



Volume 7. Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

Adolf Hitler's (1889-1945) appointment as Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, was neither accidental nor inevitable; rather, it was a testimony to the ability of the National Socialist German Workers' Party [*Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei* or NSDAP] to successfully exploit basic weaknesses in the Weimar Republic to gain significant popular support. Without unexpected help from his political rivals, however, Hitler could have never become chancellor legally – or perhaps even at all.

Back in September 1930, the Nazi Party had captured 18.3 percent of the vote in a national election, gaining the second largest number of seats in the Reichstag, the lower house of the German parliament. Up to that point, political opponents and observers had mostly viewed National Socialism as a movement of roughnecks and alienated elements who sought to overthrow the republic by force – something that Hitler, in fact, had tried and failed to do in his putsch attempt in November 1923. By the late 1920s, however, Nazi officials and local activists working within the system had built up an increasingly effective organizational base throughout much of Germany and had discovered new – and legal – ways to appeal to different social strata. During the Great Depression, the Nazis parlayed Hitler's charisma, massive unemployment, and middle- and upper-class fears of Communism and Socialism into a considerable increase in popular support.

These years saw the Nazis and the Communists embroiled in a bitter struggle in the Reichstag, where both tried to prevent the passage of government measures at every turn. At the same time, their respective paramilitary forces, the *Sturmabteilung* [Storm Detachment, also known as the SA or the Brownshirts] and the *Rotfrontkämpferbund* [Red Front Fighters' League] battled each other (and the Social Democratic-oriented *Reichsbanner* organization) in the streets and beer halls of towns and cities throughout the country. Economic misery, political paralysis, and the breakdown of law and order all converged, with each exacerbating the others. Widespread

doubts about Germany's parliamentary system, fostered by Germany's illiberal nineteenth-century political traditions, grew even stronger.

Hitler's extreme racial ideology (which had been laid bare in *Mein Kampf*), his 1924 conviction for treason, his acquisition of German citizenship relatively late in life (in 1932), and his personal and political rigidity placed him far outside the realm of "normal" in national politics. But he was able to connect with a significant segment of German voters – for example, in the presidential election held in the spring of 1932, Hitler received 13.4 million votes (to incumbent President Paul von Hindenburg's 19.4 million) in the second ballot on April 10, 1932.

From March 1930 until January 1933, three successive chancellors – Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, and Kurt von Schleicher – maneuvered around paralyzed parliaments by using presidential emergency powers to issue laws by decree and by repeatedly dissolving the Reichstag to call for new elections. Until the middle of 1932, when the economy reached its nadir, each new election only served to strengthen the extremes. Even after losing more than 2 million votes in the Reichstag election of November 1932, the Nazis still remained the strongest party, commanding more than a third of the 584 seats.

Despite this, they still lacked a majority in parliament. Behind closed doors, there was talk of dismissing parliament temporarily – or even permanently – or of restoring the monarchy. These ideas, however, failed to win the support of President Hindenburg (1847-1934). Although he was a monarchist at heart, the aged World War I field marshal felt obliged to respect the republican constitution, at least formally. He also feared the civil unrest that a coup could trigger.

In January 1933, one of Hitler's rivals, former chancellor Franz von Papen (1879-1969), a conservative Catholic aristocrat, stepped in and brokered a deal behind the scenes – Hitler would become chancellor and he himself would become vice chancellor. Papen then helped assemble a cabinet of ministers acceptable to both Hitler and Hindenburg. Lacking any base of support in the newly elected Reichstag, which was set to convene shortly, Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher acknowledged defeat and resigned his post on January 28, 1933. Two days later, Hitler was legally appointed chancellor.

In full command of his own party, the new chancellor also benefitted from an alliance with the traditionally conservative German National People's Party [*Deutschnationale Volkspartei* or

DNVP]. This union gave him a parliamentary base of just over forty percent of the seats in the Reichstag. It is important to note that only two of Hitler's ten original cabinet members – Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Göring – were National Socialists; the rest were conservative nationalists or non-party experts. Vice Chancellor Papen thought that the composition of Hitler's cabinet (and his own close ties to Hindenburg) would allow him to contain Hitler, a figure who had mobilized the masses far more effectively than traditional members of the political right.

The real Nazi revolution occurred only after Hitler was in office; it came as he and the members of his inner circle freed themselves from the political and constitutional constraints that had shackled their predecessors. Establishing a dictatorship in stages, they used their growing power to realize a significant portion of their racial and geopolitical agenda. But if their approach appeared conservative, their goals were anything but.

I. Building the Nazi Regime

On February 1, 1933, President Hindenburg granted Hitler's wish for new elections. Immediately thereafter, Hitler requested an emergency decree allegedly aimed at Communist acts of terror. The "Decree for the Protection of the German People," issued under presidential authority on February 4, 1933, allowed the new interior minister, Wilhelm Frick (1877-1946), to work with local police to prohibit public meetings and to suppress publications deemed "dangerous" to public security and order. Additionally, Frick's ministry and police authorities were given the power to ban strikes in vital areas. They were also granted expanded powers of arrest, which meant that they could arrest individuals who knew about forbidden activities but failed to inform the authorities. The "Decree for the Protection of the German People" ultimately allowed the government to round up Communist and Social Democratic candidates and to cripple anti-government campaign activities in the weeks leading up to the elections.

At the cabinet meeting of February 8, 1933, Hitler introduced his new vision for German rearmament. Reichswehr Minister Werner von Blomberg (1878-1946), who had already been appointed to the post by Hindenburg, quickly put in his claim for resources, arguing that the state of the German army made emergency rearmament an absolute priority. Only after this was achieved could the government move on to other objectives. The transcript of the meeting reveals a good deal of common ground between the new chancellor and the German military.

Moreover, it also shows that Hitler intended to remain chancellor far longer than his immediate predecessors in office – in power for little more than a week, he was already plotting to rearm Germany within five years.

As a whole, German big business had not given the Nazis significant support in previous elections.¹ Hitler hoped to change that situation, however. On February 20, 1933, Hermann Göring (1893-1946) hosted a private meeting of approximately twenty of Germany's leading industrialists and financiers. A decorated World War I pilot and a genuine bon vivant, Göring enjoyed far better connections among the business elite than Hitler, whose modest Austrian background, awkward mannerisms, and demagogic style made many prominent businessmen wary. Also in attendance that day was Dr. Hjalmar Schacht (1877-1970), who had served as president of the Reichsbank from 1923 to 1930. Having once occupied the middle of the political spectrum, Schacht had started moving to the right in the late 1920s. By the time Hitler came to power, he had been flirting with the Nazis for years. Still, Schacht's presence at the meeting reassured and encouraged the business community, and he managed to collect pledges of financial support for the government's election campaign. The following month, he was reappointed head of the Reichsbank, this time under the new Nazi regime.

On the evening of February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building was set on fire. The alleged arsonist was Marinus van der Lubbe (1909-1934), a young Dutch Communist of questionable sanity; he was arrested on the spot and executed the following year. High Nazi officials immediately – and irrationally – interpreted the blaze as incontrovertible evidence of a Communist conspiracy to bring down the government. Victor Klemperer (1881-1960), then a professor in Dresden, responded to the incident in his famous diary: "I cannot imagine anyone really believes in Communist perpetrators instead of paid [Nazi swastika] work."² A persuasive and detailed account of the evening's events was eventually supplied by Rudolf Diels, who was head of the Prussian political police at the time. In his 1949 autobiography, Diels convincingly describes Marinus van der Lubbe as the lone arsonist.³ Among historians who have studied the evidence, there is now a general consensus that he alone was responsible for the blaze.

¹ See Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Nazism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

² Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness, 1933-1941: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, translated by Martin Chalmers (New York: Modern Library, 1999), p. 5 (entry from March 10, 1933).

³ Rudolf Diels, *Lucifer ante portas: ... es spricht der erste Chef der Gestapo* (Zurich: Interverlag, 1949), pp. 142-44.

In response to the Reichstag fire, Wilhelm Frick drafted an emergency decree designed to give the government much broader police powers. With the issuance of the “Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and State” of February 28, 1933, constitutionally protected free speech, freedom of the press, the right to free assembly and association, and the right to privacy in postal correspondence and telephone communication were suspended until further notice. House searches and property confiscations were made easier. The right to personal liberty was curtailed, and the government was permitted to imprison individuals, without trials, on a more-or-less legal basis. Finally, if an individual state government failed to take the appropriate measures to restore order and security, the Reich government could take over the state’s police force and internal administration and act directly. In addition to destroying civil liberties, this decree (also known as the “Reichstag Fire Decree”) obliterated what little remained of the old system of constitutional checks and balances that regulated the relationship between the national and state governments in Germany’s federal system. As with the “Decree for the Protection of the German People,” Hindenburg signed the “Reichstag Fire Decree,” thereby giving the Nazis another huge club to wield against their opponents. It turned out to be a long-lasting measure – the decree was never lifted during the twelve years of the Third Reich.

The elections of March 5, 1933, gave the Nazi Party an even larger plurality: 43.9 percent of the vote and 288 seats in the Reichstag. With their coalition partner, the German National People’s Party (nearly 8%), they now held a slim majority. But the Social Democrats (18.3%), the Communists (12.3%), and the (Catholic) Center Party (11.2%) had managed to hold onto most of their voters under the most adverse circumstances. Even with the aid of state-sponsored terror, intimidation, and propaganda, the Nazis were still unable to attain a parliamentary majority on their own.

Nonetheless, the election results, the Reichstag fire, and the emergency decree had shifted more power into Hitler’s hands. The protocol of the cabinet meeting of March 7, 1933, shows that both Hitler and Frick wanted to hang van der Lubbe but could not do so within the bounds of law, since a prison sentence was the legally prescribed punishment for arson at the time. In order to achieve their objective, Frick found three law professors who believed that the arson law could be toughened retroactively. Bureaucrats who occupied high-ranking positions without being party members, such as State Secretary Franz Schlegelberger (justice ministry), and State Secretary Otto Meissner (who, as head of the Office of the Reich President, had helped persuade Hindenburg to appoint Hitler chancellor in the first place) were willing to make certain

concessions, but they were also uneasy about drafting a new law *ex post facto* and thereby putting President Hindenburg in an awkward position. Even at this early juncture, however, Hitler was confident that he could maneuver around the obstacles – and he did, in fact. The proud German (and Prussian) tradition of the *Rechtsstaat* [state under the rule of law] was quickly disappearing.

Over the next several weeks, in a process that was partly planned, partly improvised, and partly initiated by party activists and SA men, the Nazis rapidly consolidated power at various levels. Some of what transpired was orchestrated at the top – as, for example, when Hitler overrode the opposition of Reich Minister of Economics Dr. Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1951) and established the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, installing longtime Nazi Party propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945) as its head. The new ministry took control of state-owned radio broadcasting and began to banish dissenting political views from all forms of media. Goebbels commandeered various outlets and unleashed a torrent of rhetoric designed to make voters fearful of a Communist revolution and hopeful of an ever stronger Germany.

At the same time, Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), head of the SS [*Schutzstaffel* or Protection Squads], opened the first concentration camp in Dachau, outside of Munich. Social Democratic and Communist opponents of the regime were rounded up by the Bavarian police and sent there. Spontaneous violence also erupted within Nazi ranks, as Brownshirts and party veterans sought to settle old scores with enemies and grasp what they believed were the spoils of the National Socialist revolution. Communists, Social Democrats, and Jews were the foremost targets of their attacks. Today's historians still pore over sources, attempting to determine whether – and to what extent – the Nazi revolution originated from above or below. What is certain, however, is that Nazi officials used violence as an excuse for the national government to assume control of some state police forces. This was but one element in a process of “coordination” [*Gleichschaltung*], whereby the Nazis extended their grip on the national government into other spheres of influence.

