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A Nation on Trial

AAARGH

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Goldhagen has threatened the Ruth Birn with a suit.

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# Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's 'Crazy' Thesis: A Critique of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*

Norman G. Finkelstein

*In the opinion, not of bad men, but of the best men,  
no belief which is contrary to truth can be really useful...*

John Stuart Mill

Rarely has a book with scholarly pretensions evoked as much popular interest as Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's study, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1). Every important journal of opinion printed one or more reviews within weeks of its release. The *New York Times*, for instance, featured multiple notices acclaiming Goldhagen's book as 'one of those rare new works that merit the appellation landmark', 'historic', and bringing to bear 'corrosive literary passion'. Although initial reviews were not uniformly positive, once the Goldhagen juggernaut proved unstoppable, even the dissenting voices joined in the chorus of praise. An immediate national best-seller, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* was balled in *Time* magazine's year-end issue as the 'most talked about' and second best non-fiction book of 1996.(2) Before long, Goldhagen was also an international phenomenon, creating an extraordinary stir in Germany.

What makes the Goldhagen phenomenon so remarkable is that *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is not at all a learned inquiry. Replete with gross misrepresentations of the secondary literature and internal contradictions, Goldhagen's book [39] is worthless as scholarship. The bulk of what follows documents this claim. In the conclusion I speculate on the broader meaning of the Goldhagen phenomenon.

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## I. Before the Genocide

Genocide was immanent in the conversation of German society. It was immanent in its language and emotion. It was immanent in the structure of cognition.  
*Hitler's Willing Executioners*, p. 449

### 1. A Nation Crazy with Hatred?

In a seminal study published thirty-five years ago, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Raul Hilberg observed that the perpetrators of the Nazi holocaust were 'not different in their moral makeup from the rest of the population... the machinery of destruction was a remarkable cross section of the German population.' These representative Germans, Hilberg went on to say, performed their appointed tasks with astonishing efficiency: 'No obstruction stopped the German machine of destruction. No moral problem proved insurmountable. When all participating personnel were put to the test, there were very few lingerers and almost no deserters.' Indeed, an 'uncomfortably large number of soldiers... delighted in death as spectators or as perpetrators.' (3)

Long before Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's study, it was thus already known that 'ordinary' Germans were Hitler's 'willing' and not infrequently cruel 'executioners'.(4) The main distinction of Goldhagen's study is the [40] explanation it purports to supply for what Hilberg called this 'phenomenon of the greatest magnitude.' (5) It is Goldhagen's thesis that the 'central causal agent of the Holocaust' was the German people's enduring pathological hatred of the Jews. (*Hitler's Willing Executioners* [hereafter HWE] p. 9) To cite one typical passage:

[A] demonological anti-Semitism, of the virulent racial variety, was the common structure of the perpetrators' cognition and of German society in general. The German perpetrators ... were assenting mass executioners, men and women who, true to their own eliminationist anti-Semitic beliefs, faithful to their cultural anti-Semitic credo, considered the slaughter to be just. (HWE, pp. 392-3)

There are no prima facie grounds for dismissing Goldhagen's thesis. It is not intrinsically racist or otherwise illegitimate. There is no obvious reason why a culture cannot be fanatically consumed by hatred. One may further recall that, Goldhagen's claims to novelty notwithstanding, his argument is not altogether new. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the genesis of the Final Solution was located in a twisted 'German mind' or 'German character'. (6) The departure point of much 'Holocaust scholarship' is that Germans, nurtured on anti-Semitism, were thirsting for a 'war against the Jews'. On the eve of Hitler's ascension to power, wrote Lucy Dawidowicz, Germany was 'a world intoxicated with hate, driven by paranoia, enemies everywhere, the Jew lurking behind each one.' (7) This is also the dominant image of the Nazi extermination among Jews and in popular culture generally.

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Bolstered as it is by a bulging scholarly apparatus, the audacious sweep, of Goldhagen's thesis nonetheless merits emphasis. He argues that, for centuries, nearly every German was possessed of a homicidal animus toward Jews. Thus, he suggests that more than 80-90 per cent of the German people would have relished the occasion to torture and murder Jews.(8) Goldhagen takes to task the 'conventional explanations' which supposedly ignore the 'identity of the victims': 'That the victims were Jewish – according to the logic of these explanations – is irrelevant.' Indeed, he declaims that we must 'abandon the *assumption* that, by and large, Germans in the nineteenth and twentieth century were not anti-Semitic.' (HWE, pp. 13, 30-1, original emphasis) In a rejoinder to critics, Goldhagen credits his own book as being the first to correct this misconception: 'Most seem now to agree that anti-Semitism was a necessary cause of the Holocaust...'. (9) Yet, one is hard-pressed to name a single account of the Nazi genocide that *doesn't* crucially situate it within the context of German anti-Semitism. Goldhagen's true distinction is to [ 41] argue that German anti-Semitism was not only a significant but rather that it was *the* sufficient condition for perpetrating the extermination of the Jews: 'With regard to the *motivational* cause of the Holocaust, for the vast majority of perpetrators, a monocausal explanation does suffice.' (10)

The Hitlerite regime accordingly plays a subordinate role in Goldhagen's comprehension of the Final Solution. Inasmuch as the inclination for 'killing' Jews 'predated Nazi political power', the Nazis were 'easily able to harness the perpetrators' preexisting anti-Semitism once Hitler gave the order to undertake the extermination.' (HWE, PP. 399, 463; see also pp. 418-19) All Hitler did was 'unleash the pent-up anti-Semitic passion', 'unshackle and thereby activate Germans' preexisting, pent-up anti-Semitism', and so on. (HWE, pp. 95, 442,443)

### **Why was the Holocaust Unique to Germany?**

Leaving to one side the question of its veracity, this last formulation of Goldhagen's is still problematic. Consider that he repeatedly contradicts it. Had it not been for 'Hitler's moral authority', Goldhagen observes, the 'vast majority of Germans never would have contemplated' the genocide against the Jews. (11) It was the Nazis' unprecedentedly 'extreme and thoroughgoing ... cognitive-moral revolution' that, Goldhagen suggests, produced Germany's 'lethal political culture'. (HWE, p. 456; see also Reply, p. 42) Unaware that 'these Germans were like no Germans they had ever known', Goldhagen explains, Soviet Jerry 'initially greeted' the Nazi soldiers 'obligingly and without hostility.' (HWE, p. 587 n. 87) But if Goldhagen's thesis is correct, these Germans *were* like all other Germans.

On a related issue, to explain why the genocide unfolded in Germany and not elsewhere, Goldhagen points up the centrality of Hitler's regime: 'Whatever the anti-Semitic traditions were in other European countries, it was only in Germany that an openly and rabidly anti-Semitic movement came to power... that was bent upon turning anti-Semitic fantasy into state organized genocidal slaughter.' (HWE, p. 419; see also Reply, p. 43.) Yet Goldhagen's explanation evades an embarrassingly obvious question: if other Europeans were as anti-Semitic as Germans which is what this argument assumes why didn't a 'rabidly anti-Semitic movement' come to power elsewhere? True, Goldhagen argues that 'Had there not been an economic depression in Germany, then the Nazis, in all likelihood, would never have come to power.' (Reply, p. 42; see also HWE, p. 87) But that simply evades another obvious question:

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if Germans were so possessed by a fanatical anti-Semitism – more on which directly – why did a 'rabidly anti-Semitic movement' have to await an economic depression to attain power?

Indeed, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is a monument to question-begging. Eschewing the claim that it is 'inexplicable', Goldhagen sets as his [42] objective to 'explain why the Holocaust occurred, to explain how it could occur.' He concludes that it 'is explicable historically'. (HWE, pp. 5, 455 [incomplete reference]) Goldhagen's thesis, however, neither renders the Nazi holocaust intelligible nor is it historical. For argument's sake, let us assume that Goldhagen is correct. Consumed by a ferocious loathing of the Jews, the German people jumped at Hitler's invitation to exterminate them. Yet the question still remains, whence the hatred of Jews? A nation of genocidal racists is, after all, not exactly a commonplace.

