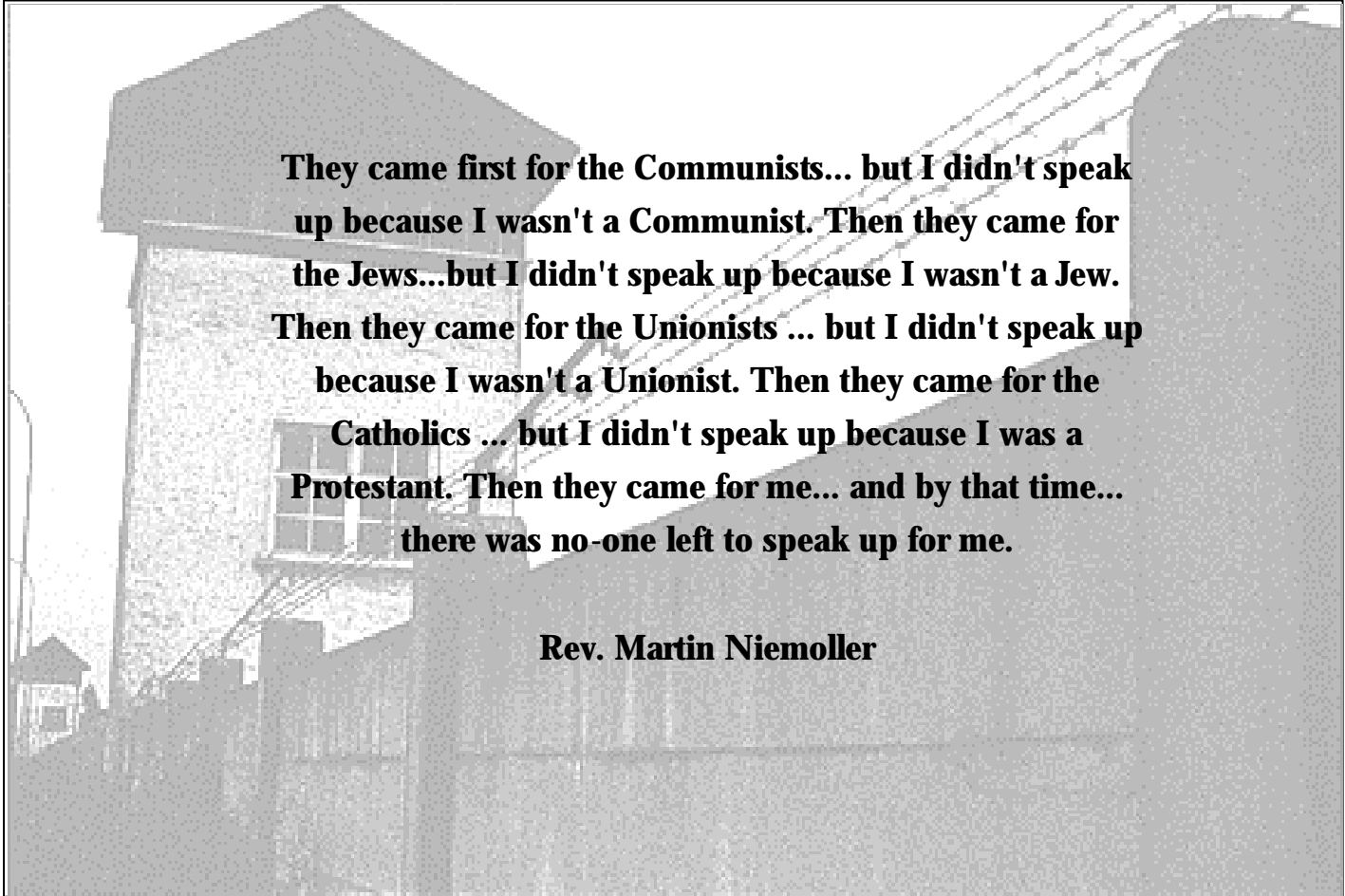


# **PRELUDE TO THE HOLOCAUST**

*An illustrated itinerary across patterns of hatred in pre-Holocaust  
Germany and Eastern Europe analyzing the Holocaust  
implications for today and tomorrow.*



**Human Rights Awareness**



**They came first for the Communists... but I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews...but I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Unionists ... but I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Unionist. Then they came for the Catholics ... but I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me... and by that time... there was no-one left to speak up for me.**

**Rev. Martin Niemoller**

## 1 FOREWORD

This booklet contains most of the text and figures – with some improvements and additions – presently available on the World Wide Web (WWW) at the URL:

<http://www.hrawareness.org/front01.html>

The exhibition, produced by [Human Rights Awareness](#) and first presented to the web public in August 1997, has undergone an extensive renovation in 1998, mainly to improve on-line readability and to lower download time for figures. As a consequence, part of the original text was cut from the sequence of exposed panels. The present booklet contains several parts of the original text, as well as several additions (the most extensive being the discussion on A. Eichmann, epublished on an issue of the HRA newsletter), which should make the discussion more complete. We recommend however that the reader pays a visit to the exhibition site, as much of the “panel branching” is lost.

Perhaps the only way to do justice to the Holocaust victims is to make impossible that mass murder may occur again, at least in the same countries that were once involved in the Jewish *shoah*. The visitor of the Holocaust exhibit is guided thorough a large set of panels showing how Jews were viewed, discriminated and attacked in pre Holocaust Nazi Germany. The last panels show disturbing similarities between the patterns of blind hatred in Nazi Germany and those against homosexuals and transgender persons in present-day Western countries.

