

The Argument for Genocide in Nazi Propaganda

Randall L. Bytwerk

The Nazis justified their attempt to exterminate the Jews by claiming that they were only defending themselves against Jewish plans to destroy Germany and its population. I show how the Nazis used the same the same words to discuss both claims, and how they argued that just as the Jews were serious about exterminating Germany, they were equally serious about exterminating the Jews. Since the argument for annihilating the Jews was hard to make in the mass media, the Nazis put it most strongly in word-of-mouth propaganda using speakers and public meetings.

Keywords: Genocide; Holocaust; Theodore N. Kaufman; Nazi Propaganda; Anti-Semitism

How does one argue for genocide?

Thousands of books and articles examine the ways in which various German bureaucracies competed and cooperated to implement the Holocaust.¹ Much has also been written on the public discourse of Nazi anti-Semitism, particularly on what Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels said and wrote.² However, although the Nazi party considered public meetings and word-of-mouth propaganda critical ways of reaching the masses, these areas have been largely neglected in previous work on German propaganda.

This essay examines two important aspects of the Nazi public argument for killing the Jews. First, I show how the claim that the Jews were attempting to destroy Germany and the Germans was used to justify Nazi efforts to murder Jews, focusing on the use of a remarkable 1941 American book, Theodore N. Kaufman's *Germany Must Perish!*, widely used by the Nazi propaganda apparatus from 1941 to 1945. Second, I examine not only the anti-Semitic material in the mass media with a national audience, but also blunter material intended for more limited audiences. Examining the full range of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda

Randall L. Bytwerk is Professor of Communication at Calvin College. Correspondence to: Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, 1810 East Beltline SE, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI 49546, USA. Email: bytw@calvin.edu

provides a new understanding of what the Third Reich told its citizens about its genocidal policies in print and orally, when it was said, and how persuasive it was.

Background

The basic Nazi argument was that exterminating Jews was a necessary defensive measure. Because Jews were determined to destroy Germany, Germans had no choice but to destroy the Jews first. Since both claims were monstrous and hard to believe, the Nazis were forced to argue repeatedly that the Jews were serious about exterminating Germans, and (less often) that they in turn were grimly serious about exterminating Jews. The war was a matter of “life or death” in a literal sense. Germany or the Jews would perish.

There is considerable controversy about the way the Nazi movement decided to kill the Jews. When did the Nazis decide on the Holocaust, and how centrally involved was Adolf Hitler? I do not propose to join that debate, but rather will summarize what is generally accepted, and proceed to what Nazi propaganda said.

The Nazis themselves needed time to determine what they were going to do about the “Jewish Question.” There was no central plan or intention to kill the Jews when Hitler took power in 1933. The Nazis began with efforts, both legal and otherwise, to make the lives of German Jews as unpleasant as possible. In the 1930s, they encouraged German Jews to emigrate to just about anywhere. Despite *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 and other anti-Semitic measures, the Nazis were still encouraging emigration when the war began, and for at least a year thereafter.

Although Nazism succeeded in expelling about half of the 600,000 Jews who were in Germany when they took power in 1933, the conquest of Poland suddenly brought nearly 2,000,000 additional Jews under German control. This was a problem. Still, until the invasion of Russia, the German leadership thought that the “Final Solution,” the nature of which was still murky, could be postponed until after German victory. The shift to murder began with the realization that the war in Russia would bring still more millions of Jews under German control, and also that different rules could be followed. In a war against “subhumans,” murder became easier. It became conceivable that all the Jews of Europe could be killed. By the fall of 1941, both Nazi practice and Nazi rhetoric increasingly suggested a policy of mass murder. Germans throughout the tangled organizational apparatus of the Third Reich had determined to kill as many Jews as they could. There probably was not a written order from Hitler, but that was not necessary. His thinking was sufficiently clear to those around him, and the Nazi system encouraged fanaticism more than caution in carrying out the Führer’s wishes.

But how did things look to a typical German? What did average Germans, who probably did not like Jews very much, but who also would have been reluctant to kill them, read and hear?

The Nazi Claim that Jews Planned to Destroy Germany

Until the beginning of 1939, a reasonably attentive German citizen had no solid reason to conclude that the Nazi goal was to exterminate the Jews. It was clear the Nazis hated Jews, but their rhetoric did not lead average Germans (or the rest of the world) to expect genocide.

On January 30, 1939, Hitler gave a speech to the Reichstag that set the model for Nazi anti-Semitic argumentation until 1945. In a frequently cited passage, he made what he called a prophecy:

If international finance Jewry within Europe and abroad should succeed once more in plunging the peoples into a world war, then the consequence will be not the Bolshevization of the world and therewith a victory of Jewry, but on the contrary, the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe.³

There are three significant things about this passage. First, Hitler claimed that the war, should it come, would be caused by the Jews. Germany would only be defending itself. Second, he asserted that although the Jewish goal would be to destroy Germany, war would instead lead to the “destruction of the Jewish race in Europe.” As we shall see, his meaning was not clear at the time. Third, the date is important—this was seven months before the war began. Within the context of the speech, it is not necessary (or even reasonable) to conclude that Hitler is speaking of the physical destruction of Jews. Rather, he suggested that the rest of Europe would solve the “Jewish Question” in the way Germany had done—through propaganda: “[T]he effectiveness of an enlightenment will once more display its might. Within Germany, this enlightenment conquered Jewry utterly in the span of a few years.” When Hitler spoke, he still hoped to achieve his goals without war, or at least to postpone war until he had completed his military preparations.

However, when Hitler quoted the passage in his speeches during the war, he always said that he had made the remark on September 1, 1939 (the outbreak of World War II) rather than January 30, 1939. The repeated slip of memory is significant. The “prophecy” has a different meaning if made during war. In that context, the word “destruction” takes on a physical connotation missing in peace, and Hitler wanted to make it clear that he was absolutely serious about his threat to destroy the Jews. In dating the statement at the outbreak of war, he gave it a new context, and harsher import.

All subsequent Nazi propaganda followed Hitler’s basic line, intensifying in tone as the war progressed. Although Hitler and the Nazis suppressed the details of the Holocaust, they clearly and publicly made the argument that the destruction of the Jews was Germany’s response to Jewish plans to destroy Germany, using words in both cases that I shall consistently translate as destroy (*vernichten*), wipe out (*auslöschen*), exterminate (*ausrotten*), and extirpate (*ausmerzen*).⁴ These words were repeated regularly in public not only by Hitler and Goebbels, but also by leading Nazi books and periodicals and in the speeches and conversations of hundreds of thousands of Nazi propagandists, who were instructed to use these and similar words in presenting Nazi thinking to ordinary citizens.

Before the Invasion of the Soviet Union

Although there are traces of the Nazi claim that Jewish world domination would destroy humanity from the beginning of Hitler's movement, they are scattered and unclear before the invasion of the Soviet Union. For example, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler asserted that the world would spin through space, empty of humanity, were the Jews to dominate the planet.⁵ In the lead-up to the war, and in its first two years (before the invasion of Russia), the Nazis regularly accused England, and sometimes the United States, of plotting Germany's destruction. In December 1939, Goebbels instructed his propaganda staff to make the argument that the "the other side is determined to annihilate [*vernichten*] Germany for good," and ordered that enemy threats against Germany were to be collected for use in later propaganda.⁶ In his January 1, 1940 proclamation, Hitler said: "For there is one thing we all know for certain, National Socialists: the Jewish-capitalist enemy of the world facing us knows but one goal—to destroy Germany, to destroy our German Volk!"⁷

The Nazi worldview was flexible, but at its core was the conviction that all of its enemies were ultimately held together by "cement of the Jews," to use Goebbels' phrase. Both communism (or, as the Nazis preferred, the more threatening term "Bolshevism") and capitalism (or "plutocracy," in Nazi terminology), however they might seem to be in conflict on the surface, were united in the service of the Jewish drive for world domination. The center of the threat varied. From 1936 to 1939, for example, Bolshevism was the focus of propaganda's enmity. When the Nazi-Soviet pact was signed in August 1939, anti-Bolshevist attacks vanished instantly, rather to the confusion of the propaganda system. After the war began, England (and to a lesser degree France and later the United States) became the major target. Hitler's major speeches in 1940 contained relatively little anti-Semitism, but a great deal of calumny against the British.