On this crucial issue, Goldhagen sheds no light. Anti-Semitism, he suggests, was symptomatic of a much deeper German malaise. It served the Germans as a 'moral rationale' for releasing 'destructive and ferocious passions that are usually tamed and curbed by civilization.' (HWE, p. 397) Yet he neither explains why these normally quiescent passions burst forth in Germany nor why they were directed against the Jews. Goldhagen depicts anti-Semitism as the manifestation of a deranged state. The Germans were 'pathologically ill ... struck with the illness of sadism ... diseased ... tyrannical, sadistic', 'psychopathic' (HWE, pp. 397, 450, quoting a 'keen diarist of the Warsaw Ghetto'), in thrall of 'absolutely fantastical ... beliefs that ordinarily only madmen have of others ... prone to wild, "magical thinking"' (HWE, p. 412), and so on. (12) Goldhagen never explains, however, why the Germans succumbed and why the Jews fell victim to this derangement.

In what is surely the book's most evocative analogy, Goldhagen compares the Germans to 'crazy' Captain Ahab. Recalling Melville's memorable description of Ahab's insanely hateful state as he harpoons the whale, Goldhagen writes: 'Germans' violent anger at the Jews is akin to the passion that drove Ahab to hunt Moby Dick.' (HWE, pp. 398-9) Yet even if the Germans were 'crazy' like Ahab, it still remains to explain what drove them to such a frenzied state. In Ahab's case, the motive is clear: Moby Dick had earlier mangled him. To quote Melville from the passage Goldhagen excerpts: 'It was revenge.' But Goldhagen plainly does not believe the Jews inflicted violent injury on Germans. Indeed, he emphatically denies that Jews bear any responsibility for anti-Semitism: 'the existence of anti-Semitism and the content of anti-Semitic charges... are fundamentally not a response to any objective evaluation of Jewish actions... anti-Semitism draws on cultural sources that are *independent of* the Jews' nature and actions.' (HWE, p. 39, original emphasis) In an almost comically circular argument, Goldhagen concludes that the Germans' Ahab-like loathing of the Jews originated in their loathing of the Jews: 'Germans' anti-Semitism was the basis of their profound hatred of the Jews and the psychological impulse to make them suffer.' (HWE, p. 584 n. 62; see also p. 399). (13) This argument recalls one of Goldhagen's key theoretical insights: 'The motivational dimension is the most crucial for explaining the perpetrators' willingness to act.' (HWE, p. 20) [43] Goldhagen approvingly cites the *Sonderweg* argument that 'Germany developed along a singular path, setting it apart from other western countries.' (HWE, p. 419) But Goldhagen's thesis has precious little in common with this argument. Unlike the *Sonderweg* proponents, he never once anchors the deformations of the German character in

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temporal developments. Rather, the perverted German consciousness of Goldhagen's making floats above and persists in spite of history. Just how little Goldhagen's argument has in common with *any* school of history is pointed up by his conclusion that the Germans' 'absurd beliefs... rapidly dissipated' after the Second World War. (HWE, pp. 593-4 n. 53; see also p. 582 n. 38) Indeed, Germans today are 'democrats, committed democrats.' (14) Emerging from oblivion and enduring for centuries, the psychopathic German mind vanished again into oblivion in the space of a few decades. Thus Goldhagen renders the Nazi holocaust 'explicable historically'.

The merit of his thesis, Goldhagen contends, is that it recognizes that 'each individual made choices about how to treat Jews.' Thus, it 'restores the notion of individual responsibility'. (Reply, p. 38) Yet if Goldhagen's thesis is correct, the exact opposite is true. Germans bear no individual or, for that matter, collective guilt. After all, German culture was 'radically different' from ours. It shared none of our basic values. Killing Jews could accordingly be done in 'good conscience.' (HWE, p. 15) Germans perceived Jews the way we perceive roaches. They did not know better. They could not know better. It was a homogeneously sick society. Moral culpability, however, presumes moral awareness. Touted as a searing indictment of Germans, Goldhagen's thesis is, in fact, their perfect alibi. Who can condemn a 'crazy' people?

## 2. Explaining Everything

Goldhagen deploys two analytically distinct strategies to prove his thesis. The first derives from his own primary research on the German perpetrators of the genocide. Goldhagen maintains that certain of his findings 'defy all of the conventional explanations.' (HWE, p. 391) In particular, he argues that only a murderously anti-Semitic culture can account for the wanton cruelty of the Germans. (Reply, pp. 38-9) Yet, it is not at all obvious why Goldhagen's thesis is more compelling than one that, say, includes the legacy of German anti-Semitism exacerbated by the incessant, inflammatory Jew-baiting of Nazi propaganda, and further exacerbated by the brutalizing effects of a singularly barbarous war. It is perhaps true, as Goldhagen suggests, that such a 'patchwork explanation' does not yet fully plumb the depths of German bestiality. (HWE, p. 391) But Goldhagen himself acknowledges that neither does his theory. Ultimately, he concedes, the immensity of German cruelty 'remains hard to fathom' and 'the extent and nature of German anti-Semitism' cannot explain it. (HWE, pp. 584 n. 62, 584 n. 65; see also p. 399)

The second thrust of Goldhagen's argument is to demonstrate historically that German society was seething with virulent anti-Semitism on the eve of Hitler's ascension to power. The undertaking is a daunting [44] one. Goldhagen relies almost entirely on the recent secondary literature on German anti-Semitism. He acknowledges that the evidence does not in a 'definitive' manner prove his conclusions. (HWE, p. 47) The problem, however, is rather larger. Profuse as it is, not a jot of this scholarship sustains Goldhagen's thesis. No serious German historian discounts the legacy of German anti-Semitism; none, however, maintains that German anti-Semitism was in itself sufficiently virulent to account for the Nazi genocide.(15) Indeed, this is one reason why versions of Goldhagen's thesis have been discarded in serious scholarly inquiry. The task Goldhagen sets himself is to force the new evidence into the Procrustean bed of an obsolete theory. To meet this challenge, Goldhagen fashions a new model of anti-Semitism. Thomas Kuhn suggested that a new paradigm comes

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into existence when anomalies crop up that the old one can no longer accommodate. The purpose of Goldhagen's new paradigm, however, is to make the anomalies fit the old one.

The essence of Goldhagen's new paradigm is what he calls 'eliminationist anti-Semitism'. Goldhagen situates German anti-Semitism along a continuous spectrum. At one extreme was the German perception that Jews were vaguely different. At the other extreme was the perception that Jews were distinctly evil. Between these poles was the perception that Jews were more or less flawed. Moving from one end of the spectrum to the other, the complementary German desire to eliminate an unappealing feature of the Jews rapidly yielded to the desire to eliminate Jews altogether. '*The eliminationist mind-set*', Goldhagen proclaims, '*tended towards an exterminationist one.*' (HWE, p. 71, emphasis in original; see also pp. 23, 77, 444) Thus, any German who questioned the group loyalty or objected to the business practices of Jews was effectively a Nazi brute. Wedded as it was to an assimilationist version of the 'eliminationist mind-set', even German liberalism inexorably led to Auschwitz.

