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## German People and the Holocaust

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German Society and the Holocaust

By  
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SBS 402 Capstone Seminar  
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## **Abstract**

This paper will explore the circumstances of Germany and the German people before the Holocaust and how those circumstances influenced the Holocaust. I will be looking at primary and secondary sources and using historical research methods. I am focusing on Anti-Semitic feelings in Germany, the propaganda against the Jewish people, using the Jewish people as a scapegoat for the problems of Germany, then finally going into how labor camps developed into concentration camps and places of mass murder. I will be using Auschwitz camp as my main focus for the concentration camp since it was one of the first camps to become a death camp and it became notorious for it.

## **German People and the Holocaust**

### **Introduction**

This paper explores the socio-psychology behind the Nazis of the third Reich during Hitler's reign as führer.

Since I was a young girl I have always been interested in learning and reading about the Holocaust. I was around 8 years old the first time I heard about the Holocaust, it was when Elie Wiesel went on Oprah and she interviewed him and went back to Auschwitz with him. I could not fully grasp what was happening why was this man crying? Where were they? It was not until I would do my own research that I found out more and thus beginning my infatuation with the Holocaust. After that I would read anything I could get my hands on, fiction or nonfiction. I would watch the documentaries that came on television and Netflix. The Holocaust is still so recent that people who experienced it are still alive. After thinking about what interests me, I thought of a genuine question for what I would really want to know the answer to.

The research question addressed by this project is about the social and psychological origins, motives, and reasons that can help explain how a person can be transformed from a regular citizen into a soldier capable of following orders requiring him to participate in massive killings of defenseless people. This project assumes that many German citizens during the Second World War went through this transformation. This question stems out of a substantive literature on the matter. This project is important to keep this part of history alive. As the saying goes history tends to repeat itself and it is up to our generation to educate not only our peers but the younger generations so as to avoid the same mistakes made by advanced societies in the past.

World War I ended in 1918 and Germany was not happy with the end results. Germany had lost, through the treaty of Versailles, it forced Germany to pay reparations for the war. Germany had to accept war guilt and pay reparations in millions of dollars. Germany also lost a lot of her territory, thirteen percent, and ten percent of her population. Some territories were returned to France, but she lost all of her colonies as well.<sup>1</sup> The German military took a huge hit as well, their navy and army were drastically cut, and they were forbidden from having an air force and submarines. At the beginning of the 1930s there was so much resentment from the German people towards the treaty of Versailles because it had crippled them in territorial, military, and economic terms.<sup>2</sup> There was a man, named Adolf Hitler, who was born in Austria. Due to his emotionally abusive father who did not support his dream of being an artist and the loss of both parents while still a young boy he found himself living in Vienna the heart of art and architecture. He tried twice to get into the art school in Vienna but was denied twice. He was

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<sup>1</sup> O'Connor, Anne Marie, 1959-. *The Lady in Gold : the Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*. New York: Knopf, 2012. (13)

<sup>2</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (14)

living in homeless shelters and doing minimal jobs. He was a supporter of Germans nationalist's views something that would be a driving force later on. He moved to Munich in 1913 and willingly enlisted into the German Army at the outbreak of World War I despite being an Austrian Citizen. He had such strong German pride and was shocked at how easily Germany surrendered and how willingly they signed the Treaty of Versailles. After the war he was still a part of the military as an intelligence officer and got involved in the political party that would be known as the Nazi party, it was during a stormed rally that he was arrested as he declared the formation of a new government. It was in prison that he wrote *Mein Kampf*, his biography that would call for one superior race to all, the German race, the Aryan race, to take their rightful place at the top of the world. He was appealing to a fearful Germany. They were economically unstable and politically falling apart. It was these events that lead to a political shift in Germany and these issues lead to the rise of Adolf Hitler.<sup>3</sup>

Hitler was quick to blame the politicians. In the post war Weimar Republic, the democratic party was not as successful as the hopeful people that had created it had wanted. It was created in the optimistic image that they could have a liberal democracy in their nation where they had only known militarism and authoritarian monarchy. But with the end results of the war they were suffering economically and through international isolation. During what was known as the Great Depression of the 1930s the Weimer Democracy fell to Nazi totalitarianism with Adolf Hitler as Germany's new leader.

