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## Racial War at Home

Every German soldier who dies in this war must be put on the debit account of the Jews. They have him on their conscience and that is why Jews must be made to pay.

—Joseph Goebbels, November 16, 1941

On January 30, 1939, the sixth anniversary of his appointment as chancellor, Hitler was in a mood his admirers described as philosophical. Since dictating *Mein Kampf* in prison in 1924, he had divulged little in public about his intentions regarding the Jewish question. To be sure, the adjective “Jewish” had often spiked his verbal jabs, but as chancellor Hitler had avoided programmatic comments. Even at times when his audiences might have expected an antisemitic tirade, he had remained silent. In his eulogy for a Nazi official slain by a Jewish assassin in Switzerland in early 1936, for example, he did not so much as utter the word “Jewish.” On the day after the pogrom of November 9–10, 1938, Hitler spoke for over two hours to journalists without mentioning the Jewish question.

Then, on January 30, 1939, Hitler vented his phobic racism as part of his self-congratulatory account of the new moral and geopolitical order he had created. He went out of his way to ridicule “German businessmen devoid of any conscience” who took pity on Jews. “Europe cannot find peace until the Jewish question has been solved.” Sarcastically, he sneered at “how the whole democratic world is oozing with sympathy for the poor tormented Jewish People [and yet] remains hard-hearted when it comes to helping these supposedly most valuable members of the human race.”<sup>1</sup> With Jews defeated in Germany, Hitler continued, the time had come to “wrestle the Jewish world enemy to the ground.” Reminiscing about the days when critics had laughed at his racial views, he mused, “In the course of my life I have been a prophet many times, and this earned me mostly ridicule . . . During the time of my struggle for power it was primarily the Jewish *Volk* who mocked my prophecy that one day I would assume leadership of this . . . entire *Volk*.” Hitler portentously added that Jews’ “laughter back then may well become stuck in their throats today.” Then came the threat: “Today I will be a prophet once again. If the international Jew-

ish financial establishment in Europe and beyond succeeds in plunging the peoples of the world into yet another world war, then the result will not be a Bolshevization of the globe and thus a victory for Jewry, but the annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of the Jewish race in Europe."<sup>2</sup> This warning, so resounding in retrospect, occupied only a few minutes in a very long speech and was barely noticed at the time. Germans might have understood *vernichten* to be merely metaphorical—as in to “smash” or “wipe out” a rival.<sup>3</sup> Foreign reporters were preoccupied with the diplomatic implications of Hitler’s speech.<sup>4</sup>

Hitler’s January 30th speech can be seen as a virtual declaration of war on two fronts: against Jews and against foreign nations that obstructed German expansion. Indeed, Hitler consistently misdated his threat of extermination to September 1, 1939, to coincide with the date on which Germany invaded Poland. Hitler’s speech is significant not only because he predicted that Jews would be annihilated in the event of war but also because he elucidated what he saw as the ethical justification of racial war. In his long-winded discourse about party history, foreign policy, economics, and the *Volk*, Hitler reaffirmed the morality of the four assumptions that underwrote the Nazi conscience.

First, he praised the organic unfolding of German destiny and reminisced about how he had rescued the *Volk* from racial disaster. Boasting about having unified ethnic Germans in Austria and Czechoslovakia into a mighty Reich, he praised his *Volk* “bound together not only by linkage of blood, but by a shared historical and cultural . . . heritage.” As a veritable preacher, Hitler noted the second axiom of his ethnic moral code, which enshrined self-denial as its cardinal virtue. Castigating as immoral all “attitudes that cannot be justified in terms of their benefits for the ethnic community,” he pointed to the advantages of collectivism. For emphasis, he repeated, “What is unimportant or detrimental to the existence of the *Volk* can never be seen as ethical.”<sup>5</sup>

From these two themes a third followed. Condemning the Treaty of Versailles, he shouted, “The rest of the world has looted Germany” and insisted on Germans’ right to strike back by claiming the *Lebensraum* they deserved. He returned at several points in his speech to the fourth axiom of the Nazi conscience which justified purifying the ethnic body politic. Among several “unwholesome attitudes” Hitler assailed “phony social morality”—which, by implication, meant a belief in the sanctity of human life. Denying universal morality (and by implication Christian teachings), he appealed to the authority of “the laws and necessities of life, as

they reveal themselves to man through reason and knowledge." The subtext was clear: nature's laws allow a strong *Volk* to attack the weak with impunity. He repeated, "German culture is exclusively German; it is not Jewish." Before Nazi rule, liberal politicians' neglect of this truth, he shouted, had led the *Volk* to "squander a large part of its inherent strength on an inner struggle as fruitless as it was senseless." An ethnic ethos, which Hitler did not identify as specifically Nazi, provided the structure of Hitler's January 30th prophecy.

Throughout this landmark performance, Hitler cast himself as the embodiment of harsh, masculine virtue and shouted righteous invective against enemies whom he described as effeminate weaklings. Far from ignoring criticisms of the Nazi regime, Hitler held them up for ridicule as a moral blight, not as political opposition. When he castigated the Catholic Church, for example, he did not object to its doctrine or politics but to its toleration of "pederasty and child abuse." To a cheering Reichstag, he thundered against the perfidious English "apostles of war" and the "useless refuse of Nature," the "hysterical, mean-spirited press . . . Dwarfs . . . [and] the old incorrigible pessimists." In the process of vindicating German territorial expansion and the elimination of Jews, Hitler posed as the sole moral arbiter of his *Volk* at war on two fronts: racial and geopolitical.

Hitler's explicit threat to Jews confirmed what nearly all Jews in Greater Germany had known at least since the pogrom of November 9–10, 1938. "I repeat," wrote a member of the clandestine Sopade network, "The Jews in Germany are lost unless they can emigrate."<sup>6</sup> In February 1939 a horrified German bystander described "the inexorable extermination [*Ausrottung*]" and warned, "What happened to the Armenians in Turkey . . . is, more slowly and efficiently being done to the Jews."<sup>7</sup> Victor Klemperer noted in his diary, "NO HOPE . . . Everything continues with such deadening wretchedness."<sup>8</sup> Where objections occurred, they came from tiny minorities within the Marxist left, dissenting Christian congregations, and the liberal bourgeoisie.<sup>9</sup> But so powerful was the ethnic consensus that even people who privately agonized over Jews' plight barely found the courage to express condolences or perform small acts of kindness. Feeling utterly helpless in the face of a consensus that Jews somehow deserved their fate, Germans who objected could only urge their Jewish acquaintances to flee. When a friend tried to console Klemperer, he wrote, she "spoke to me as to a dying man."

