

## Goldhagen—His Critics and His Contribution

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Since its appearance Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*<sup>1</sup> has reached a vast public in the United States and in other countries. It has prompted a public tempest and set off a tumultuous polemic among experts. Many readers and book reviewers have treated Goldhagen's basic assumptions as a new discovery—an elucidation of benighted and disturbing phenomena in modern society and of the enigma why millions of utterly helpless and guiltless people were murdered during the Holocaust. On the other hand, many researchers well versed in the history of the time have angrily dissociated themselves from this book, and researchers of repute—along with those who pretended expertise for the occasion—geared up to reject the book and express their contempt for its author.

Goldhagen has been accused of not basing his major thesis about the uniqueness of German anti-Semitism and its goals on relevant primary sources and comprehensive literature and, instead, relying mainly on secondary works and deliberately amassing quotations that correspond to his preconceived argument. It is alleged with angry resentment, especially in Germany, that Goldhagen has tarred the entire German people—and not only the Nazis or those who actually committed the killings—with a collective charge of murder. The author of one article that appeared in England judged the book “a hymn of hate to the Germans.”<sup>2</sup>

Many critics have complained that Goldhagen's perspective, which defines German anti-Semitism as a unique brand (“eliminationist anti-Semitism”) that not only regards Jews as alien and inferior but also strives relentlessly to expel them, overlooks the structural complexity of modern German society and the diversity of attitudes and views pertaining to the Jews. Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners, Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) (Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*).

<sup>2</sup> Gitta Sereny, “Spin Time for Hitler,” *The Observer Review*, April 21, 1996.

even though the anti-Semitism was entrenched, widespread, and brutally potent in various parts of Europe, especially its eastern reaches, Goldhagen disregards the necessary comparative dimension. Mention has been made of the numerous cumbersome repetitions and the emotional tone that pervade the book. Several critics take exception to the pretentiousness of the young Goldhagen: he deems himself original and primary in diagnosing the German brand of anti-Semitism and the motivation of “ordinary Germans”—not necessarily zealous Nazis—to engage lustily in killing Jews, but this phenomenon was pinpointed by researchers and many witnesses long before. Consequently, the toughest critics add, by way of summary, that the substantiated and acceptable elements of Goldhagen’s work express nothing new and that the novelties he does bring forth fail the test of factual and methodical criteria. The most far-reaching critics, including authoritative, well known researchers of stature, such as Eberhard Jäckel of Germany and Raul Hilberg of the United States, have ruled that we are dealing with “simply a bad book” and a “worthless” work.<sup>3</sup> Here and there they saw fit to note that the author is Jewish and the son of survivors—facts that evidently point to the origin of the author’s lack of objectivity (an eyebrow-raising argument that creates an opportunity to disqualify members of other nationalities, foremost Germans, on similar or identical grounds).

#### Different Facets of Anti-Semitism

It seems to me that, in the case of Goldhagen, those who dismissed and rejected his work so hastily and sweepingly have shown themselves to be shortsighted. In fact, the blanket repudiations and categorical rejections were quickly cracked. It is now clear that, whether or not this controversial book will lead to a general revision in Holocaust historiography, it offers a challenge and presents an argument that will leave their imprint on Holocaust research. It can be safely stated that it is ill advised to disregard Goldhagen’s theses and questions. The great attentiveness with which many readers greeted the book and the ensuing comprehensive, protracted debate point to the confusion and persistent need to plumb the roots of the phenomenon that has

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<sup>3</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, “Einfach ein schlechtes Buch,” *Die Zeit*, May 17, 1996; an open letter by Raul Hilberg, April 5, 1996.

rocked twentieth-century human consciousness. Accordingly, we are witnessing a re-exploration of basic problems that some, in the past two decades, have tried to dismiss out of hand by invoking conceptions that crowd out the ideological basis of Nazism and strive to “normalize” the Holocaust—a normalization that ostensibly fits the Holocaust into a series of historical and contemporaneous events. Therefore, we shall deal here not only with the book but with the multifaceted dispute and its implications.

Two questions stand at the forefront of the discussion: (1) What is the relationship between anti-Semitism, deeply rooted in the national consciousness and the social and political culture of the West, and the murder of millions of Jews in the Holocaust? (2) How could a people steeped in a culture that represented the epitome of creative endeavor, whose teachers imparted moral and ethical values and behavioral norms, also be the people that lined up behind a demagoguery reeking of falsehoods and delusions and invoke it in order to produce hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect murderers, with the state sanctioning a campaign of persecution and slaughter of millions of people?

In perceiving the uniqueness of German anti-Semitism, Goldhagen’s style is definitely tainted by considerable hyperbole in its presentation of details and in its uni-directionality. However, the crux of his argument is that, in his opinion, the key to understanding how the Holocaust progressed is to discuss the beliefs and values that the Germans accepted, and particularly their entrenched attitudes toward the Jews.

“These chapters demonstrate the development in Germany well before the Nazis came to power of a virulent and violent “eliminationist” variant of anti-Semitism, which called for the elimination of Jewish influence or of Jews themselves from German society. When the Nazis did assume power, they found themselves the masters of a society already imbued with notions about Jews that were ready to be mobilized for the most extreme form of “elimination” possible.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Goldhagen controversy that swept Germany, which attracted—apart from ordinary people who wrote letters to the editor and personal notes--

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<sup>4</sup> Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, p. 23

almost all of the leading historians who specialize in the modern era and the Nazi period, Hans Mommsen published several articles in response. Mommsen is a prominent historian who, as a member of the German “functionalist” camp, does not consider Hitler’s ideology a central factor in shaping the events of the Nazi era. In his article (“The Guilt of the Indifferent—Germans and the Holocaust, a Response to Daniel Goldhagen’s Book”), Mommsen discusses the issue of the radical anti-Semitism that preceded Hitler and argues:

“The threat of annihilation has long belonged to the terminology of anti-Semitic racism. However, the legal restrictions in the Wilhelmenic Reich and the Weimar Republic prevented the most radical racial anti-Semites from turning their threats into acts of murder. After 1933, the Nazi regime released the constitutional provisions that had impeded threats and violence toward Jewish citizens and encouraged such actions by turning out increasingly uninhibited anti-Semitic propaganda. All of this made the Jewish citizens, as Hannah Arendt has already noted with emphasis, into “free game” (*vogelfrei*) or ostracized persons.”<sup>5</sup>

The quotations from Goldhagen and Mommsen overlap at several important junctures. However, the difference that becomes salient in the course of Goldhagen’s book and the continuation of Mommsen’s article is considerable. Mommsen believes that the Jewish issue was of secondary importance to the Third Reich and that there was no potential for public mass violence in Germany.

Mommsen’s article gives the impression that the events that befell the Jews during the Nazi era were a sequence of secondary, almost random, occurrences initiated by extremists in the party bureaucracy and in the SS. Whereas, “the ministerial bureaucracy, largely conservative in its positions, regarded the Nazi Party’s Jewish question (*Judenfrage der NSDAP*) as a sort of amusement given to it [the Party] to discharge its pent-up social

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Mommsen, “Schuld der Gleichgültigen; Die Deutschen und der Holocaust—Eine Antwort auf Daniel Goldhagens Buch ‘Hitlers Williger Vollstrecker,’ ” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 20, 1996.

revolutionary energy, while it was denied greater influence in domestic and overall administration.”