The many unresolved issues from World War I may have been what ultimately led to World War II. The political and economic instability and the resentment towards the terms

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<sup>3</sup> O'Connor, Anne Marie, 1959-. *The Lady in Gold : the Extraordinary Tale of Gustav Klimt's Masterpiece, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer*. New York :Knopf, 2012.(30-32)

imposed by the Treaty of Versailles were the stepping stones Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi) Party needed to rise to power. Hitler's first big step was his memoir *Mein Kampf* in which he predicted a European war that would result in the extermination of the Jewish race in Germany. He used this as well as Anti-Semitic propaganda to support his campaign eventually becoming Chancellor in 1933. In 1934 he appointed himself Führer, the supreme leader. He became obsessed with the idea of an "Aryan" race, the pure German race. Hitler was openly violating the Treaty of Versailles by sending soldiers to occupy other countries, but went without confrontation.<sup>4</sup> In August of 1939 Hitler and Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. This was necessary with Hitler's plan to invade Poland, he needed to make sure that he would not have to worry about war on the eastern front as well as the western front once he invaded Poland. He wanted to make sure that he would have the support and assistance of the Soviet Union when it came to conquering the other surrounding nations.<sup>5</sup>

On September 1, 1939 Hitler invaded Poland, and not long after France and Britain declared war on Germany, thus beginning World War II. On September 17<sup>th</sup> Soviet troops invaded Poland from the east. With German troops invading from the West it did not take long for Poland to fall. In early 1940 Germany and the Soviet Union had successfully divided control over Poland. Germany was fighting on all fronts and proving to be successful, fighting at sea with Britain and taking out their ships with submarines. In 1940 Germany invaded Norway and had already occupied Denmark, and was slowly but strongly making its way throughout Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> Ladd, Brian. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997. (10)

<sup>5</sup> Ladd, Brian. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997. (12)

Fearing a similar invasion like France, Mussolini, the Italian ruler, was quick to start up a Pact with Hitler and thus declaring war against France and Britain.

With his successful invasion of France, Hitler then turned to Britain and was not only fighting them by sea, but was bombing them extensively at night. However, in what is known as the Battle of Britain, the Royal Air Force defeated the German Air Force, postponing Hitler's invasion and giving Prime Minister Winston Churchill the ability to request and get aid from the United States. The invasion of these countries was ground for Hitler's idea that the Aryan race to grow to be the supreme race. This would ultimately lead to Hitler betraying Stalin and invading the Soviet Union in June of 1941.<sup>6</sup> But the Soviets were able to meet them when it came to military power, the only advantage that the Germans had was the element of surprise.

The other half of Hitler's grand scheme was the extermination of the Jewish people throughout German-occupied Europe.<sup>7</sup> This was known as the "Final Solution" and would go down in world history as one of the heinous crimes of the twenty-first century. This moment in history would be forever known as the Holocaust and Hitler and the German murdered about six million European Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally ill, and other persecuted groups. Anti-Semitism did not begin with Hitler and the Nazi party but is deeply rooted in European history. It can be traced back to biblical times and the ancient world. The first people to persecute the Jewish people were the Romans. In 63 B.C. the Romans conquered Jerusalem, the native home of the Jewish people. Romans began to force their faith and culture on the Jewish people, that was when they began to separate, people that willingly converted to Orthodoxy beliefs, and the other side that that was fighting to stay in their monotheist beliefs, that side had Jesus. After the

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<sup>6</sup> It was Hitler's betrayal to Stalin that would lead to the formation of the Axis and Allies powers. The Allies: Britain, Soviet Union, and the United States. The Axis: Germany, Japan, and Italy)

<sup>7</sup>Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (10)

persecution of Jesus, Romans expelled Jews from Palestine and they began to spread to Africa, Spain, Eastern, and Western Europe as well. Giving way to what is known to the Jewish people as Diaspora, never really having a place to call their homeland. With the declaration of Christianity becoming the religion of the Roman Empire Anti-Semitism became a threat to the Jewish peoples existence.<sup>8</sup> During the enlightenment period there was an emphasis on religious toleration and Jewish people suffered a more racial discrimination than a religious one.<sup>9</sup>