Although the Nazis spoke of a “national revolution,” Hitler wanted to preserve the façade of legitimacy. Like his immediate predecessors in the chancellor's office, he had used presidential emergency decrees to free himself from the political constraints imposed by the Reichstag. Now the time had come, however, for Hitler to attempt the opposite: to use the newly elected

Reichstag to free himself from his dependence on emergency powers. The government thus put forward an elastic measure called the “Law to Remove the Distress of the People and the State,” also known as the “Enabling Act.” It had been drafted by Frick and approved by the cabinet. Stunning in its grasp, the bill provided a simpler path to lawmaking – the chancellor would prepare laws, the cabinet would enact them, and the official gazette [*Reichsgesetzblatt*] would publish them. Put differently, the measure would “enable” Hitler’s cabinet to pass legislation – even laws that departed from, contradicted, or altered the constitution – without Reichstag approval. The only restriction was that future laws passed under the Enabling Act had to leave the Reichstag, the Reichsrat (parliament’s less powerful upper house, which was composed of representatives of the states), and the powers of the president intact. This restriction, however, was incongruous with the act itself, which promised to seriously undermine all of the aforementioned powers.

To pass the Enabling Act, which modified provisions of the constitution, the government needed a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag. On March 23, 1933, most of the newly elected Reichstag deputies – at least those who were not under arrest – convened in Berlin’s Kroll Opera House for the opening session. (The gutted Reichstag building was out of commission.) No Communist deputies were present that day, since all of them had either been arrested or forced into hiding. Likewise, twenty-six Social Democratic deputies failed to materialize because they were either in prison or in hiding. The remaining 94 were present, however. In his opening speech, Hitler vowed to crush Marxism and punish treason with barbaric ruthlessness. Misled by Hitler’s promises to respect the rights of Catholics and fearful of the consequences of defying the government, a divided Center Party voted internally to approve the Enabling Act and to impose uniformity (fraction discipline) on its 73 deputies. Hitler’s government now had the votes it needed.

Social Democratic (SPD) leaders had never been inclined to use violence to protest illegal measures, and they felt it was simply too late – and too dangerous – to call for it at that point. With Brownshirts and SS men literally occupying the building, longtime SPD Chairman Otto Wels (1873-1939) delivered a courageous speech in which he held to his party’s principles and goals. Unmoved, Hitler had nothing but insults and revilements for the Social Democrats. The Enabling Act passed by a vote of 441 to 94, with SPD deputies supplying the only “no” votes. Without further discussion, the Reichsrat voted unanimously in favor of the bill. Originally set to

expire on April 1, 1937, the Enabling Act was eventually extended and remained in effect for the duration of the Third Reich.

With the passage of the Enabling Act, the National Socialists dealt a final legal blow to German democracy. Thereafter, it was impossible for any other political party to retain a shred of power or influence. Cabinet members who were not party members (e.g., Hugenberg) eventually resigned their posts or were replaced. Over the summer of 1933, the Nazi Party implemented a series of steps that led to the abolition of all other parties.

The General German Trade Union Federation [*Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, ADGB] and the General Independent Employees' Federation [*Allgemeiner freier Angestelltenbund*, AFA] had long been linked with the Social Democrats. After the Nazis came to power, however, certain officials of both organizations sought to retain their influence by relinquishing all ties to the SPD and offering their allegiance to the new regime. As a nominally socialist party, the Nazis had their own small trade union organization, the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization [*Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation*, NSBO], which exhibited a marked predilection for disrupting the activities of other unions. Eliminating separate "divisive" organizations that reflected old social and political differences, the Nazi regime and party activists sought to create unified, functional union organizations under Nazi control.

May 1st was the traditional rally day of the Socialist International. The Nazis stripped May Day of its Marxist traditions and turned it into a national holiday accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign. On May 1, 1933, a crowd of about 500,000 gathered to hear Hitler speak at a field near Berlin's Tempelhof airport. In total, approximately ten million workers took part in festivities throughout Germany that day, with the ADGB participating willingly.⁴ The day's events were partially motivated by a desire to lay the groundwork for the regime's next step – an action to destroy all Social Democratic union organizations.

Throughout the country, union buildings were to be occupied, high union officials taken into custody, and union assets seized. On May 2, 1933, "separatist" trade union federations were abolished and replaced by the German Labor Front [*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF], a quasi-union under the leadership of Dr. Robert Ley (1890-1945), staff chief of NSDAP political organizations. The German Labor Front aimed to give workers a general sense of being valued by the Third

⁴ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 476.

Reich, without offering them any practical tool with which to bargain for their own economic interests. On June 22, 1933, the government finally banned the Social Democratic Party.

Although fully determined to smash “Marxist” institutions and move toward a one-party state, Hitler was willing to negotiate with Catholic interests up to a point. The governments of the Weimar Republic had never been able to reach an agreement with German Catholic officials and the Vatican on the appropriate terms for a relationship between the state and the powerful international church to which roughly one-third of Germans belonged. Hitler’s government not only managed to do this, it also devised ways to lure the Catholic Church into at least implicit support of some of its goals, including the elimination of the Center Party, which had long regarded safeguarding the religious and secular interests of Germany’s Catholics as part of its mission. On July 20, 1933, representatives of the German Reich and the Catholic Church signed a concordat regulating the relationship between the two entities.

On July 14, 1933, six days before the Reich Concordat was signed, Hitler held a cabinet meeting. As the protocol suggests, he was confident that the agreement would bolster the regime by aiding it in the fight against international Jewry. (Hitler likely believed that the Vatican would not support efforts to sanction or restrict Germany – efforts that he blamed on the Jews.) Although Catholics took issue with anti-Christian elements within the Nazi movement, the Vatican was willing to enter into a formal relationship with the Nazi state and to commit Catholic bishops to its support. On that very same day, the Nazi Party was declared the only legitimate political party in Germany. Together, these two steps – the signing of the Reich Concordat and the abolition of all other parties – marked the consolidation of the Nazi dictatorship. Technically, the aged Hindenburg was still president, but he was nothing more than a figurehead. He could temper Hitler’s impulses on rare occasions but never block them.

Hitler and his inner circle of high Nazi officials now controlled the apex of the state and its police forces. Much of the government, however, was still run by those who had served before 1933. The civil service continued to exist; institutions such as the military, the foreign office, and the judiciary had been infiltrated by Nazi loyalists only to a certain extent. The relationship between the state and the Nazi Party, with its array of subsidiary organizations, remained to be determined. Would Hitler choose to rule through the party or the state?

Ernst Röhm (1887-1934), head of the paramilitary *Sturmabteilung* [Storm Detachment or SA], epitomized the potentially disruptive forces within the Nazi Party itself. As an army captain, Röhm had helped Hitler transform the tiny Munich club known as the German Workers' Party into a mass organization in the early 1920s. A brawler, a known homosexual, and an activist who was contemptuous of established elites, Röhm was more than willing to help smash traditional government and private organizations. But Röhm and his SA soon became an obstacle – even a threat – to the Nazi effort to build up Germany's military strength, since the Reichswehr felt jeopardized by the street toughs who filled the ranks of his enormous paramilitary organization. After Röhm incorporated the *Stahlhelm* [Steel Helmet] veterans' organization into the SA, he commanded a force of more than four million men.

Rivalries within the Nazi movement helped bring about a dramatic rupture. SS leader Heinrich Himmler and Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring, who also headed the Prussian state government, both regarded Röhm and his men as a threat to their respective organizations and ambitions. As a result, they spread rumors that the SA was planning to take over or supplant the Reichswehr, and they helped convince Hitler that Röhm was plotting to overthrow him. Although reluctant at first, Hitler finally decided to eliminate Röhm, one of his oldest comrades. From June 30-July 2, 1934, selected squads of Himmler's SS murdered more than 85 leading SA functionaries and assorted opponents of the regime in a purge codenamed "Operation Hummingbird." (The event is mostly referred to as the Röhm Putsch, a designation promoted by the Nazis, since it seems to imply that they had been forced into action to prevent an impending coup.) On the morning of June 30, Röhm was arrested and brought to Munich's Stadelheim Prison, where he was shot by the SS on July 1. Reich Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher (1882-1934) and his wife were also among those murdered during the SS strike; the couple was gunned down at home.

In one blow, the SA had been eliminated as a significant political force. Hitler could now expand Germany's military strength on the basis of the regular armed forces. Some army officers were even foolish enough to celebrate June 30th as a victory, overlooking the fact that two former generals (Schleicher and Ferdinand von Bredow) had also been murdered in the purge. But in retrospect, the real significance of "Operation Hummingbird" is that the head of the government, acting independently and on his own initiative, had managed to legitimize outright murder on a large scale – without any legal proceedings whatsoever – and that the country largely accepted the Nazi propaganda that presented this strike as necessary. The cabinet legalized the action after the fact. Even Victor Klemperer was at least partially taken in, writing in his diary: "He

[Hitler] does not think he is a murderer. In fact he presumably did act in self-defense and prevented a substantially worse slaughter. But after all *he* appointed these people to their posts, but after all *he* is the author of this absolutist system. [. . .] The dreadful thing is that a European nation has delivered itself up to such a gang of lunatics and criminals and still puts up with them.”⁵

II. The Nazi State

Ideas and strategies for defining the unclear relationship between the Nazi-controlled state and the Nazi Party predated the elimination of Röhm. On December 1, 1933, Hitler and his cabinet had already passed the “Law to Ensure the Unity of Party and State,” the first paragraph of which read: “After the victory of the National Socialist revolution, the National Socialist German Labor Party is the bearer of the concept of the German State and is inseparable from the state.” After this law was passed, Hitler appointed a number of high-ranking party functionaries (such as Rudolf Hess) and SA officials to the government, reinforcing the general message that the party and its organizations stood at the heart of the new system. In the end, however, the law left considerable ambiguity about the actual functions of party officials and members. Moreover, it was formulated so vaguely that no binding regulation of the relationship between party and state could actually be inferred from it.

At a meeting of *Gauleiters* [supreme regional party leaders] on February 2, 1934, Hitler demanded that the party support the government “in every way.” Numerous well-connected party officials had already managed to step into government positions, but there were many more Nazis of old who were still dissatisfied with the extent of the revolution or their share of the spoils. Evoking the “Führer Principle,” Hitler stressed the need for unity within the party and expressed his belief that only a unified party could bring about a unified nation. His call for unity, however, was at least partially rooted in his concerns about the factionalism epitomized by the SA.

⁵ Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness, 1933-1941*, pp. 74-75 (entry from July 14, 1934).

Throughout the Third Reich, fostering a sense of unity among citizens remained a central goal of the Nazi Party, which, at its peak, claimed about ten percent of Germans as members.⁶ After 1933, as unemployment declined and Germany's military and diplomatic strength grew, both Hitler and the regime as a whole enjoyed broad support among the population. Years later, the strain of a prolonged, all-out war led to serious public morale problems. On September 29, 1943, Martin Bormann (1900-1945), the head of the Party Chancellery, issued a directive explaining how the party leadership proposed to use the organization to combat the negativism of a beleaguered public. By this time, however, the popular appeal of party membership had plummeted in direct proportion to Germany's military setbacks. The party organization was itself a casualty of flagging morale.

