

Examining the German Public's Response to the Third Reich's Anti-Jewish Policies

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May 1, 2022

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## **Abstract**

The anti-Jewish policies of the Third Reich progressed from anti-Jewish legislation, stripping German Jews of their rights, to systematic mass murder. Deeply rooted antisemitism and Nazi propaganda serving as a vehicle for ideology fostered an environment of approval among most of the German public for certain anti-Jewish policies such as the Nuremberg Laws. The non-Jewish, German public responses to these anti-Jewish policies by the Third Reich shifted over the course of the Nazi's rule and during World War II. Most of the German public supported anti-Jewish legislation such as laws removing German Jews from civil service occupations because it made positions available for "Aryan" Germans. However, most of the German public was repulsed by violent acts led by the Third Reich against German Jews. The German public's abhorrence towards violent acts committed earlier during the Third Reich's rule against Jews shifted by the end of World War II as they became ambivalent towards stories of mass murder. Concerns for the war effort and constant air raids from the Allies overshadowed any concerns that most of the German public could muster for the persecutions of a maligned minority group.

## Chapter One: Introduction

The German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Berlin Mayor, Michael Müller, gathered with other German citizens on the solemn day of October 18, 2021, to remember with a mixture of guilt and shame the tragedy that occurred eighty years ago. On October 18, 1941, the first deportation of German Jews to Poland occurred, beginning a policy of forced removal of German Jews from Germany. The President recalled that, “The crimes were committed for all to see, separation and deportation happened at the heart of German everyday life, that is the horrible truth.”<sup>1</sup> President Steinmeier remarked that today most Germans feel shame and guilt over the Third Reich’s anti-Jewish policies. But what was the German public’s response when these policies occurred under the Third Reich from 1933 to 1945? How did the German public respond to anti-Jewish policies that began as legislation then violence and finally mass murder?

In 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, his ideological, Nazi regime would not only initiate a second world war but would also lead a massive genocide against European Jewry and other minorities. Hitler began his dictatorship with anti-Jewish rhetoric that developed into anti-Jewish legislation, the displacement of Jews from Germany, and ended in genocide. Historians like Christopher Browning, Ian Kershaw, and David Bankier studied the Holocaust, the systematic mass murder led by the Third Reich of European Jewry and other minorities. Their studies examined the German public’s response to the Third Reich’s anti-Jewish policies. The study of the German public’s response under the Third Reich began in the 1950s to determine what the German public knew about mass murder and if most of the German

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<sup>1</sup>Frank-Walter Steinmeier, “Importance of Fighting the Ongoing Threat of Antisemitism Wherever it Appears” (speech, Berlin, Germany, October 18, 2021), Learn German.

public supported these murderous policies. Most of the German public's response to anti-Jewish policies shifted as anti-Jewish policies developed from legislation to violence then murder. Most of the German public supported early anti-Jewish decrees but when the Third Reich committed acts of violence, most of the German public condemned it. However, the German people would not remain static in their response. When they heard stories of mass murder in eastern Europe, they were ambivalent, shocked by the stories but did not believe them and chose to prioritize their own personal concerns over any misgivings for the fate of European Jews, a maligned minority group.

Despite the Third Reich being a socialist, totalitarian regime that attempted to manipulate and coerce public opinion through propaganda and violence, public opinion did exist under the Nazi's regime.<sup>2</sup> The German public's response to the Third Reich's policies can be determined by examining multiple sources. Security service (SD) reports, Nazi party reports, letters, and memoirs from both German civilians and soldiers can be used to determine the German public's response to the Third Reich. Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, noted in his diary that these SD reports revealed that by 1943, in occupied countries, public support and morale was declining.<sup>3</sup> Goebbels recognized that public opinion did exist under the Third Reich, and he desired to garnish public support and maintain popularity by producing propaganda that reached the masses.<sup>4</sup> Hitler, too, constantly took note of public opinion. When Hitler authorized the euthanasia program (Aktion T-4) in 1939, the murder of handicapped German men, women, and

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<sup>2</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2d enl. Ed. New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1958.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Goebbels and Fred Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1939-1941*, (New York: Putnam, 1983), 301.

<sup>4</sup>David Welch, "Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a 'National Community' (Volksgemeinschaft)," *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 1 (1993).

children, he expected the public to support him. However, when it became known that the “treatment” handicapped Germans received was murder there was a public outcry in 1941 and as a result Hitler publicly halted the T4 program that same year (though he continued the program in secret).<sup>5</sup> Parents of handicapped children wrote letters to Hitler and protested the T4 program, both Catholic and Protestant clergy voiced their dissent. A German cardinal, Cardinal von Galen, shared a sermon that was disseminated among the German public condemning the Third Reich for the killing of handicapped Germans, declaring that “murder is contrary to God and Nature.”<sup>6</sup> A bishop from Limburg wrote a letter to Hitler opposing the euthanasia program making his dissent public.<sup>7</sup> Though the Cardinal and bishop did not suffer retaliation for their criticism, others less well-known were imprisoned or executed for their dissent. By rescinding the euthanasia order, Hitler responded to public opinion and in his actions acknowledged that it did exist though it was curtailed by the Third Reich through the inundation of propaganda and coercion. The historical record reveals that German citizens did not blindly conform to the Third Reich’s policies.<sup>8</sup>

Antisemitism was prevalent in Germany long before the Third Reich began its campaign against the Jews. Violent outbursts against Jewish communities occurred from at least as early as

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<sup>5</sup>Hitler publicly rescinded the program but continued it in secret and moved the handicapped Germans out of Germany to the east to be murdered by starvation, lethal injections, or gassing. Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, London, 1995), 67, 111.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 115.

<sup>7</sup>“Letter from Bishop of Limburg to the Reich Minister of Justice, 13 August 1941,” in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook an Anthology of Texts*, edited by Sally A. Winkle (London, Routledge, 2013), 332-333.

<sup>8</sup>Tirosh Noam, “Alone in Berlin? Israeli media and the German resistance to Nazism,” *The Communication Review*, 19:2, 2016.

the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> Yet, by the close of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century prejudice laws and restrictions against European Jews lifted by governments in western Europe and allowed Jews to assimilate more into society by attending universities and pursuing careers in medicine and law. But these relaxed restrictions on Jews' place in German society did not assuage the antisemitic sentiment prevalent across central and western Europe.<sup>10</sup> Once the Nazi party came into power in 1933, it did not have to convince the non-Jewish German public to be antisemitic for the prejudice was already well-established. The deep-seated antisemitic feeling among the public made it possible for Hitler to share his political extremism, voice antisemitic rhetoric, pass antisemitic legislation, and commit violence against European Jewry. The German public were not indoctrinated by Nazi propaganda to be antisemitic, rather Nazi propaganda capitalized on the long-held antisemitism already inculcated in the German people.<sup>11</sup> Despite deep-seated antisemitism most of the German public reacted in repulsion towards violent acts led by the Third Reich, but they still viewed European Jews as a foreign, outside element that needed a "solution."<sup>12</sup>

Pre-existing antisemitism in Central and Western Europe was not the sole factor in influencing the German public's opinion for the Third Reich's violent anti-Jewish policies. The inundation of Nazi propaganda promoting their ideology also influenced the German public's response. Even before the Nazi party came to power in 1933 propaganda was used, especially in newspapers, to promote party ideology. Goebbels used his newspaper, *Der Angriff*, as a tool for

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<sup>9</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press. 2nd edition. New York, 2015), 12.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 71.

<sup>11</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 161.

<sup>12</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, (Blackwell Publishers Inc. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 68.

promoting Nazi ideology, nonetheless, readers were more interested in reading about Hitler than they were in reading about party ideology.<sup>13</sup> Hitler's Nazi ideology promoted the policy of lebensraum (living space) for German Aryans. Hitler did not mask his intent of clearing Europe of Jews to make room for the non-Jewish Germans, his desire for ridding Europe of Jews was made known in speeches to the German public and through propaganda.<sup>14</sup> On January 30, 1939 Hitler made a speech before the Reichstag calling for the extermination of European Jewry- "If the international Finance-Jewry inside and outside of Europe should succeed in plunging the peoples of the earth once again into a world war, the result will be not the Bolshevization of earth...but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."<sup>15</sup> Nazi propaganda promoted the ideology of the Aryan struggle for lebensraum, the propaganda's effectiveness is evident in an SS officer's report to his wife describing the murder of Jewish women and children as a fight for German survival, "The sight of the dead (including women and children) is not very cheering. But we are fighting this war for the survival or non-survival of our people."<sup>16</sup> Nazi propaganda successfully encouraged young men to enlist when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, but as fighting continued to drag on along with major defeats in the Soviet Union and North Africa by 1943 the German people became cynical of the propaganda.<sup>17</sup> Taking note of the public's growing indifference, Goebbels desired to mobilize the public and raise morale through

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<sup>13</sup>Russel Lemmons, *Goebbels and Der Angriff*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, (1994), 53.

<sup>14</sup>Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2-3, 4.

<sup>15</sup>Adolf Hitler, "Reichstag Speech" (speech, Berlin, Germany, January 30, 1939) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>16</sup>"Letter of SS-Obersturmführer Karl Kretschmer (Sk 4a0)," in the "*The Good Old Days*" *The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* by Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1991), 163.

<sup>17</sup>Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *Broken Lives: How Ordinary Germans Experienced the 20th Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 107-125.

increasing propaganda, despite the overabundance of it.<sup>18</sup> Goebbels and Hitler constantly took the pulse of German public opinion using SD reports and Nazi party reports so as to not lose popularity among the masses. SD reports were made annually while Nazi party situational reports were made monthly. The party chancellery reviewed the Nazi party situational reports, which were abundant early in the war but eventually tapered off and requested more detail after reading the reports or requested corrections. The SD reported the changing mood of the public but concealed negative reports from Hitler.<sup>19</sup> If Goebbels received negative reports, such as a Sopade report noting the German public's repulsion at the riots committed by Nazis during Reichskristallnacht, he ignored it and instead promoted the riots and boycotting through propaganda that made it appear as if the whole public supported these programs.<sup>20</sup> SD and Nazi party reports are not entirely reliable sources to determine the non-Jewish German public's opinion of Third Reich's policy as they struggled to hide any negativity felt by the public. Despite some Germans voicing criticism of the rioting during Reichskristallnacht, the SD did not report it but instead noted that the church did not criticize the violence that occurred on Kristallnacht.<sup>21</sup> However, an abundance of memoirs, diaries, letters, and interviews from non-Jewish Germans and Jewish Germans help to reveal how the German public responded to the Third Reich's policies against European Jewry.

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<sup>18</sup>Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 38.

<sup>19</sup>Aryeh L. Unger, "The Public Opinion Reports of the Nazi Party," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 29, no. 4, (1965), 508, 572-574.

<sup>20</sup>"Sopade: Reactions of the Populace to Reichskristallnacht," in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 383-384.

<sup>21</sup>Jonathan C. Friedman, "Hilfrich, as cited by Klaus Schatz, *Geschichte des Bistums Limburg (Mainz, 1983)*, 278; and in *Wippermann, Widerstand*, 71," in *The Lion and the Star: Gentile-Jewish Relations in Three Hessian Communities, 1919-1945*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 24-25.

When Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in 1933, he openly revealed his desire to push European Jews out of Europe but he did not yet reveal or formulate a plan to accomplish it, only that Europe needed to be rid of European Jews.<sup>22</sup> Hitler did not immediately initiate violent policies against Jewish Germans, as to not alienate himself from public approval, instead he gradually proceeded to violence by beginning with speeches railing against a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Germany, antisemitic propaganda, antisemitic legislation (the Nuremberg laws), the forced removal of Jews from society, and then organized mass murder (the Final Solution). In April of 1933 the Third Reich called for the boycott of Jewish businesses. Dr. Paula Tobias, a German Jew, describes in her memoir two young Nazis standing guard at her practice preventing patients from entering, she explained that the Nazis were embarrassed as they explained that they could not allow her to accept patients that day. She noted that the young Nazis were not rude or violent to herself or any patients, they only stood guard with their weapons and turned patients away.<sup>23</sup> The boycott of April 1, 1933, proved to be unsuccessful and ended after one day, though there were places in Berlin that experienced outbursts of violence towards Jewish Germans. Germans continued to not respond well to the Third Reich's call for a boycott, not because they were against the prejudice of Jews but because they needed to utilize Jewish German businesses. Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reichsbank, penned a letter asking if the boycott could be delayed for after the holidays as he feared it would affect the local economy.<sup>24</sup> German Jews were also beginning to be excluded from public life in April as Hanna Bergas, a German Jew,

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<sup>22</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism*, 86-87.

<sup>23</sup>“Memoir by Dr. Paula Tobias about Boycott of 1 April 1933,” in *Sources of the Holocaust*, edited by Steve Hochstadt (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, N.Y. 2004), 39.

<sup>24</sup>“Letter from Hjalmar Schacht,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, edited by A. Margaliot, Y. Arad, and Y. Gutman (Jerusalem, Israel, Oxford, England: Yad Vashem, 2014), 72-73.

recounted when she was let go as a teacher because of her Jewishness but the parents of her students brought her flowers and condolences for having lost her position.<sup>25</sup> Noting the lack of support from the non-Jewish German public for the boycott in April 1933, Goebbels increased the amount of antisemitic propaganda to sude public opinion in support for the Third Reich's policies. The Third Reich quickly transitioned from antisemitic rhetoric to anti-Jewish legislation by passing the Nuremberg laws that excluded German Jews from society, which was approved by the non-Jewish German public, then the Third Reich shifted towards public demonstrations of violence against German Jews.<sup>26</sup> Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking SS officer, ordered in 1938 a Reichskristallnacht, or a pogrom night, when Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues were to be damaged.<sup>27</sup>

Some scholars, like Daniel Jonah Goldhagen or Robert Gellately, offer a simplistic summary of German's response to the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies that most of the German public were extremely antisemitic and supported these policies. But other scholars like Christopher Browning and David Bankier argue that most Germans were not extremely antisemitic but their support for the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies stemmed from multiple sources like ideology, antisemitism, and peer pressure. Primary accounts from German Wehrmacht soldiers, SS soldiers, reserve police battalions, and civilians are some of the sources that will be examined to help determine the German public's opinion of anti-Jewish policies. For example, Catholic priests conscripted in the German military by the Third Reich served as

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<sup>25</sup>Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

<sup>26</sup>Jeffrey W. Murray, "Constructing the Ordinary: The Dialectical Development of Nazi Ideology," *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1, (1998).