There are many speculations for Hitler's deeply rooted hatred towards the Jewish people. He was a soldier in World War I and just like many Germans blamed the loss of World War I on the Jewish people. After the war Hitler got involved in the National German Workers' Party, which became the National Socialist German party, and became to most known as the Nazi Party.<sup>10</sup> Hitler took advantage of the weakness of his political opponents and the country to rise to power. He targeted the weakness of the country by the giving them a scapegoat, a group of people to blame. Heinrich Himmler was once an ordinary German man, a middle class citizen in Munich and would like most German men get involved in World War I. After the end he began to feel the same way as the people around being drawn to the Anti-Semitic pamphlets that began to go around. He slowly but surely made his way to Hitler's side in the rise of the Nazi party, and soon became Hitler's right hand man.<sup>11</sup> Himmler was the head of the elite Nazi guard the Schutzstaffel, to most known as the SS, and by 1933 he had established German concentration camps. These concentration camps were first established to hold prisoners of war and political

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<sup>8</sup> Goldstein, Phyllis, and Harold Evans. *A convenient hatred: the history of antisemitism*. 2012. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves.

<sup>9</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (13)

<sup>10</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (23)

<sup>11</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (25)

opponents such as communists and social democrats. The mass murder was not only of Jewish people, but anyone who was not considered of the Aryan race, including homosexuals, gypsies, disabled people, Soviet prisoners of war, German political opponents, and many others.<sup>12</sup> These people first had their rights taken away by the Nuremberg laws, laws that took away basic human rights from the Jewish people, they were denied Reich citizenship and they could not use public transportation, they were forced to register as a Jewish person, and wear a yellow star of David on the outer wear of their clothing.<sup>13</sup> They were gathered into ghettos where they were forced to live in poverty, which would ultimately lead to their transportation to the death camps. The first step that led to the extermination of these people was not intended. It was labor camps that were meant to put these people to work it was not until later that Hitler gave a simple suggestion that there should be more, it was Hitler's underlings, Himmler, Hoss, and others that came up with the mass murder techniques, shooting them, at first men only but soon women, children, and elderly were the targets as well. But when shooting these people point blank became too much for the soldier's psyche, they found other ways.<sup>14</sup>

There were huge Nazi rallies of burning books written by Jews, communists, liberals, and foreigners. This was a symbolic act to help the ultimate message get through to the public, that there was strength in the united German people, and in the party. With the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which considered anyone with three or four German grandparents to be Jewish, they were forced to wear a yellow star of David on the outside of their clothing and they became the targets for persecution. This eventually led to Kristallnacht, the "night of broken glass" in November of

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<sup>12</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (2)

<sup>13</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (4)

<sup>14</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, "*Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution*." (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

1938. This was when the German people burned synagogues, destroyed Jewish shops, and about 100 Jewish people were killed and a lot more were arrested.<sup>15</sup>

In 1939 the first ghettos began to spring up around German occupied Poland. These ghettos were ran like captive city states and were governed by Jewish Councils.<sup>16</sup> These ghettos were overpopulated, there was poverty and hunger, and, of course, unemployment. In the fall of 1939 the process of annihilation began. It began with the selection of mentally ill and disabled Germans being gassed to death as a part of the Euthanasia Program. But German religious leaders began to protest and so Hitler publicly put an end to them but they continued on in secrecy. Hitler saw this as a way to develop the process that he would eventually use to murder the Jewish people.

Before, the process of gassing, the method of elimination was through mass grave shootings. German SS soldiers would line up Jewish people and shoot them into a grave that they would have to dig themselves. But this process was taking too long, and also taking a toll on some of the soldiers. Hitler started to develop concentration camps throughout German territories. They went from being labor camps to death camps. The transportation from ghettos to concentration camps was by train. The process began from the moment they got off the train, there were two lines; one was to the gas chambers where most of the time, women, children, and the elderly went. The other line was for those who looked capable of work went and then they were put in the camps where they would be worked to death. If prisoners were not gassed they died of starvation or disease. Auschwitz became notorious for where the most murders took

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<sup>15</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, "*Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution.*" (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

