State of Fear: Antisemitism in Nazi Propaganda and Its Effects on the German People

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STATE OF FEAR: 
Antisemitism in Nazi Propaganda and 
Its Effects on the German People 

by 

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Abstract 

Historians have debated for decades over the role of the German people in the Nazi crimes against the Jews. This paper does not attempt to argue definitively whether Germans of the Nazi period should be considered perpetrators or bystanders but instead looks in-depth at the antisemitic propaganda that surrounded them on all sides. Themes of religious, moral, racial, economic, and cultural antisemitism in Nazi books, posters, speeches, and iconography are examined in order to prove the ultimate power of propaganda on public opinion. That power effectively turned the Germans against the Jews as a result of the fear that it created. As Hitler himself said, “Propaganda is a truly terrible weapon in the hands of an expert.” 

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Between 1939 and 1945, the National Socialist German Workers' Party, in an effort to cleanse Germany of its racial impurities and create Lebensraum (“living space”) for ethnically pure Germans, murdered over six million Jews. The Nazis shot and left thousands in shallow graves whose surface continued to move as those who had survived the bullet suffocated under the weight of their friends and neighbors. Others they forced to walk on long death marches in the cold, with no rest, food, or water. Some of these tactics proved too stressing for the executioners, however, and Nazi officials determined a new solution. Thus, the vast majority of the Nazi's victims met their fate in small, windowless chambers that sealed behind them and filled with the noxious gas produced by Zyklon-B pellets. Death was instantaneous for some. For others, twenty agonizing minutes elapsed before the victims finally succumbed. In this way, the Nazi party eliminated close to two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population with calculated precision.

In the decades following these events, historians questioned the depth of German public knowledge and degree of reaction to the Nazi elimination of the Jews. How much did ordinary Germans know? What role did they play in the Holocaust? Beginning immediately after World War II, a spectrum developed along which historian have answered these questions. In the early days, many Germans attempted to paint themselves as innocent bystanders to the Nazi violence, either unaware of or unable to

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stop the deportation and murder of their Jewish compatriots.\textsuperscript{2} Others argue that an innate cultural antisemitism made the German people “willing executioners.”\textsuperscript{3} The current study will not attempt to re-answer the question of German guilt, but rather will argue that the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Third Reich influenced, shaped, and ultimately decided the beliefs of the German people regarding the Jewish population.

But where does antisemitism come from? The most common responses to this question include the education and affluence of the Jewish people, the need for scapegoats, xenophobia, and religious bigotry.\textsuperscript{4} Another school of thought claims that Judaism itself, with its exclusive adherence to one God and mission to perfect the earth, has long been the source of Jew hatred.\textsuperscript{5} Whatever the reason, antisemitism dates back as far as the Jewish people themselves. Biblical accounts of Esther's encounter with Haman and Pharaoh's decree that all first-born Israelite males be put to death are some of the earliest examples.\textsuperscript{6} Manetho, an Egyptian priest in the third century B.C.E., characterized the Jews as a race of lepers.\textsuperscript{7} In the centuries following this description, across civilizations, Jews came to be viewed as unproductive, superstitious, murderous, and exclusivist.\textsuperscript{8}

Religiously, Jews again found themselves pariahs. Their refusal to acknowledge the gods of their host countries combined with a successful proselytizing campaign

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\textsuperscript{3} Goldhagen, 48.
\textsuperscript{5} Prager and Telushkin, 23.
\textsuperscript{6} Wistrich, 4.
\textsuperscript{7} Wistrich, 5.
\textsuperscript{8} Wistrich, 5.
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resulted in widespread distrust, hatred, and persecution.\(^9\) When the myth surrounding the Hebrew antagonism toward Jesus Christ and support for his crucifixion arose around 70 C.E., Judaism became a religion of “Christ-killers,” adding fuel to the anti-Semitic fire. A further cause for persecution resulted from the Black Death epidemics of 1347 and 1360. Due to their religious practices of personal cleanliness, the Jews of medieval Europe did not contract or succumb to the dreaded disease in the same devastating numbers as non-Jews. This phenomenon led to accusations that the Jews poisoned the wells in an effort to wipe out the Christian population.\(^10\)

Despite the proliferation of secular and rational thought during the Enlightenment, the antisemitism that had permeated Europe's history persisted. Rationalist thought criticized the Jewish faith alongside all other religions, which reignited hostilities. This secular renewal of anti-Semitic dogma, supported by enlightened thinkers such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Jean Jacques-Rousseau, repeated the traditional stereotypes of Jews as imbeciles, cannibals, and “enemies of mankind.” Voltaire even went so far as to argue the centuries of persecution and massacre committed against the Jews justified.\(^11\) Into this anti-Semitic atmosphere came some of Europe's most influential Jews, such as Marx, Freud, Einstein and Schoenberg. Their influence on the culture of modern central Europe was significant, a fact that did not go unnoticed by anti-Semitic factions who would seek to eradicate it by force.