Preparing this work, we realized how little has been done in the last 50 years to understand the Holocaust. Even the most recent publications perpetuate stereotypes and dwell on commonplace. So many times we heard the ritual repetition that the “Holocaust defies reason”, a statement that sets the stage for Holocaust repetition. No. It is necessary to act toward society as the Doctor Rieux acted toward epidemic in Camus’ novel *The Plague*, to understand the danger of Nazism and totalitarianism before they emerge from the status of endemic illness to the tragedy of epidemic.

The aim of this booklet and of the exhibition is therefore to help recognize injustice and prejudices of today, paralleling them to the ones of the infamous injustice and violence committed by the Nazis which is acknowledged in an historical perspective. We hope that most of the readers and viewers will be horrified especially by the perspective of being trapped in the same “mental blackmail” that lead to mounting anti-Semitic hatred, and ultimately, to the Jewish Holocaust.

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Ref. HRA 1998/2

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Acknowledgements are gratefully addressed to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Without its collection of photographs this exhibition would have costed more efforts.

Padova, December 1998

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust - the mass murder of European Jews - is associated to the outbreak of the second world war, in September 1939. Before Hitler came to power, the situation of Jews in Germany was much better than in other European countries. There had been an opening toward Jews in several sectors of social life.

“The Jews of Germany had been among Europe's most assimilated, most cultured, most active contributor to the national life of the state in which they lived. Hundreds of thousands of them had become an integral part of German society.”<sup>(1)</sup>

After the Nazi rise to power in 1933, and before the German army invaded Poland, in 1939, the Nazi policy toward Jews has been of forced emigration. In 1938, Nazi Germany was almost free of Jews, “*Judenfrei*”. Most German Jews had lost their citizenship, and a large part of their possessions, but:

Even Hitler's anti-Jewish record was open to mixed reviews: Jews were allowed to leave, and to leave in the tens of thousands. No more than two hundred had been killed, most of them in the first fourteen months of his rule. The number of Jews, as well as of political opponents, liberals and churchmen, held in concentration camps, had continually dropped.<sup>(2)</sup>

Mass murder started 6 years after the Nazi party came to power, after the invasion of Poland, thorough the deployment of *Einsatzgruppen*, and later through gas chambers in concentration camps (the first gas chamber was built late in 1939; the actual extermination program with gas chambers started in the autumn of 1941). Table 1 provides a synopsis of the main historical developments that preceded World War II.

We will show how widespread anti-Semitism led most Germans to nurture an attitude toward Jews that was “blind hatred,” in which strong distaste, fear, deep hatred and a urge to ridicule and to hurt are inextricably mixed together. The path toward mass murder was straightforward once almost every German nurtured “blind hatred” against Jews. The comparatively small number of officers, soldiers, that were actively involved in mass murder would have never given or obeyed orders that would have provoked a strong reaction among ordinary Germans. Thus the key point is not the attitude or the feeling of an élite minority in the Nazi party, but rather the attitude of the majority of Germans. How did Germans perceive the Jews? How did they feel Jews were different?

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<sup>1</sup> M. Gilbert, *The Holocaust, A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War*, (New: York: Henry Holt and Company), 35.

<sup>2</sup> M. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 57

Prelude to the Holocaust: Basic Timetable

30 January	1933	Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany.
28 February	1933	Suspension of freedoms of speech, assembly, press, and other basic rights.
March	1933	First concentration camp opens at Dachau.
1 April	1933	Nazi-organized boycott of Jewish-owned businesses.
7 April	1933	Jews excluded from government employment, including teaching jobs at all levels.
14 July	1933	New law provides basis for forced sterilization of handicapped persons, Gypsies, and Blacks.
October	1934	First major wave of arrests of homosexuals throughout Germany.
15 September	1935	Anti-Jewish racial and citizenship laws issued at Nuremberg.
16 July	1936	Some 800 Gypsies interned near Berlin.
12 March	1938	The German Army enters Vienna. Annexation of Austria (Anschluß).
9 November	1938	Kristallnacht. Burning of Synagogues.
1 September	1939	German invasion of Poland. W. W. II begins.

Table 1 - A chronology of the main Nazi actions against sexual and racial minorities before World War II. Adapted and expanded from a Table at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum exhibition on the [1936 Olympics](#).

*In the words of the perpetrators of the worst human rights abuses, no concentration camp has been ever built to exterminate anyone; on the contrary, the misleading claims have been adapted from time to time to suggest that concentration camps have been built to defend values, children, people or heritage from the worst, most hideous enemy or from the worst "monsters" ever known.*

### 3 PATTERNS OF HATRED: THE KILLING OF JEWS AS SOCIAL PERSONS

Repressive measures against the German Jews started right after the Nazis came to power in 1933. They were not restricted to *Einsatzgruppen* or to a minority of high-ranking officers. The carrying out of these measures were highly visible: the following pictures document some anti-Jewish initiatives that were started in 1933: the campaign against Jewish shop-owners, the public humiliation of Jews. Such initiatives were re-enacted in Austria right after her annexation to Germany.