<sup>27</sup>Reinhard Heydrich, "Instructions for Kristallnacht, (1938)" in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 376-378.

chaplains or aiding in medical units, however, some were forced to engage in battle. One such chaplain, Johannes Stelzenberger, wrote diary entries offering eyewitness testimonies of European Jews being used for forced labor and of their murder, “Every day here, thousands of Jews were shot.”<sup>28</sup> In his diary entries, Stelzenberger, does not criticize using Jews for forced labor or condemn their murder nor does he voice support for it he only described what he witnessed. Some scholars like Bankier or Browning may argue that he was desensitized by his time in service as chaplain or he was bought by antisemitic propaganda prior to conscription. Hermann Graebe provides another example of an “ordinary” German who witnesses and reacts to the murder of European Jews. Graebe is not a hardened soldier but a German engineer working in a small town in Ukraine. Graebe witnesses two thousand Jewish people, men, women, and children shot by Nazi soldiers. He describes the mass shooting of Jewish civilian in detail, “Without screaming or weeping these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells and waited for a sign from another SS man.... Then I heard a series of shots.”<sup>29</sup> He is shocked that he is not ordered away but he continues to witness the mass murder. He even shares about a young woman begging for him to help her escape, but he does not help. Graebe is shocked by the “tremendous grave” but if he had any condemnation for the murders, he kept it to himself.<sup>30</sup> The Reserve Police Battalions are another example of “ordinary” middle-aged Germans conscripted into service like the German Catholic priests but unlike the priests the police battalions willingly murdered European Jews. The police battalions

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<sup>28</sup>“Akte Stelzenberger, 19 October 1941,” in *Wehrmacht Priests: Catholicism and the Nazi War of Annihilation* by Lauren Faulkner Rossi (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 100-101.

<sup>29</sup>“Affidavit of Hermann Friedrich Graebe, 1945,” in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook an Anthology of Texts*, 357-359.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid 358.

serve as an example of some Germans who actively participated in the mass murder of Jews. Despite their initial shock and some even suffering nervous breakdowns, they participated in the mass murder of European Jews.<sup>31</sup> Even fewer were the Germans who resisted the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies. Hanns Peter Herz, a German Jew, describes a neighbor who worked at the Gestapo headquarters warning Herz and his family to flee before they could be rounded up and deported.<sup>32</sup> Another instance of resistance is detailed by Gertrude Staewen, a non-Jewish German, protestant woman, who actively undermined Nazi policy by hiding German Jews and providing them with food.<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Kellner, a non-Jewish German, voices his resistance and condemnation of the violent treatment of European Jews in his autobiography, *My Opposition: The Diary of Friedrich Kellner- A German Against the Third Reich*. In his diary, Kellner describes hearing rumors of European Jews being murdered in the east and openly condemns it.<sup>34</sup> Helmut Thielicke is another German clergyman who lived under the Third Reich and protested its policies, specifically, the Third Reich's violent policies against European Jews. He witnessed the violence committed against German Jews and details his disgust and resistance by aiding German Jews he had seen mistreated.<sup>35</sup> Though the German public's response to the Third Reich's violent policies ranged from active participation to active resistance, the most common response can be viewed in Albert Speer's memoir, *Inside the Third Reich*. Albert Speer, the

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<sup>31</sup>Thomas Kuhne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 58.

<sup>32</sup>Hanns Peter Herz, "This is the most Beautiful Country in the World, but it had Some Nasty People for a While," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 304.

<sup>33</sup>Gertrude Staewen, "We Stole Groceries and Put Other People Up to Stealing for Us," in *Voices from the Third Reich*, 322-324.

<sup>34</sup>Victor Klemperer and Martin Chalmers, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 5.

<sup>35</sup>Helmut Thielicke, David R. Law, and H. George Anderson. *Notes from a Wayfarer: The Autobiography of Helmut Thielicke*. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1984).

Minister of Armaments and War Production, worked directly under Hitler. He described himself as not being antisemitic because he had Jewish friends, regardless, he was part of the Nazi party and used Jewish forced labor for his factories.<sup>36</sup> He did not condemn the use of forced labor or the Nuremberg laws, but he did describe feeling unsettled at witnessing a Jewish family going to their deaths.<sup>37</sup> His response was common among many non-Jewish Germans, they supported antisemitic legislation but condemned the Third Reich's use of violence against Jews.

The study by historians on the German public's response to the Third Reich's policies began in the 1950s, as the Cold War began to unfold in the aftermath of a devastated Germany or Europe as a whole, traditional historians answered the questions of German opinion by proposing that the people of Germany were uniquely extreme in their antisemitism and their culture of violent antisemitism resulted in blind support for the Third Reich's extermination policies, as the Germans eagerly supported the Third Reich's violent anti-Jewish policies that led to the Final Solution or systematic mass murder of European Jews and other minorities.<sup>38</sup> The traditional school of thought that argued Nazi Germany was unique as it held to an extreme form of antisemitism, shifted as historians studied how other factors like the inundation of Nazi propaganda and fear of the Third Reich's totalitarian government affected German support for anti-Jewish policies. New Left historians proposed that most of the non-Jewish German population supported anti-Jewish policies because of coercion from an oppressive regime and constant inundation of propaganda pumped out to the public. The historiography on German support for anti-Jewish policies shifted again in the 1990s as Goldhagen revived the traditionalist

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<sup>36</sup>Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, Bronx, (NY: Ishi Press International, 2009), 162.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, 25.

<sup>38</sup>Simon Taylor and Tom Stammers, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, first ed, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 54-57.

school of thought of the German public's response, while Browning and other historians argued against this traditional school of thought.

Christopher R. Browning, a Frank Porter Graham Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Carolina, specializing in Holocaust studies has written numerous works on the Third Reich and the Holocaust. Christopher Browning's most popular work, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992), challenged the traditionalist argument that ordinary, non-Jewish Germans were especially extreme, violent antisemites. Instead, Browning proposed a theory that most non-Jewish Germans, those who were not soldiers or SS men, ordinary citizens of the Third Reich supported anti-Jewish policies and even willingly participated in the mass killing of European Jewry because they were obeying authority and capitulated to peer pressure, or feared being considered cowards.<sup>39</sup> Ian Kershaw, a Holocaust historian, supported Browning's thesis with a similar argument that "ordinary" Germans were influenced by many factors contributing to their support of anti-Jewish policies and involvement in the Final Solution. The only criticism Kershaw received was not using more recent primary sources that were available at the time of his writing his argument.<sup>40</sup> Browning did not argue that obeying authority and peer pressure was the sole reason most ordinary Germans supported anti-Jewish policies, he briefly analyzed how long-held antisemitism and the dehumanization of European Jewry by the Nazi regime did affect the non-Jewish German support for violent measures against European Jews. However, he argued against the theories that ordinary Germans supported these violent measures and were perpetrators solely out of fear

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<sup>39</sup>Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992),170-171, 175.

<sup>40</sup>Paul B. Jaskot, "Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3, 2010.

of repercussion by the Third Reich or they were controlled by the inundation of Nazi propaganda. Browning proposed that most Germans chose to support violent, anti-Jewish policies stemming from the motivation to obey authority and capitulate to peer pressure.

Browning's school of thought on non-Jewish German's support for the Final Solution was quickly refuted by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's controversial work, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. Like Browning, Goldhagen sought to examine how the ordinary, non-Jewish German—neither a soldier nor SS man—could support the Third Reich's violent, anti-Jewish policies and like Browning Goldhagen chose to use the Reserve Police Battalion 101 as his case study. Goldhagen argues the traditional school of thought that the German culture, even before the Third Reich's rule, was especially extreme in their antisemitism which led to widespread support by the German public for the Third Reich's violent, anti-Jewish policies which directly contributed to the Holocaust.<sup>41</sup> Goldhagen's outdated and generalized theory was criticized by many historians, including Browning, Simon, Taylor, Kershaw, among others. Goldhagen received the most criticism for drawing his conclusion on the non-Jewish German support of the Third Reich's violent policies from only one source.<sup>42</sup> By the 1990s historians had moved away from the traditionalist school of thought Goldhagen argued for and sought to view the Holocaust and German support, not as a uniquely German led genocide. Instead, historians sought to understand it from a wider context in the backdrop of other genocides. Goldhagen's argument was criticized for oversimplifying the complexities of non-Jewish German support of the Third Reich's violent, anti-Jewish policies, and was

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<sup>41</sup>Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 13.

<sup>42</sup>Daniel E. Rogers, "Murder in our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation / Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust," *National Forum* 77, no. 1, 1997.

questioned as to why mass murder occurred during the Third Reich and not before if the German people and culture held to exterminationist antisemitism prior to the Third Reich's rule.<sup>43</sup> Despite these criticisms *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* received international acclaim as Goldhagen was granted a Democracy award from Germany for his work. Currently, Goldhagen's argument is rejected by most historians, however, his idea is considered in the study of how ideology influences people and their opinions.<sup>44</sup>

As Goldhagen's traditional approach on German support for the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies battled with Browning's work, David Bankier proposed a similar school of thought as Browning. David Bankier was a Holocaust historian and head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem. Bankier's work, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (1992), uses reports from Nazi security service and from spies analyzing German public support for the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies. Like Browning, Bankier argues against the school of thought that the German public was brainwashed by Nazi propaganda. Instead, the German public became desensitized by the inundation of propaganda.<sup>45</sup> Bankier also argues against the idea that the German public acquiesced to the Third Reich's policies solely out of fear as the non-Jewish Germans voiced their dissatisfaction with Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, when Germans were mandated to destroy Jewish homes and businesses.<sup>46</sup> Bankier continued to dispel myths that the German public were ignorant of the mass killing of European Jewry as he cited letters written by German soldiers sent home to family detailing mass shootings of the Jewish population in eastern towns, instead, he alleges

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<sup>43</sup>Simon Taylor and Tom Stammers, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 54-57.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 61-62.

<sup>45</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 20-22.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid, 73.

that the German public was aware of the Third Reich's intentions to murder all European Jewry, but was unaware of the methods used. He argues that public opinion did exist in the Third Reich, as people publicly voiced their criticisms with certain actions taken by the Third Reich, such as when most of the German public condemned the euthanasia program. Bankier argues that the majority of the non-Jewish Germans consented to violent policies against European Jewry as long as these measures did not directly affect Germans or harm their nation's reputation abroad.<sup>47</sup> Bankier's work did not receive wide-spread criticism like Goldhagen's work but it was noted by other historians for the lack of supporting evidence he had for his theory that the German people were in fact aware of the mass killings of European Jewry as he proposed that Germans refused to believe it.<sup>48</sup> Bankier's thesis and Browning's thesis both support the school of thought that the Germans under the Third Reich were not a uniquely, different culture in Europe in regards to their antisemitism. Though both differ in their motivation, their arguments converge on the idea that most Germans with varying degrees of antisemitic prejudice supported the Third Reich's exterminationist policies.

Robert Gellately's work, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, was written several years after Browning, Bankier, and Goldhagen made their arguments for why the majority of Germans supported the Third Reich's violent, anti-Jewish measures. Gellately proposed that most non-Jewish Germans willingly consented to antisemitic policies, even when it led to violence, but he also argued that the German public was coerced to be complicit through intimidation and propaganda. Lawrence D. Stokes supported Gellately's conclusion that most Germans were not opposed to the Third Reich's violent measures but he argues that they were

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid, 74.

<sup>48</sup>David M. Luebke, "The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism," *Shofar*. 12, no. 3, (1994), 124-125.

coerced more from the media than fear of Hitler's dictatorship.<sup>49</sup> Noel D. Cary concurs that the media and propaganda were the key causes of support rather than force from the Third Reich.<sup>50</sup> Gellately's and Goldhagen's works are similar to each other as both argue that the German public were complicit in supporting the Final Solution, and they are both criticized for not lending more credence to the propaganda used to influence the German public.<sup>51</sup>

The historiography on non-Jewish German support of anti-Jewish policies has shifted from viewing it as exceptionally German to viewing it in a wider context of genocide. Browning and Bankier both argue that German responses and support for the Final Solution under the Third Reich came from ordinary Germans, and they are not any different from the people of today. Goldhagen's traditional school of thought and even Gellately's argument, is no longer popular today. It is in direct conflict with historians like Browning and Bankier because they argue that the Germans in Nazi Germany were unique in their exterminationist antisemitism that led to their eager support of mass murder.<sup>52</sup> Browning used the Reserve Police Battalion 101 as a case study to surmise German support for the Final Solution and Bankier provided an in-depth study of SD (Nazi security service) and spy reports to determine German public opinion. A comprehensive approach needs to be taken in the study of German public opinion under the Third Reich. German public opinion of the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies cannot be attributed to one sole factor, antisemitism and propaganda are only some of the factors that influenced German public

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<sup>49</sup>Lawrence D. Stokes, "Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany," *Canadian Journal of History*, No. 3 (2002), 37.

<sup>50</sup>Noel D. Cary, "Antisemitism, Everyday Life, and the Devastation of Public Morals in Nazi Germany." *Central European History* 35, no. 4 (2002), 555.

<sup>51</sup>Alexander J. Groth, "Demonizing the Germans: Goldhagen and Gellately on Nazism," *Political Science Reviewer* 32, 2003.