The group that cemented its place in the long, bloody history of antisemitism as the most organized, creative, and scientific of murderers began humbly enough in 1919.

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9  Prager and Telushkin, 22; Wistrich, 7.
10  Wistrich, 14, 32.
11  Wistrich, 44, 45.
Following the defeat of Germany in World War I, a political revolution forced Kaiser Wilhelm to abdicate and established a new republic at Weimar.\textsuperscript{12} A \textit{völkisch} movement, which included the Pan-German League, refused to accept this victory of the Left and immediately set to work.\textsuperscript{13} A young private of the Bavarian army, Adolf Hitler, attended the meeting of one such group on 12 September 1919.\textsuperscript{14} His stirring speech concerning a greater Germany, in the words of one who attended, “thrilled me and all who could hear him.”\textsuperscript{15} Members of the German Workers’ Party (DAP) persuaded Hitler to join shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{16} Within the year Hitler became the propaganda chief for the DAP and by the summer of 1921 he had taken over chairmanship of the Party.\textsuperscript{17}

During the following two years, Hitler and the newly renamed National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) campaigned successfully for their growing movement, which combined racialist ideology with “a hold over the broad masses” to make “a party of struggle and action.”\textsuperscript{18} As support for the NSDAP grew, so did the strength of their anti-Semitic propaganda. In the fall of 1922 Julius Streicher, a well-known antisemite, joined the Party and became one of its most popular speakers.\textsuperscript{19} His allegiance, and that of others like him, gave Hitler the wherewithal to undertake the NSDAP's boldest movement yet. On 8 November 1923, at a meeting held in a Munich beer hall, Hitler and

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\textsuperscript{13} Noakes and Pridham, 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Ernst Deuerlein, ed., \textit{Der Aufstieg der NSDAP 1919-1933 in Augenzeugenberichten} (Düsseldorf: DTV Deutcher Taschenbuch, 1968), 60, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, 11.
\textsuperscript{15} Ernst Deuerlein, 60, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, 11.
\textsuperscript{16} Noakes and Pridham, 11.
\textsuperscript{17} Noakes and Pridham, 11, 19.
\textsuperscript{18} Werner Jochmann, ed., \textit{Nationalsozialismus und Revolution: Dokumente} (Frankfurt: Frankfurt am Main, 1963), 89, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, 25.
\textsuperscript{19} Noakes and Pridham, 25.
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600 Sturmabteilung attempted an overthrow that became known as the Beer Hall Putsch.\textsuperscript{20} Unfortunately for the young NSDAP, Bavarian police were able to quell the uprising, which resulted in a major failure for the Party. The defeat did not result in failure for Hitler, however. Though tried for high treason, the failed artist created a masterpiece of propaganda out of his trial and sentencing. Hitler made himself a patriot and a martyr for Germany, while in the process becoming a hero to antisemites outside of his previous sphere of influence. Thus, the Nazis’s greatest defeat brought about greater support and more widespread membership upon its reorganization in early 1925.\textsuperscript{21}

Then followed a period of relative economic prosperity and political stability that enabled the Nazis to pursue power through a more legal process. Beginning with only seventy-five thousand in 1928, the NSDAP quickly expanded to 100,000 members by October of that year and by September 1929 had reached 150,000.\textsuperscript{22} Bolstered by this success and significant gains in the Reichstag, Hitler and the Nazi Party had high hopes for the election of 1932. “The contest for power, the game of chess, has begun,” said Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels in early January 1932. “It will be a fast game, played with intelligence and skill.”\textsuperscript{23} Skilled though he was, Hitler proved unsuccessful in ousting Paul von Hindenburg from the Presidency. Said Goebbels, “we are beaten.” Despite the setback, Hitler remained “entirely composed” and “[did] not

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\item 20 Noakes and Pridham, 28. The Sturmabteilung (SA), also known as Storm Troopers or Brownshirts, were organized in the summer of 1921 as paramilitary protection for Party leaders and meetings. Hitler and the NSDAP employed the use of the SA up until the Night of the Long Knives during the summer of 1934, after which the Schutzstaffel (SS) became the official Party paramilitary organization.
\item 21 Noakes and Pridham, 33, 37.
\item 22 Noakes and Pridham, 58, 64.
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hesitate for a moment to face the fight once more.”  His determination paid off when Hitler managed to negotiate with President Hindenburg and his conservative party, gaining the position of chancellor in January 1933. In his diary, Goebbels wrote that “the final decision has been made. Germany is at a turning point in her history.”