Rescuing an otherwise improbable thesis, 'eliminationist anti-Semitism' serves as Goldhagen's deus ex machina. Indeed, using this device, it is not at all difficult to prove that nearly every German was a latent Hitler. It would also not be at all difficult to prove that nearly every white American is a latent Grand Wizard. How many white Americans do not harbour any negative stereotypes about black people? If Goldhagen is correct, we are all closet racial psychopaths. Why then did the 'Holocaust' happen in Germany? If we all suffer from an 'eliminationist mind-set' then that alone cannot account for what Goldhagen calls a 'sui generis event'. (HWE, p. 419)

Casting as a theoretical novelty the distinction between 'type[s] of anti-Semitism', Goldhagen dismisses previous scholars who 'typically... treated' anti-Semitism 'in an undifferentiated manner'. Before he came along, 'a person [was] either an anti-Semite or not.' (HWE, pp. 34-5; see also Reply, p. 41) Leaving aside the fact that the contrast he proposes [45] between, say, religious and racial or latent and manifest anti-Semitism is standard in the Nazi holocaust literatures, (16) it is Goldhagen himself who radically undercuts all distinctions: on the 'eliminationist' spectrum, every manifestation of anti-Semitism and even philosemitism 'tend[s] strongly towards a genocidal "solution".' (17)

In this connection, Goldhagen's resolution of a key controversy in the Nazi holocaust literature is noteworthy. Historians have long disputed whether Hitler sought from the outset (the intentionalist school) or was pressed by circumstances (the functionalist school) to exterminate the Jews. To prove the intentionalist thesis, Goldhagen simply lumps Hitler's various initiatives together: they were all effectively genocidal. Thus, Hitler's pre-invasion orders that limited the extermination of Soviet Jews to adult males was 'still genocidal'. His ghettoization and deportation schemes were 'bloodlessly genocidal', 'proto-genocidal', 'psychologically and ideologically the functional, if not the eventual, actual equivalent of genocide', 'quasi-genocidal', 'bloodless equivalents of genocide', and so on. Even the destruction of Jewish synagogues during Kristallnacht was a 'proto-genocidal assault... the psychic equivalent of genocide.' (18) The very basis of the intentionalist-functionalist controversy, however, is that the distinction between riot, expulsion, and mass murder, on the one hand, and genocide, on the other, does count. Why else focus on

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Hitler's decision to initiate the judeocide? Goldhagen's 'proof annuls the debate's central premise. It also annuls the central premise of his own book. If all these policies evidence genocidal intent, then genocidal intent is very far from uncommon in human history. Yet, Goldhagen maintains that 'the Holocaust is ... utterly new', and it is 'crucially' the genocidal intent that makes it so. (HWE, p. 5; Reply, p. 45)

Once Goldhagen attends to the matter of distinctions, the bankruptcy of his explanatory model stands exposed. Thus, he also enters the strong caveat that German 'eliminationist anti-Semitism' was equally compatible with a broad range of social outcomes. It was 'multipotential.' Indeed, 'eliminationist anti-Semitism' could 'obvious[ly]' culminate in everything from 'total assimilation' to 'total annihilation', with 'verbal assault', 'legal [46] restraints', 'physical assault', 'physical separation in ghettos', 'forcible and violent expulsion', all being intermediate possibilities. (HWE, pp. 69, 70, 132-6, 444, 494 n. 92) These multiple options, Goldhagen further elucidates, 'were rough functional equivalents from the vantage point of the perpetrators.' (HWE, p. 135; see also p. 70) Yet, if all these policy options were 'rough functional equivalents' for the 'eliminationist mind-set', then that mind-set plainly cannot account for the genocidal variant. So capacious is his conceptual device, Goldhagen suggests, that it can explain in a 'logical' manner the full gamut of unfolding German anti-Jewish policies. (HWE, p. 444) True it explains all of them; it also explains none.

Goldhagen's survey of German anti-Semitism roughly divides at the Nazis' ascension to power. In the next two sections, I shall consider his analysis of Germany before and after the Nazis took over.

### **3. Pre-Nazi Germany**

In his introductory chapter, Goldhagen emphasizes an analytical distinction: 'Some anti-Semitisms become woven into the moral order of society; others do not.' Theorizing that the former are potentially more explosive, Goldhagen puts 'the conception of Jews in medieval Christendom' in this category: 'its uncompromising non-pluralistic and intolerant view of the moral basis of society... held the Jews to violate the moral order of the world ... Jews came to represent ... much of the evil in the world; they not only represented it but also came to be seen by Christians as being synonymous with it, indeed as being self-willed agents of evil.' (HWE, pp. 37-8; see also p. 51) Alas, Goldhagen also argues that anti-Semitism was *not* at the core of pre-modern Christianity: 'In medieval times ... Jews were seen to be responsible for many ills, but they remained always somewhat peripheral, on the fringes, spatially and theologically, of the Christian world, not central to its understanding of the world's troubles ... even if the Jews were to disappear, the Devil, the ultimate source of evil, would remain.' (HWE, p. 67; see also p. 77) Apart from his theoretical insight – or perhaps insights – Goldhagen skips quickly over the pre-modern era.

Except perhaps for an obscure, unpublished, thirty-year-old doctoral dissertation, Goldhagen acknowledges, the extant scholarly literature on modern German anti-Semitism does not reach his conclusions. If, however, the same findings are 'reconceptualize[d]' in a 'new analytical and interpretative framework', they do, he believes, sustain his novel thesis. (HWE, pp. 488 n. 17, 76-7; see also Reply, p. 41)

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Summarizing his conclusions for the nineteenth century through World War I, Goldhagen writes:

It is... incontestable that the fundamentals of Nazi anti-Semitism... had deep roots in Germany, was part of the cultural cognitive model of German society, and was integral to German political culture. It is incontestable that racial anti-Semitism was the salient form of anti-Semitism in Germany and that it was broadly part of the public conversation of German society. It is incontestable that it had enormously wide and solid institutional and political support in Germany at various times ... It is incontestable that this racial anti-Semitism which held the Jews to pose a mortal threat to Germany was pregnant with murder. (HWE, pp. 74-5; see also p. 77)

[47] No serious historian doubts that anti-Semitism persisted in modern Germany. The question is, what was its scope and nature? (19) Goldhagen argues that anti-Semitism was ubiquitous in Germany. Yet German Social-Democracy forcefully denounced anti-Semitism and, as the single largest political party (the SPD), commanded the allegiance of fully a third of the electorate by the early twentieth century. Not the working-class base, Goldhagen suggests, but only 'the core of the socialist movement, its intellectuals and leaders' repudiated anti-Semitism. It was merely a 'small group'. (HWE, p. 74; see also p. 72) The only source he cites is Peter Pulzer's *Jews and the German State*, which enters no such qualification. (20) Indeed, turning to Pulzer's authoritative companion study, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, we learn that 'anti-Semitism drew little strength from ... the working-class ... The [German worker] knew that national and religious arguments were at best irrelevant to a solution of his problems and at worst a deliberate attempt to cloud his view of the "real issues".' (21) A compelling example of popular German anti-Semitism cited by Goldhagen is the recurrence of ritual murder accusations. 'In Germany and the Austrian Empire', he reports, twelve such trials took place between 1867 and 1914.' (HWE, pp. 63-4) Goldhagen cites Pulzer's *The Rise of political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*. Turning to the cited page, we find that Goldhagen has reversed the import of Pulzer's finding. The remainder of the sentence reads: 'eleven of which collapsed although the trials were by jury'. (22)

To further document the extent of German anti-Semitism, Goldhagen recalls a 'spontaneous, extremely broad-based, and genuine' petition campaign in Bavaria opposing the full equality of Jews. Yet, the corresponding note tucked in the book's back pages reveals that actually the campaign was carefully orchestrated by 'priests and other anti-Jewish agitators' and that 'many' signatories were 'indifferent' to the Jews. Ian Kershaw adds that 'many petitioners... knew little of any Jewish Question.' Unfazed, Goldhagen concludes his endnote: 'because agitators could so easily induce them to anti-Semitic expression', the petition drive still proves 'how anti-Semitic Bavarians were'. (23)

[48] Even if Goldhagen were able to prove that German culture was 'axiomatically anti-Semitic' (HWE, p. 59), that in itself would not yet prove that the German people strained at the bit to murder Jews. Thus, as seen above, Goldhagen also argues that German anti-Semitism was pervasively homicidal. Consider some other representative passages:

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By the end of the nineteenth century, the view that Jews posed extreme danger to Germany and that the source of their perniciousness was immutable, namely their race, and the consequential belief that the Jews had to be *eliminated* from Germany were extremely widespread in German society. The tendency to consider and propose the most radical form of elimination – that is, extermination – was already strong and had been given much voice. (HWE, p. 72, original emphasis)

... the cognitive model of Nazi anti-Semitism had taken shape well before the Nazis came to power, and ... this model, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was also extremely widespread in all social classes and sectors of German society, for it was deeply embedded in German cultural and political life and conversation, as well as integrated into the moral structure of society. (HWE, p. 77)