<sup>52</sup>Wulf Kansteiner, "From Exception to Exemplum: The New Approach to Nazism and the "Final Solution"," *History and Theory* 33, no. 2, (1994), 146-156.

opinion. Historians like Bankier and Browning portrayed the German public's response as static, their response remained the same throughout the duration of the Third Reich, but most of the German public's response changed with the Third Reich's shifting policies toward European Jewry.

The response by the non-Jewish German public to the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies ranged from actively supporting violent measures to resistance. It would be an error to attribute the German public's response to one factor as Goldhagen and Gellately show. Instead, many factors contributed to the public's opinion including long-held antisemitism, and propaganda serving as a vehicle for Nazi ideology. Nazi ideology and propaganda used antisemitism as a bridge to influence the public. The German public's changing opinion toward the Third Reich must also be considered as it did not remain stagnant but rose and receded in concert with the events of the war. Hitler never hid his hostility or his plan to remove European Jews from Europe since taking control of Germany in 1933, but the removal of European Jews through mass murder was not fully realized by Hitler until 1941.<sup>53</sup> As the Third Reich transitioned from antisemitic rhetoric to violence, memoirs by Germans, civilians and soldiers, and SD reports show that the majority of non-Jewish Germans supported antisemitic legislation and rhetoric but criticized the Third Reich's use of violence prior to 1941.<sup>54</sup> After 1941, when German Jews were isolated and removed from Germany and as stories of mass murder reached most of the German public their response shifted from abhorrence to ambivalence.

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<sup>53</sup>Christopher R. Browning, "The Nazi Decision to Commit Mass Murder: Three Interpretations: The Euphoria of Victory and the Final Solution: Summer-Fall 1941," *German Studies Review* 17, no. 3, (1994), 477-478.

<sup>54</sup>Julie Dawn Freeman, "German Public Opinion and the Persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945, as Reflected in Memoir Literature," Order No. 9228046, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1992.

## Chapter Two: The German Public's Response to Antisemitism and Nazi Propaganda, 1933-1940

That they are content merely to reject it makes them equally responsible for the agony of our Jewish fellowmen, for the horrible physical and spiritual suffering inflicted upon them merely because they are Jews. It is not sufficient to reject anti-Semitism. It is the duty of all good Christians to take an active part against it...

Irene Harand, *Hitler's Lies: An Answer to Hitler's Mein Kampf*

When Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, he promoted an antisemitic ideology deeming Jewish Germans racially inferior and undesirable. This antisemitic ideology was not new. Antisemitism pre-existed the Nazis but it changed over time. Jewish-hatred can be traced to the Middle Ages in Europe and over the centuries it shifted from hatred against European Jews based on religion to hatred based on race. The long-held antisemitism in Germany paired with the inundation of Nazi ideology through propaganda created an atmosphere of acceptance among the German public for the Third Reich's antisemitic policies. The majority of the non-Jewish German public, influenced by deeply rooted antisemitism and by Nazi propaganda, supported the Reich's antisemitic legislation but not state-led violence. Most of the German public's reactions stemmed in part from a long history of antisemitism that primed the German people for a state-sponsored campaign that evolved from discrimination to genocide.

Animosity toward the Jewish people existed long before the Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933. The feelings of hatred towards the Jewish people in Europe stretches as far back as the Middle Ages when Judaism existed as a minority religion in a Roman Catholic world. Catholics oppressed European Jews for rejecting Christ as their messiah and accused them of being "Christ killers."<sup>55</sup> The first major outburst of organized violence, also referred to as a pogrom, occurred in Northwest Europe during the First Crusade in 1096 when a mob murdered a

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<sup>55</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 13.

village of Jews accusing them of being “Christ killers.”<sup>56</sup> In the mid-twelfth century some Catholics accused Jews of performing ritual murders on Christian children. Then in the mid-thirteenth century Jews were accused of using Christian children’s blood for the Jewish holiday of Passover.<sup>57</sup> Jews in Europe existed under severe restrictions. They were limited to certain occupations and limited on the kinds of clothes they wore. A special tax was levied on Jewish people in central eastern Europe. In the fourteenth century Jews were blamed for the Black Death that spread throughout Europe.<sup>58</sup> European Jews suffered expulsion from various places in Europe throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Jewish people in Spain and Portugal suffered persecution in the fifteenth century during the Spanish Inquisition. Laws regulating the lives of Jewish people in Europe continued through the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It was not until the nineteenth century that European Jews pursued their emancipation in central Europe as well as their full integration into European society.

By the nineteenth century, hatred for European Jewry based on religious differences shifted to a modern antisemitism that was based on “racial” differences.<sup>59</sup> Wilhelm Marr, an influential journalist and cultural historian, founded the Anti-semites League. He developed the term “anti-semitism” and in a pamphlet he wrote in 1879 promoted the idea of a Jewish conspiracy against Germany:

Foreign rule has been thrust upon us. 1800 years lasted the battle against Jewish domination, which hardly ever strayed from its biblical tradition. The Semitic people suffered unspeakably. . . . it [Jewry] corrupted society in all of its aspects, squeezed all idealism out of it, occupies the most controlling influence in trade and daily life, penetrates ever more into public office, controls the theater, forms a

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid, 14. The accusation of Jews draining Christian children of their blood was called blood libel and was proven to be a myth.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid 14, 23.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid, 33.

social-political front and has left almost nothing for you, except raw labor which it itself has always shunned; it has transformed talent into shiny virtuosity, pimpish advertising into the goddess of public opinion and --- rules you today.<sup>60</sup>

A German philosopher, Eugen Duhring, was also influential in promoting the idea of a “scientific” form of racial antisemitism in 1881 in his work, *The Jewish Question as a Racial, Moral, and Cultural Problem*.<sup>61</sup> This “scientific” form of racial antisemitism developed from the study of eugenics which was part of the larger movement of Social Darwinism and its pursuit of the “struggle for survival.” Charles B. Davenport, an influential American eugenicist, explained eugenics as the science for improving humanity through “better breeding.”<sup>62</sup> Like in the United States, German eugenicists defined the population’s worth based on whether an individual was considered superior or inferior.<sup>63</sup> Even though eugenics was later found to be unscientific, at the turn of the twentieth century eugenics was seen as a legitimate science used to argue the superiority or inferiority of other races.<sup>64</sup> Germany and other powers like England used the idea of a racial hierarchy to justify colonizing other countries. For instance, Germany in 1884 mistreated the Herero and Nama people while colonizing German Southwest Africa, current day Namibia, and used the eugenics idea of a racial hierarchy to justify oppressing them.<sup>65</sup>

As the eugenics movement grew in western and central Europe during the late nineteenth century, European Jews pushed for legislation that would grant Jews equality. In western Europe Jewish emancipation was based on the belief that every human deserves individual rights. But

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<sup>60</sup>Wilhelm Marr, “The Victory of Judaism over Germany,” translated by Gerhard Rohringer, 8th edition (Bern, Rudolph Costenoble, 2009), 24.

<sup>61</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 57.

<sup>62</sup>Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, 3-4.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid, 9.

<sup>64</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 62-63.

<sup>65</sup>Elizabeth R. Baer, *The Genocidal Gaze: From German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich*, (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 2017), 9-10.

then in central Europe Jewish emancipation could only be achieved if European Jews gave up their “Jewishness.”<sup>66</sup> Yet as full emancipation for European Jews in central Europe were being advanced, Duhring and Marr promoted the eugenicist's idea of separating European Jews based on race rather than religion and viewing them as an inferior people. Otto von Bismarck, prime minister of Prussia, declared that Jews cannot be “real” Germans because of their ethnicity and religion.<sup>67</sup>

Blaming European Jewry for ills experienced by society continued from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. However, this time in the nineteenth and twentieth century the scapegoating of European Jews was used as a tool in politics.<sup>68</sup> Karl Lueger, founder of the Christian Social party in Austria and mayor of Vienna in 1897 to 1910, accused Austrian Jews of robbing job opportunities from the middle and lower classes of struggling non-Jewish Austrians.<sup>69</sup> Lueger constantly used Jews as scapegoats in his political speeches. Years later, Hitler recalled the dramatic impact Lueger had on his own views toward the Jews:

At all events, these occasions slowly made me acquainted with the man and the movement, which in those days guided Vienna's destinies: Dr. Karl Lueger and the Christian Social Party. When I arrived in Vienna, I was hostile to both of them. The man and the movement seemed ‘reactionary’ in my eyes. My common sense of justice, however, forced me to change this judgment in proportion as I had occasion to become acquainted with the man and his work; and slowly my fair judgment turned to unconcealed admiration.

The stirring of ethnic based nationalism became a roadblock for Jewish integration into central European society. When World War I erupted, European Jewry felt a momentary reprieve from hostilities as all able-bodied men were needed in the war effort. However, by 1918 the

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<sup>66</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 17, 33,

<sup>67</sup>Ibid, 64-65.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, 67.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, 68-71.

reprieve ended as Jews were once again used as scapegoats and were blamed for Germany's loss in World War I.<sup>70</sup> The myth of a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Europe was revived as European Jews were accused of betraying Germany and Austria during World War I. Violence towards Jewry in parts of Europe erupted. In Hungary, during and shortly after the Aster Revolution in October of 1918, Hungarian Jews were killed in pogroms across the country. Then in 1919 to 1921 Hungarian Jews were murdered in another round of pogroms during the White Terror.<sup>71</sup> Numerous pogroms occurred in Galicia, Hungary, Bohemia, and Moravia as old hostilities toward European Jews were resurrected.<sup>72</sup> The Central powers following the end of World War I endured an economic crisis as they suffered hyperinflation in the early 1920s. Politicians returned to antisemitic policies as central Europe struggled economically.<sup>73</sup> In the latter half of the 1920s, Jews in Germany and Austria were able to take a breath from antisemitic hostility as they attained positions in academia at a faster rate than before World War I but their achievement would not last as Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in 1933. Hitler and the Nazi party rose to power when President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany. Prior to the Nazi party's seizure of power, they never gained a majority of popular votes when federal elections were held.<sup>74</sup> Once President von Hindenburg and other governing authorities had acquiesced to Hitler, he transformed Germany into a dictatorship.

Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi party, before coming to power in 1933 accused Jewish people of taking part in an international conspiracy against Germans. Hitler believed that both

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid, 78-79.

<sup>71</sup>Michael L. Miller, "The Forgotten Pogroms, 1918," (*Slavic Review*, no. 3, 2019), 648-649.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 81.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid, 86-88.

Jewish communists and capitalists planned to harm Germany.<sup>75</sup> The Nazi party was not the only antisemitic political party at the time as both the Pan-German League and Austrian Pan-German League also had antisemitic platforms. The National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) or the Nazi party, promised the German people that they would reverse the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, they would pull Germany from the Great Depression, and establish Germany as a world power. Along with these promises the rhetoric of the burgeoning Nazi party was rife with antisemitic messages. The party's designs toward German Jews were made clear in its founding documents:

The Ostjuden must be got rid of without delay, and ruthless measures must be taken immediately against all other Jews. Such measures might be, for instance, the introduction of lists of Jews in every city or community, the immediate removal of Jews from all Government employment, newspaper offices, theaters, cinemas, etc.; in short, the Jew must be deprived of all possibilities to continue to make his disastrous influence felt. In order that the unemployed Semites cannot secretly undermine us and agitate against us, they should be placed in collecting camps...<sup>76</sup>

The antisemitic, Nazi ideology saw no place for European Jews as they were considered outsiders and not true Germans or Aryans. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler describes the struggle of Aryans for living space in Europe against European Jewry and other minorities Hitler viewed as undesirable.<sup>77</sup> The Nazi party ran for election in 1928 to 1933 as they failed to obtain a majority of votes in the Reichstag. After the November 1932 elections, President von Hindenburg made Hitler chancellor of Germany a few months later in January 1933. Hitler effectively consolidated

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<sup>75</sup>Albrecht Koschorke and Susan H. Gillespie, "Ideology in Execution: On Hitler's 'Mein Kampf,'" (*New German Critique*, no. 124, 2015), 8.

<sup>76</sup>"Anti-Jewish Plans of the Nazis Published Before Their Rise to Power, 1920," in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 19.

<sup>77</sup>Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 4th edition, Translated by Ralph Manheim, (Houghton Mifflin Company: New York, 1971), 646.

all governmental authority to himself and by passing the Enabling Acts in March 1933 Hitler could establish laws without passing it through a parliamentary body.<sup>78</sup> Through the Enabling acts Hitler was able to legalize discrimination and abuse of European Jews. A state sanctioned boycott of Jewish businesses began on April 1, 1933.<sup>79</sup> The Nazi party called for the boycott and gave instructions for how to proceed with the boycott, “The principle must be that no German will any longer buy from a Jew or allow Jews or their agents to recommend goods. The boycott must be general. It must be carried out by the whole nation and must hit the Jews in their most sensitive spot.”<sup>80</sup> However, the “whole nation” did not participate. The boycott was largely opposed by the German people leading Hitler to reverse the failed policy after only a day. Two years later in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws revoked Jewish Germans of their citizenship and redefining German citizenship as those who are of full German blood. Intermarriage between “Aryans” and non-German Jews was prohibited.<sup>81</sup> The Nuremberg Laws further codified Jewish ethnicity and legalized discrimination against Jews. Major mass violence against Jewish Germans occurred in March 1938 when the non-Jewish Austrians who supported the “annex” of Austria reacted in celebration by rioting against Jewish homes and businesses.<sup>82</sup> Hitler condoned the violence setting a precedent for continued acts of violence towards Jews without fear of legal repercussions.<sup>83</sup> Antisemitic legislation and outbursts of violence were not enough as the Third

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<sup>78</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 86.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid, 68.

<sup>80</sup>“Organization of the Anti-Jewish Boycott of April 1, 1933- Instructions Given by the National Socialist Party,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 32-35.

<sup>81</sup>“Nuremberg Laws on Reich Citizenship, September 15, 1935,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 77.

<sup>82</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 88.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid, 88-89.