After the November pogrom and Hitler's explicit warning, Germans and foreigners alike could have had no illusions about the danger Nazi rule

posed to Jews. Expulsion of Jews from German-held territory was not a secret plot. Moral catastrophe did not take place only on the killing fields and concentration camps in the distant East. It began at home, in the Reich, during the so-called peace years. It was, to use the philosopher Alexandre Koyre's phrase, an "open conspiracy" to commit a vast crime in full view.<sup>10</sup> Rampant criminality against Jews occurred within a public culture that disabled empathy for outcasts. This process was spearheaded not by old-fighter Nazis' coarse hatred of Jews but by a deceptively mild and supposedly objective form of racism that ultimately proved to be far more lethal. Bureaucratically sanctioned persecution was presented as a protective measure against Jewry, depicted as an amorphous moral danger. Individual Jews' evident suffering, however unfortunate, was cast as collateral damage on the crusade for ethnic rebirth. Compared with Stormtroopers' rampages, white-collar persecution could even seem moderate.

During the years of diplomatic success and economic recovery, ethnic Germans lived in an atmosphere of heady collectivism. Hitler's decision in January 1939 to speak openly of Jews and even to predict their extermination in the event of war suggested that he believed public opinion had been sufficiently prepared to accept a harsh solution to the Jewish question. His assessment was well-founded. Nazi-sponsored surveillance teams and anti-fascist clandestine mood monitors alike reported that Germans welcomed full employment and cheered the dismantling of the hated Treaty of Versailles. People seemed enthralled by the pleasures that Nazi popular culture afforded them and appreciated the state-sponsored excursions that allowed millions to enjoy their first real vacations. Even Germans with modest incomes saved to buy the inexpensive *Volkswagen*. Of course, grumblers found fault with one or another corrupt Nazi boss and made jokes about the big shots. But the cult of the Führer remained unblemished. Even when Hitler's diplomatic bombshells seemed reckless and memories of the Great War stoked their fear of another bloodletting, morale monitors registered unflagging support for Hitler. In September 1938, for example, when Hitler had demanded the annexation of the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland, war seemed inevitable. Although the "hurrah patriotism" of 1914 was absent, Germans waited "in honorable readiness to follow their Führer's commands to the utmost."<sup>11</sup> When the Big Four European powers capitulated and signed the Munich Pact a few days later, Hitler acquired the affectionate nickname "General Bloodless."

On the celebration of his fiftieth birthday, April 20, 1939, the nation

turned into “a veritable sea of flags.” An observer in central Germany described the scene: “Hardly a store window could be seen without a picture of the Führer with victorious symbols of the new Reich.”<sup>12</sup> Millions participated vicariously via radio broadcasts and newsreels. Heinrich Hoffmann produced a commemorative album, *A Volk Honors Its Führer*, which allowed readers to glimpse their chief being greeted by foreign dignitaries as well as some of the well-trained troops and modern tanks that marched in a five-hour parade.<sup>13</sup> When Hitler signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact and German armies invaded Poland in the late summer of 1939, Germans again registered anxiety, but a swift victory restored their faith. After Hitler survived an assassination attempt on November 9, 1939, at the annual Beer Hall Putsch commemoration, the media attributed his narrow escape to divine intervention. School children sang the Bach cantata, “Nun danket alle Gott” (“Now Thank We All Our God”), and adults blamed “Brit spies” and “International Jewry” for the attempt on Hitler’s life. An SS Security Service report concluded, “Love for the Führer has become even stronger, and the attitude toward war becomes more positive.”<sup>14</sup>

During the so-called phony war [*Sitzkrieg*] of 1939–40, when France and Britain were officially at war but took no action, Germans’ lives went on as usual. Although three million men served in the military and 8,000 men were killed in the Polish offensive, morale remained high in the homeland. Thanks to a steady influx of foreign workers and POWs, manufacturing and agriculture operated at full capacity, and imported food from conquered lands guaranteed that shortages like those of World War I did not recur. With the swift conquest of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France in the late spring of 1940, “General Bloodless” once again earned his moniker. Goebbels exulted, “We experience the greatest historical miracle ever: a genius is building a new world.”<sup>15</sup> So central was the Führer myth to the national euphoria that viewers felt cheated if a newsreel failed to include footage of Hitler.<sup>16</sup> Even when the British Royal Air Force began to bomb Berlin in 1940 (which Nazi leaders had boasted was impossible), Goebbels’s staff incited popular outrage against the English by maligning them as cowardly terrorists who murdered innocent women and children.

In the memories of many Germans, the “peace years” continued until June 1941, when German troops invaded the Soviet Union. But similar to the so-called grace period for Jews between mid-1933 and late 1935, the surface calm prepared public opinion and racial policymakers for an approaching storm. The first challenge facing racial persuaders was to pro-

vide credible evidence to explain why over 80 million citizens of an invincible Reich ought to believe that less than 1 percent of their countrymen who were Jewish should be deported. Half of all Jews living in the Reich had emigrated; half of those who remained behind in 1939 were over fifty years old, and only 20 percent had jobs. Such an imperiled group of people could not pose a genuine threat to a strong and confident *Volk*. But the dissemination of popularized antisemitic researchers' findings depicted Jews as the last vestiges of a racial plague or the disguised agents of global conspiracy.