III. The SS and Police System

The most distinctive coercive force in the Third Reich was not the Nazi Party itself; rather, it was the SS, which had grown from modest beginnings as a subsidiary group to become the most powerful and feared organization in the country. From 1929 onward, the SS developed as a tighter, more disciplined alternative to Röhm's SA: it was a paramilitary force that also regarded itself as the Nazi elite. After the Nazi revolution, the SS expanded, diversified, became largely independent of the party organization, and merged with various parts of the government.

The SS was the brainchild of Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945). The son of a Bavarian schoolteacher, Himmler came across as dull, pedantic, and humorless. But he had a number of qualities that served the regime well: good organizational skills, absolute commitment to the cause, and a cunning inner nature that he concealed behind a placid exterior. As a young man, Himmler kept meticulous records, including a diary and an annotated reading list, both of which still exist.⁷ Himmler's own annotated copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* has also survived and is preserved at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York. Himmler's markings and marginal notes show that Hitler's text provided him with a rich source of ideas, many of which he deemed suitable for practical application in the SS. For example, next to a passage on the importance of instilling self-confidence and a sense of racial superiority in Germany's youth, Himmler wrote:

⁶ For a good analysis of Nazi party membership, see Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁷ On the young Himmler, see Bradley F. Smith, *Heinrich Himmler: A Nazi in the Making, 1900-1926* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971).

“education of SS and SA.” In 1927, six years before the Nazis came to power, Hitler’s lengthy reflections on racial purity and the dangers of racial mixing had prompted Himmler to scribble: “the possibility of de-miscegenation is at hand.” Both Hitler’s text and Himmler’s annotations prove that ideas for purifying the German population by removing the sources of “biological corruption” were circulating well before 1933. Himmler’s later success is at least partially attributable to his early study of Hitler’s racial views and his ability to implement them within the SS.

Himmler had been raised Catholic but was a vehement opponent of the Church. Nonetheless, he was mindful of the success of the Jesuits and tried to turn the SS into an elite male “order” – more specifically, an elite order of warriors with its own distinctive cast and character. His first step was to ensure that SS members met the proper racial criteria, which meant pure “Aryan” descent. Whether or not they looked the part, SS officers had to prove that their family tree was free of Jews back to the year 1750; rank-and-file members had to offer evidence of Aryan ancestry back to 1800. Having absorbed the prevailing theories of eugenics during his training as an agronomist, Himmler charged his men with no less than improving the gene pool of the German population. But if SS men were to supply Germany with a future racial aristocracy, then equal attention needed to be paid to the racial “qualifications” of their wives. Therefore, the SS maintained the right to approve or reject the proposed marriages of its members. Applications were scrutinized by the SS Race Office (renamed the Race and Settlement Office in 1933), which was led by Richard Walther Darré (1895-1953) until 1938. The author of the Nazi “blood and soil doctrine” [*Blut- und Bodenideologie*], Darré championed the concept of a Nordic-German landed aristocracy. He became Reich Minister of Nutrition and Agriculture on June 29, 1933.

After Hitler was appointed chancellor, Himmler took over Bavaria’s political police and then proceeded, one by one, to seize control of the political police in other German states, retaining a tight grip on the SS all the while. An important leap forward occurred on April 20, 1934, when Göring, acting in his capacity as Prussian prime minister, appointed Himmler deputy chief and “Inspector of the Prussian Political Police”, also known as the Gestapo. At first, Himmler’s right-hand man, Reinhard Heydrich (1904-1942), was charged with running the Gestapo. Heydrich was already head of the SD [*Sicherheitsdienst* or Security Service], the intelligence branch of the SS. Later, he turned the Gestapo over to Heinrich Müller (1900-1945?), an experienced

Bavarian police bureaucrat. Müller had joined the SS in 1934 but did not become a party member until 1939.

Ambitious, talented, and driven, Heydrich was a man not easily contained. But he recognized early on that he could – and would – benefit from the expansion and growing influence of the SS and the police apparatus, and this meant serving Himmler. Heydrich did exactly that until he met his death at the hands of Czech resisters in Prague in June 1942. Six months later, in a secret speech delivered to high officials of the Reich Security Main Office [*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or RSHA] on January 30, 1943 (the tenth anniversary of Hitler's appointment as chancellor), Himmler recounted how he first met Heydrich and how the two of them worked together both before and after the Nazis came to power. Although the occasion was the installation of Ernst Kaltenbrunner as Heydrich's successor as head of the Reich Security Main Office, Himmler used his speech mostly as an opportunity to reminisce about Heydrich and present him as a model for other security officials.

In the mid-1930s, Himmler came into conflict with Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick, his nominal superior (the police were but one component of that ministry). Frick complained that the Gestapo, in particular, was infringing upon his policies and jurisdiction by bypassing the legal system and making excess use of measures such as "protective custody" to remove individuals they considered dangerous. In June 1936, Hitler resolved the dispute by issuing a decree "to unify police duties in the Reich," whereby Himmler was named "Chief of the German Police." Although Himmler still remained within the Reich Ministry of the Interior, a fact reflected in his cumbersome new title – Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police – he gained far more than he lost. Hitler had signaled full confidence in Himmler, and Frick largely abandoned his efforts to curb the police.

From the mid-1930s on, ideological training [*weltanschauliche Erziehung*] by SS instructors was a regular part of professional training at police schools. Although Himmler brought the SS and the police closer together, they never merged completely. His efforts to maintain strict behavioral standards in both organizations are reflected in Hitler's decree of November 15, 1941, which imposed the death penalty for members of the SS or the police who engaged in homosexual acts. Both men regarded homosexuality as willful or learned behavior, not a hereditary inclination. Moreover, Himmler had long regarded male homosexuality as a serious threat to Germany's reproductive capacity. Homosexuality was a crime under Germany's legal

code and could result in a prison sentence. Furthermore, homosexuals were also taken into “protective custody” and sent to concentration camps. The penalties were much harsher, however, for anyone within Himmler’s inner empire. Although leniency was occasionally granted in cases of momentary weakness, Himmler and Hitler used the strongest possible measures to root out homosexuality in the regime’s two interlocking elite male institutions.

Recent scholarship has undermined the idea that Nazi Germany possessed an overwhelming police apparatus that completely terrorized or intimidated the general population.⁸ From 1933 to 1939, Germans with the right “racial” characteristics and no record of political opposition to the Nazis had little to fear, provided that they did not speak out openly against the regime. The police were neither so numerous nor so effective that they could tightly monitor the entire population; rather, they depended on public cooperation – and informants – for information on violations of laws or Nazi standards of behavior. They often got what they needed, in part because the Nazi regime was popular – and Hitler even more so. Once the war began, however, high-ranking SS officials tightened their security standards. Haunted by what they viewed as the collapse of German morale during World War I, Hitler and Himmler aimed to prevent a repeat situation. As a result, Heydrich issued a strong directive that criminalized expressions of doubt about a German military victory. His guidelines mentioned “special treatment” [*Sonderbehandlung*], a euphemism – one of many used in Nazi Germany – for execution.

Wartime offered the Nazis a welcome opportunity to rid German society of “unclean” or “undesirable” elements. Additional concentration camps were built in the newly annexed or conquered territories, partly to neutralize potential or actual sources of resistance to local Nazi rule. On January 2, 1941, Heydrich tried to introduce a degree of logic into the expanding camp system by categorizing prisoners according to the severity of their crimes and assigning them to appropriate camps. His directive was sent to the Reich Security Main Office, to the heads of all state police offices, to all commanders of the Security Police and the Security Service, and to camp commanders, among others, but not to the local police. Such discrepancies in access to information typified not only the SS, but also the regime as whole. Heydrich’s directive also illustrates a further point: namely, that the expansion of the camp system had already been planned when his memo was issued. Here, his reference to Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II is

⁸ See, for example, Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

significant, since in January 1941 Auschwitz still consisted of a single camp for mostly Polish prisoners.

In the end, the growing camp system did not reflect the tiered categories initially envisioned by Heydrich. Instead, the occupation of additional lands, labor shortages, and intensified persecution contributed to a general expansion and diversification of the camp system under the management of former naval officer Oswald Pohl (1892-1951), one of Himmler's most trusted subordinates. In 1942, Pohl became head of the reorganized SS Economic and Administrative Main Office. Although Pohl had overseen most economic and administrative matters since the start of the war, the subordination of the camp system to his office represented a new area of responsibility.

In an April 30, 1942 memo, Pohl sketches the history of the concentration camps, emphasizing the use of camp labor to increase armament production. Certain camps, however, were also used to "contain" individuals suspected of having engaged in resistance to German control of occupied territories. On December 7, 1941, Hitler had issued the "Night and Fog Decree," whereby he ordered the "disappearance" (i.e. secret arrest and imprisonment) of such suspects.

Scholars have come to rely heavily on interviews with liberated prisoners, oral histories, postwar memoirs, and even novels by survivors to construct a picture of everyday life in the camps. One historical account was provided by Benedikt Kautsky (1894-1960), who survived imprisonment at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz from 1938 to 1945. The son of Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), a famous political theorist and prominent German Social Democrat, Benedikt Kautsky dissected the inmate hierarchy within the camps and described the daily struggle for survival.⁹

IV. Organized Resistance

The remnants of Communist and Social Democratic organizations sought to maintain underground networks capable – at least – of spreading anti-Nazi literature and gathering information on the success or failure of Nazi measures. Over time, other pockets of opposition

⁹ Following Kautsky's precedent of analyzing social differentiation among the prisoners, Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, translated by William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

developed among those Germans who were deeply troubled by the Nazi regime on the basis of strongly held political, ethical, and religious beliefs. A group of once powerful army officers under the effective leadership of Ludwig Beck (1880-1944), who resigned as chief of the army general staff in 1938, considered trying to remove Hitler by force in order to prevent war, but they failed to attract a critical mass among the military elite. Like other resisters, they were hampered by Hitler's popularity and his various diplomatic triumphs.

At first, German military victories bolstered public confidence in the regime. The prewar distinction between activity considered treasonous by the regime [*Hochverrat*] and treason against the nation [*Landesverrat*] seemed to vanish once German soldiers, sailors, and pilots were engaged on the fronts. For some officers, the oath of loyalty they had sworn personally to Hitler (this was introduced in August 1934, immediately after Hindenburg's death) was another inducement to shun the resistance. Moreover, plotting against the regime during wartime meant risking one's reputation, since resisters would surely be depicted as trying to stab the German military in the back – Hitler's standard (false) accusation against the revolutionaries of November 1918. And, of course, it also meant risking execution (and the execution of family members).

Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) drew attention to the spiritual isolation of those opposed to Nazism. He tried to explain the apparent lack of German "civil courage" by referring to the traditional German understanding of freedom – freedom that failed to call for individual responsibility. As a member of the Confessing Church, Bonhoeffer was banned from preaching and teaching, but he managed for a while to continue his work illegally. During the war, he became involved with the resistance movement based in the Office of Military Intelligence of the High Command of the Wehrmacht. On April 5, 1943, the Gestapo arrested Bonhoeffer for undermining military morale. After being imprisoned for two years, he was executed on April 8, 1945, only a month before the war in Europe ended.

Based at Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, the White Rose was one of Germany's most articulate resistance groups. Its core consisted of five students, siblings Hans (1918-1943) and Sophie Scholl (1921-1943), Alexander Schmorell (1917-1943), Christoph Probst (1919-1943), and Willi Graf (1918-1943); they were later joined by Professor Karl Huber (1893-1943). The group mailed and distributed a series of six broadsheets that aimed to inform citizens and encourage active resistance. Their fifth broadsheet, issued in January 1943, is notable for the

certainty with which it states that Germany was destined for military defeat. It is also significant that the broadsheet refers only fleetingly to the fate of the Jews – presumably the authors believed that this information was already public knowledge.