Another important German scholar, Hans Buchheim, saw matters much differently than Mommsen in his 1958 work. According to Buchheim:

“These ideologists stripped Jews of human attributes. A Jew was less than an enemy that one fights; less than the hated fellow-man with whom one shares the common traits of humanity even if one murders him. The Jew, rather, was considered a virus in the body of the state, a pest that had to be destroyed. That is why the persecution of the Jews resembled a campaign against a pest—a kind of act of disinfection that lacked any human concern for the victims. The sponsors of this wholesale action and those who carried it out were not affected in the least as fellow-creatures with their victims—or at least did not want to be so affected. But by their own logic they conceivably deprived themselves of a claim to be considered as fellow-humans.”<sup>6</sup>

Parenthetically, the term *vogelfrei* as an expression of the condition of the Jews, which Mommsen attributes to Hannah Arendt, had been used long before Arendt—and before the Nazi rise to power—by another German Jew, Jakob Wassermann. Wassermann, one of the greatest German authors at the turn of the century, was attached to both the German and the Jewish worlds and was torn between them. In 1921, he published an autobiographical work entitled *Mein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* (“My Path as a German and a Jew”), in which he argues that “Whoever will write the history of anti-Semitism will deal concurrently in an important slice of the history of German culture....

Lamentably, the situation today is such that a Jew is a *vogelfrei*.”<sup>7</sup> This book also contains remarks of interest to us:

“A Danish nobleman turned to me: What do the Germans actually want in their hatred of the Jews? In my own country, the Jews are usually liked. They are known to be loyal patriots, they are known to lead dignified private lives, they are appreciated as an aristocracy of sorts. What do the Germans want? I had

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Buchheim, *The Third Reich, Its Beginnings—Its Development—Its End* (London: O. Wolff, 1961), p. 43; original German edition: *Das Dritte Reich: Grundlegen und politische Entwicklung* (Munich: Kösel, 1958).

<sup>7</sup> Jakob Wassermann, *Mein Weg als Deutscher and Jude* (Berlin: Fischer, 1921), p. 117.

to answer him: The hatred. I had to answer him: They want a scapegoat. Whenever their situation sinks to a nadir, after any defeat, in view of any distress and inclemency, they hold the Jews responsible for their discomfiture.”<sup>8</sup>

#### Some Remarks on Holocaust Historiography

At the end of the world war, when the inconceivable horror of Nazi Germany’s crimes came to light, many German and non-German researchers published works that sought the meaning of the disaster and the barbarism that Germany had inflicted on itself, the world, and humankind during the Nazi era. The French scholar Edmond Vermeil called on German genealogy in search of support for the modern version of German nationalism.<sup>9</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, a researcher with a penchant for provocative stances, denied in the preface to one of the printings of *The Course of German History* the allegation that his book “indicted” an entire nation: “I made no indictment; the facts made it for themselves.”<sup>10</sup> John Wheeler-Bennett, concluding his book on the Wehrmacht and its involvement in political affairs, pondered whether the West’s rapid conciliation with the Federal Republic of Germany, prompted by the Cold War, would not allow the German army to re-involve itself in the new Germany’s policy-making.<sup>11</sup>

These and other publications repeatedly and increasingly argue that pan-Germanism had given birth to a sense of supremacy and entitlement to rule; that the belated coalescence of modern German nationalism contains a kernel of aggressiveness and unbridled expansionism; and that the Germans’ thirst for territory or “impetus for conquests in the East” presents a perpetual danger

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>9</sup> Edmond Vermeil, “The Origin, Nature and Development of German Nationalist Ideology in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” in *International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies*, ed., *The Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 701-702.

<sup>10</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (London: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 701-702.



rooted in their national consciousness. These and other perceptions—which, although one-sided, are not divorced from historical reality—evolved in the wake of the horrific devastation and tragedy that the Germans had wrought. Authors of German origin also opined that, in view of their compatriots’ barbaric manifestations and the “German catastrophe,” the world’s democracies should help the Germans exorcise the demon that had possessed them.<sup>12</sup>

It is customary nowadays to regard this wave of postwar writing as a manifestation of the shock and incrimination that destroyed much of the sobriety and discretion that systematic academic work requires. However, there is the distinct impression that the effect of dynamic political changes—including the Cold War, the economic revitalization of Germany, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc—has turned quite a few observers in the opposite direction. In the new European reality, important factors are at work that have an interest in blurring the uniqueness of the Holocaust and “normalizing” it, i.e., merging it into the lengthy list of grave occurrences in the past generally and in World War II particularly. This includes revolts and massacres perpetrated in the course of national conflicts and power struggles since 1945.

Comprehensive research and public interest in the Holocaust began belatedly around the world. Gerald Reitlinger’s book appeared in England in 1953, and left no great impression.<sup>13</sup> Only in the 1960s did the Eichmann trial, among other factors, prompt a turning point. Survivors’ memoirs, the impact of books such as *Anne Frank, Diary of a Young Girl*, and a proliferation of academic literature thrust the Holocaust into the focus of extensive public interest in the United States and other countries. Holocaust research advanced in Israel, Germany, and the United States, and many research and memorial institutes came into being. The magnitude of the crime, the irrationality of its motives, and the unprecedented brutality applied in its perpetration engendered and

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<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, *The German Question* (London: 1946); idem, *The Solution of the German Problem* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1947).

<sup>13</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (London: Vallentine and Mitchell, 1953).

implanted the anxious feeling that Western civilization had become brittle and wobbly. The Holocaust gradually became an indicator and an integral component of contemporary human consciousness. Today it is a subject of study in many education systems, in universities in many countries, and in a variety of scholarly disciplines; it is a recurrent motif in the arts; and it persists as a topic that surfaces irrepressibly on our political agenda in various contexts, refusing to retreat to the cloister of history books.

The Holocaust undoubtedly weighs upon the self-consciousness of young generations in Germany and impedes the “historicization” that would slip the National-Socialist era into the German historical continuum. “Functionalist” German historians, most prominently Mommsen, argue that the radicalism and violence of the regime were not as much the consequences of ideological indoctrination and the dictator’s iron will as they were a reflection of struggles and confrontations among power centers in the organizational and administrative mechanisms of the Third Reich. This notion, which undoubtedly contributed much to our understanding of the structure and performance of the regime within Germany itself, showed little success in its attempts to confront these phenomena in the occupied countries and the venues of the Holocaust. Quite artificially, the substantive discussion of the Holocaust was shifted to questions of “Who [Hitler or not Hitler] gave the order for the Holocaust and when” and whether the “Final Solution” was planned on a European-wide basis and began with an inclusive order and a master plan, or if it began with local actions that gradually expanded into a continent-spanning endeavor. In contrast, the inconceivable brutality evinced by the Germans in their methodical murder actions was portrayed as a common human predisposition to be expected among people who were guided by bureaucratic apparatus and did the state’s bidding.

However, no persuasive support for these and other “functionalist” postulates has been found in documentation; in fact, the tapestry of the facts and the existing documentation generally contradicts them. Thus, they are increasingly being seen as more of an intellectual exercise than a research endeavor. Concurrently, Holocaust research has made a proliferation of attempts to track down precedents and fundamentals rooted in social



developments, modern regimes, and rapid technological development, as keys to understanding the Holocaust. Ernst Nolte in his new incarnation, whose revisionist article stood at the forefront of the “historians’ dispute” in Germany in 1986, did assign decisive weight to ideological motives, but regarded violence, including that of the Holocaust, as a phenomenon that has accompanied the actions of modern movements aspiring to make revolutionary social reforms.<sup>14</sup> According to this thesis, Communism served Hitler as a prototype for emulation and as a stimulus. Nor does Nolte flinch from citing Jews and their ostensible actions as real factors in attracting the rage of Hitler and the Nazis.