Pulzer, however, maintains that only 'a small, though growing, and noisy minority' even held that 'Jews were a separate, unassimilable race'. A second authority frequently cited by Goldhagen, Shulamit Volkov, similarly concludes that nineteenth-century German anti-Semitism did not 'bring forth' the Nazi genocide. Indeed, it was 'closer to the French version of that time than to later National Socialist positions.' (24)

### **The Jews as a Separate Race**

To document his thesis, Goldhagen repeatedly points to the proliferation of radically anti-Semitic literature in Germany. For instance, he cites the 'startling' statistic that 19 of 51 'prominent anti-Semitic writers' advocated the '*physical extermination of the Jews.*' (HWE, p. 71, original emphasis; see also p. 64) One would perhaps also want to note that an overwhelming majority did not. As Goldhagen himself acknowledges two pages earlier: 'a large percentage of the anti-Semites proposed no action at all.' Goldhagen deems this last fact 'astonishing' – but it would be astonishing only if his thesis were true. Goldhagen also never asks who read this literature. Scoring Germany as the birthplace and headquarters of 'scientific' anti-Semitism, Eva Reichmann nonetheless cautions that 'an anti-Semitic literature does not of necessity prove a wide anti-Semitic response among the public.' (25)

Ill suited to his thesis, the scholarly evidence is recast by Goldhagen with [49] the aid of his novel methodology. (26) Thus, Goldhagen suggests that any German who believed that Jews constituted a 'religion, nation, political group, or race' and thus were an 'alien body within Germany', or that Jews engaged in 'underhanded' or 'parasitic' business activities fell on the eliminationist spectrum gliding to murder. (27) The identical image of Jews as a 'nation' or 'race' that was 'alien' to and 'parasitical' on European society was also, however, a staple of Zionist ideology. Indeed, as one Zionist historian copiously documents, 'the Jewish self-criticism so widespread among the German Zionist intelligentsia often seemed dangerously similar to the complaints of the German anti-Semites.' (28) Does that make all Zionists homicidal anti-Semites as well? Pressed into Goldhagen's conceptual meat grinder, even German 'liberals', 'philosemites', and 'Progressives', with their ambivalent prescriptions for Jewish emancipation, emerge as racial psychopaths. Thus, Goldhagen reckons that Enlightenment Germans were 'anti-Semites in sheep's

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clothing', 'philosemitic anti-Semites', in thrall to the 'assimilationist version of the eliminationist mind-set', and so forth. (HWE, pp. 56-9, 70, 74, 78) Small wonder that Goldhagen is able to prove that Germany was a nation of murderous Jew-haters.

For all its social turbulence, modern Germany prior to Hitler witnessed only episodic spasms of anti-Jewish violence. Indeed, there was no equivalent of the riots that attended the Dreyfus Affair or the pogroms in Russia. If Germany was brimming with pathological anti-Semites, why did Jews so rarely suffer their wrath? Alas, Goldhagen only briefly touches on this – for his thesis – plainly pivotal question. He writes, 'As powerful and potentially violent as the anti-Semitism was ... the state would not allow it to become the basis of collective social action of this [50] sort. Wilhelmine Germany would not tolerate the organized violence for which the anti-Semites appeared to long.' (HWE, p. 72) Yet, why was the State immune to the pathological anti-Semitism infecting the German body-politic? Indeed, winning the 1893 election, the Conservative Party, which according to Goldhagen was 'thoroughly anti-Semitic', along with allied avowedly anti-Semitic parties, proved a force to reckon with in the State. (HWE, pp. 56, 74-6) Why did these violent anti-Semites 'not tolerate' anti-Semitic violence?

Disobeying orders that they opposed, the Germans did not, according to Goldhagen, blindly defer to State authority. Indeed, if the State violated a normative value, 'ordinary citizens' entered into 'open rebellion' against, and 'battled in the streets... in defiance of ... and in order to overthrow it.' (HWE, pp. 381-2) Goldhagen further maintains that all the non-governmental centres of power in Germany – what he calls its 'Tocquevillian substructure' – were packed with insane Jew-haters. (HWE, pp. 59-60, 72-4) If they were thus driven by fanatical anti-Semitism that was the German 'cultural norm' (HWE, p. 61), the German people should have risen up against the Wilhelmine state that was shielding the Jews. Jewish blood should have been flowing in German streets. Luckily for the Jews, but unluckily for Goldhagen's thesis, this never happened. Ironically, the only 'continual legislative and parliamentary battles', 'bitter political fights', and so forth Goldhagen chronicles were over Jewish emancipation. (HWE, p. 56) If, as Goldhagen writes in the very same paragraphs, the 'vast majority' of Germans were 'thoroughly anti-Semitic', why was there such intense political discord on the Jewish Question?

Goldhagen acknowledges only parenthetically that, for all the entrenched anti-Semitism, modern German Jews experienced a 'meteoric rise from pariah status.' (HWE, p. 78) Indeed, German Jerry at the century's turn – recalls one historian – 'thrived in this atmosphere of imperfect toleration; their coreligionists throughout the world ... looked to them for support and leadership.' (29) Goldhagen wisely does not even try to reconcile the 'meteoric rise' of German Jews with the thesis that Germany was seething with psychopathic anti-Semitism.

Saturated with Jew-hatred, Weimar Germany was, according to Goldhagen, all of a piece. Thus 'virtually every major institution and group ... was permeated by anti-Semitism', 'nearly every political group in the country shunned the Jews', 'Jews, though ferociously attacked, found virtually no defenders', 'the public conversation about Jews was almost wholly negative', and so on, and so on. (HWE, pp. 82-4)

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It is true that anti-Semitism persisted in the Weimar era. Goldhagen recalls the 'Aryan paragraphs' that restricted Jewish entry into universities and student organizations. (HWE, p. 83) Yet Jews in England and the US suffered similar exclusions. Popular anti-Semitic violence occasionally flared up during the years 1917-23 when German society tottered on the brink of total collapse. Once the new regime stabilized, however, almost all vandalization of Jewish property was connected [51] with the Nazis. Unlike Goldhagen, Pulzer reports that the Social-Democratic Party proved during Weimar 'a committed opponent of organized anti-Semitism', and Niewyck reports that 'the penetration of anti-Jewish opinions into the organized Socialist working class was kept to an unmeasurable minimum'. To document that the 'SPD did little to attack the Nazis 'anti-Semitism', Goldhagen cites Donna Harsch's study, *German Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism*. (HWE, p. 497 n. 16) Turning to the cited page, we learn that, although the SPD did react defensively to slurs that it was beholden to the Jewish community, 'all Social Democrats' proved 'consistent' in their 'advocacy of the civil rights of German and East European Jews'.(30)

Goldhagen's monochromatic thumbnail sketch also completely omits the remarkable successes registered by German Jews. Occupying a salient place in German life, Weimar Jewry assembled a record of achievements in the arts, politics and the economy rivaled only by that of American Jewry after World War II. 'Had the German population been uniquely rabid in its hatred', Sarah Gordon reasonably concludes, 'it is inconceivable that Jews could have fared so well, especially compared to Jews in other nations.' (31)

### **How Public Were Hitler's Intentions?**

Shouting from the rooftops his maniacal hatred of the Jews, Hitler fully and incessantly apprised the German people, according to Goldhagen, of his genocidal plans: 'In his writing, speeches, and conversation, Hitler was direct and clear. Germany's enemies at home and abroad were to be destroyed or rendered inert. No one who heard or read Hitler could have missed this clarion message.' (HWE, p. 86) And again: 'Rarely has a national leader so openly, frequently, and emphatically announced an apocalyptic intention – in this case, to destroy Jewish power and even the Jews themselves – and made good on his promise.' (HWE, p. 162; see also p. 424)

Yet, Goldhagen adduces only three pieces of evidence for the period up to the eve of World War II to document this claim: the notorious passage from *Mein Kampf*, which perhaps few Germans read and even fewer took literally; a speech of 1920 when Hitler was 'still politically obscure'; and Hitler's conditional and ambiguous January 1939 'prophecy', which was largely ignored by a German public preoccupied with the impending war. (32)