The jurist and diplomat Adam von Trott zu Solz (1909-1944) tried to forge a middle ground for the more conservative elements of the resistance; he also aimed to inform the Allies of the German opposition to Hitler early on. In September 1939, Trott traveled to the U.S. to attend a conference. There, he established clandestine contacts with German émigrés and State Department officials, but to little advantage.¹⁰ Again, in December 1941, he tried to give the Allies information on the German resistance, this time through an official of the American National Council of Student Christian Associations in Geneva, Switzerland. British intelligence, the F.B.I., and the Office of Strategic Services all approved of this contact, which was originally slated for Rio de Janeiro. Trott indicated that the resistance rested on cooperation among certain labor leaders, the churches, and the army, with the last in the leading role. He also suggested that a coup might not occur until Germany's military power had been broken.

Helmuth James von Moltke (1907-1945), whose family name was known in virtually every German household – his great uncle Helmuth von Moltke (1880-1981) had been the successful strategist of the Franco-Prussian War – was a vehement, uncompromising opponent of the Nazis. An advisor in international law in the Office of Military Intelligence of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, Moltke headed a resistance group later known as the Kreisau Circle (Kreisau being the name of his family's Silesian estate, where the group met). In July 1943, he traveled to Turkey, where he met with two German émigrés, Hans Wilbrandt and Alexander Rüstow, both of whom opposed Hitler's regime. Some of the information that Moltke gave Wilbrandt and Rüstow was of potential military use to the Allies, and he asked them to pass it on. He also supplied an account of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of April-May 1943. The information that he gave them, however, included a false (i.e., exaggerated) description of how much assistance Jewish fighters had received from others and how many weapons they had possessed. Apparently, these trumped up figures originated with SS officials, who needed to make excuses when asked to explain their difficulty in crushing the uprising to the German military. Moltke did, however, accurately report that transports of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto had been sent to

¹⁰ Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance 1933-1945*, translated by Richard Barry (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 114-19.

“annihilating institutes” in Poland.¹¹ Moltke was eventually arrested in January 1944. He was sentenced to death a year later and executed on January 23, 1945.

Military and political leaders who were opposed to the Nazis hoped to engage in advance bargaining with the Allies over peace terms in the event of a German defeat. It was their wish to parlay the terms of such a deal into additional support within the military. Although the Allies were willing to consider whatever information resisters supplied, they held to their publicly announced policy of unconditional surrender. In the end, military resisters decided to act, even late in the war, to prevent the complete destruction of their homeland and to salvage some honor – to show that not all Germans supported the crimes and all-encompassing military objectives of the Nazi regime.

The leader of the famous July 20, 1944, assassination and coup attempt was Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg (1907-1944), a member of the Swabian-Catholic nobility and a descendant of the early nineteenth-century Prussian general August Graf Neidhardt von Gneisenau (1760-1831), a reformer and hero from the Napoleonic Wars. In April 1943, while fighting in North Africa, Colonel Stauffenberg had been severely wounded – his injuries left him without his left eye, his entire right hand, and two fingers on his left hand. After his recovery, he was first appointed chief of staff in the General Army Office; in June 1944, he was appointed chief of staff to General Friedrich Fromm (1888-1945), commander of the Replacement Army, a reserve force stationed in Germany.

Stauffenberg and other military resisters transformed existing plans – codenamed “Operation Valkyrie” – to use the Replacement Army to crush potential internal revolts against the Nazi regime. In their hands, Valkyrie became a plan for a coup camouflaged by orders to suppress a revolt. General Fromm was aware of the plot but refused to commit to it. Stauffenberg was one of the very few people who could actually carry out an assassination, since he had direct access to Hitler. Starting in mid-1944, he attended military briefings at the Wolf’s Lair, Hitler’s East

¹¹ The July 9, 1943, report is identified only as WRu-OKW; this abbreviation meant that Hans Wilbrandt and Alexander Rüstow obtained the information from an OKW source. A later document, a September 14, 1943, report from Cereus, specifically identified Moltke as the source of the July 9 report. U.S. National Archives, Record Group 226, Entry 137, Box 23, Folder 160, envelope 3a, part 2. For additional evidence of Moltke’s trip to Istanbul and his meeting with Wilbrandt and Rüstow, see Helmut von Moltke, *Letters to Freya*, translated by Beata Ruhm von Oppen (New York: Knopf, 1990), p. 317. On Moltke’s effort to contact Alexander Kirk, see *USA und Deutscher Widerstand*, edited by Jürgen Heideking and Christof Mauch (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1993), pp. 52-59.

Prussian headquarters. On July 20, 1944, Stauffenberg brought a bomb to the Wolf's Lair in his briefcase and detonated it. After watching the blast, which he believed had killed Hitler, he hurried off to Berlin to lead the planned coup.

The story of the near success and ultimate failure of both the assassination attempt and the coup has been told and retold many times.¹² Hitler survived the 12:42 p.m. explosion with only minor injuries. After waiting several hours for conclusive information from Stauffenberg, his co-conspirators in Berlin went ahead with their plans and issued an “official order” via telex. The call for certain measures, such as the incorporation of the Waffen SS into the army and the neutralization of the SD, suggested that these orders were not meant to uphold the Nazi regime.

Hitler's survival, subsequent radio announcements, and his own radio broadcast that same evening eliminated whatever chance the coup had of succeeding, since army officers who might have fought against Himmler or Goebbels would not venture their lives against Hitler. The coup also lacked popular support. Its failure and the ensuing executions of Nazi opponents meant that the war and the racial policies of the Nazi regime persisted for nearly ten more months.

V. Racial Politics

In step with the prevailing scientific wisdom at the turn of the century, many German biologists, anthropologists, and physicians aimed to screen genetic defects out of the population one way or another. Contemporary thinking on “racial hygiene” influenced Hitler and other Nazi leaders, who combined racial anti-Semitism with broader plans to purify the German or “Aryan” population.¹³ They regarded Jews as the ultimate and most dangerous source of racial pollution, disease, and criminality. Moreover, they believed that Jews were incapable of change, since their characteristics and behavior supposedly derived from their blood. But other nationalities, and even certain segments of the German population, were also perceived as genetically inferior, impure, or both. Influential members of the German biomedical and social-scientific

¹² See Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg und der 20. Juli 1944* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1998); and Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of the German Resistance*, translated by Bruce Little (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).

¹³ Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

communities had already laid the groundwork for these ideas, and to some extent even supported their application by the Nazis.

Shortly after assuming power, the Nazis implemented a series of measures that moved Germany toward the creation of a racial community by separating or eliminating “unsound” or “dangerous” elements within the population and promoting those of allegedly Aryan stock.¹⁴ Numerous factors – including scientific experimentation, competition among rival authorities, external constraints, conscious advance planning, and military success – contributed to the escalation of persecution into mass murder and genocide during the war.¹⁵

Scholars have long debated the timing and motives of specific Nazi racial policies. One early study (originally published in 1961, but since expanded and revised) describes the contributions of numerous government, party, and corporate organizations to a process that started in 1933 and grew organically into what has become known as the Holocaust.¹⁶ Another important work examines the interaction among various Nazi programs of eugenics, mass murder, and genocide.¹⁷ Research on the subject is difficult, since some official decisions were never committed to paper; in other cases, documents were destroyed. Additionally, official correspondence rarely reveals the actual reasons for particular actions, and the specification of goals often remains equally vague. The isolation of Nazi targets and perceived enemies – and later, their destruction – was to be carried out neatly, with few reverberations within Germany.

Early agitation and violence against German Jews by low-ranking Nazi radicals tarnished the new regime’s image abroad and threatened to provoke foreign sanctions. By March 1933, some American Jewish leaders had begun to speak of an economic boycott of German goods. Hitler could not disavow Nazi anti-Jewish efforts, but he sought to direct them into official channels. At first, the Nazi Party announced an indefinite boycott of Jewish businesses in Germany, supposedly to protest the “hostile” foreign press. Once it became clear, however, that foreign countries did not really support an economic boycott of German goods, and after some

¹⁴ Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁵ For one recent assessment of wartime changes, Christopher Browning with contributions from Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

members of parliament had expressed concerns about the economic consequences of an anti-Jewish boycott, the action was confined to one day: April 1, 1933. Still, its announcement had an intimidating and depressing effect on German Jews and some others. In his diary entry of March 31, 1933, Victor Klemperer, a Jewish convert to Lutheranism, described the public mood on the eve of the boycott. His account registers the growing sense of isolation and hopelessness felt by German Jews and those regarded as Jewish by the regime.

The “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” of April 7, 1933, was cast as a means to create a more efficient and professional administration. What the law actually did, however, was immediately disqualify all non-Aryans from the German civil service. The law primarily affected Jews, but it also applied to individuals who were married to Jews or had even one Jewish grandparent. One exception, Jewish war veterans, was made at President Hindenburg’s request. The law also stripped civil service protection from anyone who had formerly engaged in political activity deemed illegitimate by the Nazis. Moreover, it allowed the government to force anyone into retirement – even if he or she was not judged unfit – simply to streamline the administration. The law had an almost immediate impact on the composition of the faculty at schools and universities, since teachers and professors were civil servants.

On July 14, 1933, the Nazi regime passed the “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases,” which introduced compulsory sterilization for certain groups of people with illnesses that were deemed hereditary. As the text of the law shows, the boundaries of these groups were vague and expandable. Overall, the notion upon which this law was predicated – that people of inferior stock were procreating faster than genetically desirable Germans – reflected Nazi fears, not reality.

In September 1933, George S. Messersmith, the American Consul General in Berlin, briefed the U.S. State Department on the status of the anti-Semitic movement in Germany. Among other observations, Messersmith noted that the Nazis had found numerous ways to spread their brand of anti-Semitism to wider segments of the German public. According to his assessment, the situation of the Jews in Germany was “growing steadily worse.” Although Messersmith occasionally underestimated the strength of Hitler’s regime, he clearly recognized the threat it posed both to Germany and the world.

In September 1935, Hitler used the Seventh Reich Party Rally in Nuremberg as an opportunity to prod the government bureaucracy into passing a law with two objectives: to establish a clear racial criterion for German citizenship and to ban intermarriage, even sexual relations, between German Jews and “Aryan” Germans. At the time, some German Jews hoped that this demotion from the status of citizen to subject, however humiliating, might at least offer some stability for the future. After the passage of the so-called Nuremberg Laws, there was indeed a temporary lull in the introduction of new measures against the Jews. This, however, was likely attributable to German efforts to present a good public face to the world during the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

The German annexation [*Anschluss*] of Austria on March 12, 1938, and the riskier annexation of the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia (made possible by the Munich Agreement of September 29, 1938) emboldened the Nazis, leaving them less concerned with foreign opinion and ever readier to eliminate the Jews within their steadily growing reach. At the end of October 1938, the Gestapo transported about 17,000 Jews of Polish origin to the no-man’s-land between the borders of Poland and Germany. These stateless Jews, who could neither enter Poland nor return to Germany, were left wandering in this no-man’s-land until the Polish government established refugee camps for them directly inside its border. After seventeen-year-old Herschel Grynszpan, a Pole living in Paris, heard that his parents were caught up in this action, he shot the secretary of the German legation there, Ernst Eduard vom Rath (1909-1938). The attack occurred on November 7, 1938; vom Rath died from his injuries two days later.