As persecution escalated and Jewish Germans' last hopes of rescue faded, the antisemitic think tanks, university institutes, and the Office of Racial Policy supplied fresh evidence of the Jewish peril gleaned from confiscated documents and new research.<sup>17</sup> Even among the victors, one casualty of war is a lower standard of credibility because people eagerly accept almost any information that helps them to make sense of the conflagration that has disrupted their lives. Ordinary readers may well have accepted news media reports produced by the ongoing march of "Scholarship against World Jewry!"<sup>18</sup> Despite paper shortages, an immense outpouring of pamphlets, maps, and booklets deepened ethnic pride and racist panic. *Neues Volk*, the ORP periodical, expanded its coverage of topics designed to incite readers' fear or revulsion, or both. Its experts described the African and Jewish plot to debauch French culture and "The World Racial Struggle."<sup>19</sup> Antisemitic research institutes spawned new affiliates in occupied nations and looted Jewish libraries and archives for evidence of Jewish conspiracies against Aryans.<sup>20</sup> Typical of their findings were books such as *Jewish Self-Portraits*, a compilation of works by Jewish authors who had written critically about their heritage.<sup>21</sup> Other texts, like the sarcastic *The Poor Jews*, ridiculed anyone who sympathized with Jews.<sup>22</sup> Supposedly objective studies by Gerhard Kittel and his collaborator Eugen Fischer exposed the ancient roots of the Jewish peril.<sup>23</sup>

Well in advance of the first feasibility study for mass extermination (commissioned in July 1941), a continuous flow of fraudulent research on the Jewish question shaped the moral context within which desk murderers and field commanders went about their work. These ponderous disquisitions typically had two sections, a long and meticulously footnoted account of Jewish misdeeds throughout history and a brief concluding section that outlined a solution. Having demonstrated, for example, in *The Freedom Fighter*, that Jews had precipitated the Great War in 1914 and the invasion of Poland in 1939, Johann von Leers concluded, "If the Jews

had not been granted citizenship but had been left in the ghetto, they would have been unable to hatch the revolt." *Ergo* Jews ought to be re-ghettoized. The Austrian historian Franz Schattenfroh devoted over 400 pages to the history of Jewish aggression before hinting at elimination as a "final" solution.<sup>24</sup> Treatises like these were not likely to have attracted a broad readership, but they were available to the well-educated SS functionaries who drove extermination operations forward as well as to the thousands of ethnocrats responsible for the logistics of persecution, deportation, and murder.<sup>25</sup>

In order to function efficiently, perpetrators needed to maintain a moral self in the face of staggering crime. Scholarly racism facilitated this process in several ways. First, through sober, objective prose, the experts' monographs and articles converted individual Jews into "Jewry," an abstract category into which almost any manner of evil would fit. Second, by projecting their own intentions on to their victims, the perpetrators disavowed their personal responsibility. Seen against an imagined lethal menace, deportation and mass murder became pre-emptive self-defense. The tedious deliberations about which methods of solving the Jewish problem were worthy of an honorable *Volk* placed the honor of the perpetrators, not the suffering of the victims, at the center of the murderous moral calculus. Finally, the endorsement of a manly, unsentimental attitude (and ridicule of emotional, pogrom-style antisemitism) steeled perpetrators against pity.

As they left for the Polish front, soldiers, order policemen, and SS men carried reminders of their ethnic superiority in their packs. Small-format illustrated histories of Germanic art, quotations from *Mein Kampf*, and photographic essays about Nazi Party history and the life of the Führer sanctioned the world historical struggle in which they were engaged. Foreign-language phrase books suggested how to treat "inferior" peoples. In *You and Your Volk*—a nostalgic booklet illustrated with a woodblock print of a peasant family—Walter Gross admonished soldiers to think racially. A pocket guidebook to Warsaw included information about the topography of the city, with a section on the ghetto and a concise history of a centuries-old "infection" by "alien blood."

The relatively small place of antisemitism in the attitude-training these troops underwent does not suggest it was insignificant. On the contrary, as Raul Hilberg explained to the filmmaker Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah*, the most lethal orders were often sent as ordinary memos. If, for example, deportation orders had been marked by red top-secret stamps, they would

have attracted attention and provoked debate.<sup>26</sup> Their routine appearance ensured that they would be routinely obeyed. Antisemitism in soldier training was most powerful when it was most insidious—when small doses of poisonous racism were injected into benign information about foreign policy, news from the Reich, the SS honor code, and instructions on selecting racially healthy partners. In letters written by Wehrmacht soldiers as well as SS men, passionate hatred of Jews appears as only one aspect of routine accounts of daily life.<sup>27</sup> Leadership training instructed SS officers to insert racial considerations into all discussions with their men. Racial studies, along with entertainment, culture appreciation, geopolitics, and history, all contributed to what SS trainers called “the maintenance of [soldiers’] spiritual resistance [*Widerstandskraft*].”<sup>28</sup>

Of course, some instructional material, such as the booklet *The Jew on the Eastern Border*, printed for the Seventh Army, focused on Jews.<sup>29</sup> Pamphlets written in a learned style bore titles like *Israel’s Ritual Murder of Nations; Are the Roosevelts Jewish?*; and simply *The Jews*.<sup>30</sup> Before they arrived at the front, SS men probably took for granted the “fact” that Jews had turned the United States into their puppet.<sup>31</sup> Later, when the commander of the notorious Order Police Battalion 101 explained to his men that the helpless Jewish civilians they were about to murder were responsible for the terrorist air raids over German cities, he was only reinforcing the common knowledge already implanted by propaganda.<sup>32</sup>

Training material treated the Jewish question as one of many challenges facing German occupation forces. The Office of Racial Politics edited booklets for soldiers entitled *Policy toward Ethnic Aliens*, which conveyed a casual but unmistakably racist message.<sup>33</sup> *Jewish Ghettos . . . between the Baltic and the Black Seas* described the habitat of a *Volk* on the edge of extinction.<sup>34</sup> *That’s How They Really Are* and *Jews in France* introduced readers to the allegedly degenerate Jewish culture that had caused the decline of the West.<sup>35</sup> The ethnographer Max Hildebert Boehm wrote a lavishly illustrated book for general audiences, *The Liberated East*.<sup>36</sup> Himmler commissioned a photographic study of *The Subhuman* which featured photographs of ideal racial types and documented the ravages of barbarian races from the days of Attila and Genghis Kahn to massacres in the Jewish-dominated Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> In this outpouring of print, visual, and aural culture, one message rang out: Jews would soon vanish, and a superior *Volk* would rule the new Europe.

Despite high morale during the early war years, most Germans sensed that the New Order had a dark side. State policies endangered not only

Das ist der Spiegel der sowjetischen „Staatsjugend“! Das sind die Folgen der vom Juder systematisch zertrümmerten Familie! – Dieses Meer geweinter Kindertränen vermögen auch Jahrhunderte nicht auszutrocknen.



In die kollektivisierte kleine Elendskreuz, die der Jude ohne Bedenken propagierte.

Das entsetzliche, schmutzstarrende Unglücksweesen mit den Totenaugen ist ein sowjetisches Kind, ...



Diese Zehnjährigen im Grauen der sowjetischen Hölle sind wohl die furchtbarste Anklage gegen diesen Fluch der Menschheit.