One way to track the focus of Nazi propaganda is to consider the *Parole der Woche*, a weekly propaganda poster put out by the party's central propaganda office (*Reichspropagandaleitung*). Around 70,000 copies were printed, and they were posted in public places throughout the country.⁸ The propaganda system viewed it as a central way of reaching the public, as it exemplified the central message of each week. Of the first 36 issues in 1939, 17 had at least some anti-Semitic content. Then the war began. Between September 1939 and June 1941, only nine issues mentioned the Jews, often in passing. The focus was on Britain, with a variety of claims that England wanted to destroy Germany. A December 1939 issue asserted that the British intended to wipe out German manhood and marry German women to foreigners as a way of destroying the German race.⁹ In August 1940, an Englishman's letter to a newspaper was the focus: "To be frank, I favor exterminating every living creature in Germany, man, woman, and child, bird and insect. I would not leave even a blade of grass. Germany must become more desolate than the Sahara."¹⁰ Three other issues over the period stated that Britain's goal was to destroy Germany.¹¹

The entire Nazi propaganda system followed similar lines. Anti-Semitism did not disappear, but the focus was on Britain as the main enemy. For example, *Lustige*

Blätter—a weekly magazine of humor and satire—had 21 issues (about 20%) with some mention of the Jews between the outbreak of the war and the invasion of Russia, but every issue satirized England, including all but four front covers between January 1940 and June 1941. The argument that the Jews were behind England did not change, but the Jews were less prominent than England.

The same was true in other newspapers and magazines. The focus was on England, with frequent claims that it wanted to destroy Germany, though there was no concerted effort to argue that England planned the physical destruction of Germany and its entire population. Until the invasion of Russia, the average German who attended to the media would probably have concluded that the consequences of losing the war would be more serious than those following from the Treaty of Versailles (which had been a major target of Nazi propaganda), but that Germany and its population in some form would continue to exist.

The Impact of the Invasion of the Soviet Union

The situation changed on June 22, 1941. From then to the end of the war, with increasing intensity, the Nazis argued that losing the war would mean the literal end of Germany as a nation and the death of its population, though propaganda never quite agreed on how that would happen. At this point, too, the focus shifted to the Jews as the prime force behind all Allied plans to destroy Germany.

In his proclamation to the nation when the invasion began, Hitler claimed to have acted at the last possible moment to save not only Germany, but also Europe itself, from destruction: “The results of the actions of this [Soviet] regime would have brought chaos, misery and starvation to all these nations.”¹² In his order of the day to the *Wehrmacht*, he stated that “the existence of our Volk” was in their hands.¹³

Since the Nazis kept the invasion plans secret, there was no way to prepare propagandists for the abrupt change in the nature of the war. They initially failed to realize the Jews were the new target. *Gauleiter* Eigruber in former Austria, for example, gave a speech the day after the beginning of the invasion in which he claimed the invasion would not prolong the war at all, but rather that it was necessary to free all resources for the final blow against England.¹⁴ Even Goebbels took time to adjust. On July 6, he published an article in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the party’s daily newspaper, which claimed the Soviets had been planning to “plunge into the heart of Europe. Human imagination is insufficient to picture what would have happened if their animal hordes had flooded into Germany and the West.”¹⁵ There was only passing mention of the Jews.

Soon, however, the whole system was promoting the message that Jews were behind the attack that Bolshevism had planned on Germany, and that the German response had occurred at the last possible moment. Goebbels wrote a weekly lead article for *Das Reich*, the most prestigious German weekly. These essays set the tone for Nazi propaganda, both in print and verbally. Preprints were sent to tens of thousands of propagandists and party leaders around the country, and after November 1941, they were read over the radio. They were widely reprinted in other

periodicals. On July 20, his *Das Reich* lead was titled “Mimickry.” The article was an attack on the Jews, maintaining that they were behind both Bolshevism and plutocracy. “Secretly, they were planning to strangle us.”¹⁶ Still, the claims were that Jews were out to conquer the world and enslave the rest of humanity, rather than murder them. A flood of magazine and newspaper articles argued that Germany had been rescued at the last possible moment from a long-prepared Bolshevik attack.

In September 1941, the Niebelungen-Verlag, which had close ties to Himmler’s SS, published a 128-page booklet titled *Why War with Stalin?* It was prefaced with Hitler’s assertion that, were the Jews to triumph, all life on earth would cease. It provided a picture of life in the Soviet Union calculated to make any reader shudder.¹⁷ Several other mass pamphlets on Bolshevism were soon released, and the Nazi party’s propaganda office organized a major anti-Bolshevist exhibition that traveled to large cities.¹⁸

Theodore N. Kaufman and Germany Must Perish!

A month after the invasion came one of the most peculiar propaganda elements of the war: Theodore N. Kaufman’s *Germany Must Perish!* Kaufman was a 31-year-old American Jew who owned a theater ticket agency in New Jersey. In March 1941, he self-published a 100-page book that called for the sterilization of the entire German population (excepting only Jews and those no longer fertile). It would be inhumane, he wrote, to kill the Germans, but sterilization would eliminate them within two generations. He also included a map proposing the partition of German territory among neighboring nations. As he wrote in the introduction, Germany had been a source of misery for the rest of the world from its beginning:

This time Germany has forced a TOTAL WAR upon the world.
As a result, she must be prepared to pay a TOTAL PENALTY.
And there is one, *and only one*, such Total Penalty:
Germany must perish forever!
In fact—not in fancy!¹⁹

Kaufman had earlier presented himself as the president (and perhaps sole member) of the American Federation of Peace, which in 1939 had urged Congress either to stay out of Europe’s war, or to sterilize all Americans to keep their children from becoming homicidal monsters. He did have a gift for public relations. Before reviewers received his book, a small black coffin came in the mail announcing that his book would arrive the next day.²⁰ Kaufman’s effort got limited attention in the United States, generally negative, though he, in the fashion of film publicists, found several passages that could be made to sound positive to include in his second printing.²¹

That would have been the end of it, but copies made their way to Germany. Although the United States was not yet a combatant, the Nazis immediately presented Kaufman’s book as the official American plan to deal with Germany. On July 23, 1941, a month after the invasion of Russia, a Berlin press conference revealed Kaufman’s plan. The next day, the *Völkischer Beobachter* ran a story that covered most

of the front page: “The Product of Criminal Jewish Sadism: Roosevelt Demands the Sterilization of the German People.” The article stated that “Theodor Kaufmann”²² had “a monstrous plan for the extermination of the German people and the total fragmentation of Germany,” noting that he was president of the American Federation of Peace and

one of the closest advisers to the New York Jew Samuel Roseman [*sic*], who as is well known provides advice and assistance in speechwriting to the current president of the United States, Roosevelt. . . . Given the close relationship of the writer to the White House, this monstrous war program can be seen as a synthesis of genuine Talmudic hatred and Roosevelt’s views on foreign policy.²³

The story received prime coverage in other German newspapers as well. Many articles followed in the German press, all of which claimed that Kaufman’s proposal was incontrovertible proof of international Jewry’s intent physically to destroy Germany and its people.²⁴ *Das Reich* avoided commentary, simply carrying particularly startling passages from Kaufman’s book.²⁵ Significant parts were read over national radio. It is important to remember that from July to September 1941, Third Reich bureaucracies were engaged in energetic and explicit internal discussions on killing the Jews, discussions reflected in more general terms in public discourse.²⁶

But that was only the beginning. Joseph Goebbels read Kaufman’s book early in August. In his diary, he expressed outrage, then wrote:

This Jew did a real service for the enemy [German] side. Had he written this book for us, he could not have made it any better. I will have this published in an edition of millions for Germany and above all for the front, and will write the forward and afterward myself.²⁷

Goebbels realized that Kaufman’s diatribe had little significance in the United States, but that did not prevent him from recognizing its propaganda value.²⁸ Goebbels discussed Kaufman’s book with Hitler a few weeks later, who was also outraged.

Rather than adhering to his original thought of translating the full book into German (Goebbels feared copyright, of all things—since the U.S. was not yet in the war, violating an American copyright might damage German publishing), he instructed Wolfgang Diewerge, an experienced propagandist with four previous anti-Semitic mass pamphlets to his credit, to prepare a pamphlet summarizing Kaufman’s plan. Diewerge’s 32-page work appeared toward the end of September 1941 under the title *The War Aim of World Plutocracy*.²⁹ Goebbels wrote the last page, an appeal to the German people, although he did not sign his name, as he preferred to avoid the suggestion that it was an official publication.³⁰ He ordered five million copies printed.³¹ American journalist Howard Smith, then in Berlin, noted that sales there initially were good, but afterwards copies were being given to people along with their ration cards.³²

A month later, the Nazis even produced a four-page flyer to remind people of Diewerge’s pamphlet. It had mass distribution. Wearing the Star of David had become mandatory for the remaining Jews in Germany on September 1, 1941. The flyer’s cover, in large letters, announced: “When you see this symbol . . .” Beneath the

words was the Jewish star. The interior urged people to read Diewerge's pamphlet.³³ It justified the yellow star by claiming that its wearers in Germany were part of the international Jewish conspiracy that was working to implement Kaufman's proposal to destroy Germany, thus suggesting that the anti-Semitic measure had been taken in self-defense, just as Germany was waging war in self-defense.