The shooting gave Nazi officials a convenient excuse for punishing German Jews. The Nazi-controlled press quickly declared that Grynszpan’s act was part of an international Jewish conspiracy against Germany, and, after receiving the signal from Hitler, Goebbels recommended “spontaneous” outbreaks against the Jews. On the evening of November 9, 1938 (commonly referred to as *Kristallnacht* – the night of broken glass), the SA instigated a country-wide campaign of violence against German Jews. The attacks lasted for several days, killing approximately 100 Jews, injuring countless others, and destroying more than 7,000 Jewish businesses and 267 synagogues throughout Germany. Foreign observers, newspaper reporters, and diplomats gathered extensive information on the government-sponsored violence and communicated it to the rest of the world. Samuel Honaker, the American consul in Stuttgart, recognized that the “spontaneous” outbursts were, in fact, carefully stage-managed.

On November 11, 1938, Hitler charged Göring with addressing the aftermath of *Kristallnacht*. The next day, Göring called a large interagency meeting at the Reich Aviation Ministry. Joseph Goebbels, Reinhard Heydrich, and Martin Bormann (then chief of staff to “deputy Führer” Rudolf Heß) were among the powerful figures in attendance at the four-hour meeting. Göring advocated state seizure of Jewish property and was therefore eager to prevent further destruction to, or private seizure of, valuable Jewish assets. To achieve his objective, Göring proposed a range of measures to expropriate, restrict, or expel Jews – in short, to separate them from German society. Heydrich, however, rejected the idea of establishing Jewish ghettos within German cities, arguing that they would become breeding grounds for crime and disease. Göring exhibited some interest in Heydrich’s suggestions for increasing Jewish emigration, but he also threatened that severer measures would be adopted in the event of war.

During a long speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939 (the sixth anniversary of his seizure of power), Hitler also raised connections between the coming war and the elimination of the Jews. Scholars have interpreted one key passage – Hitler’s “prophecy” that a war would result in the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe – in widely divergent ways. Did his words, for example, aim to pressure Western countries to admit German Jews as immigrants? Or did they forecast what could happen if all of Germany’s potential enemies joined against her? By making every effort to paint the Jews as responsible for a war that had not yet begun, Hitler seemed to suggest that Nazi Germany would observe no restraints against them in a future wartime situation. His speech might have also been a signal for the SS leadership to begin planning for the most radical outcome.

How did the outside world react to Nazi efforts to expel German Jews? Approximately six months earlier, in July 1938, representatives of 32 nations had held a special conference in Evian, France, at the behest of U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. None of the nations represented at the Evian Conference was willing to negotiate directly with Germany or to admit more Jewish refugees than it was already accepting under current laws and policies. Instead, these nations created the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees (IGC), which was charged with devising some kind of orderly procedure for the emigration or resettlement of Germans Jews seeking to leave the country.

Raymond H. Geist, the American consul in Berlin, was directly involved in American and international efforts to alleviate the situation of Germany’s Jews. Geist tried to facilitate the

ICG's work by arranging a meeting between its chairman, the American international lawyer George Rublee, and German government officials. Geist's efforts led to a misleading newspaper dispatch by a *Jewish Telegraph Agency* reporter named Mr. Bernstein. In April 1939, Geist wrote to his former supervisor in Berlin, George S. Messersmith (who had since been appointed Assistant Secretary of State) to correct misquotes in the article and to offer a general assessment of the options available to German Jews. Geist accurately observed that the issue of Jewish emigration met with mixed sentiments within the Nazi regime. Toward the end of his letter, Geist drew upon confidential sources within the SS to make predictions about the fate of Germany's remaining Jews in the event of war. Geist's letter suggests that genocide was part of the Nazi agenda even before the war started.

Nazi authorities proceeded cautiously in acting against the Jews because of potential repercussions among non-Jewish friends and neighbors. The large-scale massacre began not with German Jews, but rather with those in Nazi-occupied territories. There was, however, one program of mass murder that was implemented within Germany early on: the so-called Euthanasia Program began more or less simultaneously with the war. People formerly subject to sterilization under the "Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases" (July 14, 1933) were now subject to murder.

The euthanasia killings were carried out in a secret operation (known as T4) run by officials of Hitler's Chancellery. Physicians were involved in the selection of victims and sometimes in the act itself. After some physicians requested assurance that this activity was legal, Hitler issued a written authorization in late October 1939, repeating what he had approved earlier in oral form only. This authorization took the form of a letter addressed to Dr. Karl Brandt (1904-1948), Hitler's personal physician, and Philipp Bouhler (1899-1945), the head of the Führer Chancellery. The letter was typed on Hitler's personal stationery and signed by the Führer himself. It was also backdated to September 1, 1939, the date of the German invasion of Poland. This change was consistent with Hitler's view that wartime necessitated drastic new measures. The original letter was kept in a safe at the Führer Chancellery; copies were later shown privately to doctors to persuade them to participate in the program. Only one copy survived the war. This letter is the only known written order signed by Hitler authorizing any type of killing initiative.

Complete secrecy was hard to maintain even in Nazi Germany. In September 1941, Lilly Offenbacher, a German-Jewish refugee in New York, gave the U.S. Coordinator of Information a report on the channels through which information on the carefully camouflaged T4 program flowed to Germans.¹⁸ Her second-hand intelligence combined accurate information, such as the fact that Jews in asylums and institutions were early targets of the program, with inaccurate information (e.g., her assertion that severely wounded German soldiers were also euthanized). Offenbacher also assumed that one primary purpose of these killings was to test poison gas – not quite realizing that the action aimed to eliminate a whole class of people entirely. Between September 1939 and late August 1941, the euthanasia authorities murdered at least 70,000 Germans thought to suffer from hereditary defects. Both the nature and scale of the T4 program more than justify one scholar's assertion that this wave of killings constituted the first Nazi genocide.¹⁹

During the early years of the war, the Nazis relied on propaganda and indoctrination to reintroduce “the Jew” as a figure of absolute evil, thereby laying the groundwork for what would come later. Professional training for the SS and the police provided one of the richest opportunities for ideological indoctrination. The SS-Sturmbannführer Paul Zapp (1904-?) was among those who lectured the SS and the police on the so-called Jewish question. Zapp's lecture notes from the end of 1940 offer an interesting window into the education he provided. Approved by Himmler, his notes are consistent with the SS belief that the “Jewish question” could only be solved on a worldwide basis. Later, as commander of one of the special mobile killing units known as *Einsatzkommandos*, Zapp put his theories into practice.

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Nazis began killing vast numbers of Jews (as well as Roma, Communist officials, and others). *Einsatzgruppen* (subdivided into *Einsatzkommandos*), battalions of the “Order Police” [*Ordnungspolizei*], regiments of the Waffen SS, and locally recruited non-German forces all took part in systematic shootings of indigenous Jews. Beginning later that fall, some German Jews were deported to the east as well. For example, in 1941 and early 1942, the Nazis deported thousands of German and Austrian Jews to the ghetto in Riga, Latvia. On November 30, 1941, forces under the command of Higher SS and Police Leader Friedrich Jeckeln (1895-1946), together with

¹⁸ A small American intelligence agency, the Coordinator of Information was the forerunner of the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S).

¹⁹ Henry Friedlander (1995).

Latvian auxiliaries under the direction of Viktor Arajs (1910-1988), systematically executed approximately 14,000-15,000 Jews outside of Riga. A week later, almost the entire remaining population of the ghetto was murdered.

Walter Bruns, a major general in the Wehrmacht, had learned of plans for a mass shooting of Latvian and German Jews and had tried to persuade various German authorities to prevent them from reaching fruition. Captured by the British late in the war, Bruns was one of many German POWs whose conversations were surreptitiously tape-recorded; British transcripts of these conversations, declassified in recent years, offer a rich trove of candid information on the attitudes of German officers, soldiers, and the SS. On April 25, 1945, Bruns spoke privately, and somewhat heatedly, to fellow German prisoners about the events in Riga. His remarks add to the weight of evidence that Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), Chief of the Office of Military Intelligence of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, spoke directly to Hitler about the killing of Jews, but with no effect upon the basic Nazi policy.²⁰ The difficulty of keeping such shootings secret was one of many factors that induced Himmler to move toward a camp-based system of killing.

Much upper-level discussion of what the Nazi leadership euphemistically called the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” was poorly documented – and intentionally so. But there is a surviving protocol for one – now infamous – high-level meeting of government, party, and SS officials on January 20, 1942. The Wannsee Conference, named after the Berlin suburb in which it took place, seems to have been called for three basic reasons: 1) to secure recognition of SS authority on the so-called Jewish question; 2) to present SS policy to a range of other authorities whose cooperation was needed for deportations and killings on a large scale; and 3) to thrash out potentially difficult nuances of policy regarding *Mischlinge* [partial Jews] and Jews in mixed marriages. Only on this last point was there much give-and-take.

The protocol of the meeting is not an exact transcript. Adolf Eichmann later testified that he had to remove some of the blunter language about mass murder at Heydrich’s insistence. The term “evacuation” appears frequently as a euphemism for mass murder. Another apparent deletion or unrecorded item was Heydrich’s statement that Hitler had entrusted him with this mission.²¹ But

²⁰ See Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, translated by James Porter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 80-87.

²¹ Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, p. 46, n. 13.

even the edited summary reveals the scope of the Nazis' objective: to murder more than 11 million Jews, including those in England, Ireland, Finland, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland. That the statistics on Europe's Jewish population were inflated speaks to the fact that Nazi officials saw Jews lurking in every corner. One year later, in January 1943, Himmler asked Dr. Richard Korherr, the Inspector for Statistics with the Reichsführer SS, to prepare a detailed progress report on the Final Solution. Korherr continued to use the term "evacuation" as a partial camouflage for the Nazi program of genocide; at Himmler's instruction, he removed another term, "special treatment," from his draft.²²

Himmler's conflicting impulses to document and conceal were evident in his famous October 4, 1943, speech to high-ranking SS functionaries [*Gruppenführer*] in Posen. About two-thirds of the way into his speech (which lasted more than three hours), Himmler raised the subject of the Final Solution – something that the SS was never supposed to discuss publicly. Moreover, he went one step further and tape-recorded the speech. The recording survived the war.

Another incriminating document vanished for a time, but is now available to scholars. On October 11, 1943, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Heydrich's successor as head of the Reich Security Main Office, sent a coded radio message with a pointed order to SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Kappler, Commander of the Security Police and the Security Service (SD) in Rome. Kaltenbrunner ordered Kappler to carry out the deportation of Rome's Jews, despite the political and logistical difficulties of which the latter had previously warned. The order survived because British intelligence intercepted and decoded it. This intercept, however, was only declassified in 2000. It was not used as evidence to prosecute Kaltenbrunner during the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. (He was nonetheless convicted and hanged.)

Nazi efforts to destroy the Jewish race in Europe led to countervailing Jewish efforts to record what was done to them. One of the most famous and most detailed accounts was compiled by two Slovak Jews, Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba, who escaped from Auschwitz-Birkenau on April 7, 1944. While hiding out in Hungary, they authored a lengthy report describing what they had witnessed during nearly two years of imprisonment. This report quickly reached American authorities in Switzerland in June 1944 and was made public, with some delay, by the American

²² Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991), p. 242.

government agency known as the War Refugee Board.²³ Although this document contains some factual errors, it represents an impressive feat of memory and testimony.²⁴

Numerous factors make it difficult to reconstruct how many people were murdered at Auschwitz: most Jews, for example, were sent to the gas chambers without having been assigned numbers, most corpses were burned in the crematoria, and most camp records were destroyed. Wetzler and Vrba's estimate that approximately 1,765,000 Jews were killed at Birkenau, one of six major extermination camps, is now regarded by scholars as too high, but it was conservative compared with the figure of 2.5 million given by Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss (1900-1947) in postwar testimony.