Reich pursued policies to force Jews out of Germany, specifically Jews who had immigrated to Germany from parts of eastern Europe before 1933. Some Jewish Germans attempted to leave Germany but could not afford to as the Third Reich placed a heavy tax on Jews trying to emigrate.<sup>84</sup> The violence towards Jews in Germany and Austria escalated when the murder of a German diplomat in Paris by a Jewish young man, Herschel Grynszpan, was used as an excuse to attack Jewish people, their businesses, homes, and places of worship.<sup>85</sup> Rioting against Jewish Germans occurred in early November but an organized pogrom, Kristallnacht, was officially sanctioned by Reinhard Heydrich, chief of Reich Security and high ranking SS official. Heydrich ordered Jewish businesses and apartments damaged. Police were restricted from preventing attacks on Jewish buildings.<sup>86</sup> From Hitler's rise to power in 1933 to the start of World War II on September 1, 1939, Jewish Germans and non-Jewish Germans witnessed the gradual shifting of antisemitic rhetoric and legislation to state sanctioned violence, but the Third Reich's antisemitic policies would not end with riots and deportations. The war in Europe from 1939 to 1945 enabled the expansion of Nazi antisemitic policies from discrimination and intimidation to organized mass murder.

In early 1933 when legislation was passed in March removing Jewish Germans from civil service occupations the German public responded with support as the newly vacant positions provided job opportunities for non-Jewish Germans.<sup>87</sup> A month later when a state sanctioned boycott was called the non-Jewish German public did not support the violence that occurred

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid, 92.

<sup>85</sup>Alan E. Steinweis, "The Trials of Herschel Grynszpan: Anti-Jewish Policy and German Propaganda, 1938-1942," *German Studies Review* 31, no. 3 (2008), 471.

<sup>86</sup>Reinhard Heydrich, "Instructions for Kristallnacht, 1938," in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 231-232.

<sup>87</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 68.

during the boycott and the boycott itself, as the German public feared the potential economic harm it would have on the already struggling economy.<sup>88</sup> Dr. Paula Tobias describes the boycott of April 1, 1933 at her and her husband's practice and how young Nazis took turns blocking patients from entering. She describes the young men as non-violent and had an "embarrassed manner" when they explained what they were doing and patients continued to come and "easily sneaked in."<sup>89</sup> Unlike the majority of Germans opposing the boycott, Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda and devoted follower of Hitler, viewed the boycott of April 1, 1933 differently:

The boycott against the international atrocity propaganda has burst forth in full force in Berlin and the whole Reich...The boycott is a great moral victory for Germany. We have shown the world abroad that we can call up the entire nation without thereby causing the least turbulence or excesses. The Führer has once more struck the right note...The effects of the boycott are already clearly noticeable. The world is gradually coming to its senses.<sup>90</sup>

Goebbels believed the boycott was successful but in his diary entry for April 1st he stated that the boycott would end at midnight, however, he did not say why it was called off because of the lack of participation.<sup>91</sup> Though most Germans did not participate in the boycott some did participate by blocking customers from entering Jewish businesses. The boycott of April 1, 1933 was a failure for the Nazi party due to the lack of action by the majority of the German public. The boycott lasted a day because most non-Jewish Germans continued giving Jewish Germans

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid, 68-69.

<sup>89</sup>Paula Tobias, "Memoir by Dr. Paula Tobias about Boycott of 1 April 1933," in *Sources of the Holocaust* edited by Steve Hochstadt, 39-41.

<sup>90</sup>Joseph Goebbels, "From Goebbels Diary on the Boycott, 1933," in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 35-36.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

business rather than boycotting many businesses which Germans believed would harm the economy.

The Third Reich received a more favorable response from the public by passing antisemitic legislation than in antisemitic boycotts and violence. As a totalitarian government the Third Reich did not need public approval for its actions, but it did want to convince the German public that their actions against European Jewry were justified and it was to the Third Reich's advantage that antisemitism preexisted them.<sup>92</sup> Though most Germans approved of antisemitic legislation a slim minority actively voiced their dissent at all the Third Reich's antisemitic policies like Irene Harand.

Irene Harand was an Austrian leader in Vienna who toured Austria and England giving lectures criticizing the Nazis. Harand refuted the Nazi's antisemitic ideology of racial purity by arguing that there is no such thing as a pure race. She also deconstructed the lies of Jewish usury and blood libel which the Nazis spread in propaganda.<sup>93</sup> Harand wrote on the antisemitic legislation created by the Third Reich and noted several years before the Nuremberg race laws were established, "It is self-evident that if a legislator designates a group as inferior, its neighbors, competitors and others will treat it as inferior. Germany has become a hell for the Jews who must remain there."<sup>94</sup> Harand was not alone in publicly voicing dissent against the Third Reich and its antisemitic policies. Both protestant and catholic clergy such as Deitrich

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<sup>92</sup>David Welch, "Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a 'National Community' (Volksgemeinschaft)," 2.

<sup>93</sup>Irene Harand, *Hitler's Lies: An Answer to Hitler's Mein Kampf*, 3rd edition, (Jaico Publishing House: Mumbai, 2011), 42.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid, 221.

Bonhoeffer and Bernhard Lichtenberg publicly voiced their dissent through sermons and writings.<sup>95</sup>

Irene Harand and others who publicly protested all the Third Reich's antisemitic policies were the minority. The response seen in 1933 of non-Jewish Germans supporting legislation but not violence against German Jews was continued in the years leading up to the war. A 1935 Gestapo report concluded, "It is noteworthy that, whenever there are actions against the Jews, these emanate chiefly from members of the party and its affiliated organizations, whereas the majority of the population shows little participation in the Jewish question."<sup>96</sup> In Berlin the president of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht, wrote a letter to the Reich Minister of Economics asking him to halt the boycott of Jewish businesses as Schacht was concerned over the effect it would have on the economy. A meeting was held by the Party Representative Wagner, the Reich Minister of the Interior, and Secretary of the State to discuss Schacht's letter and it was noted that Schacht's protest violent boycotts of Jewish business was not because he favored Jews rather, he was concerned for the economy, "Schacht rejected any suggestion that he might be called pro-Jewish. All he was doing was to point out the results for his field of operations of irresponsible incitement against the Jews."<sup>97</sup> Despite the German public's aversion to violence against Jewish Germans, the Reich continued encouraging outbursts of violence. In 1937 a Sopade report was completed on a Catholic teacher who was anti-Nazi but supported antisemitic legislation: "The Jews are for her another world. It is true that she finds barbarian their

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<sup>95</sup>Doris L. Bergen, "Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany," *Central European History* 27, no. 3 (1995), 346.

<sup>96</sup>"Gestapo Kiel, report July 1935," in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 71.

<sup>97</sup>"Recommendation by Schacht to Prevent Damage to Jewish Places of Business, June 1935," in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 72-73.

persecution and economic extermination. But she would think reasonable the introduction of a numerus clausus[sic] and certain limitations on candidacy for the civil service.”<sup>98</sup>

Antisemitic legislation began before the infamous Nuremberg race laws in 1935 with German Jews being removed from civil service positions in 1933, but they were still legally considered citizens. The Jewish Germans' citizenship changed in 1935 when the Third Reich established citizenship based on race. To advance the Nazi ideology of preserving a racially pure Germany the Reich enacted the Nuremberg race laws. Marriages between Aryans and Jews were forbidden as well as extra-marital intercourse. Existing marriages between Jews and Aryans could be annulled by the state. Jews could not hire Germans under the age of forty-five to work in their homes and Jews could not display the Nazi flag.<sup>99</sup> Hitler then gave a speech to the German public explaining why the Nuremberg laws were necessary:

. . . The only way to deal with the problem which remains open is that of legislative action. The German Government is in this controlled by the thought that through a single secular solution it may be possible still to create a level ground [eine Ebene] on which the German people may find a tolerable relation towards the Jewish people. Should this hope not be fulfilled and the Jewish agitation both within Germany and in the international sphere should continue, then the position must be examined afresh. . . Behind all three laws there stands the National-Socialist Party and with it and supporting it stands the German nation.<sup>100</sup>

Most of the German public supported the Nuremberg Laws believing that with the status of German Jews now being codified, legal precedence would quell the violent outbursts against

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<sup>98</sup> “Sopade, Feb 1937, A 22”, in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 69-71.

<sup>99</sup> “Nuremberg Laws on Reich Citizenship, September 15, 1935,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 77.

<sup>100</sup> “Extracts from Hitler’s Speech on the Importance of the Nuremberg Laws, at a Meeting of Party Leaders, September 1935,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 81.

German Jews.<sup>101</sup> A Gestapo report in Berlin reveals it's determination of the public mood on these laws: "Jewry is converted into a national minority and gets through state protection the possibility to develop its own cultural and national life."<sup>102</sup> More of the non-Jewish German public supported the new antisemitic legislation found in the Nuremberg Laws. Peter Cullman, who survived the Holocaust as a child, shared the strains the Nuremberg Laws created for his parent's marriage. His mother was Jewish and his father was not. In Peter's memoir he describes his father struggling with the prejudice he received from others for marrying a Jewish woman.<sup>103</sup> Some Nazis argued that the new laws did not go far enough in segregation of Jews from German society while even fewer voiced dissent against the antisemitic laws in its entirety.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the lack of support from most of the German public for state sanctioned boycotts, the Third Reich continued with this policy, especially, when the Reich used the murder of diplomat vom Rath by a Jewish young man as an excuse to attack Jewish business and homes. German supporters of the Third Reich's antisemitic policies took vom Rath's murder by a Jewish man to excuse furthering antisemitic policies. A protestant flier declared that the same "Jewish volk" that killed Christ killed vom Rath.<sup>105</sup> The Catholic clergyman, Donald Dietrich, and the protestant pastor, Martin Niemoller, both prominent men delivered sermons against European Jewry and perpetuated the Nazi rhetoric that Jews were, "Christ killers."<sup>106</sup> The murder of vom

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<sup>101</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 77.

<sup>102</sup>"Gestapo Berlin, report Sep. 1935, BA, R 58/513," in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* by David Bankier, 78.

<sup>103</sup>Peter Cullman, *Clandestinely: 1943-1945*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Washington D.C. 2009, 1.

<sup>104</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 78-79.

<sup>105</sup>Doris L. Bergen, "Catholics, Protestants, and Christian Antisemitism in Nazi Germany," 331-332.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid, 334.

Rath served as fodder in antisemitic rhetoric and was to justify the widespread violence witnessed in Reichskristallnacht.

The non-Jewish German public demonstrated a stronger response during the Kristallnacht pogrom than in the April 1, 1933 boycott. As discriminatory laws excluding Jewish Germans from the Third Reich continued to increase, violence by the Third Reich also increased when the first pogrom, Kristallnacht, was ordered by the Third Reich. April 1, 1933 was an economic boycott sanctioned by the Third Reich, however, Kristallnacht became the first pogrom. Ernest Fontheim, a Jewish German, was a boy when he and his classmates witnessed the destruction of Kristallnacht. “When I entered my classroom, some of my classmates were telling horror stories of what they had seen on their way to school like smashed store windows of Jewish-owned shops, looting mobs, and even burning synagogues.”<sup>107</sup> Fontheim describes being dismissed from school and on his way home watching a synagogue he attended burn. Fontheim does not say that there were only one or two Nazis protesting as Dr. Paula Tobias described in her memoir of the April 1, 1933 boycott. Instead, he explains that a “hostile crowd” formed and shouted antisemitic slurs and then joined in attacking a Jewish ground-floor apartment.<sup>108</sup> Y.S. Herz, a German Jew, describes the Nazi attack during Kristallnacht that targeted the orphanage he ran and how he went to the police for protection against the crowds rioting but was turned away.<sup>109</sup> Like Fontheim, Anita Dittman, a Jewish German, survived the Holocaust as a child and recounts events of Kristallnacht in her autobiography. Her and her mother were warned by a non-Jewish

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<sup>107</sup>Ernest G. Fontheim, *A Personal Memoir of Kristallnacht*, Leo Baeck Institute Archives, 1998, 8.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>109</sup>Y.S. Herz, “Description of the Riot at Dinslaken,” in *Documents on the Holocaust : Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 104-107.

neighbor to stay and hide in their apartment because a widespread riot against Jews was taking place in their city. Dittman and her mother hid in their apartment for five days and listened to non-stop sirens as synagogues burned and thousands of Jews were arrested.<sup>110</sup> Compared to the boycott of 1933, the pogrom of 1938 saw large participation by Nazi party members. It was not until after the pogrom when damaged had been to homes and businesses causing non-Jewish Germans insurance to rise to cover the damage did the German public condemn the violence, not because they favored Jewish Germans, but because of the financial repercussions and the time the public would have to spend cleaning up the damage.<sup>111</sup>

Antisemitism was firmly rooted in German society but it was not the only factor that influenced the public's acceptance of antisemitic policy. Propaganda also played a role in influencing the German public to support the Reich's actions against European Jews. Propaganda acted as a tool for the Reich to disseminate its Nazi ideology among the masses. Nazi propaganda perpetuated antisemitic myths and Nazi rhetoric against European Jews. Hitler recognized the influence propaganda had over the public if used effectively.<sup>112</sup> Hitler's devoted disciple, Joseph Goebbels, also recognized the effectiveness of well-crafted propaganda as a tool to prompt Nazi ideology on race as he launched a series of antisemitic attacks on European Jews in the media. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, created a series of antisemitic essays and pamphlets presenting the invasion of Poland in 1939 as a war against a Jewish international

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<sup>110</sup>Anita Dittman, and Jan Markell, *Trapped in Hitler's Hell: A Young Jewish Girl Discovers the Messiah's Faithfulness in the Midst of the Holocaust*, 4th edition, (WND Books: Washington D.C. 2014) 27-29.

<sup>111</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 86-87.