Diewerge focused on Kaufman's proposal to partition Germany among the surrounding states and to sterilize its population. He stressed that the Jews meant exactly what Kaufman said:

As monstrous as a plan to cold-bloodedly exterminate a people of 80 million is, and as much as one may be inclined to consider it impossible and unbelievable, World Jewry is serious. We would not be the first people to be murdered by the Jews.³⁴

And Diewerge made the clear conclusion that the appropriate German response was to wipe out the Jews:

[This] is not a war of the past, which can find its end in a balancing of interests. It is a matter of who shall live in Europe in the future: the white race with its cultural values and creativity, with its industry and joy in life, or Jewish subhumanity ruling over the stupid, joyless, enslaved masses doomed to death.³⁵

The pamphlet received full coverage, and not only in newspapers. A weekly newsletter called the *Zeitschriften-Dienst* provided instructions and background material for magazine editors. On October 3, 1941, it ordered editors to give good coverage to Diewerge's pamphlet.³⁶ A week later, it carried an article titled "The Tasks of Women's and Family Magazines in the Third Year of the War." Among other things, it instructed editors to intensify anti-Semitic arguments: "The recently published book by the Jew Kaufmann [*sic*], which displays boundless hatred against everything German, offers the best starting point for such observations."³⁷ Several weeks later, the *NS Frauen-Warte*, the party's biweekly for women, carried an article that followed the directive entirely. The Jews, it claimed, wanted to exterminate the German people by sterilizing them and destroying family life. Kaufman's pamphlet was cited. And the attempt was again made to claim that the Jews were entirely serious in their goals:

As terrible and unbelievable as this product of a Jewish brain may seem to us, its outline proves to us how clearly and realistically the plan has been thought out, and shows the means with which Jewry intends to realize it.³⁸

The *Zeitschriften-Dienst* carried many later articles advising magazine editors of ways to make the anti-Semitic arguments.

Other confidential material for the press also stressed Kaufman's book. During anti-Semitic campaigns in 1943, for example, the *Politischer Dienst*, a confidential newsletter for editors published by the Propaganda Ministry, carried references to it.³⁹ Two officials in the ministry published twice-monthly sets of index cards of quotations useful for journalists that also included citations from Kaufman.⁴⁰

At least as important as the press, from the Nazi viewpoint, was its corps of propagandists that reached down to the neighborhood level. The extensive party

speaker system instructed speakers to emphasize the Jewish threat.⁴¹ For example, the information material that went to several thousand party speakers gave considerable attention to Kaufman in December 1941:

The final clarity as to the fate of the German people were it to lose this war forced upon it by Jews and plutocrats is shown to us by the Jew Theodore Nathan Kaufman in his book "Germany Must Perish!"

After summarizing the standard Kaufman material, speakers were told that they would encounter citizens who simply could not believe such a satanic plan could be real. The response was to be:

One must realize that this race is capable of thoughts and actions like no other race and no other person on this earth. Were it not an insult to the creatures God has made, one would want to compare the members of this race to animals.⁴²

A year later, speakers were told to make anti-Semitism the center of all coming meetings. They were reminded of the Kaufman plan, and told to insist on the seriousness of Jewish plans to destroy Germany.⁴³ In December 1943, material went to speakers to women, reminding them of the Kaufman material, and stressing that the enemy goal was to exterminate the German people.⁴⁴ There was much more along this line.

To coordinate propaganda, the Reich Ring for National Socialist Propaganda and People's Enlightenment, with offices at the national, *Gau* (regional), county, and local levels, brought together not only party propagandists, but also those in every conceivable organization with any influence at all on public opinion, down to gardening societies.⁴⁵ Each *Gau* ring office held regular meetings for propagandists and published a newsletter. Local rings were supposed to meet at least monthly. The major focus was on oral propaganda, as a typical passage from a ring newsletter suggests: "Word-of-mouth propaganda has always been the most important part of the work of *Gau*, county, and local propaganda ring activity."⁴⁶

The ring organization instructed propagandists throughout the country to promote Diewerge's booklet. *Gau* Moselland's coverage in mid-October 1941 is typical:

The pamphlet must be read by every German, since it is not fantasy or fiction, but rather a sober and factual account of the true intentions of World Jewry. We must be sure that the pamphlet is available in every bookstore and newsstand. Party members must see to it that the pamphlet is not read once and set it aside. The material must be kept constantly in the minds of our people's comrades until the end of the war, or at least to the end of this winter.⁴⁷

There were regular injunctions to propagandists thereafter to remind citizens of Kaufman's plan, as well as of other alleged plans to destroy Germany.

The *Parole der Woche* posters of August 6,⁴⁸ September 13, October 1, October 29,⁴⁹ and December 10, 1941, and August 19, 1942⁵⁰ emphasized the Kaufman plan. A poster released in fall 1941 carried the large heading "Germany must perish!" It went on to say that since Germans knew that the enemy plan was to destroy them, their only answer was to fight and work for victory.⁵¹

There were steady references to Kaufman, usually in connection with other threats against Germany from the Allied camp, for the rest of the war in every form of Nazi media. Late in 1944, with the war's end in sight, Kaufman made his last major appearance in a widely distributed booklet titled *Never!* Released by the party's publishing house, it summarized many alleged Allied plans to destroy Germany, including a five-page section on "Theodor Nathan Kaufman," who was still "a prominent and well-known Jewish personality who belongs to Roosevelt's so-called Brain Trust, which provides intellectual and political advice to the American president."⁵² We have reviewed only a small amount of the propaganda material on Kaufman. A German at the time could not have missed encountering the message repeatedly.

Other Claims of Jewish Malevolence

I have examined Kaufman at length since he received such attention from the propaganda system, but he was only a part of the enormous collection of evidence the Nazis collected to build the case that the enemy goal was the complete destruction of Germany. No enemy comment, whatever the credibility of its maker, was taken as anything other than the firm intent of the Allied leadership, and of the Jews who were allegedly behind them. Two common citations, each of which appeared in many pamphlets and articles, are typical. One Reverend Whipp, an Anglican cleric, had a letter published in September 1940 that said: "The orders for the Royal Air Force's bombers should be: Wipe out the Germans. I say it plainly. If I could wipe Germany from the map, I would. The more Nazis are killed, the happier I am." A correspondent for the British *Daily Express* wrote on February 9, 1943:

After the war is over, one must cut the German claws, take away all their industry, establish a quarantine around Germany, and let the Germans stew for a generation in their own juices. No one in Britain or America needs to concern himself if they perish as a result. Whole nations have been exterminated in the past. What remains of the Aztecs, for example?⁵³

There were also statements by more prominent Allied leaders (e.g., Duff Cooper, Lord Vansittart, the Morgenthau Plan) that the Nazis eagerly repeated. The claims bombarded Germans from many directions.⁵⁴

The Nazis spent considerable effort attempting to persuade Germans that such statements were not the isolated statements of crackpots or people of no influence. We have already seen that the totally insignificant Theodore N. Kaufman was transformed into a member of Roosevelt's Brain Trust, even allegedly taking dictation from the president. Repeatedly, Germans were told that Germany's enemies, most notably the Jews, were not speaking metaphorically when they talked of destroying Germany and the Germans. In November 1941, Goebbels wrote in *Das Reich* that Germany's enemies were not in full agreement about exactly what to do to Germany.

One calls for the dissolution of our military and economic unity, another for dividing us into smaller states, a third for birth control and the reduction of our

population to ten million, a fourth for the sterilization of every one of us under the age of sixty. But they all agree on one thing: in the firm resolve that if they once again defeat Germany, we must this time be crushed, destroyed, exterminated, and wiped out.⁵⁵

It is hard to be more forceful than that.