Hindenburg assumed that Hitler could be governed by the conservative government officials surrounding him. Unfortunately, the President and his advisers were wrong. In his first action as chancellor, Hitler did away with the Reichstag's ability to oppose him and, following a fire in the building ostensibly started by a young Dutch communist, declared the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and State. The decree stated that as a “defensive measure against Communists acts of violence endangering the State” the sections of the German constitution regarding personal liberty, … the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press, … the right of assembly and association, and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications, and warrants for house-searches, orders for confiscations as well as restrictions on property rights are permissible beyond the legal limits otherwise prescribed.

Following a speech in the Reichstag that persuaded the Catholic church of his good intentions towards them, Hitler gained the support of one of his last political opponents, the Catholic Centre Party. The Reichstag passed an Enabling Act one day later that gave Hitler the vast majority of the power in the government and eliminated the last

24 Goebbels, Germany’s Fight, 50, 51.
25 Noakes and Pridham, 105, 121.
26 Goebbels, Germany’s Fight, 207.
27 Noakes and Pridham, 126, 139, 141.
28 Reichsgesetzblatt (RGBl), Jg. 1933, Teil I, Nr. 17, 83, quoted in Noakes and Pridham, 142.
29 Noakes and Pridham, 156.
sembles of parliamentary democracy.\textsuperscript{30} With President Hindenburg's death just over four months later, Hitler became president, chancellor, and Führer of Germany and the German people.\textsuperscript{31} His authority was now absolute.

Ancient antisemitism and modern politics became entwined through the use of propaganda in the Third Reich. Propaganda has a goal, which Randall L. Bytwerk, a German historian at Calvin College, described as the “means by which humans are persuaded to accept the powers that be.”\textsuperscript{32} In the same vein, noted scholar of Nazi propaganda Aristotle A. Kallis defined it as “a systematic process of information management geared to promoting a particular goal and to guaranteeing a popular response as desired by the propagandist.”\textsuperscript{33} To Hitler, “propaganda is a truly terrible weapon in the hands of an expert.”\textsuperscript{34} This “weapon,” wielded by Nazi experts, became the most damaging to the beliefs and perceptions of the German people regarding Jews. Using a dangerous combination of policy and artistry, the Nazis manipulated and built on the threats of religious and moral degeneration, racial impurity, economic repercussions, and war in order to indoctrinate the German public against the Jews.

Just as organized religion encompasses all aspects of life and creates a specific worldview for the believer, so did the Nazi totalitarian regime attempt to organize and shape all aspects of German public life through its ideology.\textsuperscript{35} To do so, quasi-religious

\textsuperscript{30} Noakes and Pridham, 161.
31 Noakes and Pridham, 185.
35 Bytwerk, 12, 13.
propaganda combined a mix of secular and sacred themes. One of the most prominent of these portrayed Hitler as a super-human or Messianic figure, bearing a sword rather than a crown of thorns and pursuing a divine mission to rid Germany of the evils that plagued it. One soldier said of Hitler, “I believe unreservedly in him and in his movement. He is my religion.” Propaganda Minister Goebbels wrote in his journal of the Nazi ascendancy, “God's hand has been upon it all. He has visibly directed the Leader of this movement.” For his part, the Führer promised to keep Christianity as the basis of his regime's “entire moral code” and work to defend the family, forge ethnic unity, and bring together conflicting political ideologies. In much of their propaganda and public discourse, the Nazis continued to use such familiar language, building on religious tradition, equating Christ and Hitler, the Bible and Mein Kampf.

Party propaganda reflected the Nazi deification of the Führer in a number of ways. Known as one of the most brilliant propaganda films ever created, Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will (1935) opens with Hitler descending like a god through the clouds, magnifies his stature by filming his impassioned speeches from below, and focuses in on his cupped hand catching the rays of the setting sun. In a Nazi poster distributed around the same time, Hitler once again eclipses the rays of the sun while an eagle descends