**Figure 1** The first of two pictures taken in Vienna in March-April 1938. Austrian Nazis and bystander watch as Jewish passerby are forced to scrub the streets. (The picture above is courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [USHMM] Photo Archives)

Some caution was employed by Nazis in dealing with political opponents. Germans saw Jews in a different light from other potentially dangerous adversaries. The attitude of Nazi Germans toward Jews and toward political opponents was very different, and immensely more tolerant toward the latter. Nazi came to power after a political process that split Germany. They ousted social democrats – their leading opponents – from power, but did not persecute most of them. Even out-spoken opponents were allowed to leave or to go on their normal life, provided they were not anymore politically active. Under Nazi rule there was no analogy to the arbitrary arrests and deportations of members of the Communist party that occurred in Russia under Stalin's rule. All civil servants of non Aryan descent were ousted of their jobs. Civil servants of Aryan descent -- even in very high positions -- that were not members of the Nazi

party were never forced to leave. This is said to emphasize how different the attitude was toward Jews. Above all, Germans despised Jews, they considered them to be “the scourge of the world.”

Jews were held unworthy of their social status. They could not have a social status above *any* non-Jewish German.

“From my windows I could watch for many days how they would arrest Jewish passers-by - generally doctors, lawyers, and merchants, for they preferred their



victims to belong to the better educated classes - and force them to scrub, polish and beat carpets in the flat where the tragedy has taken place, while insisting that the doctor's non-Jewish maid should sit at ease in a chair and look on. (3)

Discrimination and humiliation continued even in concentration camps. Jewish prisoners were subject to harsher conditions than non-Jewish prisoners:

The Jewish prisoners worked in special detachments and received the hardest tasks. They were beaten at every opportunity . . . They were overwhelmed with abusive epithets such as 'Sow Jew', 'Filth Jew', and 'Stink Jew'. During the working period the non-Jewish prisoners were issued with one piece of bread at breakfast? the Jews with nothing. But the Jews were always paraded with the others to see the bread ration issued. (4)

Historical evidence often overlooks the feeling and the attitudes of people – of normal people – which go unreported but may turn onto unexplained history. However, writers and artists often capture the visceral but complex feelings that nurture particular and extreme situations. Isaac Bashevis Singer is certainly one of the deepest chronicler of interior attitudes and emotions of anti-Semitic mobs.



Figure 2 A picture again taken in Vienna in March-April 1938. Austrian Nazis and bystander watch as Jewish passer-by are forced to scrub the streets.

From Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Family Moskat*:

The young man did not answer, The officer's brows drew together. "Are you a Jew?" the officer asked, using the insulting second-person singular.

"Yes, a Jew."

"Why didn't you say so when you were asked?" the officer yelled at him angrily.

There was a momentary silence. The two women with the officer looked at each other, faint smiles on their

faces. The old woman's head shook and the white hairs on her chin quivered.

The young man's face turned chalk pale.

"What were you doing in Russia" the officer asked.  
"I worked there."

<sup>3</sup> cited by Gilbert, op. cit., p.59

<sup>4</sup> M. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 57-58



"Where did you work? In the Cheka? Been a commissar? Robbed churches?  
"I've robbed nobody. I've been a student, a teacher."  
"A teacher, hah? What did you teach? Karl Marx, Lenin, Trotsky?"

"I'm not a Marxist. That is why I left. I taught children Hebrew, as long as they allowed it."

"None of your tricks, now! Who sent you here, Comrade Lunacharskyi?"

"Nobody sent me, I was born here; my mother lives in Warsaw. "

"In what part of Russia were you?" asked the officer.

"In Kiev, Kharkov, Minsk."

"What are you, an agitator or propagandist?" .

"Sir, I told you I am not a Marxist."

"You son of a bitch, what you told me isn't worth a pinch of powder. You're all liars, thieves, and traitors.

What

is your name?"

The young man's face became ashen. "Are you from the police, sir?" he asked, terrified by his own words.

The lieutenant moved as though to rise. "Answer, you cursed Jew! You're speaking to a Polish officer."

He

glanced at the curved sword hanging from the rack.

The young man closed the magazine. "Asa Heshel Bannet," he said.

"A-sa-he-shel-ban-nett," the lieutenant repeated ironically, dragging out the Jewish-sounding syllables. One of the women broke into a loud titter. She took a lace-edged handkerchief from her pocketbook and held it to her mouth. The other woman made a grimace of disgust.

"Oh, Stashu. Leave him alone."

"Who do they think they are, these Trotsky -riding second class" the officer continued, half to her and half to

himself. "Decent Polish people have to hang on to the sides of the roofs, while these cursed traitors spread themselves out easy. Where are you going to, eh?"

Another writers who captured in depth anti-Semitic attitude is André Schwarz-Bart, author of *The Last of the Just*. This epic novel contains heart-breaking depictions on how anti-Semitism and "blind hatred" was insinuated among schoolchildren, and how hatred led to gratuitous violence and harassment.

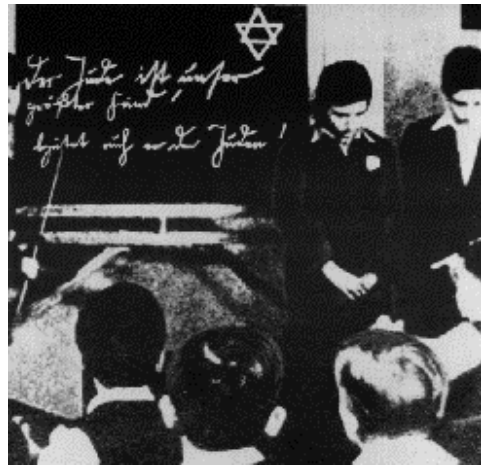


Figure 3 Jewish schoolboys humiliated in front of their classmates.