59. "Here is the hidden side of the Soviet 'bolshevized youth.' Look at the results of the Jews' systematic ruination of the family—a sea of children's tears will take centuries to dry." By implication, *The Subhuman*, a photograph book commissioned by Himmler, justified SS men's barbaric crimes as both retaliatory and preventive.

people in defeated nations but fellow citizens living in the Reich (which included annexed territories as well as Germany and Austria). Rumors circulated about the "euthanasia" of Germans who were diagnosed as incurably ill, severely disabled, or asocial. Gypsies and people labeled as work-shy or sexually deviant were sent to forced labor camps. In 1939 soldiers returned from Poland with the disquieting news that Jewish-German residents of annexed Polish territory (including decorated soldiers from World War I) had been deported to a ghetto in Lodz and many had died or been killed in transit. On the home front, people saw conscripted Jews performing menial tasks such as removing trash, cleaning public toilets, and shoveling snow. Jews in the Reich were reduced to penury because they had to transfer their savings to central exchange banks from which they could withdraw only a pittance.<sup>38</sup> During the winter of 1939–40, Viennese police evicted 60,000 Jews from their homes, sent them to occupied Poland, and transferred their apartments to non-Jewish owners. Shortly after the fall of France, 6,500 German Jews from the Rhineland and 22,000 Alsatian Jews were deported to camps in the south of France. In Berlin, Jews were evicted and sent to "Jew houses" to make way for people displaced by bombing raids and to clear land for Hitler's building projects.

Although opinion surveillance reported widespread apathy about Jews' suffering and even cases of self-pity, a few Germans objected. Employees of *Das Schwarze Korps* and the Nazi publishing company, for example, found it distasteful that they had to witness Jews being tortured in the deportation center next to their building.<sup>39</sup> But others intervened on principle. Some Wehrmacht officers in 1939 objected to massacres of civilians in Poland as both counterproductive and unworthy of Germans.<sup>40</sup> In November 1940 Catholic prelates appealed to Justice Minister Gürtner, a devout Catholic, to halt medical killing. A month later, during an official tour of Nazi-occupied Poland, Hans Frank, governor of the district, noted Gürtner's deep distress, presumably at the treatment of Jews and Poles. Immediately upon Gürtner's return to Berlin, he was hospitalized and died of an undiagnosed illness, amid rumors that he had been poisoned.<sup>41</sup>

Gürtner's fate was unusual. Dissenting ethnocrats and personnel in medical killing centers, like soldiers at the front, found ways to ease their way out of difficult situations. When an associate told Bernard Lösener, the racial expert in the Interior Ministry, about witnessing a gruesome massacre of Jews from Germany, Lösener applied for and eventually received a transfer to another department.<sup>42</sup> Although later he was expelled from the party and arrested, it was because of his alleged participation at



60. A Scene from the Lublin Ghetto, as sketched by a German soldier. Like the hundreds of snapshot albums compiled by soldiers on the Eastern Front and the color slides taken by an accountant in the Lodz ghetto that are featured in the film *The Photographer*, this soldier's drawing suggests his dissociation from the suffering of the subjects he depicted.

the fringes of the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, not because of his dissent on racial questions.

In Nazi Germany, unlike other totalitarian regimes, individuals could dissent from one or another measure, usually without devastating consequences. Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, for example, an inveterate racial re-

searcher and Nazi Party member, falsified racial identity papers to protect his Jewish co-worker, and Gerhard Kittel sheltered a half-Jewish student from deportation. The existence of a doubter here or a rescuer there did not retard the inexorable process of expulsion and extermination. By treating individual objections as private matters and not as moral protests, Nazi administrators minimized their political fallout.<sup>43</sup>

In occupied Eastern Europe, the corpses of people charged with aiding Jews were hung in public as examples of what happened to traitors. At home in the Reich, that did not happen. Citizens suspected of aiding Jews or malingering could be arrested, but unless they were judged politically dangerous they were not usually sent to concentration camps. News of punishment was spread by rumor but was not publicized in the media. Some Germans took the risk of offering shelter to fellow citizens. In Berlin, between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews (dubbed "Submarines") trusted friends and neighbors to hide them; and despite denunciations and searches, 1,400 of them survived. After the war, over 500 rescuers who lived in Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic have been honored as righteous gentiles by the Israeli government.<sup>44</sup> Even in his despair, Klemperer noted non-Jews' kindness to him and acknowledged their courage, particularly that of his wife, Eva, and the friend who concealed his diaries. In 1944, when Klemperer was forced to work in a factory, the friendly atmosphere there surprised him. "Again and again, I observe the comradely, easygoing, often really warm behavior of the male and female workers toward the Jews." Even the fear of denunciation did not stop them from "fooling around, yelling, and cheerfully touching."<sup>45</sup>

Some citizens found ways to smuggle food to Jewish neighbors before they were deported, and a few sent food parcels to friends and relatives in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. A Jewish woman in hiding, Ilse Behrend-Rosenfeld, described kindly Herr R., who protected her from the Gestapo as if it were the simplest decision in the world. As the tears welled up in her eyes, he said in thick dialect, "Well, now the first thing you'd better do is stop calling me Herr R and get used to Uncle Karl. You will be my little Maria."<sup>46</sup> The everyday decency of a few magnifies the complicity of the many.

Walter Gross's wartime career was a paradigm of the process that prepared ethnocrats to collaborate with increasingly radical measures. In the ORP newsletter, Gross urged his staff to accelerate secret sterilization (perhaps as a covert reference to medical killing) and "not to become soft" on racial issues.<sup>47</sup> While military strategists early in 1941 planned the invasion of the Soviet Union, Gross contributed his expert opinion to deliber-

ations about the problem that would be created by the addition of millions of Jews to German-controlled territory. Although concrete plans for genocide were formulated later that year, Gross and his colleagues helped to shape the conceptual milieu within which midlevel party functionaries and state employees adjusted their consciences to racial war. They did not, as it is so often assumed, suspend their moral beliefs when they put on their figurative uniforms.<sup>48</sup> Expert opinion vindicated the elimination of Jews as a moral act. For example, Gross's lecture, "Thoughts about a Solution to the Jewish Question," delivered in March 1941 at a conference organized by Alfred Rosenberg's antisemitic think tank, was distributed in three formats: as a brief article in *Neues Volk*, as a mimeographed memorandum circulated to religious and social welfare agencies, and (one year later) as a 32-page booklet.

