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## WILLING EXECUTIONERS

### Were Nazi soldiers who participated in the Holocaust committed anti-Semites who believed extermination was necessary for the preservation of social order?

**Viewpoint:** Yes. Though only a small minority of Germans killed Jews, they would not have done so had they not had good reason to believe that many other Germans shared their eliminationist anti-Semitic attitudes.

**Viewpoint:** No. The testimony of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders suggests that most Germans were ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances and under enormous pressure to engage in or acquiesce to genocide.

In 1996 a young political scientist from Harvard, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, published his dissertation, an event that rarely attracts much media attention. This occasion would be an exception. Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* claimed to overthrow virtually all contemporary scholarship on the Holocaust by arguing (a) that "eliminationist anti-Semitism" was, before the beginning of the twentieth century, a cultural norm in German society and would become "exterminationist" under the Nazis, (b) that the men and women who murdered the Jews did so because they shared this attitude toward the Jews with Adolf Hitler, and (c) that most "ordinary Germans" shared this attitude as well. Hitler had not, according to Goldhagen, forced the Holocaust onto Germany. Rather, he released German anti-Semitism from its earlier constraints of civility and permitted (rather than compelled or persuaded) quite ordinary Germans to torture, starve, and murder six million Jews. Goldhagen's book was effectively promoted by his publisher, Knopf, and though it ran to six hundred pages of often gruesome detail, it became an immediate best-seller and Goldhagen, a newcomer to the field, became one of the best known—if not the only widely recognized—scholar of the Holocaust in the United States.

Other Holocaust scholars were less impressed. Goldhagen based his arguments largely on the recorded experiences of a reserve police battalion that had carried out massacres in Poland. Christopher R. Browning had published *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992) based on the records of the same putatively "ordinary" Germans. Browning argued that these German killers were in no way the exterminationist anti-Semites Goldhagen would portray them to be four years later. Rather, they were, with some exceptions, pliable and frightened men who undertook a "terrible" task because they were told to. Only later, as they became hardened to the killing, did some of them seem to enjoy it. Browning, unlike Goldhagen, implied that any society could, in the right circumstances, produce genocidal killers.

The "Goldhagen thesis" was widely condemned by traditional historians of the Holocaust—most stridently at a conference attended by Goldhagen and his critics at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., on 8 April 1996. But more recently, other scholars have become more receptive to elements of Goldhagen's argument, thus continuing the debate.



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### Viewpoint:

**Yes. Though only a small minority of Germans killed Jews, they would not have done so had they not had good reason to believe that many other Germans shared their eliminationist anti-Semitic attitudes.**

Two books written in the 1990s gave a new focus to Holocaust studies: the question of the perpetrators and their motives. Both authors, Christopher R. Browning (*Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 1992) and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (*Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, 1996), based their research on Reserve Police Battalion 101 and their contribution to the Final Solution. Although their later conclusions clearly differ, Goldhagen and Browning come to one common important conclusion about the Order Police Reservists—a unit of approximately five hundred men that engaged in many mass shootings in the District of Lublin between June 1942 and the beginning of 1944—that they could be said to be representative of ordinary Germans. Central to the arguments is the fact that these middle-aged men “represented an age cohort that was socialized and educated in the pre-Nazi period and was fully aware of the moral norms of a pre-Nazi political culture.”

The long-neglected question for the motivation of the perpetrators is answered by Browning, who explains their behavior with “universal aspects of human nature” such as conformity, obedience, and peer pressure. In this respect Goldhagen’s approach of asking for the “historical specificity of the perpetrators themselves and of the society that nurtured them” is much more sophisticated. Unlike Browning, Goldhagen does not speak of ordinary men but stresses the particular social and historical setting. He accepts the relevance of the victims’ and the perpetrators’ identities. In this sense the historical record tells of ordinary Germans and their specific way of thinking about Jews. Goldhagen also reveals the blind spot of common explanations. Commonly, Holocaust historians’ research has been based on the presupposition that the mass of the perpetrators had to be induced to kill against their will. However, Goldhagen clearly showed—and most critics failed to mention this point as being central—that the German perpetrators “understood why they were supposed to kill Jews”; in other words, that “the annihilation of the Jews *made sense to them*.” Moreover, Goldhagen is right in asking why nearly no member of the battalion took advantage of an opportunity to avoid killing Jews and in questioning why