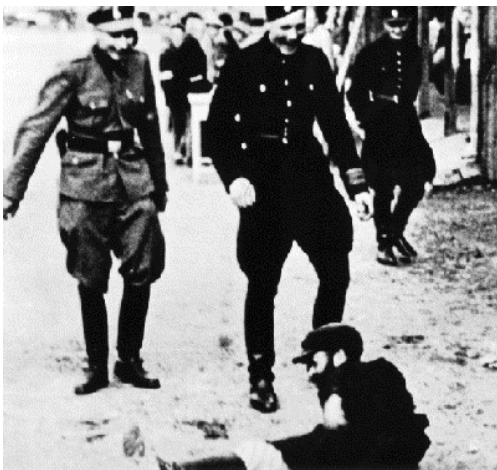


Figure 4 German soldiers kicking a Jew in a street of Wloclawek, in German-occupied Poland.

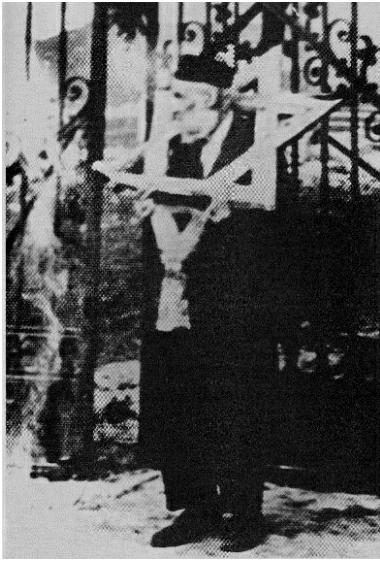


Figure 5 An elderly Jew is pilloried with the Star of David in front of a synagogue in Lublin, in German occupied Poland.

shameful implications. And if you stand on that side – as emphasized by the movie *Long Walk Home* in the context of the fight against segregation in the US by black domestic workers – it is not without a loss, not without a strain to family ties and social relationships, without exposition to misanderatndings and ambiguity. Consequence on one’s life can be tragic even if no real violence occurs: the affirmation of the right of an “external” minority may imply the loss of social ties: if you turn to supporting an ostracized minority, you are ostracized by the majority you belong, and it is not obvious that you may be accepted by the minority you want to defend. The affirmation of abstract first principles over the ties that unite a large social group is not been recognized as “heroism” and is labeled as madness and insanity in many instances. The following story is idealized, and has been invented for the purpose of showing how peer pressure and social anchoring may have affected a decision in the Thirties – in a way that is appallingly similar to the way that may be followed today. It is important to stress that is the attitude of millions that constitutes the backbone of the worst

The pictures aside illustrate how by-standers seemed to be pleased and gratified by the scene. However, it is almost never easy to stand on the side of the “despised minority”, as the label carries usually the most



Figure 7 Member of the German police kicks a Jew who is climbing onto the back of a truck during a round-up for forced labor. Two other Germans look on with derision. Date: 1940 - 1941 Krakow, [Krakow] Poland. Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.



Figure 6 Jewish businessmen forced to parade down Bruehl Strasse in Leipzig holding a banner “Do not buy from Jews. Buy in German stores!” in 1935 (courtesy USHMM Photo Archives).

human rights disasters – not just a few psychopathic individuals.

How would have a 18-year-old reacted on learning of attacks against Jews?

Suppose you are a young German girl, 18 years old, in the Thirties. You hear vaguely about Jews, the "Jewish problem". They are a distant problem. Jews are in your mind vaguely



Figure 8 A beer mat with a caricature of a Jewish shopkeeper. The inscription reads "Who buys from Jews // is a traitor of the people"

associated with a feeling of diffidence, even of "dirtiness". Your mother does not want you to have any Jewish acquaintance. No Jewish friends, not to mention a boy-friends. You see them: their countenance, so mean, so servile, without pride, the typical pride of the German Volk; their black hair that seem always dirty. The evoke a feeling of distaste. Then you meet one of your friends - your family knows his family. He is sporting his new uniform of SS officer. He is leaving to Poland and wants to greet you. He says he will get there to trash and mistreat Jews - the disgrace of the German Volk. He is so bright, blond, and tall, so proud in his uniform. He says the same things that you have heard from your parents - and you now recollect the bad impression

you had seeing the Jews across the street of your town. How can he be wrong? How can everyone be wrong? And what will happen if you do not cheer him? You will be treated as a girl that has no experience of the world. It is natural: those cursed Jews are deceivers, swindlers, they insinuate into the hearths of innocent German girls. Once this is said, you are expected to change your opinion. What will happen if you will stand by yourself? Then, someone would say, you are a bad girl, you are like them; broken- rotten people. Will you give such a displeasure to your mother?