<sup>16</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, "*Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution.*" (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

place during World War II. It was one of the first camps to be developed as a death camp. Rudolf Hoss was the head of the camp, and was no stranger he had been in charge of concentration camps since 1934. Auschwitz was founded in April of 1940 and started off as a labor camp that was for prisoners of war and political opponents. Due to its location it would become the biggest Concentration camp in German Occupied Europe. It had a lot of local resources that could be used for the war effort such as coal and lime.<sup>17</sup> The development of gassing the prisoners was first done through a small experiment. They began to select mentally ill and disabled adults and children. The stages to develop the gassing, started off with carbon monoxide, loading patients into the back of a van and that van was hooked up to the pipes so the monoxide would float into the back and slowly poison them. But that began to take too long, it was not long after that they started to experiment with Zyklon B. The patients were told that they would be taken to take a shower and then once they were in and the doors were shut behind them the gas poured out from the showerheads, not water and soon after they were dead. This development was soon adopted by Auschwitz, and some concentration camps would send their prisoners that were doomed to die to Auschwitz.<sup>18</sup> Towards the end of the war with the advancement of the Allied Powers, the Germans realized they might lose and tried to hide the evidence of what they were doing. They began to conduct these death marches from camp to camp and killing people along the way. Thousands of Jewish people were lost this way as well. This went on for five years and six million people lost their lives. By looking into the past we might be able to understand how a country of intelligence be able to let something so barbaric happen. We look into what was going on economically, politically, and what was going on in the

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<sup>17</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, *"Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution."* (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

<sup>18</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, *"Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution."* (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

world that could also contribute to the effects of how the Holocaust, happened why it happened, and how people could actively participate in something so horrific.

### **Methodology Section**

To conduct my research, I have applied historical methods. Archival research is research involving primary sources of a special collections library. I have analyzed a number of books and observed a documentary with many episodes. The primary sources that I used were the documentaries that showed live footage of the what was going on, as well as the propaganda film clips that were included. The secondary sources that I used were a number of books and a single documentary. My literature review is a historical analysis of authors who have dealt with the with this issue. The main authors that influenced my work are Laurence Rees, Ann Marie O'Conner, and Daniel Goldenhagen, their work was the base of my research. Laurence's Rees's *Auschwitz: A New History* was the base for my research and its sister documentary *Nazis and the Final Solution* was also a key source. These sources gave me a sense of how people that were so deeply involved in the Holocaust are now; we hear from SS soldiers, and descendants of Himmler and Hoss. The Book *Lady in Gold* by Ann Marie O'Conner is a true story about the beginning of the Jewish people slowly but surely making their way into Vienna and Germany's upper society and class. Within my literature I mention four themes, Anti-Semitism, Propaganda, Scapegoating, and concentration camps. I used historical research methods to gather the necessary information that I needed to answer my research question, and be supported by my theory.

### **Theory**

Herd Mentality, or otherwise known as mob mentality, by French psychologists Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon is a social psychology theory that explains an individual's loss of self-

awareness when they are part of a group. Groups can instill a sense of emotional excitement which can lead to behaviors that a person would not typically engage in if alone.<sup>19</sup>

This theory works well by giving a sense of understanding of how some, if not most, of German society blindly followed Hitler and his plans. It gives a foundation to acknowledge and expand upon the way radical, unpopular ideas may be accepted or adopted by the majority of a group. Following the theory of Herd Mentality, people in large groups tend to be more willing to forgo their own ideas and adopt the ideas of the larger group as a whole. While some of these ideas may be insubstantial, others are more extreme such as exterminating a race of people in its entirety. It is said that the larger the group of people the easier it is for them to succumb to this “mob mentality.” This theory supports my question because of the use of propaganda and how the Jewish people were used as scapegoats after World War I. Hitler was able to use the political and economic crises that Germany was experiencing to get his voice heard. He blamed the Jewish people for the hardships that Germany was going through, for the economic suffering after World War I and even the loss of the war. He was supported by people who had the same feelings and together they came up with Anti-Semitic propaganda and started putting it all over for everyone to see. They turned it into children’s books, into political cartoons, and even into films. Propaganda was used to influence the beliefs of others about the Jewish people. Herd Mentality was developed out of this crisis. When you have a very influential group of people that are slowly on the rise to power within Germany, that are giving you a source for all your suffering it is easier to believe the stuff that they are saying. Hitler used Anti-Semitism, propaganda, and scapegoating to lead to the isolation of the Jewish people and eventually to the fourth and final theme of concentration camp turned death camps.