As was his wont, in his lecture on the Jewish question Gross dredged up putative evidence about the moral depravity of the Jews and cautioned readers against assuming that "harsh treatment had weakened their position." He cast aggression against Jews as "self-defense against a discordant, near-eastern, oriental, Mediterranean Jew *Volk*" and argued for defining as Jewish anyone with two Jewish grandparents (a revision of his milder view in 1935 which required three Jewish grandparents). Thanks to Germans' stunning military successes, Gross said, he could conceive of a Europe-wide extirpation of the Jews that would have been unthinkable only a few years before. Appropriating a metaphor from Kittel's 1933 tirade against Jews, Gross pledged his high-minded dedication to a task that would "bind up a dangerous historical wound" in the ethnic body politic.<sup>49</sup> As a young physician, Gross had seen Jews as a biological threat, but ten years later he admitted that racial science had not produced a coherent body of knowledge and vaguely blamed Jews' "spiritual powers and tendencies."<sup>50</sup> Gross worked unobtrusively to weed out less-than-resolute colleagues. For example, he led the prosecution of party member and racial expert Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss for protecting his Jewish co-worker. "The party cannot conduct a pitiless struggle to exterminate the Jewish contagion if it tolerates this kind of behavior within its own ranks."<sup>51</sup> Although the Jewish woman he sheltered was deported, Clauss's only punishment was expulsion from the SS. Every issue of Gross's newsletter for ORP officials was filled with disinformation that cast the elimination of Jews as a desirable goal. In early 1944, Gross prepared a lecture on "Jewry, the Master of the World Press," for Rosenberg's international conference on the Jewish danger to be held in July in Cracow. Advancing Soviet troops forced its cancellation.

Despite Gross's tireless activity on behalf of racial indoctrination, during the war Joseph Goebbels upstaged him. In the prewar years, Goebbels had concentrated on entertainment, culture, and news, while steering clear of race-related topics. In the late 1930s, his office approved two antisemitic comedies, *Robert and Bertram* and *Irish Linen*, and a rather mediocre antisemitic saga, *The Rothschilds*. With the onset of war and medical killing, Goebbels commissioned a film that defended euthanasia. Then in 1940 he supported the immensely popular historical drama *Jew Süss*, which was seen by 20 million people. Its antisemitic impact was so powerful that Berliners left the theater chanting, "Drive the Jews from the Kurfürstendamn [the major shopping street in Berlin]! Out with the last Jews in Germany!"<sup>52</sup> To popularize antisemitism in occupied Europe as well as at home, *The Eternal Jew* was released with immense fanfare. This lurid documentary horrified audiences with its scenes of cattle being killed in a kosher slaughterhouse, photos of "typical work-shy Jews" who were actually prisoners in ghettos in Poland, and historical maps comparing "the wandering Jew" to rat infestations. The film's climax was a clip of Hitler's January 30, 1939, prophecy. Viewers could hardly escape the message that (as one morale report put it) "the Jew, despite all of his superficial adaptation to states, languages, and regions, still remains a Jew."<sup>53</sup>

As Goebbels understood, wartime audiences wanted diversion more than propaganda. One of his greatest successes was the radio show *Wünschkonzert*, devoted to popular music requested by listeners. Perhaps to offer more sophisticated readers a similar escape from wartime cares, in May 1940 Goebbels launched a new periodical, *Das Reich*, whose erudite tone contrasted with the vile racism of Nazi Party hacks.<sup>54</sup> Among the contributors to *Das Reich* were Carl Schmitt, Theodor Heuss (who became the first president of West Germany), and Rudolf Augstein (who after 1945 edited the prestigious newsweekly *Der Spiegel*). By 1941 the readership of *Das Reich* grew to 1.5 million—almost equal to the circulation of the Nazi daily *Der Völkische Beobachter*.<sup>55</sup> On every Friday evening and Sunday morning until the final month of the war, lead articles from *Das Reich* were broadcast to troops at the front and Germans at home.

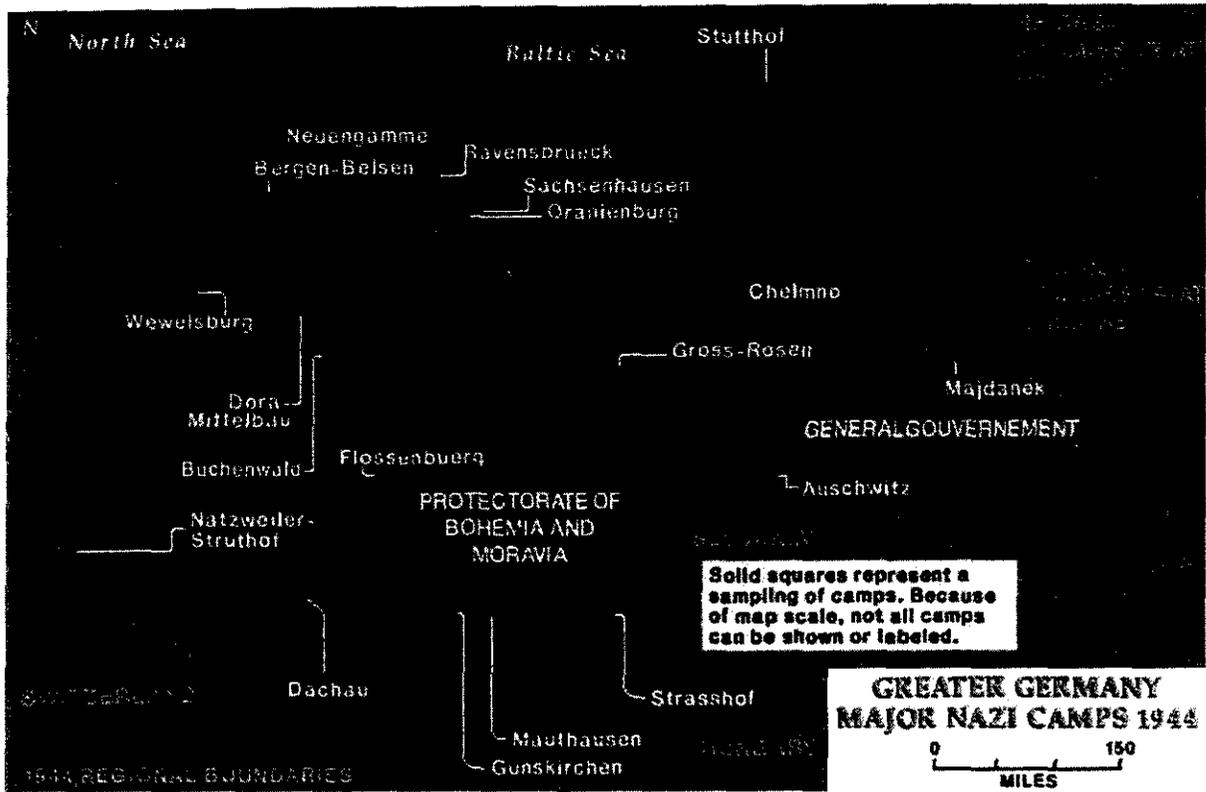
By all accounts, contemporaries concurred that "the popularity of Dr. G. was very high."<sup>56</sup> Reviews of theater, films, and literature, occasional columns by Goebbels, news of sporting events, reports on domestic politics in Britain and the United States as well as in Axis countries, art appreciation, and light cartoons filled its pages. Reproductions of great art, dra-