the perpetrators so often inflicted unnecessary suffering upon their victims. These questions become more significant when contrasted with the fact that there are no reports of serious punishment incurred by any German who refused to kill. There were substantial opportunities for the Order Police Reservists to excuse themselves from these duties. Before embarking on the killing engagements, they were asked whether they were able to take part in killing helpless Jews; few of these men chose to opt out of taking part in the killing.

The question of the historic specificity and of the “political culture that produced the perpetrators and their actions,” indeed, seems to be the right one to expand the historical debate. However, is Goldhagen correct in his assumption that a unique “eliminationist” anti-Semitism moved these “ordinary” Germans to kill Jews? First, it is important to sort out some misunderstandings. Of course, this cognitive model of eliminationist anti-Semitism cannot give a determinate or monocausal explanation of the Holocaust, nor does it represent some kind of biological collectivism (as misunderstood by some German historians). Instead, eliminationist anti-Semitism should be viewed as having its roots in the widespread anti-Jewish discourse in Germany in the nineteenth century and became—in the more radical and deadly form of exterminationist anti-Semitism—hegemonic by the 1930s at the latest. This German anti-Semitic discourse can explain the readiness of ordinary Germans to become “Hitler’s willing executioners.” At the same time, it does not deny the importance of other supplementary factors, which were necessary for the Holocaust to have been carried out.

Although initially most historians strongly rejected Goldhagen’s thesis throughout the “Goldhagen Debate,” a closer look at the latest research gives a rather different account. Even Browning acknowledges the necessity for a partial revision of the conclusions he reached about the killers. He states that he underestimated the group of “eager killers.” Indeed, there were many who were ready to kill Jews from the start. The behavior of these perpetrators did not need to be altered by situational or organizational factors. Although Browning still speaks of this group as a “significant minority, not a majority,” they nevertheless played a major role within the Holocaust. The perpetrators on the local level formed, along with the “initiators at the middle echelons and Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich at the top,” a “crucial nucleus for the killing process.” In other words, Browning concedes that a specific form of deadly anti-Semitism existed within all sectors of German society and that this eliminationist anti-



German soldiers posing by twelve Poles, hung as a retaliatory measure, Rozki-Radom, 1942

(Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin)

Semitism has to be central to an understanding of the destruction of the European Jews.

Saul Friedländer makes a similar point in his great study *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997). What he calls “redemptive” anti-Semitism substantially differs from other brands of European anti-Semitism. This “synthesis of a murderous rage and an ‘idealistic’ goal” derives from a “particularly German, mystical form” of anti-Semitism, stressing the sacredness of Aryan blood and the religious vision of German/Aryan Christianity. Though Friedländer holds the view that this most-radical kind of anti-Semitism was not shared by the majority of Germans, he makes clear that in no other European country was anti-Semitism so infused into the heart of society. Moreover, different from other countries, “a full blown antisemitic ideology was systematically elaborated” in Germany before 1933. This German specificity can be explained by a structural difference between Germany and, for example, France concerning national integration. In Germany the idea of the nation always was connected closely to the “existence of inherited characteristics belonging to a preexisting organic community.” “Nation” in Germany meant a “closed ethnocultural community.” Whereas Jews in France could become French, because the construction of national identity in Germany

was implied in the idea itself, Jews always had to be the alien other, “regardless of formal emancipation and equality of civic rights.”