The massacre of the Jews, the Roma, and numerous Soviet POWs at Auschwitz-Birkenau was only one dimension of SS policies in the Auschwitz complex. Scholars have recently shed light on Auschwitz's role as an important source of slave labor for German corporations. They have also stressed the significance of SS efforts to create an outpost of German settlement on the edges of an expanded Reich.²⁵ Auschwitz was to be a symbol of a brave, new German world. Instead, it has become a metaphor for technologically sophisticated evil.

VI. The Military, Foreign Policy, and War

Nazi plans for a racial community also involved expanding its living space [*Lebensraum*]. As historian Gerhard L. Weinberg has succinctly put it, Hitler's central concerns were race and space.²⁶ The expansion of German *Lebensraum*, however, could only be fully achieved through war. The key questions for Nazi military and foreign policy were the extent, timing, and nature of that war. Ultimately, Hitler would decide all three.

²³ See David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 289, p. 324.

²⁴ The copy of the report that was given to (and annotated by) the Office of Strategic Services in April 1945 is the one reproduced here.

²⁵ Peter Hayes, *Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 1997); Sybille Steinbacher, *"Musterstadt" Auschwitz: Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien* (Munich: ADD, 2000).

²⁶ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, vol. I, *Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).

In the early years of the Nazi regime, the goals of Hitler's government and the German military were overlapping but not identical. Both, for example, wanted to eliminate the restrictions imposed on Germany's military strength by the Treaty of Versailles and to reestablish the country's capacity for successful military action. But Hitler also had a larger, more ambitious agenda. His goals, described loosely in *Mein Kampf* and articulated more clearly in an unpublished second book on foreign policy,²⁷ involved no less than the German domination of Europe and the acquisition of a vast empire in the East, at the expense of both Poland and the Soviet Union. By the time the army officer corps realized that Hitler's foreign policy objectives far exceeded a return to Germany's 1914 borders, the military was no longer able (or willing) to assert itself cohesively against the regime.

Hitler courted support among senior Reichswehr officers before and after his appointment as Reich Chancellor. In November 1932, Colonel Walther von Reichenau (1884-1942), commander of military district I in Königsberg, East Prussia (which was isolated from the rest of the country), expressed concern about the threat of a Polish attack. In a December 4, 1932, letter to Reichenau, Hitler agreed that a Polish or Polish-French preventive war against Germany was a real danger. At the same time, however, he wanted to avoid any military or diplomatic move that would force Germany to depend on the Soviet Union. On February 3, 1933, four days after becoming chancellor, Hitler attended a dinner with military commanders at the home of Commander-in-Chief General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord (1878-1943). There, he spelled out an ambitious domestic and international agenda and spoke more concretely about the conquest of additional living space in the East for the German people. Hitler's remarks on the need for the armed forces to remain "unpolitical and impartial" and separate from the SA might have reassured the assembled leadership that night, but time would ultimately reveal that the military could not escape the kind of far-reaching indoctrination that Hitler envisioned. On January 30, 1936, Reich Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht Werner von Blomberg (1878-1946) issued a decree on political instruction for members of the Wehrmacht.

Competition for resources within the armed services and confusion about Germany's foreign policy objectives prompted Hitler to call a meeting at the Reich Chancellery on November 5, 1937. It was attended by Blomberg, Foreign Minister Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath, the

²⁷ Gerhard L. Weinberg, ed., *Hitler's Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler* (New York: Enigma, 2003).

commanders-in-chief of the three armed services (General Werner von Fritsch, Admiral Erich Raeder, and Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring), and Hitler's military adjutant, Colonel Friedrich Hossbach, who took the protocol. Hitler refrained from describing the full scope of his goals at the meeting; rather, he tried to prepare the military and the Foreign Office for diplomatic and military steps that would be taken against Austria and Czechoslovakia, regardless of the possible actions of Britain or France. (Nonetheless, some of Hitler's remarks still betray his interest in a much broader war of expansion.) Given the status of German rearmament, Blomberg and Fritsch reacted with hesitation, warning against the dangers of a war with Britain and France.

Fritsch, at least according to his own account, had a history of difficulties with Hitler dating back to his initial appointment in 1934. Blomberg, on the other hand, had enjoyed good relations with him up to this point. After the November 5th meeting, however, high Nazi officials saw the need to eliminate both men from the top of the military hierarchy. They quickly resorted to underhanded measures. After Blomberg remarried on January 12, 1938, a police file surfaced on his new bride – it indicated a prior arrest for prostitution. Shortly thereafter, a false accusation of homosexuality was raised against Fritsch. Hitler handily used these so-called scandals to force both men from office. (Fritsch insisted on a military court martial and was eventually acquitted but not restored to office.) Hitler himself replaced Blomberg as Minister of War; his new commander-in-chief of the army was Walter von Brauchitsch (1881-1948). (Ironically, Hitler had given Brauchitsch money to quickly resolve his own marital problems in time for his appointment.) Neurath, who had also expressed concerns at the November 5th meeting, was replaced by the Hitler devotee Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893-1946).²⁸

After the German invasion on March 12, 1938, the annexation [*Anschluss*] of Austria proceeded without serious foreign repercussions. But German demands on Czech sovereignty and claims to Czech territory – the ethnically mixed German-Czech border region known as the Sudetenland – brought the two countries to the brink of war. Hitler's real objective, voiced at the November 5th meeting, was not to annex the Sudetenland but to destroy the entire country. France had already signed a formal treaty to protect Czechoslovakia but wanted to ensure British backing. The British, however, supported the rectification of imbalances in the Treaty of Versailles and thus had no intention of helping the Czechs. At the suggestion of Italian Prime

²⁸ Harold C. Deutsch, *Hitler and his Generals: The Hidden Crisis, January-June 1938* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974).

Minister Benito Mussolini, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Édouard Daladier traveled to Munich for a last-minute summit conference on September 29, 1938. Unprepared for war both politically and militarily, Chamberlain and Daladier gave in to Hitler's demands for an immediate German annexation of the Sudetenland. The last step in Britain's policy of appeasement toward Nazi Germany, the Munich Agreement has come to symbolize the dangers of making diplomatic concessions to an aggressor.

In an annex to the agreement, Great Britain and France committed to a joint guarantee of Czechoslovakia's new boundaries, but this failed to deter further German encroachment – on March 15, 1939, Germany annexed Bohemia and Moravia. At the same time, Slovak politicians set up a semi-independent state under German "protection." The nation of Czechoslovakia had thus disappeared, giving Germany another base from which to launch a future attack against Poland.

Shortly after the German takeover of Bohemia and Moravia, General Franz Halder (1884-1972), chief of the army general staff since 1938, drew troubling conclusions about the dimensions of the coming war and the potential risks it posed to Germany. Halder had ties to the military opposition, and in April 1939 he expressed some of his misgivings in a confidential conversation with Raymond H. Geist, the American consul in Berlin. Geist correctly concluded that the Wehrmacht would follow the course that Hitler set, even if that meant a two-front war in which the United States participated.

A surprise move capped Hitler's diplomatic preparations for war against Poland. After a period of cautious signaling between Germany and the Soviet Union, Ribbentrop flew to Moscow to meet with his Soviet counterpart, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov. The two agreed on the terms of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty, which was concluded on August 23, 1939. On the surface, the treaty protected Germany against the possibility of a two-front war. Ribbentrop and Molotov agreed that if Germany invaded Poland, the Soviet Union would not intervene on its behalf. It followed that if Britain and France entered the war over the invasion, the Germans would only have to fight a single-front war in the West. There was more to the treaty than met the eye, however: a secret annex divided not only Poland but also most of Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence, thus preparing the way for later territorial changes.

The day before German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty was signed, Hitler had spoken again with military commanders, justifying the need for war and defining the nature of the imminent conflict. Although no official protocol was issued, various participants took notes, and these have been used to reconstruct Hitler's remarks. Hitler correctly sensed that Britain and France would be unable or unwilling to intervene effectively on Poland's behalf, even though they were officially committed to do so. His remarks about the need to act with brutality may have actually gone farther than this reconstruction suggests: another version of the speech, probably dramatized, had him exclaim: "Who nowadays still remembers the extermination of the Armenians?"²⁹

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, overwhelming Polish forces in a matter of weeks. A series of German offensives in the spring of 1940 conquered Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. Germany's ally Italy joined the fighting during the last stages of the war against France. But Britain, under the new government of Winston Churchill (1874-1965), who succeeded Neville Chamberlain in May 1940, refused to consider peace negotiations and resisted the German bombing campaign designed to break British morale.

In the summer of 1940, Hitler decided to attack the Soviet Union, even though Britain remained unconquered, and even while the United States, without entering the war, found ways to support its friend and ally. On December 18, 1940, Hitler directed the German military to prepare a campaign against the Soviet Union. "Directive No. 21 Operation Barbarossa" reflects Hitler's view that Stalin was presiding over a weak colossus in danger of simply collapsing; it also shows just how vast Germany's territorial objectives were. Though fateful, Hitler's decision to declare war on the Soviet Union stemmed from his original insistence on German *Lebensraum* (living space); it was neither impulsive nor based on a misjudgment of Soviet intentions.

Shortly before the invasion, the High Command of the Army and the High Command of the Armed Forces followed Hitler's lead by instructing their men on the racial-ideological nature of the conflict and the need to physically eliminate the bearers of Bolshevism. Wilhelm Keitel (1882-1946), chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces, signed an order authorizing the execution of political commissars attached to Soviet troops. The view, widespread among

²⁹ Winfried Baumgart, "Zur Ansprache Hitlers vor den Führern der Wehrmacht am 22. August 1939; eine quellenkritische Untersuchung," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 16 (1968): 120-49.

officers, that Jews were intrinsically linked to Bolshevism encouraged the military to cooperate with SS and police units that systematically shot Jews en masse. Orders for barbarities originated at the top of the military chain of command, even before the Soviet campaign was launched.

Less than a month into what seemed to be a successful German campaign, Hitler and some of his top-level subordinates discussed German occupation policy in the Soviet Union. According to Martin Bormann's protocol, Hitler sketched out his policy in broad strokes, and Nazi officials proceeded to wrangle for influence and jurisdiction. The tone of this meeting foretells what one scholar has described as a process of barbarization that spread throughout the ranks of the German army in the East once the German offensive became bogged down and frustration increased.³⁰ Complete disregard for the lives and loyalties of non-German peoples in the Soviet Union was also expressed in the *Generalplan Ost* [General Plan for the East], which envisaged the reduction of the resident population by about thirty million.

Despite tremendous early successes, the German campaign of 1941 failed to break the Soviet resistance. German troops were able to hold most of their ground deep inside Soviet territory, but they were not prepared for the winter of 1941-42, and casualties were high. Bloodletting in the East, together with Germany's declaration of war against the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, set off a worldwide struggle in which economic mobilization and resources became increasingly important over time.

VII. Economy and Labor

Germany's economy was heavily industrial, but millions of small and medium-sized farms still operated on a family basis or with relatively few workers. In accordance with Darré's "blood and soil" doctrine, Nazi ideology glorified traditional peasant life as purer and more "natural" than its urban counterpart. The regime's desire to help farmers followed from this. On September 29, 1933, a law was enacted to protect peasant farms through entailment. It was called the Hereditary Farm Law, and it restricted farm inheritance to lineal descendants of the owner and

³⁰ Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), and *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford, 1992).

rendered properties indivisible. This effort was not particularly effective in halting the declining number of small farmers, however. After the war began, Himmler and other peasant enthusiasts initiated efforts to plant outposts of German peasant-warriors in the conquered territories of the East.