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36 Bytwerk, 11, 13. 
37 Bytwerk, 14-15; Wistrich, 67. 
38 Gunter d'Alquen, Das ist der Sieg! Briefe des Glaubens in Aufbruch und Krieg (Berlin: Franz Eher, 1941), 42, quoted in Bytwerk, 15. 
39 Goebbels, Germany's Fight, 8. 
41 Wistrich, 69; Bytwerk, 17. 
42 Triumph of the Will, directed by Leni Riefenstahl (1934; Bloomington, IL: Synapse Film, 2000), DVD; Bytwerk, 16. For more information on Leni Riefenstahl and her work for the Third Reich, see Leni: The Life and Work of Leni Riefenstahl by Steven Bach and Women Directors and Their Films by Mary G. Hurd.
upon him, highly reminiscent of the dove over Jesus Christ at his baptism. The caption reads, “Long live Germany!”\(^{43}\) Quotations chosen for the *Wochenspruch*, a series of inspirational weekly posters, include several descriptions of Hitler as a religious leader defending a chosen nation. During the week of 12 December, the Koln-Aachen *Gau* (district) distributed this quote by Hermann Goering, a leading Nazi official: “As long as people and Führer are united, Germany will be invincible. The Lord sent us the Führer not in order for us to perish, but rather for Germany to rise again.”\(^{44}\) Just weeks before, between 31 October and 6 November, Alfred Rosenberg's quote, “Holy ground is everywhere that is defended by Germans,” shared the pseudo-religious imagery with the Oberdanau district.\(^{45}\) A year before that, a poster in Düsseldorf epitomized the ideology by proclaiming that “the Fatherland is a religion.”\(^{46}\)

If Hitler was the Savior of a Germany founded on Christian principles, who played the role of the devil? For the Nazis, the Jewish population represented all the disorder, decay, and evil present in the world. Building on centuries of hatred and prejudice, the Third Reich took religious antisemitism one step further by shifting the characterization of Jews from agents of the devil to the Devil himself. Therefore, by eliminating Jewry, the Nazis were ridding the world of evil and creating a new one free

\(^{44}\) Herman Goering, poster, 1938, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-k%C3%B6ln.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).
\(^{45}\) Alfred Rosenberg, poster, 1938, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-2.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).
\(^{46}\) Ernst Juenger, poster, 1937, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-d%C3%BCsseldorf.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).
from its stain. 47 Hitler recorded his conviction on the subject in Mein Kampf, writing that “by warding off the Jews, I am doing the Lord's work.”48 Thus, by creating a dichotomy between the Christian moral order of the Third Reich and its sworn enemies the Jews, Hitler created the “single most powerful cause in producing an endemic antisemitism … in the Christian world.”49

The Nazi propaganda machine disseminated this theme through a plethora of posters, pamphlets, speeches, books, films, and radio broadcasts. Weekly quotations stressing the mission of Germans in ridding the world of Jewry stated, “We are a people that bears the fate of the world on our shoulders,” and “We are fighting on German soil for the whole world.”50 Religiously antisemitic posters proclaimed that “He who wants to fight the Devil should stand on his own feet and grit his teeth, not hide under the robe of the holiest angel!” and

...his breath is pregnant with poison. The pure die from his kiss. A good death is one that prolongs his life. Murder, arson, and falsehood are his pleasures. No people loves him! His devilish face makes one want to vomit. He is not a human being, not a spirit, but rather a hellish animal always ready to rip its prey with its claws.51

Propaganda did not limit itself to adults. German children were taught propaganda-filled lessons in school and given antisemitic books to read. The most famous example is Ernst

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47 Goldhagen, 67.
48 Hitler, 84, quoted in Bytwerk, 26.
49 Goldhagen, 43.
50 Hans Schemm, poster, 1940, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-2.htm (accessed March 5, 2013); Adolf Hitler, poster, 1938, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-2.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).
Hiemer's *Der Giftpilz* (The Toadstool), a children's book that likens the Jews to hard-to-distinguish yet deadly poisonous mushrooms. A poem from *Der Giftpilz* reflects the religious nature of Nazi propaganda:

> From a Jew’s face
> The wicked Devil speaks to us,
> The Devil who, in every country,
> Is known as an evil plague.

> Would we from the Jew be free,
> Again be cheerful and happy,
> Then must youth fight with us
> To get rid of the Jewish Devil.\(^{52}\)

As a sub-theme of religious antisemitism, morality and the Jewish lack of it became a secondary focus of Nazi propaganda. In medieval times, Jews became associated with lust and carnality due to their religious leaders' practice of marriage. Catholic priests remained celibate and taught that a life devoid of sexual contact and desire was holy. While supporting their own virtue and piety, the Church campaigned against sexuality, procreation, and marriage. These desires became Jewish and dirty.\(^{53}\) Medieval art depicted the Jew as a seductive woman, always trying to bring good Christians down to her lecherous level.\(^{54}\) The Nazis continued the portrayal in various media, but most notably in Julius Streicher's antisemitic newspaper *Der Stürmer* (The Stormer). One article from 1935 relates the double suicide of a Jew and his German mistress outside Berlin. According to author Fritz Fink, previous reports of the tragic love between the two were ridiculous, since "a Jew [would] not kill himself over a [non-