<sup>112</sup>Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 180.

conspiracy against non-Jews.<sup>113</sup> Goebbels used the Nazi party's racism to justify their ideology for their conquest of Europe. The propaganda produced in newspapers, posters, essays, and pamphlets portrayed the Nazi ideology of the Aryan's struggle against Jews for living space in Europe.<sup>114</sup> The German public was not inundated with antisemitic propaganda on a daily basis. Instead, Goebbels strategically launched multiple series of antisemitic propaganda throughout certain points of the war reminding the German public that the war was the Jews' fault.<sup>115</sup>

The idea of a "Jewish conspiracy" aimed to destroy non-Jews in Europe was not introduced by the Nazis. Karl Lueger referenced a Jewish conspiracy to harm non-Jewish Austrians in his political speech. Wilhelm Marr also referenced a Jewish conspiracy in his pamphlet, "The Victory of Judaism over Germany." A Russian based book, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, made available in central Europe after World War I though quickly revealed as a forgery claimed to be a document written by Russian Jews outlining their plan to rule Europe.<sup>116</sup> Despite being found as a forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were used in Nazi propaganda to promote their ideology of a Jewish conspiracy to destroy non-Jewish Germans. Both Hitler and Goebbels acknowledge that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a fake but they believed it held "inner truth" of a conspiracy.<sup>117</sup> *Der Sturmer*, weekly circular published by

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<sup>113</sup>Jeffrey Herf, "The "Jewish War": Goebbels and the Antisemitic Campaigns of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005), 52.

<sup>114</sup>Leon A. Jick, "Method in Madness: An Examination of the Motivations for Nazi Mass Murder." *Modern Judaism* 18, no. 2 (1998), 156.

<sup>115</sup>Jeffrey Herf, "The "Jewish War": Goebbels and the Antisemitic Campaigns of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry," 58.

<sup>116</sup>Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 74-75.

<sup>117</sup>Randall L. Bytwerk, "Believing in "Inner Truth": The Protocols of the Elders of Zion in Nazi Propaganda, 1933–1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015), 212-214.

Julius Streicher (another devoted follower of Hitler), promoted *The Protocols* and the Nazi ideology of a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>118</sup>

The *Der Stürmer* played a key role in molding how the German public viewed European Jews especially through its visual portrayal of the Nazi ideology of the German struggle against Jews.<sup>119</sup> The Third Reich recognized the *Der Stürmer* as a national newspaper and it had to be displayed and copies made available in all German businesses.<sup>120</sup> An example of how the *Der Stürmer* portrayed European Jews to the German public is shown below (The headline reads, “He came to Germany like this,” and the caption below the image says, “Without a solution to the Jewish question, there can be no redemption of humanity.”):



Figure 1. An Advertisement for the Anti-Semitic Tabloid *Der Stürmer*, 1935, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives, courtesy of Jack J. Silverstein, copyright of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Used with permission from US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid, 221.

<sup>119</sup>David I. Kertzer and Gunnar Mokosch, "In the Name of the Cross: Christianity and Anti-Semitic Propaganda in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62, no. 3 (2020), 462.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid, 461-462

When this edition of *Der Sturmer* was published it was offered inside all German businesses, shown in display cases outside businesses, and plastered on walls. Julius Streicher's publication was so influential in shaping the German public's perception of European Jews and inciting violence against Jewish Germans that he was accused and found guilty at the Nuremberg trials for crimes against humanity.<sup>121</sup>

Anita Dittman described being harassed by a group of school boys who were, "swollen with Aryan pride and propaganda that told them to stamp out inferiors."<sup>122</sup> Martin Koller, a non-Jewish German, recognized that the Nazis were successful in using the radio as a tool to disseminate propaganda, "Now I know the Nazis very consciously used this new instrument to influence the masses."<sup>123</sup> Jutta Rudiger, a non-Jewish German and head of the Nazi League of German Girls, describes being impressed by Hitler and uses favorable terms when recounting a meeting she had with Hitler. Regarding the war she explains, "We didn't go to war with any great enthusiasm, but we thought Hitler was right." She later admits to believing the propaganda that Hitler invaded Poland because Germans were being persecuted.<sup>124</sup> Dorothea Schlosser's father was non-Jewish and considered "Aryan" by the Reich and her mother was Jewish German. She describes the mistreatment she endured in Nazi Germany as a result of her neighbors being convinced of her inferiority by Nazi antisemitic propaganda. Dorothea admits she did not take

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<sup>121</sup>David I. Kertzer and Gunnar Mocosch, "In the Name of the Cross: Christianity and Anti-Semitic Propaganda in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy," 472.

<sup>122</sup>Anita Dittman, and Jan Markell, *Trapped in Hitler's Hell: A Young Jewish Girl Discovers the Messiah's Faithfulness in the Midst of the Holocaust*, 5.

<sup>123</sup>Martin Koller, "Introduction: Rejected Republic," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

<sup>124</sup>Jutta Rudiger, "The Master of Europe," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 19-21.

the Nazis seriously even when they came to power until legislation was passed restricting half-Jewish Germans admittance into universities. The Nazi's antisemitic ideology did not become real to her until she heard a remark made by her principal before she graduated from high school, "There are Jews and there are Christians, but worst of all there are the half-breeds."<sup>125</sup> Klaus Scheurenberg, a Jewish German who survived the Holocaust, recalls a shifting of attitude among the group of commuters he traveled with daily on his way to perform forced labor. Klaus explains that he saw this same group of commuters daily. He did not think they knew he was Jewish as he described them being friendly towards him. The commuters invited Klaus to sit with them, and they conversed as a fellow German until the day he arrived at the train with the yellow Star of David he was forced to wear. The commuters noticed the yellow Star of David, invited him to join them anyway, and offered Klaus a cigarette.<sup>126</sup> Then he goes on to say:

Everybody smiled reassuringly at me for a few seconds, then the expression on their faces changed. It was as if they suddenly realized they were betraying the German people. During the last several years, they had been indoctrinated with the idea that the Jews were Public Enemy Number One. They felt like traitors just because they knew a 16-year-old Jewish boy. They never came back to that compartment again. There was so much mistrust, they even avoided one another after that day. Their behavior was typical of how people act under a dictatorship.<sup>127</sup>

Though the German public's view of European Jews was shaped by propaganda conveying the messages of Nazi ideology, there was some resistance to Nazi propaganda in the media. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was one of the few periodicals from the Weimar years allowed to continue under the Third Reich. Jewish Germans used the advertisement section of the

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<sup>125</sup>Dorothea Schlosser, "The Master of Europe," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 45-46.

<sup>126</sup>Klaus Scheurenberg, "Defeat and Crimes," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 291.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid, 292.

newspaper to voice their protests against the Third Reich's antisemitic laws.<sup>128</sup> The German public did oppose organs of the Nazi party such as *Der Sturmer*. It was not the antisemitic rhetoric that Germans challenged. Rather the German people were repulsed by such publications for inciting violence against Jewish Germans and their businesses.<sup>129</sup>

Antisemitism and Nazi propaganda fostered an environment for the German public to accept antisemitic legislation. However, most of the German public detested the violence against Jews encouraged by the Third Reich. Antisemitism preceding the Nazis made it easy for Hitler and the Nazi party to use European Jews as scapegoats for Germany's economic struggles and the loss of World War I. The German public was accustomed to antisemitic rhetoric so Hitler's rhetoric was no different. The German public's acceptance of antisemitic language coupled with the barrage of Nazi ideology delivered through propaganda paved the way for the German public to accept the Third Reich's antisemitic laws but some drew a line at state sanctioned violence. The non-Jewish German public supported antisemitic legislation or propaganda until violence was used or encouraged. Then the German public protested the Third Reich's use of violence against German Jewry. Between Hitler's rise to power in 1933 to the beginning years of World War II the German public witnessed outbursts of violence culminating in Kristallnacht. Immediately following Kristallnacht most of the German public abhorred the state sanctioned violence. The German public had not yet witnessed deportations of Jewish Germans or their mass murder, and their responses to these escalations remained to be seen. Would the German

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<sup>128</sup>Karl Christian Führer, "Contradicting Nazi Propaganda: Classified Advertisements as Documents of Jewish Life in Nazi Germany, 1933-1938." *Media History* 18, no. 1 (2012), 65, 67.

<sup>129</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 78.

public sustain the pattern of accepting discrimination while objecting to violence or would their response change as the Reich escalated its persecution of European Jews?

### Chapter 3: German Public's Response to Deportations and Genocide of European Jews, 1941-1945

It was just impossible to believe that people could be so evil and cruel. No one really believed it. I say with my whole heart that we wouldn't have believed it in any case because we just didn't think such things were possible. You tend anyway to pretty much go along with the crowd. You believe certain things because you want to believe them, you want to be able to sleep at night.

Ines Lyss, *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*

With Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 leading to the outbreak of World War II the attention of the majority of Germans turned from the persecution of German Jewry to mobilizing for war. The non-Jewish Germans witnessed and confronted the persecutions German Jews suffered under the Third Reich from antisemitic rhetoric and ordinances to pogroms. While the majority of Germans supported antisemitic laws, they were repulsed by the violent acts the Third Reich committed against German Jews. The majority of public opinion would shift from repulsion toward violent acts against German Jewry to indifference towards the mass murder of German Jewry. Once German Jews were isolated from "Aryan" German and were removed from the German public through forced removal it was easy for non-Jewish Germans to dismiss the rumors of mass murder as untrue and refuse to believe them, especially when concerns for the war effort took precedence.

Daily life for German Jews living under Nazi rule continued to worsen as persecution led by the Third Reich increased. Between Kristallnacht and Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 two hundred twenty-nine laws against Jews were decreed then later an additional five hundred twenty-five laws were passed.<sup>130</sup> The onslaught of anti-Jewish mandates made life increasingly unbearable for European Jews. Shortly after Kristallnacht in November

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<sup>130</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 150.

1938 economic mandates were enforced banning the employment of Jews and banning Jews from accessing their own bank accounts. In 1939 German Jews who lost employment were forced into hard labor, welfare was taken from them, their possessions were confiscated, and they were put on severe food rations.<sup>131</sup> Beginning January 1, 1939 Jews in the Third Reich were “forbidden to operate retail stores, mail-order houses, or sales agencies or to carry on trade independently.”<sup>132</sup> Jews could not be in charge of an enterprise or be in an executive position in a business. Despite being banned from all employment German Jews had to pay a punitive fine of one billion Reichsmarks for remaining in Germany.<sup>133</sup>

Once German Jews were isolated from employment Nazi Germany began forcing them out. A letter from Hermann Goring to the Reich Minister of the Interior ordered that “the emigration of the Jews from Germany is to be furthered by all possible means.”<sup>134</sup> The Third Reich used the murder of German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath, by a Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, as the pretext for the forced removal of Jews from Germany as conveyed by the German Foreign Ministry Memorandum. “It is probably no coincidence that the fateful year of 1938... brought the Jewish question close to solution.”<sup>135</sup> German Jews were evicted from their homes on short notice and had to relocate to “Jewish” homes. With the threat of constant

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid, 145.

<sup>132</sup>“Regulation for the Elimination of the Jews from the Economic Life of Germany, November 12, 1938,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 115-116.

<sup>133</sup>“Regulation for the Payment of an Expiation Fine by Jews Who are German Subjects, November 12, 1938,” in *Documents on the Holocaust*, 117.

<sup>134</sup>“Establishment of the Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration, January 1939,” in *Documents on the Holocaust*, 125.

<sup>135</sup>“German Foreign Ministry Memorandum on Policy Regarding Jews in 1938,” in *Documents on the Holocaust*, 126-127.

evictions and forced labor plaguing German Jews, their life was unbearable.<sup>136</sup> Mounting anti-Jewish mandates from the Third Reich limited Jews in providing for their families. The titles of doctor and attorney were stripped away from German Jews, businesses they owned and the trades they worked in were snatched away. The economic isolation alone made life extremely difficult for Jews in the Third Reich but the isolation from “Aryan” Germans would only continue to increase.

Once the German Jews economic isolation was realized by 1941, through banning Jews from employment in all businesses and limiting them on where and when they could shop for provisions, the Nazis pursued the Jews social isolation.<sup>137</sup> Private telephones and radios were confiscated, limiting communication and access to media.<sup>138</sup> German Jews struggled to procure groceries for their family after forced labor when they were restricted to times and places they could shop at so that they were not mingling with “Aryans.” Then German Jews had to choose between procuring provisions in the limited time they had or visiting friends or family due to a curfew imposed on them. German Jews were completely banned from places of enjoyment like parks, theaters, restaurants, and cinemas, further segregating them from “Aryan” Germans.

The separation between German Jews and “Aryan” Germans widened in 1941 when the Third Reich mandated that Jews wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing while they were out in public. The same mandate was made in Poland in 1939 but it was not mandated in Germany until September 1941. The mandate required that, “Jews over six years of age are

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<sup>136</sup>“The Situation of the Jews in Germany in the Summer of 1941,” in *Documents on the Holocaust*, 150-153.

<sup>137</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 121.

<sup>138</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 145.

prohibited to appear in public without wearing a yellow star.”<sup>139</sup> By marking German Jews in this way the Nazis ripped off any cloak of anonymity they could have hidden behind while living in Nazi Germany. The mandate made German Jews vulnerable to antisemitic attacks by marking them before the public.<sup>140</sup> Jews remaining in Germany were forced to bear the yellow star on their clothing while out in public, but their homes also had to be branded with the Star of David making it convenient for Nazis to target the Jewish population in Germany.<sup>141</sup> Before German Jews were branded with the yellow Star of David their social isolation was already felt. According to Ruth Kluger, a Viennese Jewish Holocaust survivor, her social isolation felt complete before having to wear the yellow star, “I tend to think it was earlier, because discrimination was already rampant.”<sup>142</sup> Though the German Jews social isolation had already begun before they were forced to wear the star, the mandate officially built a social wall between Jewish Germans and non-Jewish Germans.