[52] Hitler's public statements have been subject to numerous analyses. None confirm Goldhagen's depiction. Indeed, yet again directly contradicting his own thesis, Goldhagen reports that Hitler 'prudently would not repeat in public' his explicitly genocidal aims 'after he had achieved national prominence'. Goldhagen also validates Goebbels's boast in 1944 that, before seizing power, the Nazis 'had not made their ultimate intentions known publicly'. (Goldhagen's paraphrase; HWE, pp. 425, 589 n. 13) The actual documentary record for the period through 1939 shows that: 1) Hitler's earliest speeches were pervasively anti-Semitic; 2) realizing, however, that anti-

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Marxism had a wider appeal than anti-Semitism, Hitler muted his attacks on Jews once he entered public life in 1923; 3) attacks on Jews figured only marginally in Hitler's speeches during the years immediately preceding his electoral triumph; 4) upon taking power and until the eve of World War II, Hitler publicly announced as his ultimate goal not the annihilation but the forced emigration of the Jews. (33)

'Even during the War, when his machinery of destruction was running at top capacity', Max Domaniš recalls, Hitler 'confined his remarks on a massacre of Jews to threats within the scope of his foreign policy, knowing only too well that such an openly propagated program of extermination was certain to meet with resistance from the majority of the German people and the bulk of his parry followers.' (34) Yet, Goldhagen writes: 'Hitler announced many times, emphatically, that the war would end in the extermination of the Jews. The killing met with general understanding, if not approval.' The endnote refers readers to Max Domarus. (HWE, pp. 8 [incomplete reference], 477 n. 10)

The Nazi genocide, Goldhagen elucidates, was 'given shape and energized by a leader, Hitler, who was adored by the vast majority of the [53] German people, a leader who was known to be committed wholeheartedly to the unfolding, brutal eliminationist program.' (HWE, p. 419) Pointing up 'Hitler's enormous popularity and the legitimacy that it helped engender for the regime', Goldhagen elsewhere refers readers to Ian Kershaw's important study, *The 'Hitler Myth'*. (HWE, p. 512 n. 2) Yet Goldhagen omits altogether Kershaw's main finding – that anti-Semitism never figured centrally in Hitler's mass appeal. Thus Kershaw typically writes:

Anti-Semitism, despite its pivotal place in Hitler's 'world view', was of only secondary importance in cementing the bonds between Fuhrer and people which provided the Third Reich with its popular legitimation and basis of plebiscitary acclamation. At the same time, the principle of excluding the Jews from German society was itself widely and increasingly popular, and Hitler's hatred of the Jews – baleful in its threats but linked to the condoning of lawful, 'rational' action, not the unpopular crude violence and brutality of the Party's 'gutter' elements – was certainly an acceptable component of his popular image, even if it was an element 'taken on board' rather than forming a centrally motivating factor for most Germans.

Indeed, 'during the 1930s ... when his popularity was soaring to dizzy heights', Kershaw underlines, Hitler 'was extremely careful to avoid public association with the generally unpopular pogrom-type anti-Semitic outrages.' (35)

### **Was Anti-Semitism Appealing?**

Like Hitler's public persona, the electoral cycle culminating in the Nazi victory has been closely scrutinized by historians. These contests were a uniquely sensitive barometer of the fluctuations in German popular opinion. The consensus of the scholarly literature is that anti-Semitism did not figure centrally in the Nazis' ultimate success at the polls. (36) Before the massive economic depression sent German society reeling, neither the Nazis nor any of the other radical anti-Semitic parties were able to garner more than a minuscule percentage of the votes. Even as late as 1928, only 2.8 per cent of the German electorate cast ballots for the Nazi Party. The

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subsequent spectacular upswing in the Nazis' electoral fortunes was due [54] overwhelmingly to the solutions they proposed for Germany's economic crisis. Not the Jews but Marxism and Social Democracy served as the prime scapegoats of Nazi propaganda. Anti-Semitism was not altogether jettisoned by the Nazis; it did not, however, account for the core of their support. In perhaps the single most illuminating interpretive study of the Nazi phenomenon, Eva Reichmann subtly elucidates this relationship:

In an excessively complicated situation Nazism offered to a society in full disintegration a political diet whose disastrous effects this society was no longer able to realize. People felt that it contained tidbits for every palate. The tidbits were, so to speak, coated with anti-Semitism.... But it was not the covering for the sake of which they were greedily swallowed.... The wrapping in which the new security, the new self-assurance, the exculpation, the permission to hate was served might equally well have had another colour and another spice.

The 'conclusiveness of this analogy', Reichmann significantly adds, is 'confirmed' by the absence of popular anti-Semitic malice prior to the Nazi victory:

If those people who, under the influence of anti-Semitic propaganda, had been moved by outright hatred of the Jews, their practical aggression against them would have been excessive after the Jews had been openly abandoned to the people's fury. Violence would not then have been limited to the organized activities of Nazi gangs, but would have become endemic in the whole people and seriously endangered the life of every Jew in Germany. This, however, did not happen. Even during the years in which the party increased by leaps and bounds, spontaneous terrorist assaults on Jews were extremely rare ... In spite of the ardent efforts of the [Nazi Party], the boycott against Jewish shopkeepers and professional men before the seizure of power was negligible, although this would have been an inconspicuous and safe way of demonstrating one's anti-Jewish feeling. From all this all but complete lack of practical anti-Semitic reactions at a time when the behaviour of the public was still a correct index to its sentiments, it can only be inferred that the overwhelming majority of the people did not feel their relations to the Jewish minority as unbearable. (37)

Goldhagen dispatches the crucial cycle of elections culminating in the Nazi victory in one page. He highlights that, in the July 1932 election – the Nazis' best showing in an open contest – 'almost *fourteen million* Germans, 37.4 per cent of the voters, cast their lots for Hitler.' (HWE, p. 87, original emphasis) He might also have highlighted that more than *twenty three million* Germans, 62.6 per cent of the voters, did not cast their lot for Hitler. 'There is no doubt', Goldhagen concludes, 'that Hitler's virulent, lethal-sounding anti-Semitism did not at the very least deter Germans by the millions from throwing their support to him.' (HWE, p. 497 n. 22) This finding, however, feebly sustains Goldhagen's thesis. If, [55] as Goldhagen claims, the Germans were straining at the bit to murder the Jews, and if, as he claims, Hitler promised to 'unleash' them if elected, then Germans should have voted for Hitler not despite but *because of* his anti-Semitism. Not even Goldhagen pretends this was the case. Indeed, he acknowledges that 'many people ... welcomed Nazism while disliking certain of its aspects as

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transient excrescences upon the body of the Party which Hitler ... would slough off as so many alien accretions.' (HWE, p. 435) This was precisely the case with Nazi anti-Semitism. (38) Finally, to demonstrate Hitler's greater popularity right after the seizure of power, Goldhagen recalls that the throttling of all dissent 'did not deter voters, but increased the Nazi vote to over seventeen million people' in March 1933. (HWE, p. 87) One may have supposed that this increment in Nazi votes was perhaps *because* all dissent was throttled. Imagine if, to demonstrate the Communist regime's growing popular appeal, a Soviet historian argued that massive repression 'did not deter, but increased the vote for Stalin to over...' It is doubtful that even *Pravda* would have noticed such a book.