Even if there can be no doubt of the existence of radical anti-Semitism in almost all European countries, one essential difference of the German development should be emphasized. According to an article by Herbert A. Strauss in *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism 1870–1933/39: Germany–Great Britain–France* (1993), among the German middle and elite classes before World War I (1914–1918), anti-Semitism was already a “social norm”—after the German defeat a more radical form of anti-Semitism with murderous potential came to the fore. This strain predominated among young elites at universities throughout the Weimar Republic. This anti-Semitism was opposed to other types of personal hatred and succeeded in both objectifying and radicalizing anti-Semitism. Fighting Jews was now thought of in “scientific” terms of a natural problem that necessarily has to be “solved.”

Put to this context, Goldhagen’s explanation that the perpetrators, ordinary Germans, were animated “by a particular *type* of anti-Semitism that led them to conclude that the Jews *ought to die*” clearly makes sense and is not really as incompatible with the tasks of other historians, as it has

often been stated. As Yehuda Bauer observes, there can be no doubt that by the mid 1930s most Germans had adopted the Nazi ideology with its radical anti-Semitic content, but he also adds that the reason this fact was so pervasive “has not been sufficiently dealt with.” Goldhagen’s approach gives an adequate answer to this question. First, one must understand anti-Semitism as a cognitive model more complex and subtle than a mere prejudice. Certain conceptions of Jews were already being produced by German discourse, which made the last stage of radicalization a logical step for the perpetrators. A central component of this view has been “the idea of Jewish work-shirking parasitism,” which had deep historical roots in Germany.

In the traditional German discourse, Jews shirked physical work and did all they could to avoid “honest” work. Opposed to this model, being German and taking work seriously were closely connected. Hard, productive work was equated with the notion of “German work.” This binary opposition of hardworking Germans and work-shirking Jews preceded the Nazis, but they turned this belief into ideological capital. By at least the 1920s there were widespread anticapitalist resentments in all strata of society, which were not scornful of work and industrialism, because concrete labor appeared as a natural, creative process. Only the abstract dimension of capitalism, finance and interest capital, was criticized for being “rootless” and “parasitic,” or simply put, as being “Jewish.” The Nazi movement was both a part of and a means to advance this discourse. Thinking of anti-Semitism in this way, Moishe Postone called Nazism “a foreshortened anti-capitalist movement,” one characterized by a hatred of the abstract and a hypostatization of the concrete. The Nazis gave themselves one mission: “to rid the world of the source of all evil.” In other words, at the root of their ideology, as well as their intended actions, were components of eliminationist anti-Semitism.

As Goldhagen has conclusively shown, only this mind-set can explain the German treatment of the Jews in its economically self-injurious way. What happened in work camps such as Majdanek provides a good record of this attitude. On one hand, factories useful to war production had to be closed in order to continue the mass killing of Jews. On the other hand, Jews were the only group of victims who were compelled to perform senseless work. Singled out for especially miserable conditions, Jews suffered mortality rates in the work camps that far exceeded those of other groups of prisoners. These seemingly irrational actions gain significance when observed within the context of eliminationist anti-Semitism and German notions about Jews and work, which explains why Germans forced them to per-

form primarily noninstrumental labor. Jewish labor in German camps was clearly set apart from the ordinary ideas of work—it even differed from other kinds of forced labor at the camps. Jewish work was always a means to death; in Goldhagen’s words, “it was death itself.”

If one accepts the compelling record of a murderous anti-Semitism that derived from specific developments within German political culture, the question remains as to what extent this ideology affected Germans. First and foremost, many perpetrators of the Holocaust were ordinary Germans. Browning tells us that the reservists of the Order Police Reservists were “conscripted virtually at random from the population of those middle-aged men who enjoyed no exemption for providing skilled labor essential to the war economy.” It is not possible to show each one of the perpetrators as either ready to kill Jews right from the start or as needing to be radicalized by situational factors. However, there remains one more detail that strengthens Goldhagen’s thesis: the willingness of perpetrators to have their wives among them or to take photos and give written witness to their deeds. One does not have to verify that every German perpetrator did so, but the mere existence of a multitude of such evidence shows that the men had to have good reason for expecting their relatives to accept the killing of Jews as a necessary or even a beneficial act. The killers rightly expected other ordinary Germans to understand that the Jews had to be killed. This attitude surely is something that cannot be easily explained if most Germans of that time had not been eliminationist in their anti-Semitic attitudes.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No. The testimony of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders suggests that most Germans were ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances and under enormous pressure to engage in or acquiesce to genocide.**