#### 4 THE BANALITY OF EVIL

One has to consider that perpetrators are often “other oriented individuals” which to feel well adjusted with themselves often need the support and the consensus of other – even more often than most people do. The personality profile of a perhaps typical perpetrator has been masterfully traced by Hannah Arendt in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: An Essay on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt chronicles the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a German SS officer who supervised the deportation of Jews during W. W. II from several countries occupied by the Germans. Hannah Arendt's analysis is extremely deep and insightful, and helps dispel several commonplaces on the Holocaust and on the ultimate human rights catastrophes: war and genocide. First, it is dispelled the notion that human rights violations are due to “extraordinarily evil” persons. The banality of evil is largely due to the fact that Eichmann was a plain, in many ways mean and mediocre, bureaucrat that was never involved personally in brutal actions. He did what he was expected to do by everyone else around him, and may have spent his life unnoticed, had he not been instrumental to the deportation and murder of millions of persons. Second, it appears that reaction against Nazis was never ineffectual: when Nazis were met with a strong opposition against deportation of the Jews, especially by pro-Nazi governments of occupied countries, they renounced the plans of deportation. Both points emphasize, in different contexts, the role of social and peer pressure in the worst violations of human rights. The first point emphasizes the need to have individuals that are culturally prepared to break out from the frame in which they are embedded – whenever their actions retains their banality but become intrinsically evil. And there is no such cultural attitude now. Even highly emotional movies like *Schindler's List* perpetuate the image of the lone monster, the *Untersturmführer*. Without him, concentration camps will disappear. It is, unfortunately, not so. In the role of Eichmann's there could have been millions of other Germans. Everyone should be prepared to see her or himself as a potential human rights victim, but also as a potential perpetrator. Someone said, badly misinterpreting Arendt's words, that Arendt herself justified Eichmann. Nothing could be farther from truth. She illustrated how everyone could be, or better could play the role of Eichmann, if framed in the proper social context. Why didn't Eichmann simply say “no”? One may consider that he grew up and was educated in an environment where Jews were a distinct reality, despised, denigrated, pictured as working against the values and even attempting at the survival of Germans, as we will show below, and considered ridiculous or aesthetically repellent. That the Jews were seen under dehumanizing stereotypes is very important, but just half of the story. Perhaps more relevant is that this view was socially shared, and helping the Jews was something that would bear only the promises of shameful consequence. It would have been the same as to help a transvestite prostitute for many people today. A thing few would dare to do. It is symptomatic that a person like Schindler helped the Jews. He was somehow outside the border of commonplace morality, since he was a typical profiteer, whose activities were barely



Figure 9 A German civilian wearing a Nazi armband holds a sheaf of anti-Jewish boycott signs, while SA members paste them on a Jewish-owned business. The leader of the group gives instructions as to where to post the signs. Most of the signs read, "Germans defend yourselves against Jewish atrocity propaganda; buy only at German stores." Date: Circa 1933 (National Archives, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives).

legal. Had Eichmann refused to obey orders, he probably would not been accused or incarcerated or formally punished, as Arendt suggests, but he would have damaged his career, been held as a vile person, discredited by his own peers. Social disapprobation and ostracism are among the most difficult thing a lone man or woman could face without an adequate source of inner strength. Eichmann apparently lacked such strength. Most people would never face the risk of becoming social out-casts. We should consider that, in most issues, and for almost everyone of us, true and good is what is socially accepted. To break out of this pattern a widespread, socially shared awareness of the universality of basic human rights is needed. Such awareness did obviously not exist then and does not exist today.

## **5 AND TODAY?**

Tv, video cameras, and other technological advances have somehow removed our physical being from many places. Even astronomers do not observe at the telescope anymore, but on a monitor in a computer room. Police monitoring and surveillance are similarly remotely controlled. Even torturing devices, or other illegal practices, like sleep deprivation, can be remotely controlled. Thus evil is even more banal today -- as banal as switching on a remotely controlled device.

Maybe you are thinking that now we are safe. There are not SS officers around. Your thoughts do not go throughout the form of blackmail outlined above in the idealized case of the 18 year old girl. Even if you consider let's say – the case of a police officers – and of a transvestite? The police officer is boasting his favorite sport is to trash transvestites he met on the streets, “to give them what they deserve. . .” One has to compare present day situations to that of the Jews assuming that the targets are the most deeply despised minority – those with whom none would get along without being ashamed of.

## **6 JEWISH RACIAL SEGREGATION**

As soon as the Nazi came to power, they attempted to enforce a policy of racial segregation. This practice was not new. In Catholic countries, the policy of segregation – and eventually expulsion – has been a consolidated practice for centuries. The ghetto of Rome still served as a place of compulsory confined residence as late as in 1870. The first step in the enforcement of segregation was an extensive boycott campaign against Jewish-owned businesses, which went on in Germany in 1933, and was then repeated after Austria's annexation to Germany in 1938.





Figure 10 SA in front of a Jewish business forced to close. The inscription on the larger sign reads: "Germans! Defend yourselves! Do not buy from Jews!" Apr 1, 1933 Berlin. Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.

## 7 THE "JEWISH DANGER"

Germans saw Jews as different. First of all, being a Jew is a racial fact. Thus, even if Germans witnessed violence against Jews, it could not happen to non-Jews. Jews have darker hairs, darker skin; but there was also a cultural heritage - stereotypes and commonplaces inherited by centuries of persecutions - that emphasized the difference, rather than the similarity, between Jews and Christians. Jews ate differently. Jews dressed and behaved

differently. Jews, of course, spoke differently. Jews worshiped a different religion. Jews did not live in the countryside, they did not own land. They lived in cities, and their professions were often different from the professions of gentiles. Germans were *Volk*, Jews were non-*Volk*, in the sense that they were the negation of German values, and of the most cherished German values, deeply rooted in the German *Vaterland*. Political opponents were dangerous to Nazi; but being a political opponent is a cultural fact. Political opponents, too, were part of the German *Volk*.

In a few words, Jews *could not* share the values of Germans.