Nazi propaganda worked to persuade Germans that, were Germany's enemies to win the war, they would not go just after Nazi leaders, particularly when internal reports after Stalingrad found that many citizens expected that the Russians would hang leading Nazis and leave average citizens alone. The party launched one of its anti-Bolshevist propaganda campaigns in February 1943, just after Goebbels' "Total War" speech. One of the main points was:

The fate that would befall the German people, each person without exception, under Bolshevism must be made clear. As the Führer said in his proclamation [of January 30, 1943], the lot of millions of Germans would be the hardest and most miserable slave labor in the Siberian tundra. The wretched existence of millions of working people in the Soviet Union, the ruthless system of forced labor, and the horrible conditions in the forced labor camps speak clearly and make brutally clear what the fate of our working people would be.⁵⁶

Goebbels stressed looming danger in a major anti-Semitic article in early May 1943: "Do not think that the Old Testament tirades of their newspapers and radio are merely political propaganda. They would carry it all out to the letter, should they have the opportunity."⁵⁷ Or as Goitsch wrote late in 1944:

The enemy war leadership has proved in these five years that this is a concrete plan, not mere fantasy. The extermination and enslavement of not only the German, but all the European peoples, is at the center of the enemy's goals.⁵⁸

Nazism's propagandists realized that citizens had read so many claims that Jews were out to destroy them that the media had lost much of their power. They therefore stressed the theme in injunctions to propagandists at the lower level. Propaganda ring newsletters encouraged propagandists to press the argument that Jews were out to destroy everything German. For example, the ring newsletter for the Wester-Ems region carried a standard list of quotations with dire threats against Germany, noting that they were particularly appropriate for word-of-mouth propaganda.⁵⁹

With various twists and turns in emphasis and intensity, the basic argument from summer 1941 to the end of the war was that the Allies, directed by the Jews, intended the complete destruction of the German nation, at the least the deportation of much of its workforce to Siberia and the reduction of the rest to an agrarian life, and at the worst their physical extermination. Repeatedly, the claim was made that this was not an excess of propaganda, rather the plainly stated intent of Germany's enemies that they fully intended to realize.

The Nazi Argument for Exterminating Jews

Given the steady Nazi claim that losing the war meant losing everything, the corresponding Nazi assertion that they were out to exterminate the Jews takes on

added clarity. The Nazis used exactly the same words to describe their intentions for the Jews that they used about Jewish intentions for Germany: destroy, exterminate, extirpate, and wipe out, but with greater circumspection.

In contrast to their remarkably wide range of citations from the Allied side, the Nazi media did not need to cite obscure priests or crackpots. They could and did cite Hitler himself, who regularly stated that he meant his words literally. We have already considered Hitler's January 30, 1939 speech, which at the time did not necessarily imply physical annihilation. When it was repeated in a "Quotation of the Week" poster in mid-September 1941, in the midst of an anti-Semitic campaign, it did.⁶⁰ A review of Hitler's public statements reveals his continuing emphasis:

January 30, 1941: "I would not like to forget to repeat the advice that I gave before the German Reichstag on September 1, 1939 [*sic*]; namely, the advice that should the outside world allow itself to be plunged into a general war by Jewry, then all of Jewry will be finished in Europe! They may still laugh about this today, just as they earlier laughed about my prophesies. The coming months and years will show that I have foreseen things correctly this time also."

January 1, 1942: "The Jew will not exterminate the European peoples, he will instead become the victim of his own plot."

January 30, 1942: "I wish to avoid making hasty prophesies, but this war will not end as the Jews imagine, namely, in the extermination of the European-Aryan peoples; instead, the result of this war will be the annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of Jewry."

September 30, 1942: Hitler said that he told the Reichstag on September 1, 1939 [*sic*] that: "should Jewry instigate an international world war in order to exterminate the Aryan people of Europe, then not the Aryan people will be exterminated, but the Jews."

November 8, 1942: "You will remember the Reichstag session in which I declared: should Jewry imagine itself to be able to bring about an international world war for the extermination of the European races, then the result will not be the extermination of the European races, but instead the extermination of Jewry in Europe."

February 24, 1943: "This fight will not end with the planned annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of the Aryan but with the extermination of the Jew in Europe."⁶¹

The concentration of such statements in 1942, when mass executions were in progress, is striking. One should also remember that Hitler made many more such statements in private meetings.

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of Hitler's speeches during the Nazi period. They were the focus of enormous attention. Every effort was made to encourage people to listen to the speeches when they were delivered, whether at home or in public places. Restaurants and pubs turned on their radios, public loudspeakers broadcast them, and citizens were expected to listen attentively (which they often, but not always, did). Newspapers generally carried the texts of the speeches, with key passages highlighted. The following week's newsreel usually carried a segment. The texts were printed in books and pamphlets. The *Parole der Woche* carried Hitler's

extermination threat of September 30, 1942 (with his incorrect date). Its headline was: "They will stop laughing!!!"⁶² And people paid heed. Confidential morale reports found that people read Hitler's speeches with great care, sometimes picking out a sentence or phrase and speculating at length as to its meaning. The public was more interested in his statements on the war than on the Jews (for example, people discussed his promises of new weapons at length), but took note when he said something new about them.

Hitler was not the only public figure threatening the Jews with annihilation. Goebbels made frequent statements in speeches and articles. He began one of his most vehement anti-Semitic articles in November 1941 by looking back to Hitler's January 30, 1939 speech (and unlike Hitler, he got the date right). He wrote:

The Jews are receiving a penalty that is certainly hard, but more than deserved. World Jewry erred in adding up the forces available to it for this war, and now is gradually experiencing the destruction that it planned for us, and would have carried out without a second thought if it had possessed the ability.⁶³

In May 1943, he wrote:

None of the Führer's prophetic words has come so inevitably true as his prediction that if Jewry succeeded in provoking a second world war, the result would be not the destruction of the Aryan race, rather the wiping out of the Jewish race.⁶⁴

There are many more such statements in his articles and speeches.⁶⁵

Two major anti-Semitic films released in fall 1940 hinted at genocide. *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), a vituperative pseudo-documentary, closed with Hitler giving his threatening "prophecy" of January 30, 1939. *Jud Süß*, a historical drama set in the 18th century, ended with the Jewish villain hung and all Jews being driven from Stuttgart. The film's close made it clear that the example should be followed by later generations. Both films received the full support of the propaganda system, and were shown for the remainder of the war by the well-developed party film system that included trucks with projection equipment to bring films to areas without a movie theater.

The press was more cautious in making the argument for destruction, apart from the regular quotations from Hitler's speeches and Goebbels' articles, although their statements were clear enough. The *Zeitschriften-Dienst* instructed editors in April 1943, for example, that: "The destruction of Jewry is no loss for humanity, rather just as beneficial for the peoples of the earth as the death penalty or imprisonment for criminals."⁶⁶

The major exception was Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer*, which regularly called for the destruction or extermination of the Jews.⁶⁷ He even published a book of children's stories in 1940 comparing Jews to various unpleasant animals. Some concluded with direct calls for extermination. For example, a story comparing Jews to poisonous snakes ended:

Just as the danger of poisonous snakes is eliminated only when one has completely eradicated poisonous snakes, the Jewish question will only be solved when Jewry is destroyed. . . . If we do not kill the Jewish poisonous serpent, it will kill us!⁶⁸

Since even some Nazis saw Streicher as a crackpot, his repeated calls for extermination did not carry the persuasive force of Hitler or Goebbels, but neither were they insignificant.⁶⁹

The most insidious press appearance of the argument was in May 1943, with the claim that some in Allied countries favored the death of the Jews. The British press had carried a variety of articles about growing domestic anti-Semitism, which the Nazis found excellent material for their propaganda. Many newspapers, including the *Völkischer Beobachter*, quoted a British sailor's comment to a journalist on May 13: "The sooner the Jews are destroyed, the better off the world will be."⁷⁰

Still, the mass media were generally discreet for pragmatic reasons. The Nazis were sensitive to public opinion, both domestic and international, and knew that revealing details of the Holocaust would do their cause no good. They thus held most mass media material to vague, if ominous, generalities. The *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, for example, carried this order in December 1943: "Details on German measures in the Eastern Jewish areas now under German control may not be mentioned by magazines."⁷¹ By then, the major killing had finished.

Speakers and Word-of-Mouth Propaganda

There was, however, another way to get the message across. When the Nazis wanted to reach the public with an argument that was awkward to present in the press (and which increasingly lacked credibility), they turned to speakers and word-of-mouth propaganda. Things could be said that could not be printed. Speakers, in fact, were regularly told that they were to say things that newspapers could not print.

The argument was stated cautiously, but more directly than in the mass media. Just after Stalingrad, all of the *Gau* newsletters repeated Goebbels' statement that the Jews were responsible for the death of every single German soldier, and that they would have to pay. In the context, the nature of that payment was clear. Each German had to take a stand on the matter, propagandists were told. They were to press their fellow citizens to affirm anti-Semitic views. But there were more explicit statements. The newsletter for propagandists in *Gau Pommern* stated in 1943:

As long as a single Jew remains in the world, he will not stop spreading poison about Germany. The existence of a single Jew is a source of infection against which we must protect ourselves. That protection lies only in the most radical and determined action.⁷²

The *Gau Franconia* newsletter put it more bluntly, as one might perhaps expect from Julius Streicher's *Gau*, even if he had been deposed for corruption in 1939. Propaganda's goal was to present the Jew to people such that they would realize:

Here is your enemy, who will give you no rest as long as he lives. You know your enemy and his methods. Render him harmless. We know the Jew, we have him by the throat, and we will not let go until the breath has gone out of him. There can be no mercy with such a pitiless enemy. One can only fight back according to the Jewish motto: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."⁷³

In such quotations, and in such a context, it is hard to imagine any meaning other than mass killing.