Generalizations are easy. It takes no great leap of historical imagination to find the Germans collectively guilty of genocide. Any number of examples can be found within any particular topic to support an author’s position, and so it is with this topic. Given the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis in Germany and the *Wehrmacht* (German army) in Russia and the

Ukraine, thousands of examples can be produced to attest to the callous behavior of the Germans against people they deemed inferior. With regard to "ordinary" Germans, the Holocaust historian Christopher R. Browning in *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (2000) has rightfully stated, "One of the most elusive tasks facing historians of any event is to uncover the attitudes and mindset of the 'ordinary' people who 'make history' but leave behind no files of official documents and precious few diaries and letters." This statement epitomizes the difficulty that an historian faces when confronted with a question that forces him or her, with ambiguous evidence, to explain the actions and attitudes of a large group of people.

The Nazi regime caused the German people to suppress their traditional standards of morality and to act in ways they would have otherwise found repugnant. Resistance to Nazi policies was possible and was moderately successful against the T-4 "euthanasia" program, but it had to be undertaken by a broad enough section of the population that trying to quash the opposition would threaten the Nazis' hold on power. Resistance conducted by small groups, such as the White Rose in Munich, was ruthlessly and publicly crushed. In a society such as Nazi Germany, silence does not imply acceptance or consent to the actions of the ruling regime. Knowledge of the Final Solution might have been widespread and anti-Semitism endemic, but the Nazis, not Germans as a whole, were responsible for the Holocaust. There is no reason to believe that the German people, even those who supported the Nazi regime, were uniquely "eliminationist" or "exterminationist" in their attitudes toward the Jews. Centuries of anti-Semitism may have bred indifference to the fate of the Jews and hostility to their social and political influence, but no more so among Germans than among the French, the Greeks, or even the Danes, who undertook enormous risks to rescue virtually their entire Jewish community.

The German population in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany had its fair share of anti-Semites. In Poland in the late 1930s the government was seeking a solution to its own Jewish Question. In October 1938 the Polish ambassador to Great Britain proposed sending a specified number of Jews each year to the British colony of Rhodesia. The presence of anti-Semitism, however, does not correlate to a desire to exterminate the Jewish race. The Nazi Party, after achieving power, concentrated on an ever-increasing process of marginalization and exclusion against a population that numbered 500,000, or less than 1 percent of the German population, of which 20 percent were unassimilated Jews from eastern Europe. It is safe to say that most Germans had

little contact with Jews, given that most Jews lived in the larger German cities and not the towns and countryside where the majority of the German population resided.

Early attempts by the Nazis to marginalize the Jews met with widespread resistance. The American consul general in Berlin, George S. Messersmith, reported the 1 April 1933 boycott of Jewish businesses as not being popular because it harmed the economy and damaged the image of Germany abroad. Messersmith declared that many Germans did not take the boycott seriously and continued to shop at stores owned by Jews. A year later Messersmith related that although the German public was not much concerned with Jewish suffering, it was "tired and disgusted" with the persecution of the Jews. A report written by the Office of Strategic Services in 1943 stated that while previous animosity to the Jews must have existed in some sectors of society, the working class was not enthusiastic about anti-Semitism to start with and had benefited little from Nazi persecution of Jews.

Indeed, at a press conference held on 17 November 1938, instructions were given to reporters that under no circumstances was the impression to be given that any part of the population did not agree with anti-Jewish measures. It would seem that anti-Semitism was regarded as not well enough entrenched in society but that a concerted press campaign would bring the German population around to support the measures taken. The chief spokesman of the Ministry of Propaganda, Alfred-Ingemar Berndt, went so far as to acknowledge that the impression should not be created "that only the party and the state are antisemitic." In 1941 Joseph Goebbels, writing in the weekly magazine *Das Reich*, defended action against the Jews "because there had been some indications of solidarity with them by segments of the non-Jewish population." Even eight years of increasingly hostile anti-Jewish propaganda did not seem to affect the attitudes of Germans toward the Jews. This resistance begs the question: If the German population was behind the destruction of the Jews, then why were press campaigns necessary to convince people that the Jews were their eternal, racial enemies?