Others headed in different directions. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (of Polish-Jewish origin) regarded the concentration of authority and power in individuals—specifically, the rulers of leading modern developed countries—as elements of a modern “genocidal” reality, in which advanced states adopt mass-killing methods as a way to attain their goals.<sup>15</sup> According to this scenario, the Holocaust was not exceptional, but rather a recurring phenomenon in a protracted and dangerous reality. In contrast to Bauman, it is not difficult to realize that leading developed democracies, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, certainly did not advance in the “genocidal” direction. In the post-World War II era, most venues of mass killing have been in backward states that lacked national and economic stability.

Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, original German researchers who avail themselves of primary documentation, searched for the “starting line” of the Holocaust. They found it in grandiose plans concocted by German technocrats in the Nazis’ service who aspired to bring about a curative

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<sup>14</sup> Ernst Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will; Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte,” *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der national-sozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich: Piper, 1987), pp. 39-47. See also his article, “Die Sache auf den Kopf gestellt,” *ibid.*, pp. 223-231. Pursuant to the articles on this controversy, Nolte published a series of weighty tomes that give expression to his sharp radicalization, which casts doubt upon his reliability as a researcher.

<sup>15</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

economic revolution in the flawed national economies in Eastern Europe by taking drastic measures in human engineering, among other things.<sup>16</sup> Jews were considered an impediment and unproductive element in these sweeping reforms, and their removal corresponded with the proposed plans. Although the drafts of such plans discovered by Aly and Heim are of much interest, there is no proof that ruling officials in occupied Poland adopted them as practical guidelines. In fact, much evidence indicates that not only Wehrmacht officers in occupied Poland but also civilian administrators—such as Ludwig Fischer, governor of the Warsaw district, Hans Biebow, administrator of the ghetto, and even Hans Frank, governor of the *Generalgouvernement*—were interested in Jewish labor, and sometimes even sought to increase the Jews' food rations in order to make their labor more effective.

Theories and hypotheses of these types, including others not mentioned here, have the unifying effect—whether or not the various authors have it in mind—of rationalizing the Holocaust and integrating it into existing and comprehensible human processes. Furthermore, these researchers' works are sometimes construed as dealing with the Holocaust through innovative scholarly methodical tools that strip the event of its mythical and emotional mantle.

#### The Comprehensible and the Incomprehensible

It seems to me that the irritability and anger occasioned by Goldhagen's book derive mainly from its challenge to the prevalent intent of this novel research approach. After all, the question is: If Goldhagen's book is really worthless and undeserving of attention, why all the fuss, and why have so many authoritative people mobilized to attack and dismiss it? This effort has not succeeded and cannot succeed over time because the origins of the Holocaust and the human aspects of its events cannot be treated thoroughly without exploration of the Jews' place in European history and culture and the impact of anti-Semitism and its modern incarnations.

Franz Neumann, in his book *Behemoth*, notes:

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tz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz* <sup>16</sup> See, among others, G und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993).

“Scientific arguments contribute little to an understanding of German racism. It is of little avail, for example, to attack racism by pointing out that the term “Aryan” does not denote a common bone structure or blood composition, or any other physical or biological similarity, but merely a common linguistic origin. Even the discoveries of National Socialist anthropology are not to any great extent incorporated into the body of National Socialist philosophy, which merely speaks of Aryan races or of Nordic and Germanic superiority. Instead of refuting the racial theory, we shall try to understand its social, political, and cultural significance. The attempt has already been made. Scholars have drawn attention to the intimate connection between racism and the persecution of minorities, that characterized the Inquisition, the Albigensian crusade, and the campaign against the French Huguenots, and have interpreted race persecution as a modern form of religious intolerance and heresy-hunting. On this basis, racism has been described as an ideology designed to defend and justify “unequal citizen rights.” This theory is certainly correct, but does it help us to understand why racism supersedes nationalism and why Anti-Semitism, which is the German form of racism (emphasis mine—Y. G.) is accepted not merely as a device for persecution but as a genuine philosophy of life pervading the whole National Socialist outlook?”<sup>17</sup>

Anti-Semitism and mass psychology, as described by Le Bon and José Ortega y Gasset, constitute an arena of the unknown that generally eludes our field of vision when we contemplate world reformers’ theories. Villainous demagogues are sometimes—to use the Soviet term—better as “engineers of the human psyche” and prove adept in liberating the psyche’s dark side and harnessing it to their ends. One should not infer from this that our inability to understand fully the hidden facet of the human psyche excuses tyrants, their partners, and their fellow-travelers of liability for their web of perversions and crimes. Each of us presumably harbors criminal urges and brings such ideas to the surface in moments of weakness, but guilt belongs only to those who cross the line into criminality. By implication, those who seek to oversimplify and reveal a facile and all-embracing rational motive—on the basis of

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<sup>17</sup> Franz L. Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (London: Gollancz, 1942), pp. 85-86.

sociological, economic, and political models—do not always help us understand the complexity of the human being and the singularity that typifies an ideological and political tapestry.

#### The Book's Reception in Germany

Early in the Goldhagen controversy, Gordon Craig, a noted American authority on German history, wrote an article for the *New York Review of Books* in which he expressed his favorable impression of parts of the book and remarked that Goldhagen's main thesis may move research onto worthy new paths. A German author, Gräfin Marion von Dönhof, who claimed to be an admirer of Craig's work, responded to his positive remarks with disappointment and staunch resistance. In his response to Dönhof's comments, Craig explained:

"Goldhagen argues powerfully and persuasively that German anti-Semitism was the basic cause of the Holocaust. Although he carries this thesis to great length, his book is nevertheless welcome because it will prompt new debates and research on an issue that may justly be considered the most horrific and least understood event in the present century."<sup>18</sup>

Volker Berghahn of Brown University, in turn, wrote that despite the flaws of this passionate book and the discomfiture that it causes, "its publication is to be welcomed. At a time when some German historians and politicians are working strenuously to stress the so-called normality of modern Germany's development, here we are being offered more than 600 pages of argument from the opposite point of view. . . ."<sup>19</sup> Leon Wieseltier, a member of the editorial board of the *New Republic*, maintains that "Goldhagen has returned moral agency to a place of prominence in the consideration of genocide."

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<sup>18</sup>Gordon A. Craig, "Hitler's Willing Executioners," *New York Review of Books*, April 18, 1996;  
idem, "Ein Volk von Antisimiten," *Die Zeit*, May 10, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Volker R. Berghahn, "Der Weg in die Vernichtung," in *Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zu Goldhagen—Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust*, Julius H. Schoeps, ed. (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1996), pp. 56-62. The collection in this book is random and poorly edited. As we know, similar collections in other languages are in press. Berghahn's article also appeared in *The New York Times*, April 14, 1996.

“After Goldhagen, the causal relation between ideas and genocide will be impossible to deny.”<sup>20</sup>

The book’s route in Germany is extremely illuminating. The event that was termed a “public tempest” or a “new historians’ dispute” began months before the book appeared in German translation and reached greater intensity when the German edition debuted in September 1996. Interest in the book peaked during Goldhagen’s visit, his public encounters in the large cities, and the intensive television coverage of debates in which he participated. The serious Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit*, early on opened its pages to an extensive series of articles for a debate in which many researchers in Germany and elsewhere were prompted to take part. Concurrently, the controversy spread throughout the daily and periodical print media and gave rise to extensive involvement of public opinion.