#### 4. The Nazi Years, 1933-1939

In her study of Nazism, Eva Reichmann observes that the 'spontaneous' German attitude toward Jews can no longer be gauged after Hitler's ascension to power. Totalitarian rule corrupted Germans. (39) Goldhagen disagrees. Consistent with his 'monocausal explanation', Goldhagen maintains that the Nazi regime's propaganda and repressive apparatuses did not do special injury to German-Jewish relations. 'It must be emphasized', Goldhagen writes, 'that in no sense did the Nazis "brainwash" the German people.' Rather, the Germans were already in thrall to a 'hallucinatory, demonized image of Jews' long before Hitler came on the scene. (40) Why then did the Nazi regime invest so much of its resources in fomenting Jew-hatred? Goldhagen recalls, for instance, that 'the most consistent, frequently acted upon and pervasive German governmental policy' was 'constant, ubiquitous, anti-Semitic vituperation issued from ... public organs, ranging from Hitler's own speeches, to never-ending installments in Germany's radio, newspapers, magazines, and journals, to films, to public signage and verbal fusillades, to schoolbooks.' Indeed, Goldhagen himself stresses that this 'incessant anti-Semitic barrage' took an 'enormous toll' not only on Jews but 'also on Germans', and was aimed at 'Preparing Germans for still more drastic eliminationist measures.' (HWE, pp. 136, 124, 137)

*Hitler's Willing Executioners* is in fact replete with illustrations, cited approvingly by Goldhagen, that Nazi Jew-baiting did poison German sensibilities. Germans embraced anti-Semitism, an Einsatzkommando confesses, because 'it was hammered into us, during the years of propaganda, again and again, that the Jews were the ruin of every *Volk* in the midst of which they appear and that peace would reign in Europe only... when the Jewish race is exterminated.' (HWE, p. 442). Popular anti-Semitism 'was, after all, no surprise', a German Jew explained in [56] 1942. 'Because for nearly ten years the inferiority and harmfulness of the Jews has been emphasized in every newspaper, morning and evening, in every radio broadcast and on many posters, etc., without a voice in favour of the Jews being permitted to be raised.' (HWE, p. 449) 'I believed the propaganda that all Jews were criminals and subhumans', a former murderous police battalion member discloses, 'and that they were the cause of Germany's decline after the First World War.' (HWE, p. 179) 'Nazi schooling produced a generation of human beings in Nazi Germany so different from normal American youth', an American educator recalls, 'that mere academic comparison seems inane.' (HWE, p. 27)

Indeed, Goldhagen's crowning piece of evidence confutes the book's central thesis. 'In what may be the most significant and illuminating testimony given after the war',

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Goldhagen reports, an 'expert legal brief' submitted at Nuremberg argued that the Einsatzgruppen 'really believed' that Germany was locked in mortal combat with the Jewish agents of a Bolshevik conspiracy. Quoting from this 'all but neglected' document, Goldhagen locates the 'source' of these psychotic beliefs not in a murderously anti-Semitic German culture but in Nazi propaganda: 'it cannot be doubted that National Socialism had succeeded to the fullest extent in convincing public opinion and furthermore *the overwhelming majority of the German people* of the identity of Bolshevism and Jewry.' (HWE, p. 393, original emphasis) Goldhagen seems totally unaware that he has just highlighted his 'monocausal explanation' of the Nazi genocide into oblivion. (41)

Citing the findings of Robert Gellately, 'the foremost expert on the Gestapo', Goldhagen reports that only a tiny handful of Germans were prosecuted for verbally dissenting from Nazi anti-Semitism. According to Goldhagen, this German silence cannot, however, be credited to repression. Contrary to widespread belief, Goldhagen maintains, the Hitlerian state was benign. The Nazis ruled 'without massive coercion and violence'. The regime 'was, on the whole, consensual'. Germans generally 'accepted the system and Hitler's authority as desirable and legitimate'. (HWE, pp. 132, 429-30, 456)

Yet Gellately situates his findings in a radically different context from Goldhagen's. He proceeds 'from the assumption that fear was indeed prevalent among the German people.' To pretend otherwise, he asserts, is 'foolish'. Denunciation to settle private scores was rampant. Especially vulnerable were Germans critical of Nazi anti-Semitism. With the promulgation of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, 'anyone friendly to Jews could be denounced on suspicion of having illicit relationships.' Thus [57] 'numerous' Germans 'in the employ of Jews or in some kind of business contact with them had brushes with the Gestapo when they persisted in these relations or expressed the mildest kinds of solidarity with the persecuted.' Indeed, more often than not, transgressions were summarily dealt with: 'When it came to enforcing racial policies destined to isolate Jews, there can be no doubt that the wrath of the Gestapo knew no bounds, often dispensing with even the semblance of legal procedures. It is important to be reminded of the "legal" and "extra-legal" terror brought down on the heads of those who would not otherwise comply.' 'Sometimes... they were driven to suicide.' Given the scope of the repression, Gellately suggests, care must be exercised not to infer too much from the Gestapo files. They 'may well underestimate the degree of rejection of Nazi anti-Semitism'. Germans 'would be foolhardy to speak openly about reservations they might have on that score when brought in for interrogation.' Moreover, 'if they were never caught, hence never turned over to the Gestapo, there would be no official record of their activities. In addition, most of the files of those who were caught were destroyed.'

Germans generally 'accommodated themselves to the official line', Gellately nonetheless suggests, 'and to all intents and purposes, did not stand in the way of the persecution of the Jews.' It was, however, an acquiescence borne not of fanatical hatred but significantly of fear: 'Being turned into the authorities for the smallest sign of non-compliance was too common not to have struck anxiety in the hearts of anyone who might under other circumstances have found no fault with the Jews.' (42)

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Dissenting, Goldhagen maintains that behind the German silence was not at all fear but 'ideological congruity' with the murderous Nazi project. (HWE, p. 591 n. 27) Accordingly, in his overview of the Nazi era, Goldhagen writes: 'Whatever else Germans thought about Hitler and the Nazi movement, however much they might have detested aspects of Nazism, the vast majority of them subscribed to the underlying Nazi model of Jews and in this sense (as the Nazis themselves understood) were "Nazified" in their view of Jews.'

None of the copious relevant scholarship, Goldhagen acknowledges in the corresponding endnote, reaches his conclusions. Rather, Goldhagen leans on a 'theoretical [and] analytical account of anti-Semitism' and an understanding of 'the nature of cognitions, beliefs, and ideologies and their relation to action.' (HWE, pp. 87, 497-8 n. 24) Without his novel methodology, Goldhagen is indeed no more able to prove his thesis for the period after Hitler's ascension to power than he was for the period before it.

### **German Attitudes to Anti-Jewish Laws**

Goldhagen recalls the degrading and onerous proscriptions on Jewish life in Nazi Germany. He cites, for example, the barring of Jews from public facilities (for example, swimming pools and public baths), the exclusion of Jews from prestigious professional associations and institutions (for example, medicine, law and higher education) and later much [58] of the economy, the posting of signs that pointed up the Jews' pariah status (for example, 'Jews Not Wanted Here', 'Entry Forbidden to Jews'), and so on and so on. (HWE, pp. 91-3, 96-7, 124-5, 137-8)

Implemented 'with the approval of the vast majority of people', these measures evinced, according to Goldhagen, the 'Germans' eliminationist intent.' (HWE, pp. 422, 93) The actual record, however, is rather more complex. (43) Acting narrowly on their economic self-interest, Germans generally supported Nazi anti-Jewish initiatives from which they stood to gain materially, and opposed Nazi anti-Jewish initiatives from which they stood to lose materially. Socially restrictive Nazi initiatives initially got a lukewarm reception. Goldhagen suggests otherwise. Citing Gellately, he reports that 'Germans posted signs' with anti-Jewish prohibitions. (HWE, pp. 91-2) Turning to the cited page, we learn that the campaign was orchestrated 'by local hotheads in the Nazi movement', with opportunist Germans occasionally joining in. Succumbing, however, to the combined pressures of propaganda and repression, most Germans, already more or less disposed to anti-Semitic appeals, did come to endorse, with relative ease if not conviction, the social segregation of the Jews. Yet in this respect, the Germans' 'radical treatment' – as Goldhagen puts it (HWE, p. 422) – of the Jews barely differed from the Jim Crow system in the American South. (44)

Consider the Nuremberg Laws. Repeatedly pointing to these enactments as the crystallization of the murderous Nazi mind-set, Goldhagen, for instance, writes:

The eliminationist program had received at once its most coherent statement and its most powerful push forward. The Nuremberg Laws promised to accomplish what had heretofore for decades been but discussed and urged on ad nauseam. With this codifying moment of the Nazi German 'religion', the

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regime held up the eliminationist [59] writing on the Nazi tablets for every German to read. (HWE, pp. 97-8; see also p. 138)

The Nuremberg legislation stripped Jews of the franchise ('Reich Citizenship Law') and prohibited sexual relations between Jews and Germans ('The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour'). Yet black people in the American South suffered from identical restrictions. Indeed, they did not effectively secure the vote, and the Supreme Court did not outlaw the anti-miscegenation statutes, until the mid 1960s. These proscriptions enjoyed overwhelming support among Southern whites. Does that mean nearly all Southern whites were genocidal racists waiting for a Hitler to 'unleash' them? (45)

The German disposition to anti-Semitic violence is plainly the crucial test of Goldhagen's thesis. Seizing power, Hitler effectively opened the sluice gates. Moral and legal restraints were lifted. The opposition was crushed. Virulent anti-Semitic incitement was literally in the air. 'The state', as Goldhagen puts it, 'had implicitly declared the Jews to be "fair game" – beings who were to be eliminated from German society, by whatever means necessary, including violence.' (46) What did the German people do? Did they spontaneously indulge in anti-Semitic pogroms? Did they join in the Nazi pogroms? Did they approve the Nazi pogroms? Did they, at bare minimum, condone the Nazi pogroms? The voluminous scholarly evidence points to a uniform, unequivocal answer to all these questions: No. There were few, if any, popular German assaults on the Jews. Indeed, Germans overwhelmingly condemned the Nazi anti-Semitic atrocities.