Speakers were provided with a fuller version of the statement by the English sailor cited earlier, including these words that all newspaper articles omitted: “**The sooner Hitler destroys those five million Jews, the better off the world will be.**”⁷⁴ The addition of the figure of “five million” gave concreteness to annihilation that the standard general statements lacked. It was too blunt to print.⁷⁵

During the first half of 1943, the party conducted two anti-Semitic propaganda campaigns in which its speakers were instructed to make the case forcefully. On May 5, 1943, speakers were told to stress anti-Semitism in every speech they gave: “This war will end with an anti-Semitic world revolution and the destruction of the Jews in the entire world.”⁷⁶ Two weeks later, the point was emphasized again in a directive titled “Twilight of the Jews Throughout the World”⁷⁷ and, to make sure speakers got the point, a month later they were told that only the “total destruction” of the Jews and Bolshevism could bring peace.⁷⁸

Since there were thousands of Nazi speakers reaching every part of the country, the message was surely heard. For example, the *Gauleiter* of Baden-Elsaß made an explicit claim in May 1943 that the Jews would die when speaking to a mass meeting: “**Either the Jew will exterminate us, or we will exterminate the Jew. As terrible as this alternative may seem, we did not bring the idea into the life of the nations, rather world Jewry did.**”⁷⁹ This was blunter than what people normally read, and much similar material probably did not make the newspapers, since they had few pages to give over to speech reports due to paper shortages (in the speech just cited, the speaker was the regional party leader, someone a newspaper editor could not ignore). The message gained added force by being delivered in person by forceful speakers. It was one thing to read the passage cited earlier, in which a foreigner hoped that Hitler would destroy the Jews. It was more immediate when a speaker cited the same passage—and added that five million Jews should die. A speaker was unlikely to suggest that Germans should be less anti-Semitic than a British sailor.

Many *Gau* propaganda ring newsletters had ceased publication due to paper shortages and the “total war” effort by fall 1944, but other materials reaching lower-level propagandists were explicitly murderous from mid-1944 to the end. Goebbels’ *Reichspropagandaleitung* and Robert Ley’s *Reichsorganisationsleitung* jointly began publishing the *Sprechabenddienst* in December 1943, which went to county and local group propaganda leaders.⁸⁰ It provided guidance for the regular discussion meetings they held for citizens of their area, and contained a great deal of anti-Semitic material, including regular accusations that the Jews and their puppets were out to destroy Germany. The September/October 1944 issue carried an article titled “To Know the Jews is to Understand the Meaning of the War.” After a review of the familiar Nazi accusations, it concluded:

Who in this struggle can still speak of pity, brotherly love, etc.? Who believes that a parasite (e.g., a louse) can be improved or changed? . . . We can only choose between being devoured by the parasite or destroying it. **The Jew must be destroyed**

wherever we meet him! In doing so, we commit no crime against life, rather serve life's law of struggle, which always oppose that which is an enemy to healthy life.⁸¹

This fit clearly with Nazism's Darwinian approach to the natural world, since its propaganda regularly claimed that less fit races deserved to perish, just as less fit animals or plants.

The *Reichspropagandaleitung* put out a newsletter late in the war intended for local group leaders. It repeated the familiar arguments, including quotations from Kaufman, that the Jews intended the physical annihilation of Germany. In January 1945, it regretted that Nazi propaganda had sometimes lost "the clear and consistent line that is a foundation of National Socialist struggle: **Death to the Jews.**" The final phrase was also the article's title.⁸²

To recapitulate, the Nazis claimed that Jews were attempting to destroy Germany in a physical sense, stressing that their words were not the result of rhetorical excess, but of a coldly serious plan. The only response was to destroy the Jews, once again in a literal sense. The propaganda ring newsletter for *Gau Moselland* made the connection clearly in November 1941, after a discussion of Kaufman's pamphlet:

The Führer made the claim in one of his major speeches before the war began: "If the Jews should succeed in plunging the European peoples into a bloody war once more, these peoples and nations will not perish, rather the Jews will be destroyed." It was a hard, pitiless statement that many did not take seriously, interpreting it only in an allegorical manner. But the Jews knew that a death warrant stood behind this prophecy that would inevitably come to pass if plutocracy and Bolshevism one day collapsed, and were replaced by a new world order.⁸³

Even in 1941, the point is that Hitler's words should be taken literally—and that was when it still seemed that Germany would win the war.

The frequent Nazi claim that the Jews were out to destroy Germany became inextricably linked to the less frequent argument for murdering Jews: it was kill or be killed. Germans grew used to hearing the words "destruction" and "extermination" applied both to themselves and to Jews. Gradually, the terms became, if not comfortable, at least familiar. The idea of the death of the Jews became acceptable.

How Credible was the Argument?

That brings us to the final questions. What was the impact of the argument? Did Germans believe that the Jews in fact intended their extermination, and that the Nazis intended to exterminate the Jews?⁸⁴ Was German anti-Semitism increased as a result?⁸⁵ These are tangled questions without simple answers.

The general scholarly issue regarding the impact of German anti-Semitic propaganda centers on the degree to which it persuaded Germans to be anti-Semitic. Otto Dov Kulka summarizes the disagreement in this way:

One interpretation holds that the silence or general passivity toward the fate of the Jews was the result of indifference, of not knowing or not wanting to know, or, alternatively, of a repression of such knowledge. The second interpretation views the absence of a pronounced reaction and the general passivity toward the physical

annihilation of the Jews as the expression of a broad consensus on the government's policy, a kind of tacit agreement that there was no need to take an active stand on the subject. This analysis views the emerging passive orientation as the cumulative effect of the German population's gradual internalization and assimilation of the claims and content of the war propaganda on the country's "life and death struggle" against the driving force behind its enemies.⁸⁶

The first interpretation is held by scholars like Ian Kershaw.⁸⁷ The extreme version of the second interpretation is held by Daniel Goldhagen.⁸⁸ The fresh material in this essay supports the first interpretation, suggesting that the German response to the Nazi anti-Semitic argument was more indifference than internalization. Despite the steady anti-Semitic propaganda we have surveyed, Nazi internal communication consistently worried about the lack of passionate anti-Semitism on the part of the German population.⁸⁹

Anti-Semitism increased gradually as the war went on. For the first two years, most Germans did not pay much heed to the alleged Jewish threat, since there seemed little chance the Jews would be able to do anything to Germany. Propaganda emphasized Germany's other enemies, and the Nazis were winning the war. The Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD) of the SS provided confidential reports on public morale until 1943, when Goebbels had them eliminated because they too accurately reflected public doubts about the war.⁹⁰ A July 1941 SD report, written after the first appearance of the Kaufman story, noted that people read newspaper accounts with interest, but without any particular concern. "Frequently, there were characteristic expressions of popular humor: 'Sure, they would if they could.'" It did seem to strengthen anti-Semitic attitudes, but others saw it as propagandistic preparation for the expected entrance of the United States into the war.⁹¹

In the national euphoria of the first months of the Russian campaign—as late as October 10, 1941, the party newspaper's headline was "The Great Hour has Come: The Campaign in the East is Decided"⁹²—Germans were more interested in approaching victory than in dealing with the Jews, who seemed defeated. Goebbels himself wrote the Jews off as a threat in July 1941: "The Jews talk as if they were really strong, but soon they will have to move their tents and run like rabbits from the approaching German soldiers."⁹³

An SD report in November 1941 noted that Diewerge's pamphlet had had a favorable effect, but that the message was getting across slowly.⁹⁴ Although the SD reports are relatively objective as Nazi sources go, they were written by fanatic Nazis (Otto Ohlendorf, the editor, was executed after the war for his role in the murder of 90,000 people, mostly Jews, in the Soviet Union) who wanted to see what the Nazis thought was true, even if that sometimes required ignoring or minimizing contradictory evidence. If the report claimed that the message was getting across slowly, not the result the Nazis wished for, it is probably an accurate observation. The winter battles, however, made Germans more aware of the war's gravity, and probably more susceptible to anti-Semitic propaganda. A spring 1942 report from Detmold found the pamphlet had been effective in persuading even those not friendly toward the Nazis that Jewish revenge was to be feared.⁹⁵ Another report from about the same

time stated that many had been convinced of Jewish responsibility for the war by Kaufman's pamphlet.⁹⁶