matic military photographs, and graphics enlivened its fare. As Goebbels put it, *Das Reich* cultivated a respectable image because “the more radical the opinions voiced, the more distinguished and unprovocative it needs to look.”<sup>57</sup> Perhaps Goebbels’s sense that readers wanted diversion explains why, for over a year, *Das Reich* avoided coverage of his extreme opinions on the Jewish question. During this time, Hitler himself barely mentioned Jews in public and resisted pressure to impose harsh anti-Jewish laws within the Reich even as troops in occupied territories were massacring not only Jews but members of the Polish elite and suspected Communists.

Then in August 1941, as German generals rejoiced at their victory over Soviet forces, Hitler made two decisions about racial policy. He ordered the official end of medical killing in Germany, and he assented to pressure from Goebbels and other zealots that Jews be required to wear a badge in public that would stigmatize them.<sup>58</sup> Even after Hitler’s go-ahead, Goebbels wrote, “I am persistently driving the Jewish question forward, but admittedly major resistance in almost every quarter is evident . . . The Jews must not remain as guests of our *Volk* . . . at a time when the German *Volk* is fighting for its future.”<sup>59</sup> To prepare public opinion, on September 7, 1941, Goebbels made Hitler’s 1939 prophecy that Jewry would be exterminated the “Slogan of the Week.” Immense placards with Hitler’s words were posted throughout Berlin, in effect investing Hitler’s political capital in the war against the Jews. A week later, all Jews over the age of six had to wear a yellow cloth badge with a Star of David and the word “Jew” written in mock Hebrew letters. Failure to do so meant immediate deportation.

In the next few months, Goebbels demonstrated his skill as a hate-monger. In “The Jews Are Guilty!” a front-page article in *Das Reich*, Goebbels reiterated Hitler’s prophecy and demanded that Germans show no mercy in “smashing down this colossal filth.” Then, in the detached tone of antisemitic research, he asserted that the elimination of Jews conformed to “an elementary law of national and social hygiene,” and he mocked anyone “who feels a stir of pity at the sight of an old woman wearing the Yellow Star.” Not passion, he wrote, but a sense of duty must guide Germans in their difficult task. “We discuss this without any feelings of resentment . . . There is no room here for sentimental considerations.”<sup>60</sup> Perhaps sensing that delay might enable Jews to go into hiding, he added, “The stab will be administered without mercy and without pity.”

For Berliners, Goebbels’s staff published a four-page leaflet, printed in



61. As this map of concentration camps in the Reich shows, crimes did not occur only “somewhere in the East,” as many Germans claimed after the war, but also at home. Camps within the Reich, such as Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Gross-Rosen, Ravensbrück, Neuengamme, Dora-Mittelbau, Dachau, and Stutthof, became the administrative centers of huge networks of subsidiary forced-labor camps in nearby areas.

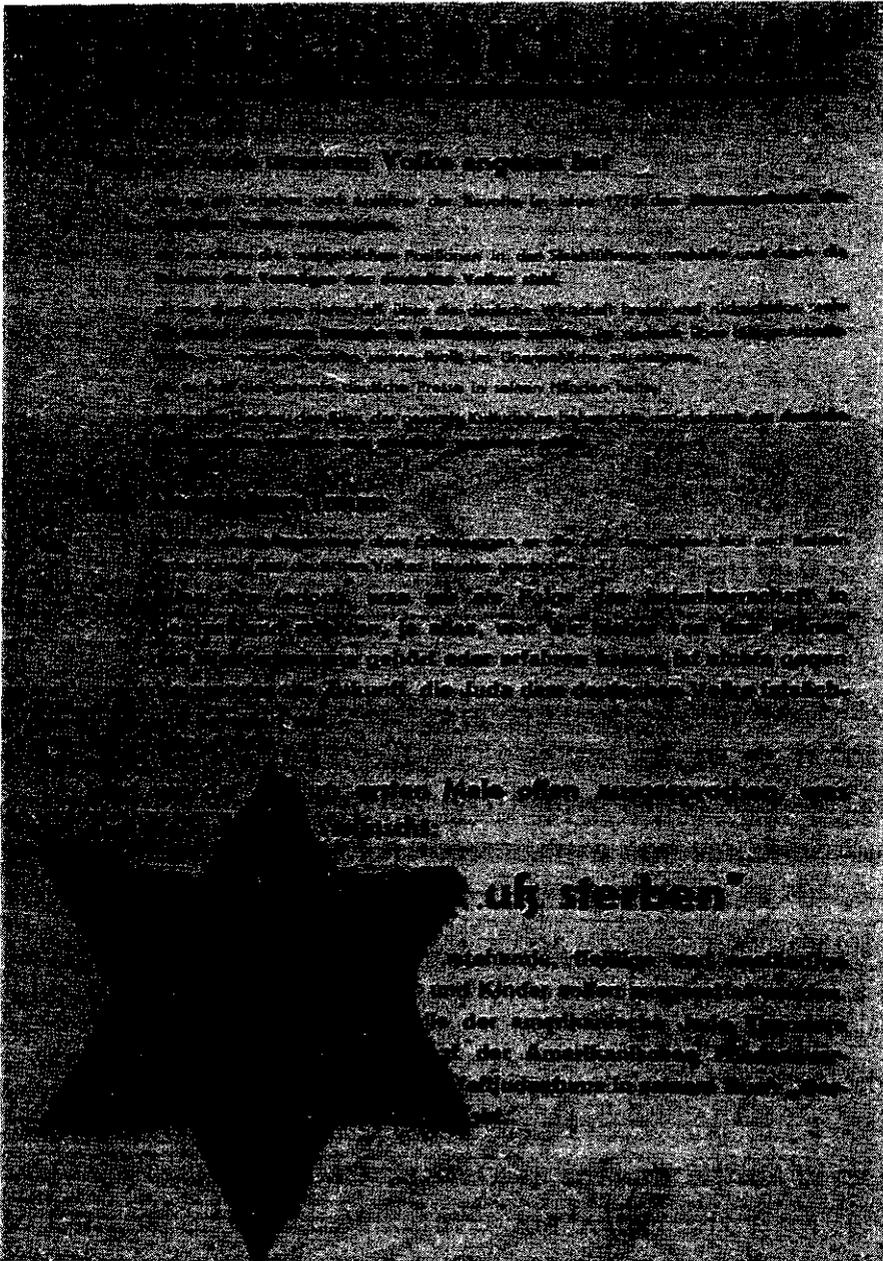
color on heavy paper stock. On the cover, white headlines against a black field warned, “When you [Du] see this badge . . .” and at this point the regulation cloth badge was affixed to the page. The text inside continued, “Then think about this. About what the Jews have done to our *Volk*.” Jews had fomented revolution in 1918, deprived seven million Germans of a livelihood in the Depression, poisoned the *Volk*, and debauched morality. Every conceivable crime that antisemitic research had invented during the previous six years took on a new life as part of the litany of dangers attributed to Jewry. The text continued, “Everything that we have done against world Jewry is nothing compared to the future Jews have in store for us.” At the bottom of the page, after “Now, for the first time, the Jews’ intention is proclaimed out loud,” the boldface text breaks off and another yellow cloth badge obliterates the message underneath. Where the text would have read that Jews said “Germans must die,” the badge pasted over the words changed the text to read, “The Jew” (symbolized by the