The front page of *Der Stürmer*. The front title runs "Jewish murder plan" while at the bottom one can read "Jews are our calamity."

Beyond perceiving them as different, Germans did perceive Jews as dangerous. Jews had a “Mordplan” - plans for assassinations of Germans. “Die Juden sind unser Unglück,” Jews are our calamity, was a motto repeated a countless number of times on newspapers and banners. Following the announcement of a boycott of Jewish stores in 1933, a rally was held in New York's Madison Square Garden. A counter boycott of all German made goods was threatened. On posters attached everywhere on German cities one could read:

The Jews of the whole world are trying to destroy Germany.  
German people, defend yourselves! Do not buy from the Jews!

But Jews had to be much more dangerous than that: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* unveiled an insinuating attempt to gain control of the whole world. No matter if the Protocols had been exposed as false, that was something the people would believe to. At the same time, literary fiction and movies had since long purported the idea of conspiring, evil Jew: a vile creature, devoid of real humanity, of roots, that achieved his goal thanks to his mercilessness.



Figure 11 Another front page of the newspaper Der Stürmer (National Archives, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archive). The accusation of ritual murders carried out by the Jews dates back to the Middle Ages but survives even today. San Simonino was a child allegedly killed by the Jews, who was later canonized by the Catholic Church. The cult has been exploited for anti-Semitic purposes from time to time.

Jews were seen - as they lived mostly in a climate of *apartheid* or segregation - through a set of stereotypes: the money-lender, the usurer. Social marginalization enforces stereotypes. The stereotype of the usurer was largely due to the prohibition or restriction gentiles imposed on Jews regarding the practice of several liberal professions. No doubt German after WWI went through a terrible period of inflation and misery. In the early Thirties, before Nazi came to power, the German economy was slowly recovering, but the specter of high unemployment, recession, and even famine was still a tragic reality. If resources are limited, a resource sharing social group that is perceived different from ours - invariably becomes target of hostility. So, for the average German it was straightforward to think that Jews had money - while gentiles had not. Jews appear at the very least privileged, but at the same time being most unworthy of any privilege. Gentile children were facing starvation - while Jewish children were well-fed. Thus, the Jews appeared as the reason gentile children went hungry. Money was the mean of survival: Jews had money, most gentiles had not. Thus, Jews were seen acting against the survival of the gentiles. No concentration camp has been ever built to exterminate everyone - just to defend the children from the worst enemy ever known.



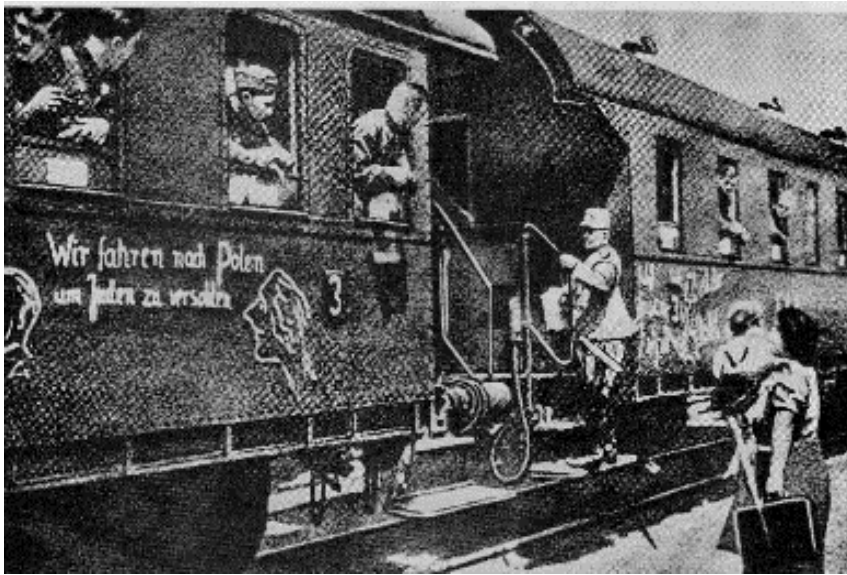


Figure 12 German Soldiers leaving to Poland at the outbreak of W.W.II, 1 September 1939. The inscription reads "Wir fahren nach Polen um Juden zu verschlen" ("We travel to Poland to trash the Jews")

*Guilty of what?  
When men can hate without risk,  
their stupidity is easily convinced,  
the motives supply themselves.*

Louis-Ferdinand Céline,  
*Journey to the End of the Night*

## 8 TOWARD THE TRAGIC END

There is as yet no justice in the world for the victims of the Holocaust. There never will be. A consolation is that sooner or later, who lets heads drop, is recognized for what he is: a murderer, regardless of the "highest ideals" that guided his actions. As Hannah Arendt wrote:

It is true that totalitarian domination tried to establish these holes of oblivion into which all deeds, good and evil, would disappear, but just as the Nazis feverish attempts, from June, 1942, on, to erase all traces of the massacres . . . were doomed to failure, so all efforts to let their opponents "disappear in silent anonymity" were in vain. The holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left to tell the story. Hence, nothing can be "practically useless", at least, not in the long run. <sup>(5)</sup>

There should be a much better consolation: that the Jewish Holocaust has made another Holocaust impossible.

## 9 THEN AND NOW

Before the Nazis came to power Germany was – culturally – a leading European country. The contribution of German scientists in almost every field was astonishing; Germany, at the beginning of the century, played a role in science that is analogous to the role of the United States today. The Nazis' open anti-semitism and racial laws forced Jewish scholars and scientists (among them Albert Einstein) to leave Germany; many non-Jewish scientists also left soon after W.W.II. German science has never regained the importance and leadership it enjoyed before the Nazi came to power.

