

*My summary of the Holocaust lecture notes.*

**Racism and Anti-Semitism:**

- Genetics and biology.
  - Carl von Linné – races and families. 1757
    - Applied to humans too.
    - As the Tiger differs from the Cat, the African differs from the European.
  - Charles Darwin 1859
    - The survival of the fittest.
    - Evolution had made some more equipped for survival than others.
    - It was against nature to try to save inferior elements.
  - Mendel 1865
    - Proved that evolution and genetics were one.
    - Parents' genes are transferred to the next generation.
  - Social engineering.
    - Affecting the genes of future generations can solve the problems in society.
    - Believed that not only deadly diseases but also behavior such as criminality was inherited from generation to generation.
    - Sweden for example as well as USA, Canada, Great Britain etc sterilize “unpopular elements”. In Sweden 60 000 people are sterilized between 1935 and 1976. 13 000 because they were overly sexual active, hysterical, belonged to the gypsy minority etc.
- Racial biology / Social-Darwinism:
  - French Arthur de Gobineau published in 1854 his theses:
    - Inequality of the races.
    - Aryans were superior to all others.
    - The Imperialistic European countries welcomed these ideas.
  - H S Chamberlain, British German, 1899.
    - Jews and other inferior races threaten Aryan race.
    - Aryan people are lead by the Germanic People.
    - Influenced by Darwin he meant that the biggest threat was the way inferior races through mixed marriages and mixed children worsened the Aryan gene pool.
- Anti-Semitism and Racial Biology:
  - Jews had always been kept outside the European society.
  - Persecution against Jewish minority was nothing new in Europe.
    - Jews were accused of the death of Jesus.
    - Jews were accused of the Black Death.
    - Jews were given areas of trade that no Christians wanted, banking and lending money for example.
    - Dreyfus trial in France 1894.
  - After the French revolution an emancipation of Jews took place.
    - Zionistic ideas and the demand for a Jewish state were raised.
    - 1896 Herzl in Vienna Publish “Jews' state” stating that Palestine should be given to the Jews.

- These demands were seen as a threat to the established political power in Europe.
  - If they demanded a nation of their own they proved themselves to be working against their own country.
  - Jew = traitor becomes a very common “knowledge”.
- Jews were part of a conspiracy to seize power in the world.
  - The Great Conspiracy.
  - Zion the Wise Protocol. Faked by Russian Czar.
- Jews were Marxists and hence Communism is a world Jewish conspiracy to destroy the Aryan race.
  - Relatively more Jews were communists.
  - Why?
- Jews belonged to an inferior anti-Aryan race and the only way to solve the problem was to stop their influence on the Aryan gene pool.
- This is unfortunately NOT a typical German idea.
  - Supported by many Poles, Hungarians, Swedes, Lithuanians etc.

### Short chronology:

- Dachau is opened in March 20 1933. The first concentration camp is opened.
- Throughout the 30's laws against Jews, Gypsies, Colored, Homosexuals and handicapped are passed.
- Nuremberg Laws of 1935 are important.
- Kristallnacht nov 1938
- Jews are stigmatized in German society.
  - Use of propaganda very important.
    - Jews = Traitor
    - Jews = Enemy
    - Jews = Animals
  - “The bigger a lie, the better”
  - Laws are passed step by step.
- Outbreak of War. 3 sept 1939
  - Big Jewish population in Poland.
  - Transports of German Jews to Lublin Area in October 1939
  - The use of the Star of David.
    - In Poland nov 1939.
  - The use of Gas to murder is introduced on mental patients in Germany in Jan 1940.
    - The Nazis learn that this is unpopular and decides to be more secret in the future.
  - Dehumanize the Jews.
    - Starvation and filth in the ghetto. Conditions horrible in the ghettos.
      - The first ghetto in Lodz is closed off from outside world in April 1940
      - In October the same year the ghetto in Warsaw is created.
    - Registration of Jews in Holland starts in Jan 1941.
    - Jews from all over Europe will later be sent to Poland for the Final Solution.
- Germany attacks Russia June 22 1941.