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53 Wistrich, 18.
54 Wistrich, 29.
Jew]. A Jew is not capable of such great and deep love.” Instead, according to Fink, economic fraud and fear of the law led the Jew to take his own life, after seducing and lying to the poor German girl.\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Der Giftpilz} employs more age-appropriate yet similar themes in indoctrinating children, suggesting that Jews are wont to kidnap and molest children willing to follow them.\textsuperscript{56}

The Nazis broadened the public fear of the immoral and seductive nature of the Jews by spreading the ideology of racial inferiority. In his first major political statement in September 1919, Adolf Hitler stated that antisemitism was most effective when based on facts, one of which was that the term “Jewish” referred to a race.\textsuperscript{57} Though his initial stance on anti-Jewish racism was largely ignored, following the election of 1933 Hitler institutionalized antisemitism, which became a foundational doctrine of the Nazi party.\textsuperscript{58} Official ideology called on Germans to fulfill their moral duty to destroy the enemy that wanted to destroy them through inter-breeding and the subsequent pollution of German blood.\textsuperscript{59} Hearkening back to another major theme, a “racially pure German 'heaven' was the goal” of Nazi racial propaganda. An “earthly paradise” could be achieved through generations of purification and ethnic cleansing.\textsuperscript{60} Hitler believed this new Germany would be filled with the very best examples of humankind: upright, honest, clean, strong, pure “Aryans,” the master race. He believed in a racial utopia maintained and protected

\textsuperscript{56} Hiemer, page numbers unavailable, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/thumb.htm. See Illustration B.
\textsuperscript{57} Noakes and Pridham, 12.
\textsuperscript{58} Wistrich, 71.
\textsuperscript{59} Wistrich, 75.
\textsuperscript{60} Bytwerk, 25.
by the removal of its most dangerous enemy, the Jew.\textsuperscript{61}

Nazi propaganda disseminated this doctrine to the German public through a mix of uplifting images, visual and audible, of healthy, fair-skinned Aryans and fear-inciting ones that depicted demonized, dirty Jewish caricatures. Weekly quotation posters distributed across the country claimed that “Each sin against racial purity is a sin against God's will and the created order,” “A people that keeps its blood free of the Jews will live forever,” and “The ultimate immortality in this world is in the eternity of ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{62} In a radio talk directed at the youth of Germany, Dr. Walter Gross preached on race and how it revealed “whole groups of people who are separated from other groups of people by their common genetic inheritance.”\textsuperscript{63} This inheritance, according to Hiemer's storybook, included the parasitic nature of the Jewish race, their cheap, miserly, and dishonest business ways, the Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus Christ, and stereotypical physical characteristics that distinguish Jews from non-Jews.\textsuperscript{64} Published works for adults also repeated the theme. In early 1942, one district reported having distributed more than two million handbills and eighty-five thousand placards containing maxims on racial purity.\textsuperscript{65} Shortly before this particular propaganda campaign, a film funded by the Nazi party was released to the public. \textit{I Accuse} was the first motion picture

\textsuperscript{61} Wistrich, 76.  
\textsuperscript{62} Hans Schemm, poster, 1938, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/ws/ws34-15aug-koeln.jpg (accessed March 5, 2013); Julius Streicher, poster, 1938, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-k%C3%B6ln.htm (accessed March 5, 2013); Adolf Hitler, poster, 1938, found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wochenspruch-k%C3%B6ln.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).  
\textsuperscript{64} Hiemer, page numbers unavailable, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/thumb.htm.  
to introduce “mercy killings” of those unworthy of or undesirable for reproduction to the
German public. Nazi records show high levels of attendance. Similarly, in posters and
visual stimuli the Nazis attempted to desensitize the public toward its increasingly deadly
strain of antisemitism. According to Goebbels, propaganda had to make the enemy look
brutal and inhuman as opposed to silly or ridiculous since the Propaganda Ministry could
not incite the public hatred they desired otherwise.