After Kristallnacht the economic and social isolation of Jews in Germany was realized by the end of 1941. German Jews did not face as much harassment by the German public because they were banned from workplaces and places of entertainment.<sup>143</sup> The non-Jewish German public had less opportunities to harass German Jews because “Aryan” Germans and Jewish Germans were not allowed to interact, and the plethora of anti-Jewish mandates seemingly made them disappear from the German social scene. Once Jewish Germans identified themselves by

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<sup>139</sup>“Police Decree on Identifications of Jews, 1 September 1939,” in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*, 340-342.

<sup>140</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 157.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid, 159.

<sup>142</sup>Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, first English-language ed. (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2001), 48.

<sup>143</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 121.

bearing a yellow Star of David the non-Jewish public were shocked at how many Jews remained in Germany.<sup>144</sup> Initially the German public was unsure of how to react to the public branding of German Jews, some feared that in retribution Germans living in Ally countries would be forced to wear a mark identifying themselves.<sup>145</sup> The public's shock would not last as they became accustomed to seeing German Jews wearing the yellow star and the German public grew insensitive towards the Jews.<sup>146</sup> Wearing the yellow star made it easier for Jews to be targeted for anti-Jewish hostility. Congregants complained to their priests at having to take communion with converted Jews so the priests asked converted Jews to not attend services or if they did attend services they needed to be "inconspicuous."<sup>147</sup> The security service reports or SD reports claimed the public was in full support of Jews being forced to wear the yellow star and was initially shocked at seeing how many remained in Germany, demonstrating an insensitivity toward the discrimination suffered by the Jews. When Victor Klemperer, a Jewish man married to an "Aryan" woman, was forced to wear the yellow star he refused to go out in public fearing that his wife would be harassed.<sup>148</sup> Erna Becker-Kohen, a Jewish woman married to an "Aryan," and her son had to wear the yellow star. Kohen's young son was attacked by the neighborhood boys when they realized he was Jewish, and Erna's husband feared that the neighbors would attack his wife and son when he was away.<sup>149</sup> There were some small acts of sympathy towards Jews. Groceries were saved and set aside for German Jews arriving at the end of their workday at the

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid, 122.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid, 129.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid, 122.

<sup>148</sup>Victor Klemperer and Martin Chalmers, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, 177.

<sup>149</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 159.

time allotted to them for shopping or small gifts of food were left at doorsteps and placed into pockets. Ruth Kluger recalls when a man pressed an orange into her hand when he saw the yellow Star of David on her.<sup>150</sup> These few acts of sympathy were enough to catch Goebbels' eye as he remarked to Albert Speer, "People everywhere are showing sympathy for them. This nation... is full of all kinds of idiotic sentimentality."<sup>151</sup> A decree was issued on October 24, 1941, punishing sympathetic acts with three months of imprisonment in a concentration camp.<sup>152</sup> As the initial shock of seeing German Jews with the yellow star wore off and acts of sympathy waned in the face of threatened reprisals, the German people hardened themselves towards the Jewish population as is evident in Anna Haag's account:

I traveled on the tram. It was overcrowded. An old lady got on. Her feet were so swollen that they bulged out of the top of her shoes. She carried the Star of David on her dress. I stood up to allow the lady to sit... "Out!" Shouted a whole choir... The tram stopped. The driver ordered, "Both of you get out!"<sup>153</sup>

Now that the German Jews were economically and socially isolated from Nazi Germany the next step for the Third Reich was the forced removal of German Jews from Germany.<sup>154</sup> German Jews were evicted from their homes on short notice and assigned to Jewish ghettos or taken directly to concentration camps completing their social isolation and total expulsion from Germany.<sup>155</sup> When the deportations first began 73,000 German Jews lived in Germany but by 1944 only 6,000 Jews remained.<sup>156</sup> Once the removal of the Jewish public began, using

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<sup>150</sup>Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, 48.

<sup>151</sup>Albert Speer, *The Secret Diaries*, 287.

<sup>152</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 127.

<sup>153</sup>Anna Haag, "Entry for 5 October 1942," *Das Gluck zu Leben*, in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism* by David Bankier, 130.

<sup>154</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 197.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 197.

euphemisms Goring gave directives to Heydrich for a “final solution” to the “Jewish question.” Goring states, “I charge you furthermore to send me before long, an overall plan...of the desired final solution of the Jewish question.”<sup>157</sup> Germany had already expelled Polish Jews from Germany in 1938 but then they began systematically expelling German Jews in 1941.<sup>158</sup> The orders Jews received to leave their homes were purposefully kept vague. German Jews were unsure of their exact destinations or even if they would return.<sup>159</sup> Initially when deportations began in 1941 Jews married to “Aryans” were not deported, instead projected to be deported last. The Third Reich began deporting German Jews married to “Aryans” in in 1943 but the war ended before the Nazis could have all “privileged” Jews removed. When German Jews received the deportation notice they were instructed on what they could take with them like a suitcase, a set of clothes, a blanket etc. They also had to fill out paperwork on the possessions they were leaving behind.<sup>160</sup> German Jews knew they were being deported to eastern Europe but in the beginning of the deportations they were unsure of what lay ahead for them.<sup>161</sup> The ambiguity of the deportation orders created fear among the Jews in Germany as family members were deported to the east and not heard from again. Jews lived in fear of receiving a deportation

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<sup>157</sup>Hermann Goring, “Order to Heydrich to Begin Preparations for the Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1111.

<sup>158</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 179.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid, 194.

<sup>160</sup>“Instructions for the Deportation of the Jews from the Palatinate (PFALZ) October 1940,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 145.

<sup>161</sup>“The Last Days of the Zionist Youth Movement in Germany, 1942,” in *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 154.

notice, Hermann Rosenau recalls, “We constantly lived in fear...when more than three hundred people, the sick and the healthy, were loaded on a freight train and deported.”<sup>162</sup>

Both German Jews and non-Jewish Germans witnessed groups of Jews walking or being taken in trucks to train stations or meeting points to be deported. Workers in Berlin on their way to work in the early morning hours watched vans full of Jews being driven to a train station for their forced removal.<sup>163</sup> Ruth Abraham describes a group of onlookers watching Jews gather for their deportation: “Curious people had gathered in front of the building and were gloating over the misery that had befallen their fellow citizens, the Jews....”<sup>164</sup> Since Jews were banned from public transport many Jews had to walk to the train stations or meeting points before being transported to concentration camps.<sup>165</sup>

German Jews had to leave behind their homes and most of their possessions when they were expelled from Germany. The possessions left behind were auctioned off to “Aryans” who “fought like jackals over a carcass.”<sup>166</sup> Many “Aryan” Germans witnessed Jews gathering for deportations and many purchased the items and homes German Jews left behind. Before the German public detested witnessing the violent acts committed by the Third Reich against German Jews but now that they were being removed from Germany the public did not protest

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<sup>162</sup>Hermann Rosenau, “I had Been Declared the Winner of a National Competition,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 301.

<sup>163</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 197.

<sup>164</sup>Ruth Abraham, “Forced Labor and Deportations,” in *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* by Marion Kaplan and Thomas Gale, 3rd Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 198.

<sup>165</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 185.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

and the violent acts that had elicited such opposition were now to be conducted out of sight from the German public.

Those who were members of the Nazi party supported the removal of Jews from Germany while the majority of the population were indifferent to the forced evacuations of their Jewish neighbors.<sup>167</sup> The forced removal of German Jewry occurred while Nazi Germany was fighting World War II. Ordinary civilians were concerned more for their men fighting on the front, food rationing, labor shortages, and air raids than in the fate of an unwanted people group.<sup>168</sup> The majority of the German public was so unconcerned with the forced removal of Jewish Germans that SD reports hardly took note of the public's reaction.<sup>169</sup> Ursula von Kardorff recounts an observer saying, "Why should I care about the Jews? The only thing I think about is my brother in Russia."<sup>170</sup> Some voiced their dissent to the deportations but the only protest against the deportations occurred in 1943 in Rosenstrasse, Berlin when Jewish men were taken from their forced labor jobs to be deported. The men's "Aryan" wives gathered at where their Jewish husbands were being held and protested their deportations, they protested until all 1,500 men were released.<sup>171</sup> For most Germans their concern for the removal of their Jewish neighbors went as far as wondering about their destination- "We found out that the entire family had disappeared. Naturally we asked ourselves where they could be...."<sup>172</sup> The same non-Jewish

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<sup>167</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 133-134.

<sup>168</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 141.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid, 200.

<sup>170</sup>Ursula von Kardorff, *Berliner Aufzeichnungen*, 3 Mar. 1943, in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* by David Bankier, 136.

<sup>171</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 193.

<sup>172</sup>Ines Lyss, "You Open Your Mouth About Any of This, We'll Kill Your Family," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 317.

Germans repulsed at witnessing violent acts against Jewish Germans now did not have to be troubled by the violence because German Jews were forced out of Germany and their murder occurred out of the sight of the German public. The same non-Jewish public with their deeply rooted antisemitism did not prioritize wondering about the fate of an alienated minority group when they had family members fighting in a war to be concerned about. The majority of Germans were uninterested in discovering the answer to their question of where could the German Jews be?

The ambiguity as to what awaited German Jews after they were removed from Germany did not last as rumors circulated among both Jews and “Aryans” on what happened to those removed to the east.<sup>173</sup> A secret meeting was led by Heydrich with leaders of various Nazi agencies to coordinate efforts to systematically murder European Jews or the “Final Solution” as Heydrich and others had code named it. At their meeting they decided on a plan to deport European Jews to concentration camps where they would be murdered.<sup>174</sup> The plan for organized mass murder, the “Final Solution,” fit in the context of the Nazi’s ideology for making living space, lebensraum, for only “Aryan” Germans.<sup>175</sup> Jewish Germans had no place in Nazi ideology and those still in Germany and living in Nazi occupied Europe needed to be removed, according to the Nazi’s mind. Victor Klemperer recorded in his diary in 1942 rumors that deported Jews were being shot. Those who had radios listened in secret to BBC reports on the mass murder of European Jews and other minorities led by the Third Reich.<sup>176</sup> As the forced removal of German Jews continued with no word returning from relatives who were taken, deportations equated to

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<sup>173</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 141.

<sup>174</sup>“Wannsee Protocol, 1942,” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1126–1135.

<sup>175</sup>Leon A. Jick, “Method in Madness: An Examination of the Motivations for Nazi Mass Murder,” 154.

<sup>176</sup>Marion A. Kaplan and Thomson Gale, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, 195.

death for Jews still in Germany.<sup>177</sup> Inge Deutschkron heard rumors about murders in the east and refused to believe it was true until an “Aryan” friend confirmed it to her.<sup>178</sup> Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, an “Aryan” German woman secretly hiding Jews heard about the rumors and described them as “ghastly.” Soldiers also wrote letters confirming the rumors that European Jews were being murdered.<sup>179</sup> Anita Dittman, whose mother was Jewish, and father was “Aryan” German, heard “horror stories,” about the fate of deported Jews.<sup>180</sup>

If German Jews who were banned from owning radios or telephones heard rumors about gassings and mass shootings of Jews, then Aryans who had full access to the media and spoke with soldiers on leave from the front were aware of the rumors circulating about the mass murder of European Jewry. German prisoners of war shared their knowledge of the mass murder of Jews with the Allies.<sup>181</sup> Dorothea Schlosser performing for Nazi soldiers in Poland was told by soldiers, “the horrible things happening to the Jews....”<sup>182</sup> Peter Pechel recounts a German colonel describing how Jews were sealed in a tunnel and gassed to death.<sup>183</sup> The White Rose resistance group released leaflets to the German public asking how they can be apathetic when 300,000 Jews were murdered.<sup>184</sup> A German Jew hiding his identity heard conversations from

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<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid, 199.

<sup>180</sup>Anita Dittman with Jan Markell, *Trapped in Hitler’s Hell: A Young Jewish Girl Discovers the Messiah’s Faithfulness in the Midst of the Holocaust*, 37.

<sup>181</sup>Stephen Tyas, "Allied Intelligence Agencies and the Holocaust: Information Acquired from German Prisoners of War," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22, no. 1 (2008), 1-24.

<sup>182</sup>Dorothea Schlosser, in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 317.

<sup>183</sup>Peter Pechel, “Even a Criminal German Government Cannot Order Mass Murder,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 334.

<sup>184</sup>Inge Scholl and Dorothee Sölle, *The White Rose Munich, 1942-1943*, First Wesleyan paperback edition, (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 78-79.

civilians at bars and theaters discussing mass shootings of European Jews.<sup>185</sup> An SD report from April 1940 shared that soldiers on leave were discussing the killing of Jews with German civilians.<sup>186</sup> Hermann Friedrich Graebe, a civilian working for a construction firm with the Wehrmacht, witnessed mass shootings of men, women, and children.<sup>187</sup> The population of a village of Wohrlau were onlookers to the murder of hundreds of Jews.<sup>188</sup> Anti-Nazi organizations like the White Rose and Kampf dem Faschismus circulated BBC reports on the mass murder of Jews. Allies also dropped leaflets over German cities sharing about the number of Jews murdered by the Third Reich.<sup>189</sup> Even foreigners like the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, was aware of the tragedy occurring to European Jewry. In his letter Eden explains that a half million of Jews were gassed and burned in a crematorium at Birkenau, a death camp.<sup>190</sup> If BBC reports and foreign ministers were aware of the mass murder of European Jews so were the Germans. The majority of Germans, both Jewish and non-Jewish, heard rumors of the mass murder of European Jews. Though the details were distorted on how European Jews were murdered, the German public was aware that Jews were being removed from Germany and murdered.

Even before deportations began and rumors of mass murder circulated, the German public were aware of Nazi Germany's intention of creating a society where European Jews could

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<sup>185</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 103.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid, 104.

<sup>187</sup>"Affidavit of Herman Graebe," in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*, 358.