<sup>5</sup> H. Arendt, *Eichman in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 1994, (New York: Penguin Books), p.232-233.

Homosexuals, not unlike Jews, have been able to give incommensurable contributions to western culture, with astonishing creativity: Tchaikowski, Leonard Bernstein, Oscar Wilde, Alan Turing, Allen Ginsberg, Versace, Leonardo da Vinci, Pier-Paolo Pasolini, Walt Whitman...

We still live in a time where basic rights of homosexual men and women are not fully granted. Following a period of visibility and openings, hate crimes and a general hostility against homosexuals are on the rise. Hostility toward homosexuals is still widespread (even 50 % of Americans may share some anti-gay attitude, according to a 1996 TIME magazine poll). The military and police are a stronghold of anti-gays attitudes.

Homosexual businesses are still being discriminated. For example, the world-famous fashion designer Versace kept hidden his homosexuality in Italy because he feared a drop in sales. To be known as homosexual may mean to be fired in several European countries. Even if there are laws protecting individuals against discrimination, that laws are often not applied especially if the job is high-profile or involves public relations.

Many think that homosexuality is a shameful condition. Many think that homosexuals are child abusers, as once Jews were thought to kidnap gentile children: homosexuals therefore appear as a danger to the children, and as despicable individuals. Several times we heard homosexuals insulted as “stinking f ...,” and homosexuals are by many associated to disgust or filthiness. Other maintain homosexuals are in a condition of “moral disarray.” We can see here an analogy with the different religious code of Jews: Jews then and homosexuals now are held “ethically inferior.”

Homosexuals and transgender persons are often viewed under a set of dehumanizing stereotypes as Jews once were. There are many similarities that accomunate anti-Semitic attitudes of Germans and anti-gays attitudes of today. The conditions that made possible the Holocaust are being reproduced in similar fashion. In the panels “Then” and “Now”, we will summarize several aspects of pre-Holocaust Germany that are mirrored today.

<b>DISCRIMINATION</b>	
<b>THEN: BY RACE</b>	<b>NOW: BY SEX/GENDER IDENTITY</b>
<p>Germans saw Jews as intrinsically different from Germans. Germans could not identify themselves as potential targets of violence simply because being Jewish is primarily a racial fact. In addition, Jews were thought unable to share the the values of the German Volk, because of their different religion, culture, and history. Being without a true Vaterland, they were seen as despicable people without roots.</p>	<p>Being homosexual or lesbian or transsexual is a mainly genetic fact. Thus, it can happen to those that aren't. Many think that homosexuals men and women can not share basic and fundamental values of our society - or even that homosexuality sets in danger basic structures of our society, family, for example.</p>

<b>SEGREGATION LEADS TO NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES...</b>	
<b>THEN</b>	<b>NOW</b>
<p>Jews were socially segregated. Even if they did not live in ghettos anymore, most of them lived de facto in a parallel society. Soon after the Nazis came to power in Germany, segregation became almost total; eventually the Germans practiced a policy of mass expulsion. No citizenship, no more human contacts, Jews were known only through a defamation campaign.</p> <p>Social segregation reinforces stereotypes. The stereotype of the usurer was largely due to the prohibition or restriction gentiles imposed on Jews regarding the practice of several liberal profession.</p>	<p>To be exposed as an homosexual may mean the loss of business or job, and exclusion from social ties and productive society. Homosexuals living "closeted" are actually segregated. In addition, negative stereotypes are often being spread by mass media - i. e., association of homosexuals with violence, murder, and crime.</p> <p>Today a transsexual woman may easily lose her job in several European countries, and, generally, finding a job is one of the thoughtest difficulties for transgender women. Prostitution is a consequence of leaving transgendered persons without any possibility of employment. To claim that the individuals of that class are depraved - is to confuse the cause with the effect.</p>

<b>A PRESSURE ACTING ON SOCIETY AS A WHOLE...</b>	
<b>THEN: ECONOMIC</b>	<b>NOW: DEMOGRAPHIC</b>
<p>When the Nazis gained power, the specter of famine and starvation was a tragic reality. The German society was still under economic pressure, and even if conditions were improving, the memory of recent hardships was still a running sore in 1933. If resources are limited, a resource sharing social outgroup may become target of hostility.</p>	<p>European society is not under economic pressure; the pressure is now demographic. In some European countries, the child birth rate is a little above one child per woman, meaning a global population decrease, and an increase of the fraction of elderly people.</p>

<b>...HELPS CREATING AN ILLUSORY ENEMY</b>	
<b>THEN: CHILD EATERS</b>	<b>NOW: CRIMINALIZATION &amp; CHILD ABUSERS</b>
<p>Germans saw Jews in a different light from other potentially dangerous adversaries. They had not only to be feared, they had to be despised as <i>Untermenschen</i>, sub-humans, non-persons. And dehumanization eases violence.</p>	<p>Several Hollywood movies portrayed the evil characters as sexually deviant. In several instances, homosexuality and child abuse are confused together. There is no education in favor of the respect of sexual diversity. Homosexuals may be paranoidically associated to the “disappearance of children” (as Jews once were). Again, the label of homosexuality is often associated with ridicule, loss of respectability (especially for lesbian women), “nastiness”. These dehumanizing patterns make violence easier.</p>

<b>NO CULTURAL PREPARATION AND NO SOCIAL QUENCHING OF HATE</b>	
<b>THEN</b>	<b>NOW</b>
<p>At the time of the Jewish Holocaust, emphasis was on Nationalism, on racial superiority rather than on acceptance of racial and cultural diversity. To side with “inferior” races or “vile” individuals, as Jews were held, was shameful and despicable. Would anyone put himself or herself in danger to save someone who is despised? This may depend on the perspective of a reward, but in the ‘30s there was rather a promise of shameful</p>	<p>You witness that a colleague of yours is being ousted from his/her job because s/he is homosexual. Would anyone risk the consideration of your colleagues – his/her reputation and possibly his/her job – to manifest opposition against discrimination?</p>

consequences.