As stated, the book was first generally treated to emotive rejection and almost unequivocal angry opposition. The reaction of several prominent researchers in this sensitive (from the Germans’ standpoint) field, including Hans Ulrich Wehler and younger scholars who have authored basic texts that drew wide attention—Ulrich Herbert, Götz Aly, and Dieter Pohl—is interesting. While sparing no criticism and painstakingly recording errors that they found in Goldhagen’s work, these scholars also noted that they had found Goldhagen’s routine hyperbole comprehensible in view of the salient neglect of the most important issues—anti-Semitism and the role of ordinary Germans in the murders—in German research. But the unexpected response that signaled the impending change in public opinion came from ordinary readers and viewers, especially young Germans.

During his visit to Germany, Goldhagen strove to elucidate multivalent terms in his book in a moderated and detailed manner—without retreating from his basic premises—and his even-handed and topical presentations left a favorable impression. Moreover, they contrasted sharply with the uncompromising denunciations that were expressed by many of his well-known rivals. The pundit Ralph Giordano summed up the matter: “When all is

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<sup>20</sup> Remarks by Leon Wieseltier in a debate on April 8, 1996, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington concerning Goldhagen’s book.

said and done, Goldhagen's trip to Germany did not lead to the results his opponents had expected. A large audience of critics and onlookers, young Germans above all, sided with him in these public appearances. Goldhagen managed to move something."<sup>21</sup>

In the opinion of several German critics, the debate concerning Goldhagen's book or its main arguments looked like the beginning of a new "historians' dispute"—*Historikerstreit*—in Germany. In fact, the 1986 debate among historians in the FRG on the question of the uniqueness of the anti-Jewish genocide should not be likened to the challenge that Goldhagen posited in the "Goldhagen dispute." Neither should the controversy that erupted when Fritz Fischer's book *Griff nach der Weltmacht* appeared in 1961<sup>22</sup>—a controversy that essentially concerned the assessment of the imperial goals of German militarism and Germany's leading rulers up to and during World War I. Likewise, the division of the research community into two schools ("Intentionalism" and "Functionalism") in evaluating the image and structure of the National-Socialist regime and the Third Reich should not be viewed in the same vein.

It is more reasonable to maintain that the Goldhagen affair strongly resembles, on a broad public level, the surprising shock that swept Germany after the American television series *Holocaust* was broadcast in 1979. The late German historian, Martin Broszat, explains:

"The broad impact of this melodramatic film series taught not only conservative historians, but above all the film producers and publicists, a lesson. All of them had dared thus far, if at all, to confront the especially grave issue of the fate of the Jews during the Hitler era with extreme caution and cold practicality. Now, what has happened has happened: the series has brought millions of viewers in the Federal Republic into contact with the

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<sup>21</sup>From remarks by Ralph Giordano, "Nine Theses," *Gesher*, Journal on Jewish Affairs (Hebrew), 134 (1997), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup>Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht; Die Kriegspolitik des Kaiserlichen Deutschlands 1914/1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1961).



Jewish catastrophe during the Nazi tenure more intensively than ever before.

Many may now have confronted it for the first time in their lives.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, a series of broadcasts that illuminates in bold colors the terror and disaster that the German Nazi regime wrought upon individuals and families hardly resembles an academic tome that seeks to plumb the roots of these events and trace the behavior of simple folk who turned into murderers. However, both cases caused a great many Germans to discover powerfully, and evidently for the first time, that the anti-Semitism that had pervaded their country played a major if not a decisive role in engendering an immeasurably horrific catastrophe.

#### The Contents of the Book—Jews in Germany and the Countenance of Antisemitism

After considering the “what” and “how” of the book, let us examine its contents. According to Goldhagen, the Jews had been considered throughout their existence in Germany a “foreign entity,” alternately tolerated and suspected. For generations anti-Semitism had been a consistent element in the religious and socio-cultural consciousness of the Germans. The anti-Jewish fundamental became more influential after modern German nationalism coalesced in the early nineteenth century and in the second half of that century, because the traditional hostility merged with the increasingly assimilated racial doctrine. It evolved into a general ideological and political pattern that preached the banishment of the Jews as a way to solve the irksome problem that Jews represented for Germany.

Goldhagen sums up the character of nineteenth-century German anti-Semitism with a series of identifying markers: anti-Semitism was ubiquitous, “common sense,” and the subject of obsessive preoccupation. Jews were identified with and deemed emblematic of everything that departed from sound order. Jews were evil-minded and powerful; all of Germany’s ailments traced exclusively, or at least principally, to them. Accordingly, they posed a menace to Germans’ well-being. This imagery marks a departure from the Christian anti-Jewish perception of the Middle Ages. Although this perception

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<sup>23</sup>Martin Broszat, *Nach Hitler: Der schwierige Umgang mit unsere Geschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1987), p. 271.

marked Jews as intrinsically iniquitous and pernicious, they nevertheless belonged—or were always relegated—to the fringes of general life. The modern German anti-Semites, unlike their medieval precursors, adduced that peace on earth could not be attained unless the Jews were eliminated. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this cultural model began to consolidate around the concept of “race.” This variety of anti-Semitism, extremely violent in its imagery and intent, sought to banish the Jews by deliberate action, although it was still bound by social conventions.

As long as this type of anti-Semitism represented a potential threat only, the Jews served as objects of insult, threat, and discrimination in certain segments of society, but their physical security was not at risk. The turnabout that released the pent-up tension occurred with the accession of a radical party regime, that of Nazism, which adopted anti-Jewish racism as its ideological basis and operational policy.

The question is whether this picture of the pervasive anti-Semitism in Germany reflects the entire reality. Does it not overstate the extent and depth of the anti-Jewish sentiment? Does the continuity and buildup of anti-Semitism not imply a deterministic formula of sorts that inexorably leads to a Nazi-style “Final Solution”? Our basic knowledge about nineteenth-century Germany Jewry shows that the emancipation of the Jews, including granting them equal rights, had many supporters. Among the many active and creative Jews (or persons of Jewish origin) of stature in Germany during that century and up to the 1930s were: Friedrich-Julius Stahl, Gabriel Riesser, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Lassalle, Eduard Bernstein, Eduard Lasker, Emil and Walter Rathenau, Heinrich Heine, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Arnold Schönberg, Max Reinhardt, Max Liebermann, Edmond Husserl, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Jakob Wassermann, Leon Feuchtwanger, Fritz Haber, Albert Einstein, banking and publishing families, and the owners of the country’s important department stores. This gallery represents the zenith of a large population of business and economic entrepreneurs, writers, artists, scholars, and other public figures who attained honor and success in Germany. Arguably, the Jewish minority that emerged from its cocoon during the

Emancipation in Germany and throughout Western Europe was an impressive success story.

Germany was also the cradle of modern Jewish scholarship (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), which sought to convey Jewish heritage to new generations in a critical, scientific garb. According to Gershom Scholem, “The great founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the nineteenth century . . . attempted to formulate this discipline and set it in motion, [and it] crossed the German border and became very influential in all countries where Jews dwelled.”<sup>24</sup> Various segments of European Jewry were imbued with longing for German culture--Jewish and general. East European Jews perceived Germany as a place where Jews had attained civil stature, high education, and substantial well-being. It is also well known that German Jews, whose numbers included agents of ferment, activists, and reformers, were usually noted for patriotic loyalty to their country and strong affinity for the German language and cultural world.

The intermarriage rate of Jews in Germany climbed to 17 percent of all Jewish marriages in the early twentieth century, 30.25 percent in 1912-1913, and nearly 50 percent in 1927, when the Weimar Republic experienced its period of tranquility. Almost all the offspring of these mixed families were divorced from their Jewishness and any sense of Jewish affiliation. Prevalent demographic factors among German Jewry, such as a high proportion of elderly, large-scale emigration in the mid-nineteenth century (only partially offset by an influx of Jews from Eastern Europe), and low fertility rates caused the Jewish collective to dwindle both in relative terms (from 0.93 percent of the German population in 1910 to 0.77 percent in 1933) and in absolute figures. At the time of Hitler’s accession, Germany had fewer than half a million Jews, concentrated mainly in Berlin and several large cities.