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<sup>19</sup> Donley, Megan. "Examining the Mob Mentality." South University. 20016. Accessed March 6, 2016. <http://source.southuniversity.edu/examining-the-mob-mentality-31395.aspx>.

## Literature Review

It is well established in the literature and is a common understanding that one of the darkest hours our world has ever seen was the Holocaust in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following sources address the idea of German people and their contribution to the Holocaust if not directly then indirectly, by being a bystander. They also look into the history of Germany itself and the Anti-Semitic belief that is deep-rooted into Europe and the culture.

### **The history of Germany and Anti-Semitism**

One of the main themes that was noticeable was the history of antisemitism that was mentioned throughout the sources that I used. The use of Anti-Semitism was extremely important to the development of the Holocaust and of Nazi Germany. But Anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in German history. In Peter E Bergmann's "Daniel Goldhagen in Germany: An Exploration in German Historiography", He refers to Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. He brings up how German historians are always so quick to leave evasive historiographies. There are a lot of evasive theses out there that deny that the holocaust even happened. Nazi neobarbarism is a defensive mechanism that calls for sympathetic understanding.<sup>20</sup> This article goes into how the history of Germany is recorded and touches on how the history of the Holocaust was recorded in Germany by German historians and how they switched things and left things out.<sup>21</sup> In Marty Blatt's *Holocaust Memory and Germany*, we go back and look at the future of the Holocaust and it's influence on the future. It has to do with the memory of the Holocaust. The history of the holocaust and how deep it is rooted in Germany itself, no matter

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<sup>20</sup> Bergmann, Peter E.. 2000. "Daniel Goldhagen in Germany: An Exploration in German Historiography". *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 26 (1). Berghahn Books: 141–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41299168>.

<sup>21</sup> Bergmann, Peter E.. 2000. "Daniel Goldhagen in Germany: An Exploration in German Historiography". *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 26 (1). Berghahn Books: 141–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41299168>.

where one goes there was something there that Hitler had touched in some way.<sup>22</sup> In A. Dirk Moses's *Stigma and Sacrifice in the Federal Republic of Germany* once again an article on the how the past influences the future. Politics are mentioned and how the influence of the perpetrator generation has influence of the remembrance of the Nazi past.<sup>23</sup> In Bergerson's *The Happy Burden of History From Sovereign Impunity to Responsible Selfhood* he as well as the other authors, Andrew, Baker, Scott, Martin and Clancy, look into the people and their part. This book was a study on Germany and looked into German philosophers, playwrights, and political theologians.<sup>24</sup> In Dan Diner's *Beyond the Conceivable* it looks at the evidence from the beginning of Nazism into its developing stages and into the mass extermination. It goes into German History and how Nazism and the Holocaust went work their way into topics that seem like they have little to do with it but to be honest they actually have some long-term tendencies of German history.<sup>25</sup> For example, how the model of German *sonderweg* (special path); it transforms historical objects and questions deeply rooted into nineteenth century prehistory of National Socialism.<sup>26</sup> In Charles Maier's *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* opens up with a statement on German historians' conflict. The issue being if Nazi crimes were unique, "a legacy of evil in a class by themselves" or in they were comparable to other national atrocities.<sup>27</sup> Many argue whether the fact that the holocaust was

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<sup>22</sup> Marty Blatt. 2012. "Holocaust Memory and Germany". *The Public Historian* 34 (4). [National Council on Public History, University of California Press]: 53–66. doi:10.1525/tpb.2012.34.4.53.

<sup>23</sup> Moses, A. Dirk. 2007. "Stigma and Sacrifice in the Federal Republic of Germany". *History and Memory* 19 (2). Indiana University Press: 139–80. doi:10.2979/his.2007.19.2.139.

<sup>24</sup> Bergerson, Andrew S., K. Scott Baker, Clancy Martin, and Steve Ostovich. *The Happy Burden of History From Sovereign Impunity to Responsible Selfhood*.

<sup>25</sup> Diner, Dan. 2000. *Beyond the Conceivable*. Berkeley, US: University of California Press. Accessed April 30, 2016. ProQuest ebrary.