The Nazis created a brutal and inhuman stereotype through the creation of
something they called Jewish-Bolshevism. A pamphlet issued by the Reich Propaganda
Directorate in July 1921 defined it as “a system of Jewish criminals and their accomplices
whose purpose is the exploitation and enslavement of humanity.” Building on a history
that associated Jews with both capitalism and communism, the Nazis spread the idea that
Jewish-Bolshevism meant the end of German happiness and the beginning of widespread
hunger and lawlessness. In his diary, Minister Goebbels recorded the Nazi dogma
regarding Jewish-Bolshevism in these words: “Bolshevism is a doctrine of the devil.”
According to Nazi leaders, both the “sufferings of Russian people under Bolshevism” and
the international desire to attack and hinder Nazism came from Jewish-Bolsheviks

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66 Herzstein, 427.
67 Aufklärungs- und Redner-Informationsmaterial der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP, Deutschland
dem Endkampf mit dem jüdisch-bolshewistischen Mordsystem angreifen (Munich: Zentralverlag der
NSDAP, 1941), in NARA, T81, roll 672, RPL 52, 5480200, quoted in Jeffrey Herf, The Jewish Enemy:
Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
2006), 100.
68 Medieval antissemites banned Jews from a majority of professions, which led them to usury (money
lending) and tax collecting. Such jobs created a connection between Jews and capitalism that continued
into the twentieth century. For more on the historical background of economic antisemitism see Prager
and Teluskin, 74-75; Herzstein, 204.
Company, Inc., 1948), 85.
throughout Europe and the United States.\textsuperscript{70} When Hitler alarmed his Western European neighbors by invading Czechoslovakia in 1939, he instructed the propaganda offices to blame the invasion on world Jewry, since “Germany could not tolerate a 'stronghold of Jewry and Bolshevism' on its borders.”\textsuperscript{71} The German public received similar stories regarding the invasions of Poland in September 1939 and the Soviet Union in 1941. In June of that year, Goebbels spoke at a Minister's Conference, claiming that just as “National Socialism started as a movement against Bolshevism … National Socialism and the German people are reverting to the principles that first impelled them—the struggle against plutocracy and Bolshevism.”\textsuperscript{72} The forces of plutocracy and Bolshevism, according to the Nazis, desired the destruction of Germany and meant to incite a war in order to achieve it.\textsuperscript{73} Goebbels contended that though they had infiltrated major world powers and used them to excite anti-German hostilities, “this won't avail the Jews anything. The Jewish race has prepared this war; it is the spiritual misfortune that has taken over humanity. Jewry must pay for its crime just as our Führer prophesied.”\textsuperscript{74}

To disseminate the Nazi view of the economic and international threat posed by Jewry, a clever and insidious propaganda campaign commenced. To convince the German public that it “render[ed] an inestimable service” to the world by eradicating the influence of international Jewry, the Nazi propaganda machine turned out pamphlets,

\textsuperscript{70} Goebbels, \textit{The Goebbels Diaries}, 86; Herf, 51.
\textsuperscript{73} Herf, 97-98.
\textsuperscript{74} Goebbels, \textit{The Goebbels Diaries}, 243.
slide shows, films, and posters focused on the dangers posed by the Jews.\textsuperscript{75} Between September 1939 and October 1940, for example, the Reich Propaganda Directorate reported the production of nine slide shows (one of which was entitled “Plutocracy and Jewry”), which were shown across Germany in over twenty-nine thousand slide show evenings and attended by close to 4.3 million people.\textsuperscript{76} The Nazis also produced twenty-three thousand color posters during this same time period depicting a Jew with Russia under his arm, a whip in one hand, and bloody coins in another as advertising for \textit{The Eternal Jew}, one of the Third Reich's most well-known antisemitic films.\textsuperscript{77} \textit{The Eternal Jew}, along with \textit{Jud Süss} and \textit{Der Rothschilds}, two other propaganda-heavy films released around the same time, brought in record numbers of film-goers during the war. In order to meet the demand and spread its dogma, the Nazi party Film Office operated 850 mobile projection vans by 1940 and sponsored 240,000 film shows that year.\textsuperscript{78}

Newspaper articles, cartoons, and posters also characterized Jews as an economic threat to German people and peace. The main article of the November 1937 issue of \textit{Der Stürmer} accused Jews of every economic misdeed imaginable and its accompanying cartoon, called “Demon Money,” depicted a monster labeled with the Star of David sinking its claws, adorned with the American dollar and British pound, into the world.\textsuperscript{79} A poster released in late 1943 carried the caption “The Jew: The inciter of war, the

\textsuperscript{75} Goebbels, \textit{The Goebbels Diaries}, 86.
\textsuperscript{76} Herf, 59.
\textsuperscript{78} Herzstein, 415.
prolonger of war.” Another depicted a large-nosed figure wearing the Star of David and cowering under a pointing finger, which stated “He is to blame for the war.” Still others described the alleged relationship between Jewry and international forces, such as one titled “Behind the Enemy Powers” and illustrated with a stereotypical Jew peaking out from behind British, American, and Soviet flags.