For 'far greater empirical support for my positions than space permits me to offer here', Goldhagen advises, readers should consult David Bankier's study, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism*. (HWE, pp. 497-8 n. 24) Consider then Bankier's conclusions. During the first years of Nazi anti-Semitic incitement, most Germans ('large sectors', 'the bulk', 'sizable parts') found 'the form of persecution abhorrent', expressed 'misgivings about the brutal methods employed', 'remained on the sidelines', 'severely condemned the persecution', and so on. With the revival of Nazi anti-Semitic terror in 1935, 'large sections of the population were repelled by the *Sturmer* methods and refused to comply with demands to take action against the Jews.' Indeed, the 'vast majority of the population approved the Nuremberg Laws' not only because they 'identified with the racist policy' but 'especially' because 'a permanent framework of discrimination had been created that would [60] end the reign of terror and set precise limits to anti-Semitic activities.' '*Sturmer* methods and the violence' in the years 1936-37 'met with the same disapproval as in the past.' 'The overwhelming majority approved social segregation and economic destruction of the Jews' on the eve of Kristallnacht in 1938 'but not outbursts of brute force... it was not Jew hatred in the Nazi sense.' 'All sections of the population', Bankier reports, 'reacted with shock' to Kristallnacht. 'There were few occasions, if any, in the Third Reich', Kershaw similarly recalls, 'which produced such a widespread wave of revulsion', reaching 'deep into the ranks' of the Nazi Party itself. The motives behind these outpourings of popular disgust, to be sure, were not unalloyed. Some Germans evinced genuine moral outrage. Some recoiled from the sheer brutality of the violence which also defaced Germany's image. Some opposed the destruction only because it squandered material resources. Yet, whatever the motive, Goldhagen's thesis is unsustainable. (47)

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For argument's sake, let us assume the worst-case scenario: Germans repudiated Nazi anti-Semitic violence not on strictly humanitarian grounds but, rather, because it was gratuitously cruel and economically wasteful. According to Goldhagen, however, these were precisely the differentiae of the Nazi genocide. The 'limitless cruelty' of the German perpetrators, Goldhagen emphasizes, was 'a constituent feature of the Holocaust, as central to it as the killing itself.' (Reply, p. 38; I will return to this crucial distinction in part II) Goldhagen also devotes a significant part of his study (pp. 281-323) to demonstrating that, in the hierarchy of 'guiding values' in the German 'work' camps, persecution of the Jews always took precedence over 'economic rationality'. (HWE, p. 322) Regardless of the reason, then, the German people's overwhelming condemnation of Nazi anti-Semitic violence is conclusive evidence that Goldhagen's 'monocausal explanation' is false. Note further that, according to Goldhagen, a crucial facet of the Nazi genocide was the voluntarism of the perpetrators. Always taking the initiative, ordinary Germans – to quote a typical passage – 'easily and with alacrity became executioners of Jews'. (HWE, p. 395; I will also return to this point in part II) Yet, as we have seen, spontaneous German anti-Semitic attacks rarely occurred. On the eve of the Nazi holocaust, the German people were, on Goldhagen's own terms, very far from 'Nazified.' Indeed, there was much less popular participation in and [61] support for violent racist incitement in Nazi Germany than in the American South.(48)

Apparently aware that the crushing weight of scholarly evidence obliterates his thesis, Goldhagen improvises a three-pronged damage control strategy: tacit admission, minimization, and misrepresentation. I shall only sample his procedures here (see Table).

## Table

### TACIT ADMISSION

Goldhagen acknowledges the evidence but not its devastating implications for his thesis. For example:

'The law excluding Jews from the civil service, being unaccompanied by public displays of brutality, was, not surprisingly, widely unpopular in Germany.' (HWE, p. 91)

Recalling the 'uncoordinated and often wild attacks upon Jews' during the first years of Nazi rule, Goldhagen observes that 'many Germans' felt 'unsettled.' (HWE, p. 97)

'The reaction of the populace at large' to Nazi initiatives 'was one of general approval... , though it was accompanied by significant disapproval of the licentious brutality.' (HWE, p. 99)

To document that 'workers ... were, on the issue of the Jews, in general accord with the Nazis', Goldhagen cites an SPD report stating that 'The general anti-Semitic psychosis affects ... our comrades' but 'All are decided opponents of violence.' (HWE, pp. 106-7)

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## MINIMIZATION

Goldhagen acknowledges the evidence but denies that it undermines his thesis. For example:

'The criticism of *Kristallnacht* 's licentious violence and wasteful destruction that could be heard around Germany should be understood as the limited criticism of an eliminationist path that the overwhelming majority of Germans considered to be fundamentally sound, but which, in this case, had taken a momentary wrong turn.' (HWE, p. 102; See also pp. 101, 103, 120-1, 123) (Weren't 'licentious violence' and 'wasteful destruction' the hallmarks of the Nazi genocide?)

'Episodic distemper with aspects of the regime's assault on the Jews should not be understood as being indicative of a widespread, general rejection of the eliminationist ideal and program... the character and overwhelming plenitude of the counter-evidence... is vastly greater than Germans' numerically paltry expressions of disapproval of what... can be seen to have been generally only specific aspects of the larger eliminationist program and not its governing principles.' (HWE, p. 120; see also p. 91)

Conceding that 'Ordinary Germans did not leap to mass extermination on their own, or generally even urge it', Goldhagen explains that 'Hitler was already working towards this goal with heart and soul, so many Germans sat by, satisfied that their government was doing the best that any government conceivably could.' (HWE, p. 445-6) (Weren't Germans anxiously awaiting Hitler to 'unleash' and 'unshackle' their 'pent up anti-Semitic passion'? Seizing every opportunity, didn't Germans leap 'with alacrity' to kill Jews during the Nazi genocide?)

'No evidence suggests that any but an insignificant scattering of Germans harboured opposition to the eliminationist program save for its most brutally wanton aspects.' (HWE, pp. 438-9; see also pp. 509-10 n. 165)

## MISREPRESENTATION

Goldhagen mangles the evidence. For example:

spontaneous ones from ordinary Germans and ones orchestrated by government and party institutions', Goldhagen adds: 'the vast majority of the German people... were aware of what their government and their countrymen were doing to the Jews, assented to the measures, and, when the opportunity presented itself, lent their active support to them.' (HWE, pp. 89-90) (Didn't Goldhagen's main empirical source state that Germans overwhelmingly opposed Nazi violence?)