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<sup>24</sup>Gershom Scholem, “Wissenschaft des Judentums Then and Now” (Hebrew) in: Selections in the Heritage of German Jewry, Collection of Essays, Avraham Tarshish, ed., (Jerusalem: Leo Baeck Institute, 1975).

Doomsayers expected German Jewry to decline and assimilate totally into the general population within the foreseeable future.<sup>25</sup>

I believe it is important to touch upon these facts because they contain an element that clashes with the generalized, unified view of anti-Semitism. It is true that the Jews' changing status, their level of intermarriage, and their rapid ascent in various sectors of life under the Emancipation did not eradicate revulsion and pejorative stereotyping of Jews, but these developments could not have occurred without the consent or acquiescence of sizable circles among the German population at large.

The opposition to the Jews' social integration that arose following the Emancipation overlaps the concept of "political anti-Semitism" or "modern anti-Semitism" (since the 1880s). It represents a new phase in hatred of Jews, a marriage of political anti-Semitism with racism. According to a German researcher of anti-Semitism: "Germany is the country where the [modern anti-Semitic] movement originated and is also the homeland of the concept itself"—a concept that rapidly spread to other European countries.<sup>26</sup> Racism alleges that people possess uniform physical and mental attributes that, for reason of heredity, cannot be eradicated or modified. This hallucinatory perspective was an effective instrument in the hands of the anti-Jewish movement.

Since the new European Jew had adopted the language, culture, and behavioral patterns of the population at large, his opponents needed markers that would transfer his ostensibly objectionable essence from overt manifestations to subliminal, inscrutable ones rooted in biology. Furthermore, one could argue in making the distinction that anti-Jewish racism, unlike the "emotional racism" of the past, rests on the scholarly foundation of Social Darwinism. Therefore, if the erstwhile anti-Semitism ordered the Jews to abandon their singularity and be like everyone else, the modern anti-Semitic theory argued that a Jew remains a Jew after he effects his social integration,

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<sup>25</sup>See, among others, Felix A. Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden: Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1921).

<sup>26</sup> Reinhard Rürup, *Emancipation und Antisemitismus: Studien zur "Judenfrage" der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), p. 95.

even if he goes so far as to abandon his faith. Indeed, Jews who no longer look Jewish and abandon the traditional behavior patterns are much more menacing than overt Jews who remain cloistered in their compatriots' society. The "Jewish problem," formerly rooted in the Jews' intransigent refusal to abandon their singular traits, was reincarnated as the "Jewish problem" of those who had immersed themselves in society at large. In other words, it ballooned from an internal Jewish problem to a national and universal one. Above all, while a Jew could solve the erstwhile problem of "differentness" by repudiating his origin and religion, the problem of the Jews as a racial entity defied all solutions. Such a solution must lead to the removal of the Jews from the national territory, and, where a continental or global solution is being sought, the solutions should by right be much more radical and severe.

Jew-hatred was indeed an entrenched component of the German consciousness, and the impact of the racial motif, first adopted in small circles, radiated along various paths to the public at large. Many of Goldhagen's precursors shared this view of developments. Eleonore Sterling, in her book on hatred of the Jews (*Judenhass*) and the beginnings of political anti-Semitism in Germany in 1814-1850, analyzes the contrast between the Jews and their surroundings, in view of the socioeconomic problem of the time, in which Christian theological motives were still prevalent:

"Instead of overcoming the situations that themselves had caused the distress, people hated those who symbolized the distress and, thus, always kept these others in mind. They identified the extinction of the Jews with the general eradication of distress, with world redemption, and with the deliverance of Germany. . . .The idea of extermination surfaced pervasively: the talk was of exterminating Judaism, not the Jews. They sought to extirpate "Jewishness"—"Jewish singularity"—in order to "make the Jews into people." . . . Even radicals and liberals, who were favorably disposed toward the Jews, sometimes argued that the Jews must abandon their Jewishness if they wished to become "human" and "politically fit."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Eleonore Sterling, *Judenhass, die Anfänge des politischen Antisemitismus (1815-1850)* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1969), p. 169.

Jacob Katz, in an article published in 1993, explained that the anti-Semitism that surfaced in Germany after the Emancipation did not content itself with revising the equality of rights that the Jews had been granted; instead, “Its leaders believed that they had discovered the principal evil of their time: the acceptance of Jews as equals within German society.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1988, the German social researcher Hans-Ulrich Wehler called attention to an attitude that, he asserts, typified the racial and political anti-Semites who preceded Hitler:

“The vulgar Social Darwinism that characterized the style of Hitler and the many Nazis had become one of the ideological components of their *Weltanschauung* long before 1917. . . . Hitler’s crazed ideas and hatred of Jews originated in the poisoned egg of German and Austrian anti-Semitism. The new racial-political anti-Semitism of the post-1870s era led explicitly and rather quickly to extermination.”<sup>29</sup>

Schematic analogies between East European and West European anti-Semitism are common. Some note that enmity toward Jews was overt, endemic, and socially pervasive in countries such as Russia, Rumania, and Poland, and of course they are right. This anti-Semitism, sometimes ignited by social contrasts and economic difficulties, was fanned by stimuli and incitement into disturbances and pogroms. After World War I, the civil and juridical equality that Jews and other minorities had been given in Central and Western Europe applied only formally in the eastern part of the continent. In many respects, it was not applied at all, as the ruling authorities sought and found ways to circumvent its implementation.

In the inter-war period, especially in the 1930s—to no small extent under the influence of German Nazism—anti-Semitism in Rumania, Poland, and Hungary (developments in the Soviet Union during that time are a separate issue) lurched onto a path of intensive public activity. At its peak, it was accompanied by violence and a demand to attenuate or expel the Jews in

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<sup>28</sup>Jacob Katz, “On Jewish Social History: Epochal and Supra-Epochal Historiography,” *Jewish History*, 7:1 (1993), pp. 89-96.

<sup>29</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen vergangenheit, Ein polemischer Essay zum “Historikerstreit”* (München: Beck, 1988), p. 202.



order to cure economic and social ailments. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism of the East European kind, essentially a grass-roots phenomenon that reeked of enmity and ancient religious prejudices, while seeking to worsen the Jews' situation, did not enthusiastically adopt the racist and ideological elements that circulated in the West, especially in Germany. Enmity toward and persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe was originally local and seldom ballooned into a world-spanning, trans-national ideology.

Secular anti-Semitism, in its nationalist and racist German attire, assailed the Jews for allegedly concentrating themselves in financial fields, which they controlled by manipulation. They were held responsible for the disintegration of traditional patterns of life in urban society, for playing a major role in the dissemination of leftist political ideas, for cosmopolitanism, and for permissiveness in culture and entertainment. The racist doctrine, although cultivated more effectively in France than in Germany, found zealous loyalists in Germany above all. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a relatively modest forgery by the Russian secret police, rose to prominence in Germany and the West after World War I and the Russian Revolution. Furthermore, it is illuminating to note that a parallel literary version of the libel in the Protocols was produced in Germany early on.