Regional studies undertaken in Germany have shown that the Jewish Question was of minimal importance to the population, especially in the war years. Reports from the German Security Service (SD) reveal a remarkable lack of commentary, positive or negative, from the Germans on this topic. Most of the remarks approving measures against the Jews came from within Nazi Party circles. Even these comments must be taken with a grain of salt; a private survey of Nazi Party members undertaken about their opinion toward the Jews reveals a remarkable apathy. In

## THEY KNEW

*Although Belzec death camp was in Poland, many Germans knew of its purpose, as seen in this passage. On 31 August 1942 a German officer recorded his conversations with other passengers while traveling by rail past the camp in which more than 550,000 Jews lost their lives:*

I talked to a policeman on duty at the railway station. Upon my question as to where the Jews actually came from, he answered: "Those are probably the last from Lvov. That has been going on now for 5 weeks uninterrupted. In Jaroslav they let remain only 8, no one knows why." I asked: "How far are they going?" Then he said: "To Belzec." "And then?" "Poison." I asked: "Gas?" He shrugged his shoulders. Then he said only: "At the beginning they always shot them, I believe."

Here in the German House I just talked with two soldiers from front-line prisoner-of-war camp 325. They said that these transports had lately passed through every day, mostly at night. Yesterday a 70-car one is supposed to have gone through.

In the train from Rawa Ruska to Cholm,  
5:30 P.M.

When we boarded at 4:40 P.M. an empty transport had just arrived. I walked along the train twice and counted 56 cars. On the doors had been written in chalk: 60, 70, once 90, occasionally 40—obviously the number of Jews that were carried inside. In my compartment I spoke with a railway policeman's wife who is currently visiting her husband here. She says these transports are now passing through daily, sometimes also with German Jews. Yesterday 6 children's bodies were found along the track. . . .

5:40 P.M.

Short stop. Opposite us another transport. I talk to the policemen who rode on the passenger car in front. I ask: "Going back

home to the Reich?" Grinning one of them says: "You know where we come from, don't you? Well, for us the work does not cease." Then the transport train continued—the cars were empty and swept clean; there were 35. In all probability that was the train I saw at 1 P.M. on the station in Rawa Ruska.

6:20 P.M.

We passed camp Belzec. Before then, we traveled for some time through a tall pine forest. When the woman called, "Now it comes," one could see a high hedge of fir trees. A strong sweetish odor could be made out distinctly. "But they are stinking already," says the woman. "Oh nonsense, that is only the gas," the railway policeman said laughing. Meanwhile—we had gone on about 200 yards—the sweetish odor was transformed into a strong smell of something burning. "That is from the crematory," says the policeman. A short distance farther the fence stopped. In front of it, one could see a guard house with an SS post. A double track led to the camp. One track branched off from the main line, the other ran over a turntable from the camp to a row of sheds about 250 yards away. A freight car happened to stand on the table. Several Jews were busy turning the disk. SS guards, rifle under the arm, stood by. One of the sheds was open; one could distinctly see that it was filled with bundles of clothes to the ceiling. As we went on, I looked back one more time. The fence was too high to see anything at all. The woman says that sometimes, while going by, one can see smoke rising from the camp, but I could notice nothing of the sort.

*Source: "Behind the Fence," in Documents of Destruction: Germany and Jewry 1933–1945, edited by Raul Hilberg (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pp. 208–211.*

1938 one-third of those surveyed revealed indifference toward the Jewish Question; in 1942 that had risen to 69 percent. The crudely anti-Semitic "documentary" film *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew, 1940), though promoted aggressively, was poorly attended.