Propaganda proved to be a highly effective influence on the German public due to its nation-wide dissemination and a lack of any counter-point. According to Goldhagen, “when beliefs and images are uncontested or are even just dominant within a given society, individuals typically come to accept them as self-evident truths.” Germany under Hitler was largely devoid of criticism regarding the antisemitic slander that permeated every official statement and publication. In 1933, Germany distributed more daily newspapers than the United States—between 500 and 600 total—and only fifty-nine contained Nazi material. By 1939, however, the Nazi publishing house Eher Verlag controlled two-thirds of Germany's press, after having merged or bought (sometimes by force) close to six hundred papers. Other publications met the same fate. In September 1933 the Nazis passed the “Editor's Law.” The new legislation required all artists to belong to their respective Chamber, which reserved the right to permit or deny

81 Herzstein, 203.
83 Goldhagen, 46.
84 Goldhagen, 441.
85 Noakes and Pridham, 390.
86 Noakes and Pridham, 391.
membership.\textsuperscript{87} Even after gaining entrance, members of the German press enjoyed little or no artistic freedom. The Propaganda Ministry maintained control of all published materials through a steady stream of directives that gave specific and detailed guidelines for publications.\textsuperscript{88}

Radio, art, and music received similar treatment. In March 1933, Goebbels told the controllers of German broadcasting that the “radio belongs to us and to no one else.” He also encouraged broadcasters to use their imaginations in order to disseminate Nazi ideals and to “avoid being boring.”\textsuperscript{89} Goebbels knew indoctrinating the German people successfully meant producing propaganda that was not easily recognizable; it had to be interesting. Unfortunately for the Nazis, the art they classified proper and worthy of the German people was anything but exciting. However, Hitler, once an artist himself, saw art as an expression of race and believed that Aryans alone could produce it.\textsuperscript{90} At a speech given for the opening of the Degenerate Art Exhibit in Berlin, Hitler asked the modern, new-age artists he despised, “but what do you manufacture? Misformed cripples and cretins, women who disgust, men who are more like wild beasts, children who, were they alive, must be regarded as God's curse.”\textsuperscript{91} The Exhibit featured banned art works in a crowded, disorganized venue and shared the message that “Nazism had saved Germany from Jewish Bolshevist art which glorified perversion and ugliness.”\textsuperscript{92} The Nazi

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87 Noakes and Pridham, 298.
88 Noakes and Pridham, 387.
89 Quoted in Noakes and Pridham, 385.
90 Noakes and Pridham, 400.
92 Bytwerk, 110. It is interesting to note that despite the propaganda that surrounded it, the Degenerate Art Exhibit drew three million ticket sales, while the exhibit of traditional German art around the corner did not receive nearly as many patrons.
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The persecution of Jewish influence on music followed a similar pattern. The Third Reich forced many of Germany's finest musicians into emigration or silence. Richard Wagner, whom Hitler revered, published a treatise in 1850 that blamed Jewry for the modernity and decadence of musical expression and characterized the Jews as devoid of passion, soul, and true music. The Nazis followed in his musical footsteps, banning Jewish music from the radio just as they had banned Jewish art from the museums.

The purpose of this massive and far-reaching propaganda effort was both to inculcate hatred in the German public for the Jewish race and to dehumanize the Jews to the point of alienation and complete social death. Some historians argue that Nazi propaganda ultimately failed to achieve this two-fold goal, since after the Third Reich produced no adherents willing to restore it after its fall. These historians believe that the German public “played the game, but many of them knew better.” Statistics show that such views may be true for some, but not all or even most Germans. In 1947, 75 percent of polled Germans stated that they considered the Jews another race. Close to the same number stated they would not marry a Jew. A third of Germans in 1952 listed the Jewish character as the primary cause of antisemitism and 65 percent believed the Nazis had been successful in spreading aversion towards the Jews. As late as the 1980s, many Germans maintained the belief that Jews are “shrewd and money-grabbing,” as well as “exploitative of Germany's Nazi past,” and “too influential on an international level.”

93 Noakes and Pridham, 406.
94 Wistrich, 55-56.
95 Bytwerk, 155, 162.
97 Wistrich, 85.
At that time, six to seven million Germans remained classified as antisemitic, two million of which fell under a “hardcore” classification.\(^{98}\) These data reveal the extent to which the Nazis did in fact succeed in indoctrinating the German public against the Jews with long-lasting effects. As years passed, Germans no longer encountered the racist and dehumanizing propaganda that had permeated the nation during the Third Reich. Accordingly, statistics show a decline in antisemitic beliefs. However, the endurance of racial, political, and social antisemitism in the minds of the German people is a testimony to the power of Nazi propaganda.