'The attacks upon Jews during the first years of Nazi governance of Germany were so widespread and broad-based that it would be grievously wrong to attribute them solely to the coughs of the SA, as if the wider German public

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had no influence over, Recalling inter alia the 'Physical and increased verbal attacks upon Jews, both or part in, the violence.' (HWE, p. 95)

'In light of the widespread persecution and violence that occurred throughout ... Germany, *Kristallnacht* was, in one sense, but the crowning moment in the wild domestic terror that Germans perpetrated upon Jews.' (HWE, p. 99; see also pp. 100-1)

'The perpetrators [of the Nazi genocide], from Hitler to the lowliest officials, were openly proud of their actions, of their achievements; during the 1930s, they proclaimed and carried them out in full view and with the general approval of the *Volk*.' (HWE, p.429; see also p. 430)

Left without a shred of scholarly evidence that Germans overwhelmingly savoured the prospect of massacring Jewry, Goldhagen devises more ingenious methods of proof. Thus, to document the 'whiff of genocide' in the 'anti-Semitic German atmosphere', Goldhagen quotes an American journalist's murderous conversations with 'Nazi circles', and 'at a luncheon or dinner with Nazis.' (HWE, p. 595 n. 68) 'It is oxymoronic', according to Goldhagen, 'to suggest that those who stood with curiosity gazing upon the annihilative inferno of *Kristallnacht*' did not relish the violence and destruction. Apparently never having witnessed a crowd mill about a burning edifice, Goldhagen writes: 'People generally flee scenes and events that they consider to be horrific, criminal, or dangerous.' (HWE, p. 440)

Although there was no palpable evidence in the 1930s of Americans' intent to kill Japanese, Goldhagen finally analogizes, they did so 'willingly... and fully believing in the justice of their cause' during World War II. (HWE, p. 446) The comparison is instructive. The merciless war in the Pacific, John Dower has argued, was the culmination of a plurality of factors: pervasive anti-Asian prejudice, furore over the Pearl Harbor attack, inflammatory war propaganda, brutalizing combat, and so on . (49) To reckon by Goldhagen's analogy, however, the explanation is rather more simple: Americans were homicidal racists.

### **Opposition and Indifference**

Even during the early war years, most Germans repudiated Nazi anti-Semitism. In September 1941 the Nazis issued a decree forcing Jews to wear the yellow star. 'A negative reaction to the labelling', Bankier reports, was the 'more typical public response.' Indeed 'people were often demonstratively kind', according to reliable accounts. 'Many displayed forms of disobedience, offering Jews cigars and cigarettes, giving children sweets, or standing up for Jews on trams and underground trains.' 'Germans clearly could not tolerate', Bankier infers, 'actions which outraged their sense of decency, even towards stigmatized Jews.' Shocked and appalled by such dissent, the Nazis intensified anti-Jewish [63] propaganda and even enacted a new law sanctioning philosemitic displays with three months' internment in a concentration camp. (50) Although listing Bankier's study as his main empirical source, Goldhagen omits altogether these remarkable findings. Rather he reports:

Wearing such a visible target among such a hostile populace... caused Jews to feel acute insecurity, and, because any German passer-by could now identify

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them easily, Jews, especially Jewish children, suffered increased verbal and physical assaults ... The introduction of the yellow star also meant that all Germans could now better recognize, monitor, and shun those bearing the mark of the social dead. (HWE, pp. 138-9)

With the passage of time and especially as the war took a more disastrous turn, Germans grew increasingly insensitive to Jewish suffering. Propaganda played a part, as did the escalating repression and physical isolation of the Jews. Then the callousness toward human life typically attending war exacerbated by the terror bombing and worsening deprivations on the home front-set in. Turning ever more inward, Germans focused on the exigencies of survival. Hardened and bitter, in search of a scapegoat, they occasionally lashed out at the weak. (51) To illustrate this gradual coarsening of heart, Bankier first recalls 'not unusual' episodes in 1941 when, breaking the law and outraging Nazi authorities, Germans surrendered their tramcar seats to aged Jews, eliciting 'the general approval of the other passengers.' Yet by 1942, according to Bankier, Germans displaying sympathy for Jews were hooted in public. He recounts a particularly brutal incident also on a tramcar. Citing *only* this last episode in his book, Goldhagen goes on to criticize Bankier's balanced conclusion based on *all* the evidence:

It is difficult to understand why Bankier ... concludes that 'incidents of this sort substantiate the contention that day-to-day contact with a virulent, anti-Semitic atmosphere progressively dulled people's sensitivity to the plight of their Jewish neighbours'... That any but a small number of Germans ever possessed 'sensitivity to the plight of their Jewish neighbours' during the Nazi period is an assumption which cannot be substantiated, and which... is undermined by the empirical evidence which Bankier presents throughout his book. (HWE, pp. 105, 502 n. 90)

Truly, the Germans' progressively dulled sensitivities are 'an assumption which cannot be substantiated' – if all the empirical substantiation is subject to excision.

Although unaware of the full scope of the judeocide, most Germans did know, or could have known if they chose to, that massive atrocities were being committed in the East. There is no evidence, however, that most Germans approved of these murderous acts. Indeed, precisely because [64] Hitler knew he could not count on enthusiastic popular support, the Final Solution was shrouded in secrecy and all public discussion of Jewry's fate was banned. (52) The near-consensus in the scholarly literature is that most Germans looked on with malignant indifference. Ian Kershaw, who has written most authoritatively on this topic, summarizes:

Apathy and 'moral indifference' to the treatment and fate of the Jews was the most widespread attitude of all. This was not a neutral stance. It was a deliberate turning away from any personal responsibility, acceptance of the state's right to decide on an issue of little personal concern to most Germans ... the shying away from anything which might produce trouble or danger. This apathy was compatible with a number of internalized attitudes towards Jews, not least with passive or latent anti-Semitism – the feeling that there *was* a 'Jewish Question' and that something needed to be done about it.

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It bears emphasizing that Germany's anti-Semitic legacy did constitute a vital precondition for the genocide. Had Jews not been placed outside the community of moral concern, Kershaw stresses, the Nazis could not have committed their monstrous deeds: 'The lack of interest in or exclusion of concern for the fate of racial, ethnic, or religious minority groups marks ... at the societal level a significant prerequisite for the genocidal process, allowing the momentum created by the fanatical hatred of a section of the population to gather force, especially, of course, when supported by the power of the state.' This is a far cry, however, from asserting that ordinary German anti-Semitism – let alone ordinary German anti-Semitism before Hitler's reign – in itself accounts for the Nazi genocide.

Indeed, Kershaw suggests that little in the German response was 'peculiarly German or specific only to the "Jewish Question"', and, conversely, that most peoples similarly situated would probably not have responded in a more 'honourable' fashion than the Germans. (53) Vehemently dissenting, Goldhagen maintains that such alleged indifference in the face of mass slaughter is a 'virtual psychological impossibility'. (HWE, pp. 439-41) Yet how differently did ordinary Americans react to the slaughter of four million Indochinese, ordinary French to the slaughter of one million Algerians, or, for that matter, ordinary non-Germans to the slaughter of the Jews?

## II. Perpetrating the Genocide

When the correlations are made of the Germans' anti-Jewish measures with their deduced or imputed intentions, Hitler's [65] hypothesized psychological states and moods, and the Germans' military fortune, the correlation that stands out, that jumps out, as having been more significant than any other (than *all* of the others) is that Hitler opted for genocide at the first moment that the policy became practical. (HWE, p. 161)

With the onset of the Nazi holocaust, the validity of Goldhagen's thesis ceases to be at issue. On the one hand, all the evidence points to the conclusion that, on the eve of the genocide, the vast majority of Germans were *not* in thrall to a homicidal malice toward Jerry. On the other hand, it is simply not possible, after 1941, to isolate, among the sundry factors potentially spurring German behaviour – an anti-Semitic legacy, virulent Nazi propaganda, brutalization caused by the war, and so on – a 'monocausal explanation' of the judeocide. (54) Thus, even if everything Goldhagen maintains about the Nazi holocaust is accurate, his thesis remains false or at best moot. Goldhagen's rendering, however, is *not* accurate. Indeed, in a veritable negative tour de force, Goldhagen manages to get nearly everything about the Nazi holocaust wrong. The wrong questions are posed. The wrong answers are given. The wrong lessons are learned.

### 5. How Many Willing Executioners?

Crediting himself as being the first to reckon the magnitude of German complicity in the Nazi holocaust, Goldhagen boasts:

Until now no one else has discussed seriously the number of people who perpetrated the genocide ....The critics do not bother to inform their readers

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