As the war situation worsened, Germans began to worry more about what might happen in the event the war ended badly. By the time of Stalingrad, morale reports found that people feared the retribution that would follow a lost war.⁹⁷ Germans knew enough to realize that the rest of the world, and in particular the Jews, had reason for revenge. However, even then people tended to direct their enmity toward the immediate threat of enemy bombers that appeared every day rather than the distant Soviets or the even more distant Jews. The constant stream of articles about Allied plans for Germany even tended to backfire. People got tired of reading them, but as an SD report noted, they also discouraged citizens, since they suggested that the Allies were so confident of victory that they had no hesitation about telling the Germans what would happen to them once the war was over.⁹⁸

Moreover, the Nazis had announced so many Allied threats to dismember Germany and kill its population that they had lost their news value. Even real Allied plans (for example, to strip Germany of significant parts of its territory) failed to upset people greatly. As a morale report noted in November 1944, people expected Germany to lose territory to its neighbors after the war, but did not think that being part of France, Belgium, or Holland would be all that bad. It would probably save them from Bolshevism.⁹⁹ The Soviets were another matter. The mass migrations of people fleeing toward the west as the Red Army approached were testimony both to the effectiveness of anti-Bolshevist propaganda and to the knowledge Germans had of what their country had done to the Soviet Union.

Despite constant propaganda that the Allies would make no distinctions, but would view every German as an enemy to be killed or shipped to Siberia, Germans in general failed to accept the argument. Germans made a clear distinction between the Western Allies and the Soviets, despite propaganda's claims that the same murderous Jewish spirit guided both. Even Goebbels, despite his regular claims that the British and Americans were as bad as the Soviets, suggested that his wife flee with their six children toward the west (though in the end, he and his wife killed their children before themselves committing suicide).

Moreover, the Germans were weary of war that had no prospect of success. After the failure of the Ardennes offensive in December 1944, there were no reasonable grounds to hope the war could end well. Bad things might happen if Germany lost the war, but bad things were already happening as the leveling of German cities continued, as enemy armies approached from all directions, and as more death announcements appeared in the newspapers. By spring 1945, morale reports found that citizens were saying "Better an end with its horrors than horrors without end."¹⁰⁰

In the end, Germans determined that, despite Nazi claims that the war was a matter of life and death, it was not. Nazi threats of the Werewolves, who would wage partisan warfare, proved empty. Germans generally accepted the Allies with little open resistance, and endured less misery than Nazi propaganda had threatened (although one should not forget the millions of refugees, many of whom died or lost all they had, or the estimated two million German women raped, generally by Soviet troops).

The Plausibility of Genocide

What about propaganda's accurate claim that the Jews would be exterminated? It is clear from my analysis that the Nazi argument for killing the Jews followed in time the argument that the Jews were planning to destroy Germany. Hitler's January 30, 1941 comments were among the mildest of his threats against the Jews, and he was largely silent in public on the matter for the remainder of the year, although he spoke often on it in private conversations. The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 brought with it a burst of claims that the Jews were out to destroy Germany. Kaufman's material was only the most spectacular. Once the alleged Jewish plan to destroy Germany had been driven into public consciousness, the propaganda system began in November 1941 to build the argument for genocide, which grew in intensity as the war situation worsened. It presented genocide as a necessary defense against dreadful enemy intentions.

What Germans knew, and when they knew it, is still a controversial topic. By the sobering winter of 1941–1942 much information was circulating, based on rumor, reports from soldiers, and vague media coverage. Although propaganda treated the military situation in an optimistic manner, in fact the German offensive stalled, the military was not prepared for winter in the field, and the Russians counter-attacked with determination. The leadership realized the gravity of the situation, and the public could not be entirely deceived. Propaganda began to present the alleged Jewish threat with growing intensity. In his January 30, 1942 speech, Hitler recalled his earlier threat that the Jews would be destroyed in a new war. The public took notice. The SD report found that people attended to his statement that Germany would demand “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” and concluded that “the Führer's battle against Jewry would be fought to a pitiless conclusion, and that soon the last Jew would be driven from European soil.”¹⁰¹ Germans did not seem to expect mass murder, but Hitler's language suggested to them that Jews would suffer. They were not distressed at the prospect.

As the war situation worsened and the Nazis intensified their anti-Semitic propaganda, the German public found itself in an unpleasant situation. Enough had been said already to convince any attentive citizen that dreadful things were being done to the Jews (and on the Eastern front in general). People were at least peripherally aware that the Nazis were carrying out their publicly stated threats to deal with the Jews. Although many, probably most, Germans suspected enough of what was happening to make them uncomfortable, the general reaction was to think of pleasanter, or at least more immediate, matters. As J. P. Stern put it, Germans knew enough to know that they did not want to know any more.¹⁰² On a similar line, David Bankier argues that steady anti-Semitism had a numbing effect: “the more that Goebbels raised the issue, the more the public manifested fatigue; the more that news of mass murder filtered through, the less the public wanted to be involved in the final solution to the Jewish question.”¹⁰³ In short, most Germans could make themselves think of other things, and most did.¹⁰⁴ Still, their knowledge of what Nazi propaganda was saying could not but make them uneasy.

Just as the Nazis did not need to persuade all Germans to be fanatical anti-Semites (it was enough if most were indifferent to the fate of the Jews), so also it was not necessary to persuade the population actively to support genocide. In fact, the Nazis did all they could to keep specific details from reaching the public.¹⁰⁵ It was enough if most citizens were willing to accept the idea in the back of their minds. Nazi propaganda in this regard was “a hint of a possibility,” in Meyer zu Uptrup’s words.¹⁰⁶ The Nazis realized that attitudes changed gradually, and that the majority of the German population did not share their murderous intent toward the Jews. Whenever they took sudden action against the Jews (e.g., the 1933 boycott or the 1938 pogrom), there was significant popular discomfort. Had the Nazis announced clearly what they were doing in 1941, or even 1944, most Germans would have been shocked. Just as gradually increasing anti-Semitic measures were accepted by the German public before the war, so gradually increasingly murderous anti-Semitic rhetoric was accepted. Had the Nazis won the war, the German public would not have been concerned about what had become of the Jews. The Nazis would not have publicized the details, and the general public feeling would probably have been that unpleasant things had happened, but that the Jews had deserved most of it. Victory would have made it easy to forget what Germans had never quite known for sure.

The Nazi attempt to justify the policy of genocide on the grounds that the enemy intended the same toward Germany was not fully accepted by the German population, but it had some success. It persuaded Germans that, at the least, losing the war would have most unpleasant consequences, and they held out almost to the end. The constant accusations they read and heard that the Jews were out to destroy, wipe out, exterminate, or extirpate them made the hints provided by the less frequent (but more accurate) claims that Germany intended the same for the Jews more acceptable. Germans did not have to want to kill the Jews themselves; they only had to be willing to let others do it for them.

Nazi rhetoric followed a careful and consistent plan in presenting the alleged Jewish threat to Germany. As this essay has shown, the expressions of anti-Semitism in the mass media that have been widely discussed in the literature were reinforced and intensified in the less visible forums of public meetings and conversations, arenas more immediate and sometimes more credible. This is consistent with the general Nazi emphasis on word-of-mouth propaganda. It is not enough to focus on Nazism’s public anti-Semitic rhetoric, as most previous studies have done. It is also critical to consider what happened in channels outside the mass media, channels that allowed Nazi propaganda to be blunter in stating the message, with little risk of adverse foreign publicity.

As a postscript, it may be noted that the Nazi argument for genocide is used today by neo-Nazis and revisionists, who still claim that Kaufman and those like him were speaking for “World Jewry.” The revisionist David Irving, for example, who is better at assiduous research than in drawing reasonable conclusions, cites Kaufman’s book as a reason for Nazi anti-Semitic measures, asserting that *Time* magazine gave it high praise.¹⁰⁷ He obviously did not read what the magazine actually wrote. At Irving’s annual revisionist conference on “Real History” held in Cincinnati in August 2003,

amateur historian Charles Provan even argued that Kaufman's book was the cause of Hitler's decision to kill the Jews.¹⁰⁸

Although the Allies did not sterilize the German population or erase Germany from the map, revisionists argue, Hitler and his regime were justified in their campaign against the Jews. It was, after all, only self defense. If such nonsense is believed even today, it perhaps helps to explain why ordinary Germans during World War II could read and hear the same claims and give them at least some credibility.