yellow patch) "Must Die." To the right of the cloth badge, the text continued, "Thousands of decent and respectable . . . [elipse in the original] and children shall be exterminated."

For decades after the war, Germans insisted that, although they may have sensed terrible things were happening "in the East," they had no knowledge about the fate of Jews or any other persecuted group. From the immediate postwar years, however, such professions of ignorance have not withstood scrutiny.<sup>61</sup> As early as the autumn of 1942, the *Times* of London published a letter from a German Jew who reported, "The intention of extermination has been professed often enough."<sup>62</sup> Klemperer heard the drumbeat early; so did other Germans. "Only the Jew is to blame; we must *exterminate* him in Europe."<sup>63</sup>

In the first study of the concentration camps, published in 1947, Eugen Kogon, a Viennese journalist who survived five years in Buchenwald, quoted a credible witness. "The methodicalness of the killing must certainly have become visible even to the totally blind . . . There is no doubt whatsoever that there was not a single person in Germany who did not know that the Jews were being harmed, and had been for years."<sup>64</sup> Starting late in 1942, the BBC broadcast explicit reports of mass murder.<sup>65</sup> In bomb shelters, Germans' awareness of their culpability emerged in anxieties that bombardments were reprisals and in fears that invading Soviet troops would wreak savage vengeance. Knowledge about genocide was available to anyone who cared to find it.

Anyone who had heard Hitler Youth chanting "When Jewish blood spurts from the knife" knew Jews were in peril. Witnesses to the public torment of Jews in Austria after the *Anschluss* or the destruction of the November 9–10, 1938, pogrom could not have doubted Jews' helplessness or Nazis' ruthlessness. Even without Hitler's explicit prediction of January 30, 1939, no bystander could deny the intention of the Nazi leadership to eradicate Jews, one way or another. During the war, whether or not they grasped the full horror of the catastrophic atrocities that occurred "in the East," Germans observed Jews' anguish firsthand. They may have passed one of the 38 camps established in 1941 for Jewish forced laborers.<sup>66</sup> In small towns and cities, coincidence brought people into contact with reality. "I happened to pass a square into which Jews had been herded together . . . I will never forget the shock . . . There were respected businessmen, workers, physicians, aged invalids awaiting deportation."<sup>67</sup> A Berliner noticed heavily loaded panel trucks in the streets and one day chanced to see that the back cover of one had not been totally lowered.



62. "When you see this badge," read the cover of this pamphlet, "Then Pause to Consider" a detailed list of alleged atrocities perpetrated by Jews against Aryans that had become commonplace in textbooks, exhibitions, and educational films. After these fraudulent accusations, the text read, "Now for the . . . first time it can be openly proclaimed what World Jewry [represented by the yellow cloth badge] intends. The Jew [again represented by the badge] must die!"

The sight of “pretty shoes next to worn shoes, feet wrapped in rags,” filled her with horror.<sup>68</sup> Labor camps for POWs and foreign laborers, some of whom were Jewish, dotted the German countryside. Residents of nearby villages and cities knew enough to turn away from their windows when they heard the sound of clogs on the pavement before daybreak and after dusk.

Many did more than turn away. Several thousand marauding men could carry out a national pogrom (as on November 9–10, 1938), but orderly expulsion required hundreds of thousands of compliant ordinary citizens. Over 675,000 Jewish citizens of the Reich had to be identified in municipal files. When they were required to add “Sarah” or “Israel” to their names for identification purposes, files had to be updated. Police routinely searched Jewish households for telephones, radios, cameras, and illegal written material. The non-Jews who “purchased” Jews’ property for as little as 10 percent of its market value required banks to sanctify the legal fiction. Postal employees censored Jews’ mail. In March 1941, when Jews were conscripted into forced labor, police checked attendance at worksites and dispatched the tardy to concentration camps. Bank clerks verified declarations of financial assets. In October 1941, when Jews’ pensions, health insurance, and paid vacation were terminated, records required adjustment. When Jews were moved into “Jew houses” and work camps, residential records were updated. On the eve of deportation, electricity bills and mortgage payments were settled and ration cards canceled; keys were turned in to superintendents and new “owners.” Records were marked, “Address unknown, moved to the East.” The saturation of public culture with racist arrogance for “us” and contempt for “them” framed this sequence not as the prelude to wholesale murder but as a continuation of the bureaucratic routines already in place.