German economic planning was guided by Hitler's conception of economic self-sufficiency. Yet the move toward "autarky" involved sacrifices that interfered with other political and economic goals – even war preparations. Other challenges stemmed from the unwieldy administrative apparatus responsible for thrashing out economic disagreements and entertaining solutions. A mixture of government, party, and private economic authorities influenced economic decisions, complicating the pursuit of consistent or rational policies. Economic and labor policies exposed the jagged edges, irrationality, and inefficiency of the Nazi system.

Although the Nazi regime left most private corporations in the hands of management and stockholders, it did not hesitate to intervene in corporate decisions to bring about what was needed in the perceived general interest. Private corporations that refused to cooperate were disciplined, either through the withdrawal of state contracts or the establishment of competing, state-run enterprises such as the *Reichswerke Hermann Göring* [Reich Works Hermann Göring], a plant that made steel from low-grade domestic coal and iron ore.

In August 1936, Hitler's dissatisfaction with the government's handling of economic policy and his belief that Germany's corporate executives were unable – or unwilling – to subordinate their own interests to essential national goals prompted him to write an economic manifesto. It established general guidelines for achieving economic self-sufficiency and preparing for war but hardly managed to resolve specific conflicts or fulfill particular objectives. Nonetheless, the manifesto stood at the heart of Hitler's decision to appoint Göring head of the Office of the Four-Year Plan, a move that made the latter a virtual economic tsar. On March 17, 1937, Göring tried to coerce the Working Group of the Economic Team of the Iron-Making Industry into forcing its member firms to increase iron production in the interest of the war economy. At the meeting, Göring revealed in passing that the annexation of Austria – which occurred almost a year later to the day – was already anticipated. This sort of contact with top-level Nazi officials gave corporate executives unusual insight into future developments.

The pressure for increased production meant that Germany moved rapidly toward full employment. Eventually, labor shortages developed. To be sure, the complete destruction of independent labor unions meant that individual workers gained absolutely no economic leverage from these conditions. With the exception of factory workers in the Soviet Union, they were just about the lowest paid workers in all of Europe. On the flip side, most German workers still remembered what life had been like during the depression. Gathering data on the mood of workers was hardly easy in a police state, but the Social Democratic Party organization in exile [Sopade] used underground contacts to assess worker morale by region and to gauge changes therein over time. A Sopade report on central Germany from September 1938 was guardedly optimistic about how few workers had become supporters of the Nazi regime.

The German Labor Front organized programs such as “The Beauty of Labor” [*Schönheit der Arbeit*], which sought to improve working conditions in factories, and “Strength through Joy” [*Kraft durch Freude*], which provided (or at least aimed to provide) a range of structured leisure activities previously beyond the financial reach of many workers.³¹ Although such efforts carried with them a heavy dose of propaganda, they offered some indication that the government cared about ordinary workers. And workers, in turn, recognized and appreciated Hitler’s diplomatic successes of the 1930s.

Early successes in the war gave the German military somewhat greater economic influence but in no way reduced the difficulties of consistent and rational economic planning. In his 1973 memoirs, Hans Kehrl described the fragmented and inefficient management of the German economy in the fall of 1940. At the time, he was General Consultant for Special Affairs in the Reich Economics Ministry, where he was in charge of raw materials exploitation in the occupied territories. Kehrl correctly indicated that, without regular cabinet meetings to coordinate policy and manage conflicting priorities, the political system itself was a major stumbling block to economic inefficiency. The reported statements about Hitler’s disinclination to impose harsh restrictions on the civilian population are also generally correct.

The regime’s inability to make tough choices and insist upon sacrifices at home added to the pressure to exploit conquered territories and resident peoples. One result was Fritz Sauckel’s Labor-Mobilization Program of April 20, 1942. It should be noted, however, that the recruitment

³¹ Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and use of foreign laborers within the German Reich affronted ideologues and worried officials: the former being concerned with racial purity, the latter with security. Ultimately, military setbacks and economic necessity forced a slightly more pragmatic approach. In April 1943, after extensive interagency debates, the Reich Propaganda Ministry and the Reich Security Main Office issued a memorandum on the treatment of foreign laborers within the Reich. On the one hand, they advised against treating conscripted foreigners as sub-human, since “everything had to be subordinated to the goal of winning the war”; on the other hand, Nazi standards of racial solidarity and racial identity had to be firmly upheld – a difficult balance, and one that probably did little to help foreign workers. By August 1944, there were more than 7.6 million conscripted foreigners working in German farms, mines, and factories, and concentration or labor camps.³²

VIII. Gender, Family, and Generations

For Hitler and many leading Nazi officials, men and women differed not only with respect to biology, but also in terms of character. It thus followed that the sexes should play very different roles in the new state and new society. Strongly opposing the emancipationist trends of the Weimar Republic, Hitler laid out some of his basic views on women’s roles in a September 1934 speech to the National Socialist Women’s League.

The Nazi emphasis on women’s maternal role reflected both biological determinism and a perceived demographic imperative: namely, the need to increase the German population. Those who married and bore children in sufficient numbers benefited from a series of positive financial incentives (such as a 1933 marriage loan program) and status enhancements (such as the “Mother Cross” award).³³ Such efforts may well have contributed to an increase in birthrates during the mid-1930s, but economic recovery probably also played a role.

The flip side of Nazi population policy included strenuous efforts to ban abortion and restrict access to birth control, as well as a systematic campaign against homosexuality led by a special police office, the Reich Central Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion

³² See Edward Homze, “Nazi Germany’s Forced Labor Program,” in *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, edited by Michael Berenbaum (New York: NYU Press, 1990), p. 38; and more generally, Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³³ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988).

[*Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und Abtreibung*]. Speaking at a conference of medical experts in April 1937, the head of this office, Josef Meisinger (1889-1947), laid out the more-or-less official view that male homosexuality was a predominantly learned behavior that could – and must – be changed.

Since many women could not marry or become mothers, and since some married women chose to work, the number of women in the labor force was substantial (and rose over time as labor shortages developed). But even the outbreak of war did not change the basic Nazi view that the female worker was the exception and not the rule; therefore, the government ratified existing policy against the conscription of women into the labor force. Shortly thereafter, Himmler encouraged all members of the SS and the police to ensure that they left children behind before heading off to battle. Moreover, he explicitly repudiated the limits of bourgeois conventions (i.e., the need to marry before having children), explaining that they did not apply to German women during wartime. This assertion prompted an immediate backlash, forcing Himmler to issue a clarification. Still, he did not retreat from his basic position.

The continuation of the war and the attendant rise in German casualties sparked high-level discussions about the need to increase the birthrate to compensate for wartime losses. The relative surplus of women meant that many would be unable to marry. This, in turn, meant that most distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate children would have to be eliminated in the postwar period. In a note dated January 29, 1944, Martin Bormann, who, as head of the Party Chancellery, enjoyed more day-to-day contact with Hitler than other officials, put forth a set of ambitious and expensive initiatives to support single mothers of multiple children.

Although the Nazis touted the traditional family, their efforts to increase the birthrate among German women represented an incursion against it. Strenuous organizational activity and propaganda designed to politicize and indoctrinate German children and youths – who were deemed more important for the future than older generations – placed additional burdens on the family. The Nazi goal was to create overriding and instinctive loyalty to Hitler and the system, partly by excluding or minimizing other sources of influence, including parents.

In 1933, Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach (1907-1974) was given the authority to oversee all youth activities. The subsequent “coordination” [*Gleichschaltung*] of a wide range of preexisting youth organizations resulted in their elimination or absorption into the Hitler Youth

early in the regime. With the passage of the “Law on the Hitler Youth” on December 1, 1936, membership in the organization became at least nominally compulsory, and the authority of the Hitler Youth was placed on a par with that of schools and the home. The “Second Execution Order to the Law on the Hitler Youth” of March 25, 1939, provided specific guidelines on mandatory membership in Nazi youth organizations – the Hitler Youth, the Junior Hitler Youth, and the League of German Girls – for all children between the ages of 10 and 18.

The Nazi youth experience did not wear well with everyone.³⁴ There are indications that, over time, the excitement and dynamism of the 1930s youth experience gave way to regimentation, professional opportunism, and even alienation. A report issued by the domestic unit of the SD [*Sicherheitsdienst* or Security Service] on August 12, 1943, described the relatively pessimistic and cynical attitude of senior members of the Hitler Youth. Even more alarming was a Ministry of Justice report from early 1944 on the problem of youth gangs. In the face of wartime constraints and multitudinous other problems, discontentment was so high that even the threat of severe punishment could not eliminate dissident youth groups.

During the Third Reich, primary and secondary education was suffused with Nazi propaganda, and university teaching was altered to suit the times as well. History was a particularly sensitive discipline. Thus, in 1938, the Reich Ministry for Science, Education, and Public Instruction published guidelines for the teaching of history in secondary schools. The Nazis benefited from nationalistic and xenophobic traditions that existed even among university students and faculty members. But Nazi regimentation eventually encountered limits, as some university students kept their distance and others became politically apathetic.³⁵

IX. Religion

The Nazi regime wanted family and youth culture to be incorporated into the state and racial community. Religious institutions, on the other hand, were regarded as rival authorities that needed to be curbed or eliminated. Plans to act on these sentiments, however, had to be veiled

³⁴ For a general assessment, see Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³⁵ Geoffrey J. Giles, *Students and National Socialism in Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Steven Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

for political reasons, postponed in times of crisis, and ultimately abandoned during the war; nonetheless, they still emerged in confidential discussions or indiscreet public statements by some Nazi radicals. Still, most Protestant and Catholic religious officials sought accommodation with the Nazi regime. They may have done so on the basis of misleadingly reassuring public statements by Hitler or shared feelings of nationalism and anti-Marxism. In the early years of the Third Reich, only a small minority of churchmen sensed the huge gulf that separated Nazism from any of the Christian faiths, and within this group some saw few alternatives to working within the system.

In general, the Evangelical Church (which was predominantly Lutheran) was very much inclined to support the government. But in late 1933, an anti-Nazi element began to coalesce among Lutherans in response to the machinations of a fervently pro-Nazi faction called the German Christians.³⁶ The arrest of two Lutheran state bishops in the fall of 1934 led almost immediately to the formation of the separatist organization that came to be known as the Confessional Church. The Nazi regime temporarily retreated, and the two arrested bishops were reinstated. Within the Evangelical Church, the Confessing parishes remained a small minority.

Unlike the Evangelical Church, the Catholic Church was an international institution with a supreme authority based outside of Germany. The “Reich Concordat between the Holy See and the German Reich” of July 20, 1933 – mentioned in Section I of this introduction – supposedly defined the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state, thus resolving a range of sensitive issues. Its confidential appendix also envisioned the drafting of Catholic priests into military service, a noteworthy inclusion since there was no draft at the time – the German army had been limited to 100,000 men by the Treaty of Versailles.

By 1937, Pope Pius XI (1857-1939) had seen too many violations of the Concordat and too much Nazi anti-religious propaganda. In a papal encyclical entitled “With Deep Anxiety,” he issued a stark condemnation of the regime. The Pope’s criticism embarrassed the government, which tried to suppress the distribution of the encyclical within Germany. It also retaliated against the Catholic Church in Germany, arresting priests on various pretexts. Pius XI died in early 1939, without having resolved the Vatican’s difficulties with Nazism.

