as a motivator for German atrocities and behavior of “ordinary” Germans. Hundreds of thousands of Germans involved directly in the Holocaust—including SS, police, bureaucrats, transportation officials, and many in the armed forces—acted as both “ordinary men” and “ideological soldiers.”<sup>24</sup> As this book will emphasize, some perpetrators killed for “practical” reasons while others did so, sometimes even independently from higher-ups, because they knew they would be approved from a fanatical anti-Semitism and racism.

## GERMANY AND THE RISE OF HITLER

**AT A TIME WHEN** Europe still retained global preeminence, the continent's most advanced and powerful state perpetrated the Holocaust amid a massive world war. Nazi Germany and Hitler carried to the most fateful and horrific of extremes an obsessive racial anti-Semitism and willingness to use unlimited violence that originated in the West immediately before and during World War I.

What made the Germans, and not some other Western people, the driving force behind the Holocaust? Some answers seem simplistic and off the mark. This is the case, for example, with the claim that anti-Semitism was historically more embedded, widespread, and peculiarly vicious in Germany than anywhere else. Yet, however much such views may lack credibility, the Holocaust nonetheless makes the history of Germany and German anti-Semitism different from any other Western country.

### The Many Faces of Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism, the “longest hatred” that reached back to ancient and medieval times, had no deep tradition in Germany than in much of the rest of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Nearly everywhere in predominant Christian Europe, the vast majority of people had accepted, and often acted in accordance with, the virulent Jew-hatred that had its origins in both an irrational fear of outsiders with noticeably different ways and in the teachings of early Christianity. First the Roman Catholic Church, and then the Protestants, had raised to the level of truth numerous myths alleging the evil of the Jews.

Early Christians, despite owing a substantial portion of their theology and moral precepts to ancient or Old Testament Judaism, claimed erroneously that the Jews had killed Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus, who was himself a Jew and who lived in the ancient Roman province of Palestine, had both Jewish followers and opponents. When his followers failed to persuade significant numbers of the fellow Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God come to save the world from sin, they gradually formed a new religion. Based on the ideas of St. Paul, Christianity sought converts among Jews as well as among the pagan populations of the Roman Empire. Both Paul and later Christian writers sought simultaneously not to antagonize the Roman authorities and to discredit their rivals by increasingly portraying the Jews rather than the Roman authorities in Palestine as responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Accusing them of being “Christ killers,” the ancient and medieval Christian Church “satanized” the Jews.<sup>2</sup> It viewed Jews falsely as agents of the Devil who conspired to rule the world, corrupted the civilizations of their host peoples and countries, and kidnapped or killed Christian children. Christian leaders warned that unless Jews converted to Christianity, they were condemned to eternal damnation. These attitudes promoted terrible anger and hatred toward Jews, whose small numbers in most Western lands made them vulnerable to the hostility toward them.

In medieval Europe, Jews suffered discrimination from church and state laws, isolation in ghettos

expulsion from their homelands, and violence and death in pogroms and massacres. Often barred from owning land and excluded from town guilds, medieval Jews concentrated in trade and money lending occupations that frequently earned them greater resentment from non-Jews. In 1543, the German monk and founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther, in his pamphlet titled *About the Jews and Their Lies*, denounced Jews in the most vile manner and urged they be persecuted for their refusal to convert to the new form of Christianity. Later Nazi ideology would owe much of its image of the Jew to Christian and other early forms of anti-Semitism.

The creation of the Second German Empire (*Reich*) in 1871, despite its rule by an authoritarian monarchy, the army, and elite upper classes, had brought “emancipation” to the German Jews, a process begun in Prussia earlier in the century. Emancipation had originated in large measure with the spread into Central Europe of human rights ideas from the Enlightenment and the France of the 1789 revolution and Napoleon.

After 1871, emancipation heralded for German Jews a new day with the promise of full and equal participation as well as assimilation in a united and dynamic new nation. This promise had changed little with the unsettling transformation produced in the German empire at the end of the nineteenth century by rapid industrialization and modernization, both of which anti-Semites decried and attributed to excessive Jewish influence. The new empire was an economic and military power of the first rank. Its government, supported by extreme nationalist groups, pursued the ambitious policy of extending German power in Europe and the world, a course of action that would contribute significantly to the outbreak of world war in 1914.

Many German Jews accepted the premise that education formed the cornerstone of emancipation and the successful incorporation of Jews into German Gentile society. Jews entered German universities in unprecedented numbers. While they accounted for barely 1.3 percent of the population in Germany’s largest state, Prussia, they represented almost 9 percent of the Prussian university student population in 1886–1887 and 8 percent in 1900.

In the German empire, most Jews were more prosperous, more assimilated, and more visible in the economy, the professions, and cultural life than elsewhere in Europe. They were also patriotic and deeply attached to their homeland. Their emancipation and increased visibility, however, helped kindle a steadily expanding anti-Semitic movement. The movement flourished in the universities and included a number of Germany’s intellectual, social, and political elite. Nowhere else in Europe would the achievements of Jews produce greater resentment than among Germans.

As early as 1879–1880, a petition signed by 265,000 persons and sent to the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, complained about “the growing dominion of the Jewish part of the population.” The petition urged the restriction of Jewish immigration in Germany, the dismissal of Jews from government posts, and the establishment of an official census for Jews. Anti-Jewish political parties also emerged.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Europe anti-Semitism flourished much more outwardly and noticeably than in the new German Reich. In France it produced the Dreyfus affair, a national scandal in which anti-Semitic elements wrongfully accused a Jewish army captain of selling military secrets to the Germans and unjustly imprisoned him. The affair divided France sharply and reflected the widespread anti-Jewish sentiments in the country.

In tsarist Russia violent spontaneous and state-sponsored pogroms left some Russian Jews dead, especially in the Ukraine, traditionally a hotbed of anti-Semitism. The Rumanian government prohibited most Jews from holding office and from voting, imposed economic restrictions on them, limited their admission to schools and universities, and in 1886 financed an international congress of anti-Semites. Authorities in Russia and several other lands placed Jews on trial for alleged slaughtering Christian children as part of a Passover ritual—the deranged accusation that originated



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