<sup>26</sup> Diner, Dan. 2000. *Beyond the Conceivable*. Berkeley, US: University of California Press. Accessed April 30, 2016. ProQuest ebrary.

<sup>27</sup> Maier, Charles S. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988

unique is important. Many historians feel it does not matter how unique it was the magnitude of the mass murder it was horrendous either way. This book goes into German nationhood, historical method, it looks into questions that many social scientists have asked.<sup>2829</sup> It was the thought process behind these Anti-Semitic beliefs that eventually lead to the use of Jewish people as scapegoats through propaganda.

### **Scapegoat & Propaganda**

With the rise of Hitler in power and the rise of the third Reich came the rise of propaganda and using the Jewish people as scapegoats for all that was wrong with post war Germany. These methods were used to give the German people someone to blame. To have a scapegoat was so much easier for Germans to go along with Hitler and his beliefs. The propaganda that was being aired on television as well as through pamphlets that were being passed around. “*Der Giftpilz*” or “the poisonous mushroom” was a book written by Julius Streicher in 1938. It was a children’s book and was used as Anti-Semitic propaganda. This book taught children to be afraid of Jewish people that they were bad people and scary people.<sup>30</sup> There was a lot of propaganda that came out, some were even videos, one of the documentaries that I was observing for this paper was *Auschwitz: Nazis and the Final Solution* directed by author Laurence Rees. During this documentary they showed the propaganda film “Der Ewige Juden,” the Eternal Jew, it was a film that showed the world how horrible of a race that the Jewish people are. It shows that they are swindlers, how they are dirty as race, and how they are

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<sup>28</sup> Maier, Charles S. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988

<sup>29</sup> Mann, Michael. “Were the Perpetrators of Genocide ‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Real Nazis’? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographics.” Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, “*Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution*.” (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

the cause of the German peoples woes.<sup>31</sup> This ties in with how Hitler would use the Jewish people as scapegoats. Throughout his campaign he blamed the Jewish people. He spoke of how the Jewish people were a part of “International world Jewish conspiracy” which was how Jews were secretly helping each other across country borders. He was convinced that this conspiracy was the reason in which Germany lost World War I and what he absolutely had to destroy.<sup>32</sup>

### **Ordinary Men turned leaders, soldiers, executioners**

The term “ordinary men” was used throughout several of my sources. It was in reference to the people that became the leaders of the Nazi party, Hitler’s right hand men. As well as the people that became soldiers following his orders blindly and in the end becoming willing executioners. These people started off as ordinary men, farmers, fathers, and every day people. In Daniel Goldhagen “Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.” Goldhagen’s basic thesis is that most German people became willing executioners in the Holocaust. He states, “eliminationist’ hostility toward the Jewish people were so deeply ingrained in Germany” that’s how the people were willing to do whatever it took to rid the country of them.<sup>33</sup> In Laurence Rees’s “Auschwitz a New History” he mentions Hoss and his story. How his family was a simple farming family, and in order for them to sell their goods they had to go through a Jewish man. His father and mother ingrained in him that the Jewish man was scamming them out of money, and the reason his family struggled was because of this. This fueled his hatred well into adulthood, and was one of the main reasons he was able to kill Jews without any remorse and he said he would well do it again.<sup>34</sup> In Richard Overy’s “Ordinary

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<sup>31</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), (48-49)

<sup>32</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (67)

<sup>33</sup> Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. “Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.” New York: Knopf, 1996.

<sup>34</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (56)

Men,' Extraordinary Circumstances: Historians, Social Psychology, and the Holocaust" it uses Milgram's experiment to find support that the people that were committing the mass murders were not psychopaths or criminally abnormal. That they were indeed just ordinary men who were obedient. The article looks into the historical and psychological relationship. Because the holocaust itself is a mass murder of intelligent kind, meaning it was systematic and a lot of planning and thought went into it, the people involved could have had many reasons as to why they would partake in the murder.<sup>35</sup> the type of people that committed the murders were ordinary policemen, lower ranked SS officers and were 'terrible and terrifyingly normal.' This article delves more into Milgram's experiment and the psychological findings and how they link to the historical part of the Holocaust. In Michael Mann's *Were the Perpetrators of Genocide 'Ordinary Men' or 'Real Nazis'? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies* he analyzed a large sample size, 1,581 men and women that were involved in the Nazi genocide.<sup>36</sup> Most of the people that were in the sample size said they resembled more of "real Nazis" than an "Ordinary German". This article goes into the theories of the perpetrators, evidence, and eventually into the sampling size itself. There are graphs that show a visual of how many men identified with a certain rank. For example; elite occupations, lower middle class, workers, etc.