In order to truly understand the effects of Nazi propaganda efforts, however, data is insufficient. Statistics do not give voice to the human experience of the Third Reich. One German woman, reflecting on the Nazi regime in a private journal during the occupation of Berlin, wrote, “Was I for... or against? What's clear is that I was there, that I breathed what was in the air, and it affected all of us, even if we didn't want it to.”\(^{99}\) Characterizing the influence of the Nazi propaganda even more strongly, a Protestant minister felt that “one would be pushed further, step by step, until he had crossed over the line, without noticing that his spine was being bent, millimeter by millimeter.”\(^{100}\) Nazi themes of race, Jewish-Bolshevism, and the international threat posed by the Jews also resurfaced in the reflections of the people. One German admitted in 1936—just three years after Hitler's seizure of power—that “the feeling that the Jews are another race is

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98 Wistrich, 85.
today a general one.” Following the war, Dr. Reinhard Mauruch acted as legal defense for members of the Einsatzgruppen tried at Nuremberg. As part of his testimony in their behalf, Dr. Mauruch stated “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.” He continued, stating that the “Einsatzgruppen had genuinely believed that Bolshevism 'was a Jewish invention’” and that the preservation of Germany itself depended the elimination of this threat. One Einsatzkommando executioner on trial that day gave his own account of this belief, testifying

it was hammered into us, during 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 could reign in Europe only then, when the Jewish race is exterminated. No one could entirely escape this propaganda.

As the members of the Einsatzgruppen at Nuremberg and their lawyer exemplify, the antisemitic slander spread by Nazi propaganda reached all members of the German public with little or no disputing voice. According to Goldhagen, “every significant institution in Germany supported a malevolent image of Jews.” Thanks to its overwhelming coordination of antisemitic themes and images, the Nazi propaganda machine succeeded in disseminating this image to the German public.

“An individual learns the cognitive models of his culture, like grammar, surely

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101 Cited by Ernst Hanfstaengl, The Unknown Hitler (London: Gibson Square, 2005), 72-73, quoted in Luckert and Bachrach, 91.
103 Mauruch, 351, quoted in Goldhagen, 393.
105 Goldhagen, 441.
and effortlessly,” says Goldhagen.106 Leading up to and during the twelve years of the Nazi regime, the cognitive model of Germany became increasingly antisemitic in its dogma and propaganda. At first, Germans and Jews alike ignored the subtle antisemitism underlying Nazi campaigns and platforms.107 The strongest attraction for many lay in Hitler's promise of economic reform, not his thinly-veiled disgust for Jews.108 The strength and unity of the Volksgemeinschaft, or “people's community,” also endeared the Nazi party to the people of Germany. Only slowly did the public realize what this meant for their Jewish neighbors. In a letter to a Jewish friend written after the war, a German woman wrote of the inspiration she took from the idea of a national community and admitted that “the fact that you [her Jewish friend] were not allowed to belong I overlooked for as long as I could.”109 Before long, however, overlooking the exclusion, alienation, and persecution of Germany's Jews became impossible. Nazi speeches, radio broadcasts, and newspapers slandered the Jews as immoral and cast them as religious threats; pamphlets, textbooks, and children's books lowered Jews to a race of animals, genetically inferior to Germans; and posters, films, and newspapers blamed them for starting a war against Germany while hiding behind the skirts of international powers. Jewish art, literature, and music became anathema to German society. The Jews of Germany, by means of spoken and written word alone, ceased to be human. Non-Jewish Germans, barraged on every side by racist and defaming information, could not escape the antisemitic indoctrination that resulted. Even while bombs fell, machine guns

106 Goldhagen, 46.
107 Luckert and Bachrach, 48.
108 Prager and Telushkin, 156.
109 David Clay Large, Where Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 78, quoted in Luckert and Bachrach, 86.
chattered, and tanks rolled through Europe, Hitler's deadliest threat remained leveled at
the German public on the home front. Since, according to Hitler, “propaganda is a truly
terrible weapon in the hands of an expert.”

110 Hitler, 179.
Illustration A. “Long live Germany!” The poster has no known author or date, but represents one of the most Christological images of Hitler ever produced. Found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters/dove.jpg.
Illustration B. Image from Der Giftpilz by Ernst Hiemer (1938). The caption reads “Here kids, I have some candy for you. But you both have to come with me...” The story warned children from being tricked into following a dangerous Jew. Found in German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/thumb.htm.
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