<sup>188</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 107.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>190</sup>"Letter by British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden About Bombing Auschwitz, 7 July 1944, in *Sources of the Holocaust*, 246.

not exist. In 1941 Hitler gave a speech to the Reichstag calling for the annihilation of European Jewry. In 1942 he gave a speech in Berlin then in Munich explaining that the war would result in European Jew's extermination.<sup>191</sup> Hitler's speeches were posted on the front page of all national newspapers, broadcasted on radio, and disseminated through pamphlets and posters.<sup>192</sup> Goebbels and Goring both made public speeches threatening to exterminate European Jewry during the war.<sup>193</sup> In 1943 Goebbels gave a speech in Berlin to the German public justifying the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies- "Germany, in any event, has no intention of bowing before this Jewish threat, but rather intends to act at the right moment, using if necessary the most total and radical measures to deal with Jewry."<sup>194</sup> Even Robert Ley, the Head of Germany's Labor Front, made speeches to German laborers warning that if European Jewry were not exterminated Germany would lose the war.<sup>195</sup> The German public may not have known about death camps or how European Jews were being murdered but they knew, even before deportations of German Jews began, that the Third Reich intended to remove all European Jews and other minority groups from Nazi society.

Considering the negative responses, the non-Jewish Germans had towards the Third Reich's violence against Jews before 1939, the Germans should have been repulsed upon hearing rumors of the mass murder of Jews. Many German civilians did not witness the shootings or gassings of European Jews, therefore, the majority of Germans refused to believe the rumors that

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<sup>191</sup>Jeffrey Herf, "The 'Jewish War:' Goebbels and the Antisemitic Campaigns of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005), 55.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid, 56.

<sup>194</sup>Joseph Goebbels, "People, Rise up, and Storm, Break Loose," 18 February 1943," in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, edited by Randall L. Bytwerk, 1st ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 121.

<sup>195</sup>Jeffrey Herf, "The 'Jewish War:' Goebbels and the Antisemitic Campaigns of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry," 58.

the Nazi government was murdering Jews. By 1943 Germans ignored the rumors of murder of European Jewry and were concerned with the setbacks Nazi Germany faced in the war.<sup>196</sup> A security service report noted that the populace was concerned with the war and the lives of their family members being sacrificed on the front.<sup>197</sup>

Many Germans could not believe the rumors that a government would systematically murder an entire people group. Ursula von Kardorff on reading the testimonies of escaped Jews describing the gassings responded, “Is one to believe such a ghastly story? It simply cannot be true. Surely even the most brutal fanatic could not be so bestial.”<sup>198</sup> Even German Jews struggled to believe that European Jews were being murdered. Dorothea Schlosser a half-Jewish German who survived the war explains, “...Jews who were Germans themselves, couldn’t comprehend what was happening to them. They refused to believe it.”<sup>199</sup> Ines Lyss echoes the same belief upon hearing rumors of mass murder, “It was just impossible to believe that people could be so evil and cruel. No one really believed it.”<sup>200</sup> Peter Pechel also refused to believe the German colonel’s story of a gassing tunnel until he talked to his father imprisoned at a concentration camp and asked if the rumors were true, his father confirmed that it was.<sup>201</sup> Many refused to believe the rumors were true, and only accepted the truth when the rumors were corroborated with eyewitness testimonies or evidence. Lilo Clemens’s Jewish father who was married to an

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<sup>196</sup>Aryeh L. Unger, “The Public Opinion Reports of the Nazi Party,” 579.

<sup>197</sup>“Reactions to Goebbels’ Speech, 1943,” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 1246-1247.

<sup>198</sup>Ursula von Kardorff, *Berliner Aufzeichnungen*, 3 Mar. 1943, in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 114.

<sup>199</sup>Dorothea Schlosser, “There are Jews and there are Christians but Worst of All are the Half-Breeds,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 46.

<sup>200</sup>Ines Lyss, “You Open Your Mouth About Any of This, We’ll Kill Your Family,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 318.

<sup>201</sup>Peter Pechel, “Even a Criminal German Government Cannot Order Mass Murder,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 333-336.

“Aryan” worked for the Nazis filing documents on the murder of Jews. Clemens explained, “it’s unbelievable, but it’s true! The Nazis wanted to exterminate the Jewish people....”<sup>202</sup>

There were few Germans who protested the murder of Jews, if they did protest, they risked being sent to a camp themselves or executed like the leaders of the White Rose group. Then there were those who willingly participated in mass murder like SS-Obersturmfuherer, Karl Kretschmer, who justified the murder of Jews in a letter to his wife, “As the war is in our opinion a Jewish war, the Jews are first to feel it. Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is no Jew remains.”<sup>203</sup> After witnessing the mass shooting of Jews the head of 2nd company, Reserve Police Battalion 13 only protested that the shootings were occurring in front of civilians.<sup>204</sup> A war correspondent witnessing the mass executions of a group of Jews saw SD men weeping and others keeping score of those they killed. The soldiers justified the murders to him, “death was certain for them, they said...such afflicted people would never be permitted to return to the homeland [Germany].”<sup>205</sup>

The majority of Germans aware of the mass murder of European Jews willingly chose to deny that the rumors were true, instead, they dismissed it as anti-Nazi propaganda or believed it was too incredulous to be true.<sup>206</sup> The majority of the German public did not openly support the mass murder of Jews, nor did they protest it. Instead, the majority of the German public chose to

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<sup>202</sup>Lilo Clemens, “There Goes a Jew Girl,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 291.

<sup>203</sup>“Letters of SS-Obersturmfuherer Karl Kretschmer (SK 4a),” in “*The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, 163.

<sup>204</sup>“The Head of 2nd Company, Reserve Police Battalion 13,” in “*The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, 127.

<sup>205</sup>“A War Correspondent on the ‘Unfortunate’ Murderers.” In “*The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, 129.

<sup>206</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 115.

not believe the rumors corroborated by eyewitness testimonies, as David Bankier states, “They knew enough to know that it was better not to know more.”<sup>207</sup> The majority of Germans did not protest or fully support the isolation of Jews from economic and social life. They did not protest the deportations of German Jews from Germany. The anti-Jewish mandates and the forced removal of German Jews occurred amid World War II. Non-Jewish Germans had their own immediate concerns that trumped concerns for the trials of a minority people group they had previously tolerated before Hitler came to power. Non-Jewish Germans were concerned over family members fighting on the front, air raids from Allies, and military setbacks during the war. Perhaps if there was no war and they were forced to face the reality of the mass murder of European Jewry the German public would have reacted, but Germany was fighting a war and those concerns were easily prioritized over addressing the fate of European Jewry.

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<sup>207</sup>Ibid.

#### Chapter 4: The Majority of the German Public's Response to the Holocaust

When I entered the courtyard, I saw young Jews digging graves—large, deep graves. The older Jews were being shot in the back of the neck.... The sight of all the blood, along with the smell, made me sick and I collapsed.... I joined our advance unit and confided only to my closest friends my feelings that we were going to have a lot to answer for if we lost the war.

Rudolf Wurster, *Voices from the Third Reich*

The German public's response to the Third Reich's anti-Jewish policies shifted over the course of the Nazi's rule. Most of the German public supported anti-Jewish decrees like laws that banned German Jews from holding civil service occupations or laws that stripped German Jews of their rights. With the removal of German Jews from certain occupations, those jobs became available for "Aryan" Germans. Most Germans did not voice outrage when German Jews lost their rights because of a deep-seated antisemitism that viewed German Jews as a foreign people not belonging to Germany. Most of the German public, however, did oppose the Third Reich's early use of violence towards German Jewry. When World War II began with Germany's invasion of Poland and the Nazi regime increased repression of public criticism against the Third Reich, the German people withdrew into its own private sphere keeping its criticisms to itself and focusing their attention, not on the fate of a marginalized people, but on their own immediate concerns like air raids and setbacks in the war. When the Jews fate was discussed among German civilians it was after a series of air raids from the Allies. The Germans feared the bombings were in retaliation for how the Third Reich treated European Jewry. Most Germans were not indifferent towards the persecutions of European Jewry, most were ambivalent. When they heard rumors of mass shootings of Jewish civilians many Germans were shocked, however, they refused to believe the rumors or for most, they were not interested in discovering the truth because they had more immediate concerns in their daily lives than in knowing the true fate of a marginalized, minority group.

Most Germans accepted the Third Reich's antisemitic policies if they stayed within a non-violent, legal framework such as the Nuremberg laws including and up to expelling Jews from Germany.<sup>208</sup> A majority of Germans did not support state sanctioned violence against German Jews. They were repulsed by the violence used during the November 1938 pogrom where synagogues, Jewish homes, and businesses were damaged and German Jews were attacked. Many Germans did not oppose anti-Jewish measures but if it crossed the line into state-sanctioned violence they opposed it. When the forced removal of Jews began from Germany the Third Reich mailed notices to German Jews for them to leave their property on short notice and gather at a meeting point so that they could be transported to Poland or the "east." Many Germans voiced little dissent at the removal of their Jewish neighbors because they benefitted from acquiring Jewish property left behind and it was the Nazi's goal to expel all minority groups, they deemed undesirable from the Third Reich. As Germans witnessed the forced removal of their Jewish neighbors to the "east," they watched German Jews leave behind their homes and possessions. Jewish homes were sealed with most of their possessions still in their homes as they were given directives on what they could take with them on their transports to the "east." Once German Jews were expelled from their homes, the seal was broken, and their possessions auctioned off and their home sold. The German's actions of taking their Jewish neighbor's possessions or moving into their homes imply that Germans were aware that the deportations meant Jews would never return to lay claim to their property.<sup>209</sup> Some Germans seemed to portray feelings of guilt after acquiring Jewish owned homes as the new owners

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<sup>208</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 139.

<sup>209</sup>Carolin Dorothée Lange, "After They Left: Looted Jewish Apartments and the Private Perception of the Holocaust," 436.

experienced panic attacks or complained that the home had to be redone because they could not live with “Jewish furniture.”<sup>210</sup> Then others who moved into homes previously belonging to German Jews justified their ownership because they had lost their own property to air raids.

After 1941 as the Third Reich began to advance in Europe and acquire more territory, and greater numbers of minority groups such as European Jews, its goal of eradicating Jews from Europe became clearer with the pursuit of the “Final Solution.”<sup>211</sup> It was not enough for German Jews to be removed from Germany to another country. According to Nazi ideology they could not continue to exist. The “Jewish problem” had to be solved through mass murder. Most of the German public, having voiced criticism early on against the Third Reich for using violent measures against German Jews, now in 1941 to 1945 refused to believe the rumors that the Germans Jews who were “relocated” were in fact being murdered. Knowledge of the mass killings of European Jews led by the Third Reich was widespread among the German public but their knowledge was incomplete. The German public was aware of mass shootings, such as the ones that occurred at Babi Yar and Riga, but they were not aware of Auschwitz or of gas chambers.<sup>212</sup> Once deportations of German Jews began, rumors traveled from the east of mass shootings of Jewish civilians. Soldiers on leave from the front shared testimonies with their family and friends of witnessing or taking part in the mass murder of European Jews.<sup>213</sup> Rumors of mass shootings circulated among the German public but exact details such as death camps,

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid, 437.

<sup>211</sup>Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 318.

<sup>212</sup>Peter Fritzsche, “Chapter 4: Babi Yar, but No Auschwitz What did Germans Know about the Final Solution?” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, edited by Susanna Schrafstetter and Alan E. Steinweis (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 99.

<sup>213</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 202.

gassings, and cremation were not known but the German public was aware that atrocities against Jews were being committed in the east.<sup>214</sup> Some rumors of gassings circulated among the public but they were far less prevalent than rumors of mass shootings. A woman in Munich who spoke out against Hitler and was punished with three years in prison for her criticism was one of the few who shared rumors to her neighbors that Jews were being gassed in the east.<sup>215</sup> Most Germans were not aware of the scope of the systematic mass murder until after the war when concentration camps were liberated by the Allies and the Nuremberg trials in 1945 to 1946 revealed the magnitude of the genocide of European Jews.<sup>216</sup> Rumors of mass killings of Jews first began with the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 but it was not until the deportations of Jews from Germany began that stories of mass shootings widely circulated.<sup>217</sup> In 1941 the first news of mass killings at Babi Yar and Kiev, and then later Riga reached the German public. The SS followed behind the Wehrmacht on the frontlines and were assigned to the execution of Jewish civilians so that the Wehrmacht would remain shielded from the horrible task. The Wehrmacht, however, did participate in the mass murder of European Jews by helping to organize the mass shootings and witnessing them.<sup>218</sup> Fritz Nast-Kolb a “half Jewish” German who survived the war by working at Bosch electrical company recounts that he knew deportations meant death though he was not aware of the extent of the systematic mass murder of Jews. Nast-Kolb, like many Germans, struggled to accept as truth what seemed to be the fate of deported Jews. “We did hear something that was filtered through by soldiers at the front to the

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid, 202-203.

<sup>216</sup>Peter Fritzsche, “Chapter 4: Babi Yar, but No Auschwitz What did Germans Know about the Final Solution?” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 85.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid, 87.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid, 88-89.

effect that the Jews who had been transported to Riga back in 1941 had all been shot.... You didn't believe it; you didn't want to believe it."<sup>219</sup> Another example of disbelief comes from Hans Gunther Seraphin testimony, he served in the German Army and was a witness in the Nuremberg trials. He describes finding out about the systematic mass murder of European Jews in 1944 but he believed it was anti-Nazi propaganda. It was not until he served in the Nuremberg trials that the news of mass murder was confirmed to be true, "I was sick. It was so incredibly hard to believe."<sup>220</sup> Karl-Heinz Maier a "half Jew" drafted into the Wehrmacht and later discharged also describes his shock at hearing of soldiers murdering Jews-

"I overheard a few older soldiers discussing the price of a pistol. The one who wanted to sell it said, 'This is really a first-rate piece. I tested it out myself. Jews are being shot here. I was out yesterday and shot three or four of them...' this was an extraordinarily shocking experience for me. These were not SS men; they were simple privates."<sup>221</sup>

Victor Klemperer, a Jewish survivor, recorded his shock in his diary at the news of mass shootings of Jews and he did not believe the Third Reich had planned to murder European Jewry, instead, he believed that the Third Reich's mass murder of Jews was in reaction to the war.<sup>222</sup>

Hans-Ulrich Greffrath, an officer in the Wehrmacht, only believed the rumors of mass executions when in 1947 he saw a documentary on Auschwitz: "I was forced to believe that the

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<sup>219</sup>Fritz Nast-Kolb, "My Mother Looked Like a Small, Emaciated Little Girl," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 300.