### **Findings**

After analyzing the sources, I found that the Herd Theory was highly relevant, a lot of the influence that affected people's reactions and actions is the way that they were raised and the environment in which they were raised. In many situations families talked being wronged by the

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<sup>35</sup> Overy, Richard. "'Ordinary Men,' Extraordinary Circumstances: Historians, Social Psychology, and the Holocaust." *Journal Of Social Issues* 70, no. 3 (September 2014): 515-530. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 29, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Mann, Michael. "Were the Perpetrators of Genocide 'Ordinary Men' or 'Real Nazis'? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies." Oxford University Press, 2000.

Jewish people and therefore children grew up listening to anti-Semitism in the home. In the documentary, *Nazis and the Final Solution*, they interview a man by the name of Hans Friedrich. Friedrich was a SS soldier of the 1<sup>st</sup> SS Infantry Brigade. It was this brigade that was sent to liquidate the Jewish village of Ostrog. Friedrich talks about being born in Romania on a farm and how the local Jews were intermediate traders, buying the produce from the farms and then selling it to the markets. Friedrich's parents told him over and over that the Jewish people made too much profit from their business and that their family was regularly cheated by them.<sup>37</sup> Within his interview he was asked, "what were you thinking, feeling while you were shooting?" in which he responded, "Nothing... aim carefully so that you can hit properly."<sup>38</sup> His hatred was too great that even years after it occurred he is still able to feel no remorse for what he was a part of.<sup>39</sup> It was young men like Friedrich that grew up from ordinary Germans into S.S. soldiers and leaders. These men took their hatred and grudges from childhood and believed the scapegoat propaganda that was being ran by the media. People are easily influenced by the world around them, what people say and what people do. Hitler was speaking out and speaking to a lot of people's fears, they were more willing to go along with him. Even though he was racist and openly discriminated against people who were to him not a part of the Aryan race. He spoke of restoring the pride of the German people, of bringing them back to the greatness that they knew that they were. The German people have always been proud of their history and their heritage. Hitler appealed to that pride, he appealed to the idea of restoring their faith in the German way of life, and putting Germans back into jobs, back on the track of greatness that they all knew that they as a group of people deserve. It was a timely situation after World War I for Hitler to be

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<sup>37</sup> Rees, Laurence. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. (48)

<sup>38</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, "*Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution*." (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

<sup>39</sup> Rees, Laurence. Tatge, Catherine, "*Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution*." (United Kingdom. BBC. 2005)

able to rise as a leader. The usage of propaganda gave him and his beliefs legitimacy. He played into the fear that Germany had after the end of World War I. Hitler and the Nazi party, fed those fears the Anti-Semitic propaganda, the Jewish people became an open scapegoat as a reaction to those fears. Fear was a key player into the public being able to tolerate all that they witnessed, and years later fear will be what they use to escape judgment when the war ended. Soldiers that were faithful to Hitler, will claim they did what they did out of fear of Hitler's wrath. Hitler was the one in control, because he controlled fear.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, after all this research I believe that people are powerful, they are extremely influential with their words and their actions. That people en masse can create a pressure which results in change. Sometimes that change is good and sometimes people are so driven by their fear or their own selfish desires that they do not think of the effect that it could possibly have on the people around them. I have seen a lot of similarities come to light within the past year and the election within the United States and Donald Trump running for presidency. It was almost ironic how similar Adolf Hitler and Donald Trump's campaigns were, but it was more frightening. The reality of it all makes it that much more important to educate and bring awareness to the factors that eventually lead to the Holocaust. We are losing the World War II generation, people that were involved and Holocaust survivors are still alive. We need to preserve this history while we can and take note of it so that this kind of manipulation and mass murder never happens again, and to make sure that we as humans and the future generations never repeat these mistakes.

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