Notes

- [1] For an excellent study of the development of Nazi genocidal policy, see Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).
- [2] For a good summary of Hitler's thinking, see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 461–495. For Goebbels' role, see Christian T. Barth, *Goebbels und die Juden* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003) and Wolfram Meyer zu Utrup, *Kampf gegen die "Jüdische Weltverschwörung": Propaganda und Antisemitismus der Nationalsozialisten 1919–1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003).
- [3] Max Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations 1932–1945*, trans. Mary Fran Gilbert, 4 vols. (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1990–2004), vol. III, 1439. Still, newspapers captioned that section of Hitler's speech in alarming ways. One heading was: "War means the destruction of the Jewish race." See "Schaffende der Welt, erkennt euren gemeinsamen Feind," *Westfälische Neueste Nachrichten* (Bielefeld), January 31, 1939.
- [4] These are all strong words in German although, as in any language, meaning is dependent on context. *Vernichten* is the most general since it, like the English "destroy," has no necessary biological implication. *Auslöschen* can mean extinguish, wipe out, or obliterate. *Ausrotten* has clear biological implications. It is the word one uses when speaking of the elimination of pests, and implies their death. *Ausmerzen* typically carries a biological significance as well. The last three all suggest finality.
- [5] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 65.
- [6] Willi A. Boelcke, *The Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels: The Nazi Propaganda War 1939–43*, trans. Ewald Osers (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 8.
- [7] Domarus, III/1910.
- [8] For background information on the *Parole der Woche*, see Franz-Josef Heyen, *Parole der Woche: Eine Wandzeitung im Dritten Reich 1936–1943* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983). The circulation figure is based on "Die Arbeit der Partei-Propaganda im Kriege," *Unser Wille und Weg* 11 (1941), which claimed that eight million copies had been printed since the beginning of the war. A full translation of the article is available at the German Propaganda Archive: <http://www.calvin.edu/cas/gpa/warprop.htm>. Future references to the GPA will take this form: GPA/title.htm.
- [9] *Parole der Woche* (PdW), #49/1939.
- [10] PdW #33/1940. It is reprinted in Heyen, 76.
- [11] PdW #10/1940, #12/1940, and #10/1941.
- [12] Domarus, IV/2446.
- [13] Domarus, IV/2451.
- [14] *Mitteilungsblatt des Gaupropagandaamts Oberdonau*, July 1941, 2.
- [15] The article is dated July 6, 1941. Joseph Goebbels, *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel: Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1939/40/41* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1941), 524. See GPA/goeb15.htm.
- [16] Joseph Goebbels, *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel*, 528. See GPA/goeb18.htm.

- [17] *Warum Krieg mit Stalin? Das Rotbuch der Anti-Komintern* (Berlin: Niebelungen-Verlag, 1941). The book was hurriedly prepared and based on old material. The party propaganda system did not promote it heavily. See “Vertrieb der Broschüre ‘Warum Krieg mit Stalin?’” *Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP* (Munich: K. G. Sauer, 1983–1992), part II, vol. 2, microfiche 140, frame 58674.
- [18] See Wolfgang Diewerge, *Deutsche Soldaten sehen die Sowjet-Union: Feldpostbriefe aus dem Osten* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert, 1941) and *Das Sowjet-Paradies: Ausstellung der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP* (Berlin: Franz Eher, 1942). See GPA/feldpost.htm and GPA/paradise.htm.
- [19] Theodore N. Kaufman, *Germany Must Perish!* (Newark, NJ: Argyle Press, 1941), 3. Kaufman also shipped copies to England, where they were rubber-stamped with the imprint of The Mitre Press.
- [20] For background on Kaufman’s pamphlet, see Wolfgang Benz, “Judenvernichtung aus Notwehr? Die Legenden um Theodore N. Kaufman,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29 (1981), 615–630.
- [21] See, for example, his creative citation of *Time*’s review of his book, “A Modest Proposal,” March 24, 1941, 95–96, which he used in a second printing, this time in paperback, in fall 1941.
- [22] Kaufman’s full name was Theodore Newman Kaufman. He published his book under the name Theodore N. Kaufman. The Nazis managed numerous variants of the spelling. The most interesting error was giving him the middle name “Nathan.” Sometimes, he became “Nathan Kaufmann.” The incorrect middle name was probably added to make the name sound more Jewish.
- [23] “Roosevelt fordert die Sterilisierung des deutschen Volkes,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 24, 1941, 1. The article fit into a general anti-American campaign then in progress. The previous day, newspapers reported the “sensational” discovery that pictures of Franklin Roosevelt in a Masonic lodge had been discovered in Norway. The Nazis considered the Freemasons to be part of the international Jewish conspiracy. The rest of the world did not find the photographs surprising, since Roosevelt’s Masonic membership was listed in his *Who’s Who* entry.
- [24] For other examples, see the *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 16, 1941, August 17, 1941, September 15, 1941, and February 11, 1943.
- [25] Theodore N. Kaufman, “‘Deutschland muß untergehen’: Ein Vorschlag zum ewigen Frieden,” *Das Reich*, August 3, 1941, 3.
- [26] See Browning, 318–322, 370–373.
- [27] Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: K. G. Sauer, 1997–2001), Part II, vol. 1, 168–169.
- [28] In his diary entry for October 26, 1941, Goebbels notes that the British press was claiming that Kaufman’s book was of no significance: “But that does not interest us in the least. We pay no attention. The important thing is that his opinion is brought to the attention of the German people and that the German people receive new strength from it.” Fröhlich, II/2, 155, 180. Goebbels also realized that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a forgery, but that did not affect his view of its usefulness as propaganda.
- [29] Wolfgang Diewerge, *Das Kriegsziel der Weltplutokratie* (Berlin: Franz Eher, 1941). See GPA/kriegsziel.htm.
- [30] Fröhlich, II/1, 334.
- [31] Fröhlich, II/1, 328.
- [32] Howard K. Smith, *Last Train from Berlin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), 183.
- [33] See GPA/zeichnen.htm.
- [34] Diewerge, *Kriegsziel*, 24–25.
- [35] Diewerge, *Kriegsziel*, 30. The emphasis is in the original.
- [36] *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, October 3, 1941, 19.

- [37] "Aufgaben der Frauen- und Familienzeitschriften im dritten Kriegswinter," *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, October 10, 1941, 17.
- [38] Heinz Schwaibold, "So wollen sie uns vernichten," *NS Frauen-Warte*, #10/1941, 144.
- [39] See "Die Vernichtungspläne Unserer Gegner," *Politischer Dienst*, Nr. 47 (August 26, 1943), 2, and "Die jüdische Vernichtungspläne und der Luftterror," Nr. 63 (September 17, 1943), 1.
- [40] *Politischer Zitaten-Dienst*, packets for April 24, 1943 and September 10, 1943. The cards themselves are undated, but the Hoover Institution at Stanford University has them in their original dated wrappings.
- [41] For background on the Nazi speaker system, see Ross Scanlan, "The Nazi Party Speaker System," *Speech Monographs* 16 (1949), 82–97 and "The Nazi Party Speaker System, II," *Speech Monographs* 17 (1950), 134–148. See also Randall L. Bytwerk, *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 71–88.
- [42] *Aufklärungs- und Redner-Informationsmaterial der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP und das Propagandaamt der Deutschen Arbeitsfront*, Lieferung 12 (December 1941). There were later reminders to speakers to emphasize the theme.
- [43] *Redner-Schnellinformation*, Lieferung 46, November 6, 1942. The *Redner-Aufklärungsmaterial* and the *Redner-Schellinformation* were issued by different departments of the *Reichspropagandaleitung*. The first was intended to provide long-term reference material for speakers, the second guidance for immediate campaigns.
- [44] Bundesarchiv Berlin, NSD 12/17, "Redner-Information für Frauenversammlungen."
- [45] For details on the Reich Ring, see Walter Tießler, "Der Reichsring für Nat.-Soz. Propaganda und Volksaufklärung," *Unser Wille und Weg* 5 (1935), 412–416.
- [46] *Mitteilungsblatt des Gaurings für nationalsozialistische Propaganda und Volksaufklärung im Gaupropagandaamt Ostpreussen*, February 1944, 38.
- [47] *Mitteilungen des Gauringes für nationalsozialistische Propaganda u. Volksaufklärung NSDAP. Gau Moselland*, October 1941, 34. Similar injunctions are found in other *Gau* ring newsletters. The entire party propaganda apparatus was mobilized to promote the pamphlet.
- [48] Reprinted in Heyen, 92.
- [49] The party also published a playing card-sized edition with part of the contents of each issue of the *Parole der Woche*. It was often pasted to the back of official correspondence. See [GPA/parole.htm](#) for an illustration of this one.
- [50] Reprinted in Heyen, 110.
- [51] The poster is available at [GPA/posters/sterben.jpg](#).
- [52] Heinrich Goitsch, *Niemals!* (Berlin: Franz Eher, 1944). See [GPA/niemals.htm](#).
- [53] Goitsch, 32–33. His pamphlet is probably the best catalog of such quotations. The Whipp quotation also appeared in the *Politischer Zitaten-Dienst* in 1943.
- [54] For more examples, see Ernst K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda 1925–1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1965), 396–402; Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 245–247; Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War That Hitler Won: The Most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1978), 361–365; and Meyer zu Uptrup, 386–395, 442–446.
- [55] Joseph Goebbels, *Das eherne Herz: Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1941/42* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1943), 81. See [GPA/goeb3.htm](#).
- [56] Bundesarchiv Berlin, NSD 12/74, "Anweisung für antibolschewistische Propaganda-Aktion," February 20, 1943. See [GPA/bolshevist.htm](#).
- [57] Goebbels, *Der steile Aufstieg*, 265–266. See [GPA/goeb37.htm](#).
- [58] Goitsch, 9.
- [59] "Das Kriegsziel unserer Gegner," *Propagandaring Weser-Ems*, March 1942, 6. Like much of the material in these newsletters, the collection of quotations was prepared by the *Reichspropagandaleitung* office in Berlin and sent to the lower offices to pass on.