The diaries of Victor Klemperer, a German Jewish professor of romantic literature in Dresden, reveals contradictions in the attitudes of the German population toward the Jews. Klemperer

was interested in the Nazi Party's use of language and its impact on the Germans. He concluded that Nazi propaganda was effective because of its simplification and repetition. But not everyone got the message. On 6 February 1942, Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller reported that anonymous letters were coming from all over Germany complaining about incidents of executions of Jews. It can be inferred that the press campaigns, such as those conducted from 1938 onward, had a pro-

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found effect on the German population, one that was both positive and negative. Along with this propaganda campaign was a simultaneous effort by the Nazi regime to keep the death camps, or at least what went on inside them, secret.

If the Germans were exterminationist with regard to the Jews, as Daniel Jonah Goldhagen has argued, then why was it necessary to keep the Final Solution a secret? The Nazis went to great lengths to keep the German public and local populace ignorant of what went on inside the camps. This effort failed mainly because most of the camps were built in or near large cities, and the camp authorities could not easily explain away the glimpses of brutality or the smells emanating from the camps. An example of this policy is the concentration camp Mauthausen near Linz, Austria, and its forty outlying camps. While explanations offered did not convince the population that nothing was going on, they permitted them to ignore or rationalize what they had seen. For example, when the crematorium at the euthanasia facility in Hartheim, Austria, went into operation, the SS tried to convince the local population that the pervasive odor of burning flesh was caused by a "chemical treatment."

The German population was affected by what they saw, heard, and smelled. Following the war, a priest from Ebensee, where one of Mauthausen's satellite camps was located, reported speaking with the townspeople regarding the camp. He stated that he found women whose nerves suffered and farmers who avoided working certain fields too near the camp. Some farmers reported seeing funeral pyres where they could see bodies being incinerated. While this account does not record what tone the townspeople used in relating their stories, it can be assumed that it was not gleeful or happy since it would have been noted. This reaction does not seem to be one of a population who wanted the Jews exterminated. One could assume that the images the townspeople saw were augmented by the implicit knowledge that they themselves could be on the other side of the fence should they step out of line, though no overt threats were recorded.

With regard to perpetrators, studies undertaken of those individuals who performed the "dirty work" of the Holocaust, such as the roundup of Jews and mass executions, have shown a remarkable disparity of opinions on the Jewish Question. The most rewarding studies have been undertaken on the Order Police, especially the Reserve Police Battalions that were made up of older individuals whose formative years took place before the rise of the Nazis. Even survivors have given accounts of the Order Police who offered assistance to Jews in the form

of identity papers stating they were Polish instead of Jewish.

References from documents indicate that the *Schutzpolizei* in East Upper Silesia felt favorably toward the Jews. In November their commander warned his men that no Jewish greetings were to be acknowledged and that anyone who had contact with Jews outside of official business could be sent to a concentration camp. As late as May-June 1942 reports reached the *Schutzpolizei* commander that his men were not sufficiently harsh toward the Jews. These reports follow survivor testimony that indicates some Germans were sympathetic toward the Jews, even while they carried out their orders. The testimony of Oswald Rufeisen serves as an example, given that his recollections have been corroborated by other documentation.

Rufeisen served as a translator for the German police in the village of Mir in Silesia. He relates that the atmosphere among the men was formal and that there was little talk of politics; he did not even know who was or was not a Nazi Party member. Of the thirteen policemen stationed in Mir, Rufeisen characterized four of them as sadistic, gleeful killers; three did not actively take part in any killings; and the rest were "passive executors of orders." The three non-killers' absence from the killing operations passed without comment among the others. For Rufeisen, the sergeant in charge of the detachment, Reinhold Hein, was the most confusing individual. He told Rufeisen that he could not shoot a Jew, yet he planned every killing expedition. He was always courteous toward the *Judenrat* members and even promised them they would "die a humanitarian death" when confronted by one of them.