German cultural and national circles turned out a proliferation of publications, leagues, petitions, letters to the Reichstag, political parties, and international gatherings that were exclusively anti-Semitic. Although the anti-Jewish element was secondary or transitory in the political field, it was accepted as a legitimate element in the political platforms and information channels of the conservatives and the German Right. The ostensible threat flowing from the international Jewish conspiracy gained momentum and credibility in many countries in view of the roles played by prominent individuals of Jewish origin in the Bolshevik revolution. These suspicions gathered special strength in Germany due to the role of individual Jews in the radical-revolutionary wave that swept the country in the transition from monarchy to the Weimar Republic.

The importance of anti-Semitism escalated powerfully in the era of acute changes and crises in Europe that followed World War I. Although it cannot be

divorced from Christian arguments and examples, it surfaced then in a new form and played a crucial role in the emergence and development of secular ideational and political currents that purported to offer an escape from the entanglement and absolute solutions for their peoples and human society. According to the Swiss researcher Walther Hofer, the concept of the Jewish enemy in National Socialism plays the same role as class warfare in Marxism.<sup>30</sup> However, even if the two worldviews display such a similitude or identity in explaining past and present developments and conflicts, they differ in their view of the future: Marxism proposed, theoretically, to establish a classless egalitarian society, whereas Nazism left Jews no room whatsoever and allocated an inferior place for inferior races in the world of the future.

Yet we would do the German reality a disservice if we overlooked the existence of very powerful currents in twentieth-century Germany that were not tainted by anti-Semitism, let alone radical anti-Semitism. Were it not for the endemic instability of the Weimar period, the misconceived foreign and domestic policies, and, above all, the maelstrom of the great economic crisis, Hitler would probably not have risen to power. However, we should not be swayed by fact-blurring explanations that claim that random trifles in the course of events, such as personal conspiracies surrounding President Hindenburg that preceded Hitler's appointment to the chancellorship or the naive expectation that Hitler in office would do the bidding of the moderate right, opened Hitler's path to power.

In the early 1930s, about one-third of the German electorate cast their ballots for the Nazis and made them into a large political camp, infused with momentum and intoxicated by its conquests. It stands to reason that not all the Nazi sympathizers saw eye-to-eye with Hitler in racial and Jewish matters. Presumably, some of those who slipped into the Nazis' wake wished above all to create a turnabout that would result in reforms in urgent existential issues and the unsound public order. However, racial anti-Semitism in varying dosages did not come off the agenda, as the Nazis were about to rise to power and did not act as an impediment to protest or resistance.

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<sup>30</sup> Walther Hofer, ed., *Der Nationalsozialismus, Dokumente, 1933-1945* (Berlin: Fischer, 1957), p. 268.

The Third Reich was, of course, a dictatorship whose terror loomed over its subjects' heads. However, one cannot know which motive—terror, or enthusiasm for Hitler and his regime—figured more importantly in the Germans' passive response to the persecutions and crimes. Hitler himself, whose consolidation of power and political successes whetted the drive to advance toward the goals of the “new racial order,” was nevertheless concerned about his popularity and the trends of thought among the German population. Palpable resistance on the part of the Wehrmacht, the Church, and large segments of the public might have impeded the anti-Jewish persecutions somewhat, just as such factors arrested the “euthanasia” murders significantly. The documentation available to us shows that even Hitler's conservative opposition, whose members became convinced at a rather early stage that his unbridled political aggressiveness would eventually lead to war and defeat, usually acquiesced in his anti-Jewish policy measures, including the racist Nuremberg Laws. Furthermore, this opposition—unequivocal, but not matched by action—was manifested only in the inner circle when the meaning of the “Final Solution” became known. The actions taken, i.e., the attempts to dispose of Hitler, were prompted not by the systematic genocide but by the magnitude of the looming defeat.<sup>31</sup>

There is good reason that the ideological factor dictated the anti-Jewish policies and legislation, which careened toward ever-growing extremes and were the main catalysts that, under the conditions of war, fomented and abetted radicalization and brutality. Goldhagen's book calls insufficient

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<sup>31</sup>Christof Dipper, “The German Resistance and the Jews,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, XVI (1984), “Most of the July conspirators were actually pp. 51-93. See also Hannah Arendt's remarks: former Nazis or had held high office in the Third Reich. What had sparked their opposition had been not the Jewish question but the fact that Hitler was preparing war, and the endless conflicts and crises of conscience under which they labored hinged almost exclusively on the problem of high treason and the violation of their loyalty oath to Hitler. Moreover, they found themselves on the horns of a dilemma which was indeed insoluble: in the days of Hitler's successes they felt they could do nothing because the people would not understand, and in the years of German defeats they feared nothing more than another “stab-in-the-back” legend.” Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 98.

attention to the circumstances that helped Hitler pursue his anti-Jewish policies—circumstances that originated in indifference and inaction on the part of other countries, including the large democracies and the churches—and to the silence or pallid responses in the occupied countries and Free World to the “Final Solution” during the war. Theoretically, Nazi racism was already infused with an element that, if fulfilled on an absolute scale, leads to annihilation. However, we should distinguish between the ideational urge and its implementation, which occurs at intricate junctures of intentions, counterpressures, and difficulties. There is no reason to assume that the “Final Solution” had been planned out in advance and that everything else was a mere way-station *en route* to the goal. As we know, the “solution” envisaged until a certain time was the removal of the Jews from Germany. Plans for a territorial solution were considered during the first year of the war, although no particular effort was made to carry them out. In the early stages of the war, Himmler spoke against the method of total mass murder. In enumerating the circumstances that abetted the all-out murder campaign, in addition to the freedom of action and cheapening of life afforded by the war (*inter alia*), one should include indifference in Germany and deliberate blindness in the occupied countries and the Free World.

#### The Question of “Hitler’s Willing Executioners”

Daniel Goldhagen states the following in his conclusions:

“The inescapable truth is that, regarding Jews, German culture had evolved to the point where an enormous number of ordinary, representative Germans became—and most of the rest of their fellow Germans were fit to be—Hitler’s willing executioners.<sup>32</sup>

Goldhagen rejects the concept of Germans’ indifference to the fate of the Jews and argues that their attitude should be characterized instead as “pitilessness.” Their dispassion toward the Jews’ plight, Goldhagen asserts, originates in their perception of the Jews as other than innocents. Therefore, they observed the progression from persecution to deportation to annihilation with consent, or, in any case, without horror.

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<sup>32</sup> Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, p. 454.

Goldhagen probes the way “ordinary” Germans carried out their orders in three contexts: (1) the use of Jewish labor; (2) the police battalions’ killing sprees; and (3) the death marches. He assumes correctly that the Germans used Jewish labor in disregard of the criterion of effective exploitation of the potential labor pool. Jews were made to labor in the *Generalgouvernement* in order to “educate” them, and the labor camps did not concern themselves with occupational skills, matching candidates to jobs, or assuring elementary living conditions. Jews were sometimes put to grueling labor for the sole purpose of oppression and abuse, or as “extermination through work.” In cases where Jews were given tasks that the Germans considered vital, their taskmasters seldom took into account their state of nutrition, health, and capacity; instead, they were treated as objects to be used until spent. In this sense, the labor of Jews was worth less than that of slaves or beasts—valuable creatures that should be kept in sound physical condition.