- Einsatzgruppe carry out the orders from Hitler.
  - Jews in the villages in the Russian territories are taken outside the villages and shot by execution patrols.
  - Himmler is impressed saying that only the proud Aryan race is capable of such greatness.....
  - 33 000 are shot sept 29 – 30 outside Kiev.
  - Tremendous problems with the soldiers forced to carry out these orders.
- New methods of mass murder is needed:
  - Dec 8 Gas is used in Chelmno for the first time.
  - Car engines are used. Busses or small chambers.
  - Ineffective and too costly.
- Wannsee Conference in January 20 1942:
  - The Final Solution is discussed.
    - The use of Zyklon B is agreed upon.
- Gassing with Zyklon B is used the first time in Auschwitz February 15 1942.
  - Mass gassing in Belzec march 17 1942.
  - Gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau in use march 20.
  - May 4 first selection among prisoners in Auschwitz, the one incapable of work are sent to the gas chambers.
- Throughout 1942 and 1943 Jews are put first in Ghettos for later transport to the camps in Poland.
- The cruelty is extremely well organized.
  - First all Jews are registered, forced to wear the Star.
  - Then they are forced to leave everything behind, and moved to ghettos.
  - In the ghetto living conditions are horrible.
    - Starvation
    - Forced labor
  - The ones that survive this are moved to labor camps
    - Forced to work until they die.
    - Promised that they are taken away for work.
  - At the train stations there are a selection:
    - Women, elderly and children are sent to the gas chambers
    - People that can work are sent to work camps.
  - Put on animal transportation wagons under horrible conditions.
  - Some ghettos are cleaned out and the people are directly sent to extermination camps:
    - Jews from Warsaw are sent to Treblinka in July – sept 1942.
- Dehumanizing the Jews:
  - To make it easier for the people working in the camps the Jews were deliberately made to starve, be filthy, smelly, more animal like, so the guards would be easier at mind than they had to order them directly to death.

## Historical Debate:

The debate on why this horrible part of history took place when it took place and how it could be carried out is still ongoing.

The hottest debate has been between:

### 1. Intentionalists.

- a. Hitler and the Nazis had the intention all the way to exterminate the Jews.
- b. “The Holocaust was the outcome of long-term, deliberate planning; in some versions the plan is traced back as early as 1919. The importance of ideology rather than structure is stressed, and the Holocaust is located primarily within the contexts of German and Jewish history and within the larger history of antisemitism (rather than in the context of modernity, or along a continuum of genocidal events in human history). Intentionalists also tend to argue for the uniqueness of the Holocaust, insisting that it was such an extreme form of genocide that it must be separated from other examples. The term Holocaust is thus to be reserved specifically for the murder of European Jewry. Lucy Dawidowicz, Gerald Fleming, Yehuda Bauer, and Eberhard Jäckel stand as the chief representatives of the intentionalist position.”<sup>1</sup>
- c. The war gave them the possibility to carry out the mass murder.

### 2. Functionalists or Structuralists.

- a. “The functionalist or structuralist paradigm focuses on the structure and institutions of the Third Reich and explains the Holocaust as the outcome of an unplanned process of ‘cumulative radicalisation’ ... There was no straight path from Hitler’s anti-Semitic intentions to Auschwitz but rather a ‘twisted road’ characterised by haphazard development, improvisation and *ad hoc* decisions by various groups within a chaotic polycratic system of rule. The Final Solution arose in a piecemeal fashion, emerging through responses by local Nazi officials to the immediate context created by the war. The importance of ideology and antisemitism is strongly downplayed in functionalist explanations. Martin Broszat, Hans Mommsen and Uwe Adam are the most prominent advocates of a functionalist interpretation of the Holocaust.”<sup>2</sup>
- b. When faced by the horrors of having to shoot people taken from their every day life the Nazis adopted the Gas and the dehumanization policies.