<sup>220</sup>Hans Gunther Seraphin, "If it is a Single Person More than None, You're in for it," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 118, 325.

<sup>221</sup>Karl-Heinz Maier, "I Thought I would do Something for the Jewish Side of My Family," in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 296.

<sup>222</sup>Peter Fritzsche, "Chapter 4: Babi Yar, but No Auschwitz What did Germans Know about the Final Solution?" *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 86.

horrible crimes that I had heard were committed by the Nazi regime were true. Ever since then... my life has been one of terrible shame.”<sup>223</sup>

The rumors of mass killings continued to circulate during the war as the Third Reich faced defeats and the fate of the war began to look grim for the Nazis. Both German civilians and soldiers feared retribution from the Allies for the violence and murder of European Jewry led by the Third Reich.<sup>224</sup> Those who were complicit in the mass murder of European Jewry justified their actions then hid their evidence of complicity. Those Germans who participated in the mass murder of European Jews insisted that the Jews were guilty of the war and that if the Third Reich did not murder all European Jews, then the Jews would exact equal or greater vengeance. Kurt Mobius, part of the police battalion, justified his actions by stating that he believed the anti-Jewish propaganda and was following orders: “The Jewish people were not innocent but guilty. I believed all the propaganda that Jews were criminals and subhuman....”<sup>225</sup> A Swedish correspondent in Germany in 1943 noticed that Goebbels allowed news of mass killings of Jews to circulate among the public and remarked, “Everyone is conscious of shared responsibility and guilt, and afraid of personal retaliation.”<sup>226</sup> Even SD reports noted that Germans feared retaliation from Allies for the state-sanctioned violence against European Jews.<sup>227</sup> Soldiers having witnessed the mass murders or took part in it also feared vengeance from Jews in the

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<sup>223</sup>Hans-Ulrich Greffrath, in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 339.

<sup>224</sup>Frank Bajohr, “Chapter 2: German Responses to the Persecution of the Jews as Reflected in Three Collections of Secret Reports,” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 53.

<sup>225</sup>“Kurt Mobius On the Guilt of the Jews and His Own Lack of Blame,” in “*The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, 220.

<sup>226</sup>Christian T. Barth, *Goebbels und die Juden*, 238, in *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 98.

<sup>227</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 203.

international community.<sup>228</sup> An SD report explained that even Germans who did not support the Nazis believed it was imperative for the Third Reich to win the war or “Jewish revenge” would be great.<sup>229</sup> Rudolf Wurster, who served in the Luftwaffe and Waffen-SS, witnessed the mass shooting of Jewish men and women. He was so shocked and sickened at what he witnessed that he passed out, “I joined our advance unit and confided only to my closest friends my feelings that we were going to have a lot to answer for if we lost this war.”<sup>230</sup> Another soldier, Walter Kessler, while on leave from the front, visited his sister and brother-in-law and alluded to having witnessed the murder of Jewish civilians while fighting in the Soviet Union. His brother-in-law recorded what Walter told him: “Certainly it has gone so far that they will do to us as it was done to them, if we should lose the war.”<sup>231</sup> As it became evident that the tide of the war was turning against the Nazis, Himmler urged that the mass murder of European Jews be kept secret and that all evidence be destroyed. In 1943, Himmler addressed SS officers in Posen and warned them that the mass murder of Jews could not be spoken about- “This is a page of glory that has never been written and is never to be written.”<sup>232</sup> In 1945 death camps closed as gas chambers and crematoriums were dismantled, bodies at mass graves were exhumed and burnt to hide evidence

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<sup>228</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 149.

<sup>229</sup>“SD Abschnitt Dortmund, Hauptaubenstelle Bielefeld, 15 Mar. 1942, YVA, JM/4568,” in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 149.

<sup>230</sup>Rudolf Wurster, “We were Going to have a lot to Answer for if We Lost this War,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 260, 331.

<sup>231</sup>Karl Durkefalden, “Schreiben, wie es wirklich war...” *Aufzeichnungen Karl Durkefaldens aus den Jahren 1933-1945*, eds Herbert and Sibylle Obenaus (Hannover, 1985), 110, in *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 89.

<sup>232</sup>“Speech of Reichsfuhrer SS Heinrich Himmler at a meeting of senior SS officers in Posen, 4 October 1943,” in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*, 370.

of the Third Reich's systematic mass murder of European Jewry and other minority groups.<sup>233</sup> Those imprisoned at concentration camps were forced to leave them on death marches that some German civilians witnessed. Barns and sheds used to house Jewish victims on these marches were later burnt to hide evidence of complicity.<sup>234</sup> The SS destroyed a great amount of evidence of the atrocities committed against European Jews towards the end of the war. Gunter Kunert, having lived in Berlin as a child during the war recalls witnessing the destruction of evidence tied to the persecution of Jews- "...Papers are taken out, documents, passports, photographs, any indication of one's own complicity... straight into the fires of purgatory with all that incriminating material."<sup>235</sup> With Nazi Germany's impending defeat, participants in the "Final Solution" scrambled to hide or destroy evidence of complicity.

Considering how the German public detested the Kristallnacht pogrom and state-sanctioned violence towards European Jews, most of the German public, upon hearing widespread rumors of mass killings in the east, responded in ambivalence. Though the large majority were ambivalent to the fate of the Jews some put their own lives at risk to oppose the atrocities being committed against German Jews. Kurt Jacobsen was protected by his "Aryan" employer. Inept at managing his business, this German hid Kurt so that he could run the operation for him.<sup>236</sup> The Third Reich increased repression of political dissidents with

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<sup>233</sup>Roderick Stackelberg, and Sally A Winkle, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook an Anthology of Texts*, 331.

<sup>234</sup>Peter Fritzsche, "Chapter 4: Babi Yar, but No Auschwitz What did Germans Know about the Final Solution?" *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 98.

<sup>235</sup>Kunert, Gunter. *Erwachsenenspiele*, in *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews* edited by Susanna Schrafstetter and Alan E. Steinweis, (New York: Berghahn, 2016): 99.

<sup>236</sup>Wolf Gruner, "Chapter 3: Indifference? Participation and Protest as Individual Responses to the Persecution of the Jews as Revealed in Berlin Police Logs and Trial Records,

imprisonment or executions causing the German public to keep their concerns even more to themselves.<sup>237</sup> With the removal of Jews from society, Germans were insulated from their persecution, and with the hardships they were experiencing from the war increasing their concern for European Jews was superseded by their own challenges.<sup>238</sup> With the German Jews out of sight, the German public showed decreased interest in antisemitic propaganda produced by the Third Reich. Upon watching two antisemitic films it was reported that the public complained at having to watch the films, “We’ve already seen *The Jew Süß* and we’ve had enough of the Jewish trash.”<sup>239</sup> The German public was not opposed to how the antisemitic films portrayed Jews, they were opposed to having to still watch antisemitic propaganda when the “Jewish problem” seemed to have been resolved in Germany with their expulsion. The German population gave little to no protest against isolating German Jews from society through laws then expelling them from Germany, but they were opposed to witnessing state sanctioned violence against Jews, which suggests that there was not widespread support among most of the German public for the mass killing of European Jews.<sup>240</sup> The German public viewed the antisemitic discrimination led by the Third Reich through rhetoric, propaganda, and laws as acceptable but state led violence was unacceptable. However, most Germans did not protest the rumors of mass

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1933-45,” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jew*, 72.

<sup>237</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 200.

<sup>238</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 139-140.

<sup>239</sup>“Boelcke, *Kriegspropaganda*, entries for 12 Sep. and 26 Nov. 1940,” in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 140.

<sup>240</sup>Frank Bajohr, “Chapter 2: German Responses to the Persecution of the Jews as Reflected in Three Collections of Secret Reports,” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 52.

killings or condemn the Third Reich, and instead remained silent and focused on their own wartime challenges.

The responses of the German public to the systematic, mass murder of European Jews led by the Third Reich cannot be examined in isolation from World War II. The mass murder of European Jewry occurred in conjunction with the events of the war. The concern for the fate of the Jewish population after they were expelled from Germany was of little import to the German public during the war years. The German public was not interested in the “Jewish question” or in pursuing the rumors of mass shootings of Jewish civilians in the east. The German public focused on more immediate concerns that directly involved them such as air raids, fearing for family fighting on the front, and economic instability.<sup>241</sup> European Jews were a marginalized minority discriminated against prior to the Nazis coming to power. With the Third Reich’s rule the Jews were gradually and systematically isolated from the rest of society so when they were physically removed from Germany they were out of sight and out of mind, so to speak, from the German public.<sup>242</sup> Though the German public grew less concerned for the fate of the Jews, they discussed the violence committed against Jews when air raids occurred and they feared that the Allies were exacting revenge for how the Jews were treated.<sup>243</sup> The fate of European Jewry was not a concern of the German public, especially when faced with air raids.<sup>244</sup> After air raids in Hamburg in July and August of 1943 the Germans living there complained the bombing was in

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<sup>241</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 199.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid, 200-202.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid, 205.

<sup>244</sup>Peter Fritzsche, “Chapter 4: Babi Yar, but No Auschwitz What did Germans Know about the Final Solution?” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 94-96.

retaliation for attacking Jews in the November 1938 pogrom.<sup>245</sup> SD offices made many reports on statements from the German public specifically linking the air raids to the suffering European Jews endured under the Third Reich. Air raids were of the utmost concern for the German public for they directly experienced the war and lost their homes and loved ones to them. Fritz Nast-Kolb remarks that the fear of air raids even trumped his fear of being deported to the east which he knew meant death, “The air raid siren sounded constantly, and you had to keep running back to the bunker.... The air raids and being amid everything that was happening made our own fate seem relatively unimportant.”<sup>246</sup>

The German public was also preoccupied with how long the war was lasting since Hitler had promised that the Third Reich would achieve a quick victory in Europe.<sup>247</sup> After the Third Reich suffered a serious loss at Stalingrad, the German public grew even more anxious about the future of the war and its longevity. The public mood in support for Hitler declined as the public grew weary of the war and had extreme misgivings about the losses the military faced in the Soviet Union and North Africa.<sup>248</sup> Fearing constant air raids, losses on the war front, and economic instability the German public was preoccupied with fears much more urgent than the “Jewish question.” The Swedish ambassador made this observation of the German public:

A visitor to Berlin is struck by the... complete apathy displayed by the people, who were entirely absorbed by the material difficulties of every-day life. Lack of goods and of manual labour, blackouts and other inconveniences were their chief interest, and not the questions of international Jewry, Freemasonry, and

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<sup>245</sup>Frank Bajohr, “Chapter 2: German Responses to the Persecution of the Jews as Reflected in Three Collections of Secret Reports,” *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*, 53.

<sup>246</sup>Fritz Nast-Kolb, “My Mother Looked Like a Small, Emaciated Little Girl,” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, 300.

<sup>247</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 140-141.

<sup>248</sup>*Ibid*, 142.

Bolshevism. [All these topics] met with complete lack of interest from the public.<sup>249</sup>

Rudolf Semmler, who worked for Goebbels, submitted reports from German civilians that were to track the public mood on the war effort. Semmler's reports noted that the German public was unhappy with the course of the war and the toll it was taking with the number of losses. The public complained that the antisemitic propaganda was unimportant compared to the setbacks occurring in the war and they feared the vengeance Jews would seek if the Third Reich lost the war.<sup>250</sup> After Germany's defeats at Stalingrad and El Alamein, criticisms grew against the continued antisemitic propaganda being pumped out to the public when more relevant concerns of wartime struggles were on the German people's mind.<sup>251</sup>

The systematic, mass murder of European Jews and other minorities was a process that began with the Nazis legalizing acts of discrimination against European Jews.<sup>252</sup> The German public approved steps to legally and socially isolate Jews from society. The German Jews isolation began with the numerous laws restricting Jews from participating in society with "Aryan" Germans, they were stripped of their rights, then once Jews were isolated, they were physically removed from Germany. The majority of Germans approved of these anti-Jewish policies led by the Third Reich until the policies turned violent. Once Jews were physically removed and the German public no longer had to witness the violence, it was easier for the German public to deny the rumors of mass murder as unbelievable. As concerns for their own

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<sup>249</sup>"30 Sep. 1941, PRO, FO 371/34431." In *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 142-143

<sup>250</sup>Rudolf Semmler, *Goebbels*, entry for 16 Aug. 1943, in *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*, 145.

<sup>251</sup>David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism*, 145.

<sup>252</sup>Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, 199.

hardships increased with the failing war effort, mounting casualties, and constant bombing, most of the German public became ambivalent. Rumors of mass shootings of a marginalized, minority people mattered little amidst the immediate problems that directly affected the German public who was growing evermore concerned about the future of Germany. However, those who participated in, witnessed, or believed the rumors about the atrocities being committed against the Jews feared retaliation as the Allies advanced. The German response to the Holocaust was inextricably linked to the German war effort. The frail opposition Germans did muster against early violence toward Jews dissolved as the physical isolation of this disenfranchised group and the failures of the German military created the conditions in which German's own fears and hardships eclipsed any concerns for the suffering of Jews.

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### **Speech**

- Steinmeier, Frank-Walter. "Importance of Fighting the Ongoing Threat of Antisemitism Wherever it Appears." Speech, Berlin, Germany, October 18, 2021. Learn German.