Goldhagen also renders a telling account of the plight of Jews in the concentration camps, citing the example of Mauthausen to prove that the Jews suffered a 100 percent mortality rate as compared to the low rates among other categories of prisoners or ethnic groups. Although this particular camp should be considered an extreme example, the inferior status and high mortality of the Jews were typical of the concentration camps at large. Jewish working prisoners continued to be selected for killing at Auschwitz after selections of exhausted and ill prisoners of other nationalities had ceased. After the prospects of the war turned against the Germans, they had to show a concern for their labor reserve, and their attitude toward their Jewish slave-laborers also improved slightly. However, Himmler went out of his way to stress that even these working Jews “will have to disappear one day.”<sup>33</sup> Tim Mason, the first to use the term “functionalism,” addressed himself to the Jews’ labor as follows:

“Among the first Polish Jews who were gassed in the extermination camps were thousands of skilled metal workers from Polish armament factories. This was in the autumn of 1942, at the turning point in the campaign against the

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<sup>33</sup> Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Avraham Margalio, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), Document 32, p. 290.

Soviet Union, which was to increase still further the demands made by the Wehrmacht on the German war economy. The army emphasized the irrational nature of this action in view of the great shortage of skilled labour, but was unable to save the Jewish armament workers for industry. The same internal power relationship lay behind the use of scarce railway installations for the deportation of persecuted Jews towards the end of the war, instead of for the provisioning of the forces on the Eastern Front. . . .The way in which the political sphere emancipated itself from all reference to the needs of society is nowhere clearer than in the example of the SS, where the translation of ideology into practice was in flat contradiction to the interests of the war economy and yet was allowed to continue.”<sup>34</sup>

Goldhagen makes a strenuous effort to deal with the reserve battalions of the German police and their murderous actions in Eastern Europe. He estimates the number of ordinary Germans who took part in killings during their service in these battalions in the hundreds of thousands—an estimate that warrants further painstaking examination. His attention in this part of his book focuses on the human element in the behavior of individual policemen. He alleges that the murderers regarded their mission not as one on behalf of Nazism, but on behalf of Germany. Although these reservists—men who were above the age of induction and hardly met the criteria of members of an active party cadre—could be released with impunity from the killing actions, only a few chose this avenue of escape. In contrast, the author dwells on instances of murder-lust, willful humiliation of prey, and insistence on killing individual children who had eluded the dragnet. In certain cases, policemen invited their wives to attend the killing operations, either to impress them or to give them the pleasure of observing the spectacle. On days when the unit engaged in murder, it also took part in routine cultural and entertainment activities.

“Ordinary Men” or “Ordinary Germans”

Reserve Police Battalion 101, on which Goldhagen elaborates in great detail, was the subject of a study by the noted American researcher Christopher Browning (*Ordinary Men; Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution*

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<sup>34</sup> Tim Mason, *Fascism and the Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), pp. 73-74.



in Poland) published in 1992.<sup>35</sup> Both researchers availed themselves of the same archive collections. Browning's scholarly integrity and diligence as a researcher are beyond doubt. But just as Goldhagen drew a central guiding conclusion from the material he reviewed, so was Browning swayed by the basic assumption in the title of his book—which attracted considerable attention—that the men of Battalion 101 who massacred the Jews of Józefów had behaved like “ordinary men.” Browning believes that cruelty, a latent characteristic in human beings, has surfaced in many mass murders and that, wherever governments encourage such activities, the result is exceptional cruelty. According to Browning, the Holocaust is unique mainly in the phenomenon of “bureaucratic and administrative murder,”<sup>36</sup> and not in the people for whom the Jews had ceased to be human beings, in the spirit of Nazi ideology.

A researcher of Browning's stature limited himself, in his background remarks and his account of the massacre of the Jews of Józefów, to the perpetrators' side only—that of the German policemen and their commanders. He neglected to describe the Jewish community and its members, even though they are documented in the testimonies of survivors and in the diary of a sharp-eyed Polish doctor who recorded the treatment of Poles and Jews in the vicinity of Józefów.<sup>37</sup> In one of his articles, Goldhagen remarks—rightly so—that it is difficult to imagine a contemporaneous work about American

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<sup>35</sup>Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> See Browning's articles and his remarks in a debate with Goldhagen on April 8, 1996, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington concerning Goldhagen's book: “Böse Menschen, Böses Taten und die normale Holocaust-Forschung: der Historiker Christopher Browning über Goldhagen und Genozid,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 6, 1997; “Dämonisierung erklärt nichts,” *Die Zeit*, April 19, 1996, “Daniel Goldhagen's Willing Executioners,” comments at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>37</sup> See Zygmunt Klukowski, *Diary from the Years of Occupation, 1939-44 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).*

slavery that would fail to include the point of view and testimonies of the slaves themselves.<sup>38</sup>

However, the main difficulty in Browning's work, I believe, has to do with its leading thesis. War, combat, and pogroms obviously encourage brutality and elicit latent cruelty. But is there not a difference in this respect between the behavior of soldiers in the heat of battle and a drunken, incited gang of bandits, on the one hand, and a unit that awakens after hours of rest and sets out to kill peaceful and defenseless non-combatants? Does the latter not require added drives and different urges to inspire people to carry out such actions? Did everyone behave this way during World War II?

Suffice it to compare Italy and the Italians in World War II. Italy had been ruled by a Fascist dictatorship since the early 1920s, had been allied with Nazi Germany since the mid-1930s, had passed its own racial laws in 1938, and had joined the war in 1940. However, it has been demonstrated that the Italians refused to participate in certain kinds of actions and to obey certain orders. They refused to hand over Jews to the Germans—knowing the fate that awaited them—either from Italy itself, or from the territories they occupied and controlled, until the German forces overtook parts of the country in September 1943. The Italians continued to balk even after Mussolini, under German duress, endorsed a deportation order. This response recurred wherever the Italians were in control. Not only were they unwilling to hand over Jews, but many Italians—soldiers and officers, policemen, simple folk, members of the Fascist Party, priests, diplomats and governors *ex officio*—displayed initiative and resolute activism in their opposition to such actions and protected Jews through various tactics and ruses. In those parts of Italy that were taken over by Nazi Germany, the concealment of threatened Jews became an extensive grass-roots phenomenon. When Jews approached Italians after the war to express gratitude for their deliverance, some of the rescuers replied that they deserved no praise, having merely discharged their human duty toward persecuted innocents.

The Danes' consistent refusal to hand over the Jews in their country and the mobilization of ordinary people in Denmark for a rescue operation—following

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel J. Goldhagen, "Motives, Causes and Alibis," *New Republic*, December 23, 1996.

the Danish saying, “Where there is room in the heart, there is room at home”—resulted in the rescue of nearly all of Danish Jewry.

Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw ghetto historian and diarist, had no guiding prejudice against the Germans. On March 6, 1940, he recorded in his diary remarks made to a Jew by a German: “You’re not a person, you’re not an animal, you’re a Jew.” In early October of that year, he entered the following: “A simple Jew from a *shtetl* who had been seriously abused said that there must be schools for torture in Germany; for otherwise, he cannot understand how human beings become such predators.”<sup>39</sup>

Local authorities and some of the population participated in murdering Jews in Rumania and Croatia; Jews were turned over in Slovakia and Hungary; and the Vichy regime in France collaborated in deportations. Analysis of the events shows that cooperation with the anti-Jewish policies gave the rulers of these countries a chance to obtain various advantages in their relations with Nazi Germany. In countries that had been established under Nazi patronage, ideological Fascist motives and dependency on Germany were at work. These facts, of course, should not be blurred, and those who took part in the “Final Solution,” in whatever way, should not be absolved of responsibility and guilt. However, I believe that Trevor-Roper spoke tellingly in assessing that “Without German power there would no doubt have been occasional pogroms in eastern Europe, but the systematic destruction of the Jews, even by native ‘fascist’ governments, is unthinkable.”<sup>40</sup> Paul Celan, a Rumanian-Jewish poet who wrote in German, stated, in a line that expresses the moral of “*Todesfuge*,” “*Der Tod is ein Meister aus Deutschland.*” Jews have often emphasized in their testimony that individual uniformed Germans treated them with a humiliating severity and cruelty that exceeded the required regimen in the ghettos and the camps.