In the village of Marcinkance, located in the district of Bialystok, there was an example of overt resistance by a German official that resulted in charges being brought against him. Hans Lehmann was a forty-one-year-old official with the forestry office and an *Alte Kämpfer* (old fighter) who joined the Nazi Party before it came to power in 1933. During a ghetto-clearing operation in the village where some Jews tried to escape, Lehmann was accused of allowing them to run past him. Sergeant Albert Wietzke, who was in charge, accused Lehmann of leaving his post without orders and allowing Jews to escape by failing to fire his weapon at them. During the investigation Lehmann stated that he had worked well with the Jews for nine months and did not want to be responsible for their deaths. Fellow officers agreed that Lehmann had sympathetic feelings toward the Jews.

Paul Oschewski, another old Party member, implied that Lehmann did not understand the racial question but that he was fully aware of it.

Before the clearing operation, a customs official who was to take part committed suicide, which could suggest that he too was unwilling to participate. During this action two other men refrained from shooting at escaping Jews. Lehmann's subordinate suffered a shoulder injury while tackling an escaping Jew; this incident would imply that he too had been unwilling to shoot any Jews. It would seem that passive protest, such as not taking part in shootings, was allowed, but crossing the line into active protest over the Jewish Question was not tolerated. Not only did Lehmann refuse to fire his weapon, he also wrote a strong letter of protest concerning the action in Marcinkance, stating that the men had gunned down "peaceful Jews." The investigating officer questioned Lehmann's moral scruples and stated "that as a National Socialist he [Lehmann] must know that there is no such thing as peaceful Jews, otherwise we would have been spared the present war."

In both of these examples, between 20 and 30 percent of the men were willing, eager killers: four of thirteen in Mir and four of seventeen in Marcinkance. The same percentages of men actively avoided taking part in these actions: three or four of fourteen in Mir and as many as five of seventeen in Marcinkance. Abstention from shooting did not have any disciplinary consequences. Consequences resulted only from challenging the system, as Lehmann did. He was subjected to intense investigation and was eventually discredited and transferred.

Ordinary Germans also engaged in active resistance by ignoring laws not to fraternize with Jews. Klemperer describes a woman named Frieda who ignored orders not to talk with Jews. She occasionally brought him an apple. As the war went on, Klemperer noticed contradictions in the reactions of Germans toward the Jews. He noted that there were offerings of sympathy, food, and comforting words, especially from non-Jewish workers he met while performing forced labor in 1943-1944. In other instances he encountered hostility from passersby in the streets who became increasingly hostile as the Allied bombing campaign reached its peak. When Dresden, Klemperer's hometown, was firebombed on 13-14 February 1945, he tore off his yellow star out of fear that Jews would be murdered, since the German population increasingly blamed Jews for the bombing.

Studies that have been conducted on large segments of the population, such as those in Bavaria, have shown that the Jewish Question was of minimal importance to the German population. This work has also suggested that the anti-Semitism exhibited by the Nazi leadership was not an integrating element between the Party and the population, whatever its binding

function was within the Party itself. Additionally, studies conducted by the U.S. Army in October 1945 found that 20 percent of Germans went along with Hitler regarding the Jewish Question, and another 19 percent were generally in favor but felt that he had gone too far. This finding would seem to follow the conclusions reached by historians, such as Ian Kershaw and others, who place the blame for the Holocaust squarely on the shoulders of the Nazis and a minority of other Germans.

It is impossible to say with any certainty how much the German population knew regarding the Final Solution or what their attitudes were toward it. Studies based on a broad variety of sources have shown that there was German ambiguity with regard to the Jewish Question. Even victims of Nazi persecution, such as Klemperer, have shown that ordinary Germans ignored orders against fraternization and even helped Jews, if only in small ways. The percentage of Germans sympathetic to the Jews found by the U.S. Army in October 1945 are similar to the percentage of Germans who were willing and even gleeful killers, approximately 20 percent. Given the variety of sources from perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, it would seem that Germans were not uniquely exterminationist but instead were ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances under enormous stresses precipitated by the Nazi regime.

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