### 3. Daniel Jonah **Goldhagen** has become one of the most famous historians in dealing with these questions in his book “Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust”.

- a. He tries to explain the Holocaust from the perspective of the perpetrators, in understanding why and how seemingly ordinary people carried out these orders he sees the explanation of why the Holocaust took place.
- b. He means that studies of the Holocaust have been colored by a few false truths:
  - i. All perpetrators were SS Nazis. Convinced hardcore nazis.
  - ii. Anyone who disobeyed an order to murder Jews would be murdered.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.yale.edu/gsp/publications/Holocaust.doc>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

- iii. The use of Gas and industrial methods of killing were necessary for the holocaust to take place. Modernity explains why it happened now.
- c. He asks the question “Why, once the killing begun did those receiving the orders to kill do so?”.<sup>3</sup>
- d. He comes up with five explanations to why the orders were carried out, all of them ending up in the simple truth that orders were followed and not questioned. These explanations are:
  - i. Shoot or be shot. Disobeying an order means death.
  - ii. Perpetrators were blind believers in Hitler and Nazism.
  - iii. Perpetrators were subjects to tremendous social and psychological pressure. In extraordinary times extraordinary measures are taken.
  - iv. Perpetrators were petty bureaucrats or soulless technocrats. A step in the career.
  - v. Tasks were fragmented, the perpetrators didn’t have the full picture.
- e. These are the conventional explanations but they don’t answer the question according to Goldhagen. He says:

“The conventional explanations *assume* a neutral or condemnatory attitude on the part of the perpetrators towards their actions. They therefore premise their interpretations on the assumption that it must be shown how people can be brought to commit acts to which they would not inwardly assent, acts which they would not agree are necessary or just. They either ignore, deny, or radically minimize the importance of Nazi and perhaps the perpetrators' ideology, moral values, and conception of the victims, for engendering the perpetrators' willingness to kill. Some of these conventional explanations also caricature the perpetrators, and Germans in general. The explanations treat them as if they had been people lacking a moral sense, lacking the ability to make decisions and take stances. They do not conceive of the actors as human agents, as people with wills, but as beings moved solely by external forces or by transhistorical and invariant psychological propensities, such as the slavish following of narrow "self-interest." The conventional explanations suffer from two other major conceptual failings. They do not sufficiently recognize the extraordinary nature of the deed: the mass killing of people. They *assume* and imply that inducing people to kill human beings is fundamentally no different from getting them to do any other unwanted or distasteful task. Also, none of the conventional explanations deems the *identity* of the victims to have mattered. The conventional explanations imply that the perpetrators would have treated any other group of intended victims in exactly the same way. That the victims were Jews - according to the logic of these explanations - is irrelevant.

I maintain that any explanation that fails to acknowledge the actors' capacity to know and to judge, namely to understand and to have views about the significance and the morality of their actions, that fails to hold the actors' beliefs and values as central, that fails to emphasize the autonomous motivating force of Nazi ideology, particularly its central component of antisemitism, cannot possibly succeed in telling us much about why the perpetrators acted as they did. Any explanation that ignores either the particular nature of the perpetrators' actions - the systematic, large-scale killing and brutalizing of people - or the identity of the victims is inadequate for a host

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/goldhagen.htm>

of reasons. All explanations that adopt these positions, as do the conventional explanations, suffer a mirrored, double failure of recognition of the human aspect of the Holocaust: the humanity of the perpetrators, namely their capacity to judge and to choose to act inhumanely, and the humanity of the victims, that what the perpetrators did, they did to these people with their specific identities, and not to animals or things. “<sup>4</sup>

- f. His point is that “Simply put, the perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality and having judged the mass annihilation of Jews to be right, did not *want* to say ‘no.’”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*