- [60] *Wochenspruch der NSDAP*, #37/1941, September 7–13. This was a small weekly poster, each of which carried an inspiring quotation, often from Hitler or another Nazi leader. For examples, see GPA/ws.htm.
- [61] Domarus, IV/2367, 2564, 2574, 2679, 2700, 2763.
- [62] PdW, #44/1942, October 28.
- [63] Goebbels, *Das eherne Herz*, 85. See GPA/goeb1.htm.
- [64] Goebbels, *Der steile Aufstieg*, 265–266. See GPA/goeb37.htm.
- [65] For a comprehensive study of Goebbels' public and private remarks on the Jews, including the regular use of words such as "extermination" and "destruction," see Barth, *Goebbels und die Juden*.
- [66] "Juden sind Verbrecher," *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, April 2, 1943, 2.
- [67] For examples, see Randall L. Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher: Nazi Editor of the Notorious Anti-Semitic Newspaper Der Stürmer*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cooper Square, 2001), 161–170.
- [68] Ernst Hiemer, *Der Pudelmopsdackelpinscher* (Nuremberg: Der Stürmer Buchverlag, 1940), 73–74. See GPA/pudel.htm.
- [69] Goebbels even tried to eliminate *Der Stürmer* in 1941 and use its paper allocation to increase the circulation of his *Das Reich*, but Hitler rejected the proposal and allowed Streicher to continue publishing until the end of the war.
- [70] "Auf dem Tag, an dem es keine Juden mehr in die Welt gibt!" *Völkischer Beobachter*, May 13, 1943, 3. I checked a dozen other German daily newspapers. All carried a version of the story.
- [71] "Das Ostjudentum—Reservoir des Weltjudentums," *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, December 10, 1943, 2.
- [72] Wolfgang Hultsch, "Der Jude bleibt der erste Feind!" *Der Gauring: Mitteilungsblatt der Gaupropagandaleitung Pommern*, May/June 1943, 3
- [73] *Mitteilungen des Gauringes Franken*, July 1, 1943, 6.
- [74] *Redner-Schnellinformation*, Lieferung 60, May 18, 1943. Emphasis in the original.
- [75] I checked a range of German magazines, and found the figure in only one magazine, and a peculiar one at that: the Nazi magazine for girls. See E. Lehning, "So hassen sie uns! Juden Stimmen aus aller Welt," *Das Deutsche Mädel*, July/August 1943, 5. Since the figure was not carried in the *Zeitschriften-Dienst*, I suspect the author was a recipient of the party speaker material.
- [76] *Redner-Schnellinformation*, Lieferung 57, May 5, 1943.
- [77] *Redner-Schnellinformation*, Lieferung 60, May 18, 1943.
- [78] *Redner-Schnellinformation*, Lieferung 63, June 28, 1943.
- [79] "Der Gauleiter: Entweder wir oder die Juden!" *Mülhauser Tageblatt* (Mülhausen), May 17, 1943. Emphasis in the original. The *Gauleiter's* words were also reported by newspapers in Heidelberg and Mannheim. All three cities were in his *Gau*.
- [80] In 1939, there were 808 counties and 28,375 local groups, so the publication had a sizeable readership. The number increased when the war began, as new territories were incorporated into the German Reich.
- [81] "Parole 21: Den Juden kennen heißt den Sinn des Krieges verstehen!" *Sprechabenddienst*, September/October 1944, 6. The emphasis is in the original. See GPA/sprech44a.htm.
- [82] "Tod den Juden," *Rüstzeug für die Propaganda in der Ortsgruppe*, January 1945, 13–14. The emphasis is in the original.
- [83] *Mitteilungen des Gauringes für nationalsozialistische Propaganda u. Volksaufklärung NSDAP. Gau Moselland*, #11 (November 1941), 6.
- [84] Jay Baird interviewed a number of leading Nazi propagandists, who claimed they had actually believed the claims themselves, though one imagines they were stretching the truth a bit in self-justification. See Baird, 306 (note 54).
- [85] For an excellent summary of the tangled state of the German mind with regards to the "Jewish Question," see David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 116–138.

- [86] Otto Dov Kulka, "The German Population and the Jews: State of Research and New Perspectives," in *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933–1941*, ed. David Bankier (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 277. For another summary of scholarly differences on this matter, see Browning, 388–392.
- [87] Ian Kershaw, "German Popular Opinion and the 'Jewish Question', 1939–1943: Some Further Reflections," in *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Antisemitism 1870–1933/39. Germany—Great Britain—France*, ed. Herbert A. Strauss (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 277.
- [88] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).
- [89] For one of many laments about insufficient anti-Semitism on the part of the masses, see "Warum auch heute noch Kampf mit den Juden?" *Mitteilungen des Gauringes Franken*, July 1, 1943, 2–4.
- [90] For more on the SD reports, see Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude during the Second World War*, trans. Thomas E. J. de Witt (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977).
- [91] Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938–1945*, 17 vols. (Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), vol. VII, 2581.
- [92] "Die große Stunde hat geschlagen: Der Feldzug im Osten entschieden!" *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 10, 1941, 1.
- [93] Goebbels, *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel*, 530.
- [94] Boberach, VII/2965.
- [95] Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 148–149.
- [96] See a report from Bielefeld dated March 15, 1942 in Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, eds., *Die Juden in den geheimen NS-Stimmungsberichten 1933–1945* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004), 489.
- [97] Kulka, 275. See also a report from a rural area in December 1942 that stated that in the event Germany lost the war, people feared "terrible revenge" from the Jews, in Kulka and Jäckel, 510.
- [98] Boberach, XVI/6243.
- [99] Boberach, XV/6052.
- [100] See the late-war morale reports in the National Archives' microfilm series of captured German documents, series T-77, roll 1037, frames 6509356 and 6509574.
- [101] Boberach, IX/3235.
- [102] J. P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 215.
- [103] Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 152. A report from the party chancellery at the end of May 1943 noted that the recent upsurge in anti-Semitic propaganda had "apparently lost its effect" on the German population, since it was too obvious: "As is well known, propaganda is best when one does not notice that it is propaganda." See Kulka and Jäckel, 524.
- [104] Kulka takes a contrary position, arguing that public opinion surveys taken after the war found significant anti-Semitism. An August 1947 poll, for example, reported that 55% thought that National Socialism was a good idea, badly carried out. Since by then the fundamentals of Nazi mass murder were known, Kulka concludes that Germans in general supported Nazi genocidal policies. I find his argument unconvincing, since there is not a necessary connection between disliking an ethnic group and wanting to kill them, and it is quite possible that mass murder was the part of Nazism Germans thought was badly carried out. See Kulka, 279–280.
- [105] For two directives from Martin Bormann in 1942 and 1943 prohibiting discussion of what was happening to the Jews, see Browning, 391.
- [106] Meyer zu Utrup, 439.

- [107] David Irving, *Goebbels: Mastermind of the Third Reich* (London: Focal Point, 1996), illustration caption between pages 332 and 333.
- [108] See http://www.fpp.co.uk/cinc/2003/report_mueller.html, accessed on February 3, 2005. An Internet search using the Nazi variants in spelling Kaufman's name will find numerous other examples, often with remarkably inaccurate information. Kaufman's middle name is frequently given as "Nathan," demonstrating that the material was taken directly from Nazi publications.

Copyright of Quarterly Journal of Speech is the property of National Communication Association. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.