Clerks at the Reich Railway scheduled special excursion trains (identified as “Da” for “David”). The SS paid third-class fares for travel in packed cattle trains at rates between 1.5 and 4 pfennigs per kilometer per person, with half fare for children under twelve. SS officers and railway functionaries haggled over round-trip or one-way rates, often settling on a 50 percent rebate for trains carrying more than 400 passengers.<sup>69</sup> Attention to detail preserved a mirage of bureaucratic order as Jewish citizens in the Reich were stripped of their dignity, their rights, their property, and ultimately their lives. Beginning in the late autumn of 1941, 260 trains, each one with over 1,000 Jews packed in boxcars, deported Jews from Ger-

many. Similar transports “cleansed” Austria and other annexed regions of Jews. By late 1943, the Reich had become, in Nazi language, “Jew free.”<sup>70</sup>

After the war, survivors and perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders, as well as their offspring, engaged in heated disagreements about how much ordinary Germans had known about the Final Solution. This is a dispute that challenges each generation to confront anew the potential for decent human beings to collaborate in evil. However, questions about precisely what Germans in the Reich knew about the extermination camps and killing fields in the east are irrelevant to these discussions. Millions chose to “decide that they knew enough to know it was better not to know” about these crimes.<sup>71</sup> But Germans living in the Reich knew beyond any doubt that their Jewish fellow citizens desperately needed material and psychological aid. How can we understand civilian compliance—bystanders’ callous disregard as well as collaborators’ zeal—in the humiliation, impoverishment, persecution, and expulsion of fellow citizens in their midst?

Germans’ readiness to expel Jews from their universe of moral obligation evolved as a consequence of their acceptance of knowledge disseminated by institutions they respected. Like citizens in other modern societies, residents of the Reich believed the facts conveyed by experts, documentary films, popular science, educational materials, and exhibitions. What haunts us is not only the ease with which soldiers slaughtered helpless civilians in occupied territories but the specter of a state so popular that it could mobilize individual consciences of a broad cross-section of citizens in the service of moral catastrophe. This persuasive process has little in common with brainwashing, which aims at turning its subjects into mindless automatons. In Nazi Germany, faith in a virtuous Führer and joy at belonging to a superior *Volk* cultivated grassroots initiative and allowed for a margin of choice.

This is not to imply that Nazi Germany was remotely similar to a democracy, but the laxity of its conceptual world distinguished it from the doctrinal rigidity of totalitarian societies such as Stalin’s USSR, Pol Pot’s Cambodia, and Mao’s China. A field policeman in Ukraine explained the difference: “We are not commissars with all their evil ways. We are soldiers of Prussian rearing and stand before a task that demands from us our greatest efforts . . . a task to which the Führer charged us here in the Ukraine; to see something very important and beautiful; something upon which the fate of Germany rests for centuries.”<sup>72</sup> German soldiers had been trained to take initiative, to think for themselves in the absence of

specific orders. They functioned well because they shared a working consensus, rooted in ethnic pride and self-denial as well as contempt for their victims. Ordinary Germans who were neither politically suspect or racially unwanted had considerable latitude to create their own patterns of selective compliance. Thus, collaborators in racial persecution were ordinary in a different and more frightening way than the image of banal bureaucrats and obedient soldiers suggests.<sup>73</sup> Despite having been raised to believe in the Golden Rule and probably more or less honoring it in their private lives, citizens of the Third Reich were shaped by a public culture so compelling that even those who objected to one or another aspect of Nazism came to accept the existence of a hierarchy of racially based human worth, the cult of the Führer, and the desirability of territorial conquest. The Final Solution did not develop as evil incarnate but rather as the dark side of ethnic righteousness. Conscience, originally seen to protect the integrity of the individual from the inhumane demands of the group, in the Third Reich became a means of underwriting the attack by the strong against the weak. To Germans caught up in a simulacrum of high moral purpose, purification of racial aliens became a difficult but necessary duty.<sup>74</sup>

Nazism offered all ethnic Germans, whether or not they joined the party, a comprehensive system of meaning that was transmitted through powerful symbols and renewed in communal celebrations. It told them how to differentiate between friend and enemy, true believer and heretic, non-Jew and Jew. In offering the faithful a vision of sanctified life in the *Volk*, it resembled a religion. Its condemnation of egotism and celebration of self-denial had much in common with ethical postulates elsewhere. But in contrast to the optimistic language of international covenants guaranteeing universal rights to all people, Nazi public culture was constructed on the mantra: "Not every being with a human face is human."

Until late in the twentieth century, Nazism appeared to have been a retrograde political faith that lacked the potential to outlive its founder. While the idiosyncratic racial fantasies of Nazism seem as dated as the goose-step, the ideology that drove it was the first example of a new and ominous kind of doctrine that based the civil rights of citizens, including the right to live, on ethnic identity as determined by the state. Hitler founded a consensual dictatorship that was "neither right nor left" on the political spectrum but occupied an entirely different political terrain. Like other fundamentalisms, it began with a powerful leader and drew on populist rage against corrupt elites who had betrayed the "common man."

On the basis of a shabby doctrine of racial struggle, Nazi functionaries and academics innovated a political strategy that did not perish with its Führer. In the second half of the twentieth century, the outbreak of ethnic strife and the emergence of populist regionalism during the break-up of colonial empires and the collapse of Soviet power made it clear that Nazism had not been a final atavistic outcropping of tribalism but a harbinger of ethnic fundamentalism, a creed that gathers force when modernizing societies are convulsed by dislocations which threaten conventional systems of meaning. The potential for racial hatred lurks whenever political leaders appeal to the exalted virtue of their own ethnic community. Against a growing commitment to universal human rights, ethnic fundamentalists broadcast alarms about ethnic danger. Evil presents itself as unalloyed ethnic good. Reforging bonds that may be religious, cultural, racial, or linguistic, ethnic fundamentalism merges politics and religion within a crusade to defend values and authentic traditions that appear to be endangered.

In an age of what critics call moral meltdown, when conventional codes governing private morality relax, the struggle between “good and evil” migrates to the political front.<sup>75</sup> Political leaders who appear to embody the communitarian virtues of a bygone age purport to stand as beacons of moral rectitude in a sea of sin. Although they incite hatred against anyone they deem to be ethnic outsiders—whether sexual degenerates, pacifists, defenders of human rights, or simply misfits—their devoted constituencies share a fear of moral and physical pollution so profound it transcends partisan politics. Long after the demise of Nazism, ethnic fundamentalism continues to draw its power from the vision of an exclusive community of “us,” without “them.”