#### Antisemitism and the Men Who Gave the Orders

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<sup>39</sup>Emanuel Ringelblum, *Diary and Writings from the War Period, Warsaw Ghetto, September 1939-December 1942 (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1993), pp. 84, 153.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, “The Phenomenon of Fascism,” in *Fascism in Europe*, Stuart J. Woolf, ed., (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), p. 37.

Hans Mommsen assigns responsibility for the initiatives that led to the “Final Solution” to local bureaucrats and commanders in the occupied countries.<sup>41</sup> This argument corresponds to Mommsen’s chosen perspective, but is not corroborated by reality. Mommsen continues to believe that the high echelons in Berlin did not hand down a specific decision on the “Final Solution” and that no particular time of such a decision can be ascertained. It is not difficult to refute this reading of events. It is sufficient to cite remarks by Hans Frank in his position as governor of the *Generalgouvernement*. In a meeting of his cabinet in December 1941, shortly before the Wannsee Conference, Frank—fully aware of what was about to transpire there—said the following:

“. . .One way or another—I will tell you that quite openly—we must finish off the Jews. The *Führer* put it into words once: should united Jewry again succeed in setting off a world war, then the blood sacrifice shall not be made only by the people driven into war, but then the Jew of Europe will have met his end. . . . As an old National-Socialist I must also say that if the pack of Jews (*Judensippschaft*) were to survive the war in Europe while we sacrifice the best of our blood for the preservation of Europe, then this war would still be only a partial success. I will therefore, on principle, approach Jewish affairs in the expectation that the Jews are some day to disappear. . . . But what should be done with the Jews? Can you believe that they will be accommodated in settlements in the *Ostland*? In Berlin we were told: why are you making all this trouble? We don’t want them either, not in the *Ostland* nor in the *Reichskommissariat*, liquidate them yourselves! . . . The views that were acceptable up to now cannot be applied to such gigantic, unique events. In any case, we must find a way that will lead us to our goal, and I have my own ideas on this.”<sup>42</sup>

A year later, in December 1942, the same Frank made remarks in a meeting of his cabinet that, though different, are extremely relevant for our discussion:

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<sup>41</sup> Hans Mommsen, “Die dünne Patina der Zivilisation,” *Die Zeit*, August 30, 1996; Christopher R. Browning, “Dämonisierung erklärt nichts,” *Die Zeit*, April 19, 1996.

<sup>42</sup>Hans Frank, *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneur in Polen, 1939-1945*, Werner Präg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, eds. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1975), pp. 457-458.

“They deprived us of considerable labor forces from the Jewish settlements that had been preserved since then. It is clear that the labor process has run into difficulties, since in the middle of the war-labor program we are ordered to put up all the Jews for extermination. The responsibility for this does not reside with the cabinet of the *Generalgouvernement*. The order concerning the extermination of the Jews comes from a higher authority. [and it is clear that from Frank’s standpoint that the higher authority is only Hitler or Göring--Y.G.]. We have to acquiesce in the final results and can only inform the Reich offices that the removal of the Jews has led to tremendous difficulties in the sphere of labor.”<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the functionalists’ beliefs, pertinent contacts between Jews and local authorities in labor affairs prompted officials in charge of this field in towns such as Łódź, Bialystok, and Warsaw to attempt to prevent the deportation of the Jews and the liquidation of the ghettos. The final decisions in such matters, however, were made by a “higher authority.” Even in the Wehrmacht, which, according to Mommsen, usually bore the plague of anti-Semitism, the authorities in charge of equipment delivery in the *Generalgouvernement* were displeased with the elimination of the Jews from the labor force. The commander of the rear forces in the *Generalgouvernement*, General Kurt-Ludwig von-Gienanth, protested this action vehemently and clashed with Himmler, who had the complaining commander replaced.<sup>44</sup>

It is true that the picture is complex; racial anti-Semitism and ideologically-based orders are not the only factors in the picture. However, the ideological element must be treated not as one factor among many, but as an empowering and decisive fundamental with respect to the Jews and the “Final Solution.”

Dieter Pohl, the author of a thorough study entitled *Persecution of the Jews in Eastern Galicia, 1941-1944*, recently published a comprehensive article on

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 588.

<sup>44</sup> See details on this matter in my writings on the Warsaw ghetto: Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943, Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 324-328.

“Holocaust Research and Goldhagen’s Theses.”<sup>45</sup> Pohl’s article deals with several issues: (1) elaborating guidelines in Holocaust research; (2) a detailed review of and critical objections to the book; (3) proposals for future research. He recommends that “the dimension of anti-Semitism since 1918, especially among the elites, be examined much more than it has thus far.” He considers it essential to expand knowledge and use of archive sources from the East European countries and to become more knowledgeable about the undergrounds, collaboration with respect to the Jews, and the fate of the Jews and other victims in Russia. In conclusion, Pohl states, “The National Socialist murder of Jews still requires new scholarly analysis and interpretation. The time is not yet ripe for summarizing views.”

Time will almost certainly allow us to become more knowledgeable in, and gain a greater understanding of, matters that are unfathomable today. However, it is the duty of contemporary researchers to obtain a maximum amount of facts and draw all possible objective conclusions from the copious multifaceted documentary material in our possession.

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**Translated by Naftali Greenwood**

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<sup>45</sup> Dieter Pohl, “Die Holocaust Forschung und Goldhagens Thesen,” Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Heft 1 (January 1997), pp. 1-48; idem, Die Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941-1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996).



Here, Daniel Goldhagen further expounded upon his research and understanding of anti-Semitism and the role that it played in the actions of the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101. He further defines his understanding of German culture and the inherent anti-Semitism which this maintained at the time of the Holocaust and for the centuries prior. This presentation was followed by that of Christopher Browning in which he maintained that it was more circumstance than anti-Semitism which allowed for the actions of these men. In "Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics" by A. D. Moses, *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (May 1998): 197. Pohl, Dieter. "Die Holocaust-Forschung und Goldhagens Thesen", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 45 (1997). Goldhagen proffer contrasting explanatory answers to this troublesome question. This article focuses on a criticism that has often been leveled at the internal coherence of Goldhagen's controversial explanatory theory. Goldhagen's explanation is that the men freely, willingly, and responsibly participated in the genocidal killing because of their beliefs about Jews—beliefs that they were causally determined to hold. Critics charge that this is incoherent: How could perpetrators have been passive recipients of determinist (shrink). Goldhagen has been accused of not basing his major thesis about the uniqueness of German anti-Semitism and its goals on relevant primary sources and comprehensive literature and, instead, relying mainly on secondary works and deliberately amassing quotations that correspond to his preconceived argument. Many critics have complained that Goldhagen's perspective, which defines German anti-Semitism as a unique brand (an eliminationist anti-Semitism) that not only regards Jews as alien and inferior but also strives relentlessly to expel them, overlooks the structural complexity of modern German society and the diversity of attitudes and views pertaining to the Jews. Goldhagen states that his aim is to help "craft institutions and politics that will save countless lives and also lift the lethal threat under which so many people live". He concludes that eliminationist assaults are preventable because "the world's non-mass-murdering countries are wealthy and powerful, having prodigious military capabilities (and they can band together)", whereas the perpetrator countries "are overwhelmingly poor and weak". [51][52]. In "Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics" by A. D. Moses, *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (May 1998): 197. Pohl, Dieter. "Die Holocaust-Forschung und Goldhagens Thesen", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 45 (1997).