³⁶ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1996); John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1997).

His successor, Pope Pius XII (1876-1958), was a longtime Vatican official who already had a long history of dealings with Germany, having lived in the country from 1917 to 1929. During the war, Pope Pius XII largely left it to German bishops to decide how to respond to the Nazi regime's murderous policies; most chose to avoid direct challenges.³⁷ In August of 1941, one Catholic bishop, Clemens August von Galen (1878-1946) of Münster, used his sermons to raise both general criticisms of the Nazi regime and specific concerns about its euthanasia policy. His words set off furious but politically measured reactions among Nazi officials, who continued to reflect Hitler's concerns about upholding morale during the war.

In late night conversations, Hitler frequently expressed his aversion to Christianity but saw little need or opportunity to destroy it immediately. Heinrich Himmler, however, expressed a more pressing interest in reducing or transforming religious loyalties in a speech to SS leaders on June 9, 1942. Himmler's views help explain why some arrests of priests and seizures of Catholic Church properties continued during the war. For Nazi ideologues, Christianity was essentially un-German.

X. Literature, Art, and Music

Culture, on the other hand, was perceived as very German. In fact, Hitler believed that one of the defining characteristics of the German race was its tremendous creative aptitude. Part of the impetus for the regime's extensive involvement in the arts and letters came from individuals such as Hitler, Goebbels, and Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), all of whom had had artistic and cultural aspirations in their youth. But another motivating factor was the conviction shared by many conservative Germans that modernist and "decadent" cultural movements during the Weimar Republic – which ranged from expressionist art to jazz – had contributed to German dissipation and weakness. Culture influenced behavior, they argued, and only a properly regulated Nazi culture that glorified race and martial values could sustain the glorious future of

³⁷ Pius XII's attitude toward, and reactions to, the Nazi regime have set off decades of controversy. For a historiographical treatment of the controversy, see: *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust*, edited by Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (London: Leicester University Press, 2002); Jose M. Sanchez, *Pius and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 2002); Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

the Third Reich. And since race determined behavior, the Nazis tried to label decadent culture as the work of racial inferiors or degenerates, or as part of the Jewish plot against Germany.

If their ancestry and prior politics were unobjectionable, writers, artists, and cultural producers of all sorts had to decide whether to cooperate with, or even promote, the Nazi takeover of German culture. The conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954) did not wholly support the early censorship of Jewish artists and appealed to Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, urging him to protect high cultural standards. Goebbels parried his criticism. Furtwängler made no further trouble and went on to have a very successful career in Nazi Germany.

Goebbels made a personal appearance at the student-organized book burning of “un-German” literature on May 10, 1933, in Berlin. Louis P. Lochner, then head of the Berlin bureau of the Associated Press, reported on the event in a tone that conveyed the fanaticism and barbarism of the Nazi movement. In September 1933, at Goebbels’ instigation, a law was passed establishing a Reich Chamber of Culture, within which most cultural forms were represented by individual chambers: literature, the press, radio, film, theater, music, and the visual arts. Since the right to engage in professional activity was dependent upon membership in the appropriate chamber, the law gave the government (and Goebbels) the power to exclude from the profession anyone whose politics, ancestry, or artistic style was deemed objectionable. The Manual of the Reich Chamber of Culture (1937) provides some insight into how these professional bodies functioned.³⁸

The House of German Art in Munich, a new museum designed by architect Paul Ludwig Troost (1873-1934), was conceived as a showcase for “good” art that accorded with Nazi tastes: neoclassical paintings and sculptures that reflected the heroic spirit of the Third Reich, idealized landscapes, mythological scenes, and images that featured – and were produced by – “pure” Aryan people. At the opening of the museum on July 18, 1937, Hitler delivered a programmatic speech on National Socialist cultural policy and its understanding of “German art.”

The next day, the “degenerate art” exhibition opened in the Hofgarten arcades of Munich’s Residenz. It included 650 works of art confiscated from 32 German museums. For the National

³⁸ For more details, see Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theatre and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1996).

Socialists, the term “degenerate” applied to any type of art that was incompatible with their ideology or propaganda. Whole movements were disparaged as such, including Expressionism, Impressionism, Dada, New Objectivity, Surrealism, Cubism, and Fauvism, among others. Many of Germany’s most talented and innovative artists suffered official defamation: for example, George Grosz, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Max Ernst, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, Paul Klee, and Ernst Barlach. With this exhibition, the visual arts were forced to fully submit to censorship and National Socialist “coordination.” Initiated by Goebbels and the President of the Reich Chamber of the Visual Arts Adolf Ziegler (1892-1959), the exhibition traveled to twelve other cities from 1937 to 1941. In all, it drew more than 3 million visitors, raising some question about popular responses to the Nazi use of art as propaganda.

XI. Propaganda and Public Reaction

Nazi officials saw propaganda as a positive and necessary means to inspire solidarity among the “sound” members of the German population. In Goebbels’ conception, propaganda would lead the nation to enthusiastically unite behind the national revolution. Successful propaganda required the suppression of criticism and the elimination of information that did not conform to prevailing ideological views.

In peacetime, one use of propaganda was to prepare the nation for war. Once the war began, propaganda served not only to incite hatred of the enemy (and to encourage Germany’s military foes to be associated with the Jews), but also to immunize the nation against the strains of war. Hitler and Goebbels believed that Germany’s defeat in the First World War was not only attributable to the machinations of Marxists and Jews, but also to the collapse of public morale.

Radios were cheap and therefore common in German households, and broadcasts were an effective means of spreading propaganda, especially when talented speakers like Hitler and Goebbels took to the airwaves. But radios also posed a security problem. Although the Nazi regime had achieved full control of the domestic media long before the war broke out, foreign radio broadcasts still presented a danger. As a result, at the outset of World War II, the regime made listening to foreign radio broadcasts a crime and allowed the Gestapo to prosecute violations. The party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, tried to minimize the strain of

economic sacrifices made by workers during wartime; it did so in part by playing upon socialist rhetoric and using Britain as a symbol of outworn capitalism.

Nazi propaganda about the Soviet Union required several nimble changes of course. Years of shrill anti-Bolshevism ceased shortly before Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Treaty of 1939. Then, on June 22, 1941, the day that Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Goebbels informed his subordinates of a radical shift in tactics: effective immediately, reporting was to interpret the realities of war in ideological terms. Still, he was clearly concerned about the public's response to the inconsistencies of Nazi propaganda

When the tattered remnants of the German Sixth Army surrendered (against orders) at Stalingrad at the beginning of February 1943, even Nazi ideologues had to concede that the war had entered a difficult phase. Seeking a new propaganda strategy that might gain traction, Goebbels tried to use military setbacks to call for increased sacrifice. On February 18, 1943, he delivered an exceedingly long speech at the *Sportpalast* in Berlin. It became his most famous. He asked whether the German public wanted "total war," and then used a staging device to show that they did. Worthy of note are his references to British claims – a sign that a substantial number of Germans were getting their news from the BBC, despite the ban on foreign broadcasts. But another reason for emphasizing Britain, rather than the Soviet Union, was the increasing damage that British (and American) bombers were inflicting on German economic targets and cities. At a party rally on June 5, 1943, Goebbels delivered a speech wherein he explicitly tried to transform German civilian suffering into a longing for retribution that he hoped would translate into increased wartime efforts. An opinion analysis conducted by the SD suggested that the propaganda of sacrifice and revenge worked only to a certain extent. Popular confidence in Hitler remained high, but the rest of the regime and the media were no longer trusted, and the public had begun to look outside of Germany for more reliable sources of information. By late 1943, the discordance between reality and propaganda had become too great for many Germans to ignore.

XII. Region, City, and Countryside

Like catastrophes throughout European history, the Nazi revolution and the war experience transformed every aspect of life in certain places, while leaving others essentially untouched.

Although patterns are difficult to establish, urban centers were generally more heavily politicized by the regime and more badly damaged during the war. At first, British and American bombing strategy focused primarily on vital economic targets, but the notion of bombing to disrupt urban activity and break civilian morale – area bombing – gained support over time. In a number of cases, Hamburg and Dresden being the best known examples, Allied bombers started firestorms that inflicted horrendous casualties and reduced major portions of cities to rubble. The Hamburg firestorm on the night of July 27-28, 1943, killed somewhere between 35,000 and 40,000 people. The Allied attack on Dresden on February 13-14, 1945, resulted in catastrophe on a similar scale. Inflated estimates of casualties in Dresden have led some to compare it with Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Reliable estimates put the number of deaths at approximately 40,000.

Towards the end of the war, the Allies were not the only ones trying to reduce Germany's infrastructure to rubble. As Allied troops moved into German territory, Hitler wanted to destroy everything that the enemy could use: supplies, roads, bridges, factories, and communications. With complete indifference to the needs, welfare, and safety of the German people, he ordered the implementation of his "Scorched Earth Decree." The responsibility of transmitting Hitler's orders befell Minister of Armaments and War Production Albert Speer, who, recognizing that the war was lost, refused to comply.

XIII. Science

American and British nuclear research was initially propelled by fears that Nazi Germany might develop nuclear weapons and put them to use. This concern was realistic: German physicists enjoyed worldwide renown for their groundbreaking experimental and theoretical work on splitting uranium to release bursts of energy. But some famous Jewish scientists (such as physicist Lise Meitner, who, together with Otto Hahn, discovered nuclear fission) had to leave the country because of Nazi persecution; others were handicapped when officials encouraged the discrediting of certain scientific theories (such as Einstein's). Nonetheless, there were still enough top-notch physicists in Germany to make the development of nuclear weapons possible. In the end, however, this goal was never attained, partly because the regime and the scientists alike failed to recognize the military significance of nuclear research early on.

Controversy still surrounds the intentions of Nobel Prize-winning physicist Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976), who later claimed that he and his colleagues did not want Nazi Germany to succeed in building a nuclear bomb. Among evidence to the contrary is the transcript of surreptitiously taped-recorded conversations among German nuclear physicists who were captured at the end of the war and detained in comfortable surroundings at Farm Hall, an English country estate. The British initiative to secretly record these German “guests” was called Operation Epsilon. An English translation of their comments was sent to General Leslie Groves, the American director of the Manhattan Project.

The Farm Hall group included Heisenberg, Hahn, and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (the elder brother of Richard von Weizsäcker, who served as president of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1984 to 1994). On the whole, their comments, and those of others in the group, suggest that they had simply failed to find the right methods to set off a chain reaction or to press for the kinds of resources they would have needed to accomplish more during the war.³⁹ The Farm Hall conversations, which occurred on August 6-7, 1945, included the interlocutors’ stunned response to news that America had just dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima.

The Nazi regime encouraged some perversions of science and engaged in some outright quackery, but it also managed to mobilize legitimate science for its own purposes, just as it harnessed the state apparatus to the Nazi Party and the SS. Its nuclear research failed, but other scientists and engineers developed sophisticated weapons, such as the V-2 rocket, which inflicted casualties and terror in London in 1944, and then served as the direct predecessor of both intercontinental ballistic missiles and space rockets.⁴⁰ Its archaic and inefficient elements notwithstanding, Nazi Germany came close to dominating Europe. That twentieth-century legacy is still troubling in the twenty-first.

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³⁹ This is the conclusion of Mark Walker, *German National Socialism and the Quest for Nuclear Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴⁰ Michael J. Neufeld, *The Rocket and the Reich: Peenemünde and the Coming of the Ballistic Missile Era* (New York: Free Press, 1994).