## 10 WHY THE HOLOCAUST?

The widespread anti-Semitism made possible the elimination of social ties between German and Jews: the Jews were killed as social being first. Jews who left Germany were deprived of their citizenship. No citizenship, no more human contacts, Jews became socially dead, only a negative stereotype. The Nazi campaign of defamation had another important outcome: to make everyone aware that the despisal of Jews was almost universal and well deserved - Jews were dangerous, and the negation of the most cherished German values. They had not only to be feared, they had to be despised as *Untermenschen*, sub-humans, non-persons. The hostility toward Jews rose at a time when Germans were under strong economic pressure, when they saw their future – and that of their children – in serious jeopardy.

The widespread anti-Semitism, blind hatred and the collective awareness of hatred among Germans were a necessary condition for the Holocaust. Are they also a sufficient condition? Perhaps because we live in a culture where there is no space for the collective dimension of evil, we still need a Copernican revolution that removes from the center stages the few individuals that were, albeit responsible as individuals, not certain a *sufficient* condition to explain the immense misery of the Holocaust or of any extermination attempt in human history. At their place, there should be a whole society that encouraged, supported and ultimately armed them. To affirm that the Holocaust was due to a few individuals that took advantage of a hierarchical chain of command is preposterous: the order they gave should have been at the very least accepted by a large fraction of subordinates. Although mass murder was not what everyone would do (after all, even Nazi officers like Adolf Eichman were never involved personally in cruelty and factual murders), it was something that everyone wished to see done.

The plot of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* asserts the responsibility of few individuals for the Holocaust. Take away the *Untensturmführer* and concentration camps will disappear. Take away Hitler and there is no Nazism. This view follows from one basically flawed view: the evil one is an exception, a perverted one; the people as a whole cannot be ethically wrong. This is contradicted by history, by studies in social psychology, and by the fact that hatred, only once it is collectively shared can *create a corridor into a bizarre world of cruelty and injustice*. After all, witches are not burned at the stake, in public, without a wide majority believing that whitches do exist.

So many times we heard that the immense misery of the Holocaust defies reason. This statement underlines the inadequacy of values, the ineffectiveness of rules and laws. Had everyone known that Jews were being exterminated, the public reaction of outrage would have been restricted to a minority. Few would have risked their reputation or social status to save the Jews. We believe that this has more to do with the diffusion of “blind hatred” rather than with a climate of police terror. Would anyone put himself or herself in danger to save someone you and everyone else despise? In most cases, this may depend on the perspective of a reward. There is a promise of shameful consequences, if you attempt to save someone universally despised. Schindler's figure epitomize the absence of cultural preparation that everyone has to face in front of such unbelievable enormity as an extermination attempt implies. Schindler's – a typical profiteer – did every effort to save his Jewish employees; Henry Ford, in many other ways a philanthropist, encouraged the diffusion of anti-Semitic views in America.

Opposition to hatred is always necessary, no matter that hate may appear appealing, self-rewarding, and relieving, no matter how overwhelming peer pressure may be. Very often we face a dilemma: should we oppose what we think is wrong – be prepared to stand against the whole world – or shall we simply comply with everyone else's attitude? We must be prepared to face hostility and disapprobation. Only in that case we can break the pattern that leads to collective hatred. Socially shared hatred is most dangerous, as it may lead to widespread and indiscriminate violence. Germans would not have carried out the extermination of the Jews if the extermination would have split the German society. As a matter of fact, when the Nazis started deportation from occupied or allied countries they always stepped back if there was a strong reaction against deportation. The Nazis could not afford to face hostility from their allies.

Can we always distinguish between the sickening madness of individuals and the septic lunacy of a dying society? Yes, we can. We must always recognize that there are no sub-humans. There are just human beings. There are no monsters, no exceptions to laws protecting fundamental rights. Any dehumanizing attitude is ultimately self-deceiving – a sort of collective paranoia – in which contact with the real other, the real person, is lost in favor of a self-rewarding delirium.

Discrimination and blind hatred – like an endemic illness – exist and are widespread in present-day Europe and America – especially in countries or in segments of society under demographic pressure. They are against Gays as they were once against Jews in Germany and in Eastern Europe. There is no socially-accepted or socially-enforced bulwark against the sliding path toward widespread violence or mass murder. This time, one must be aware that no concentration camp is needed: the means police, and military now have can make violence “home delivered” and transparent to the video-cameras. Every defamation attempt, every form of discrimination against homosexual and transgender persons should be denounced for what it is: an injustice that hurts another person's feelings.

It is ultimately the absence of a culture of human diversity (and our ignorance of the social dynamics leading to mass murder) that make possible the repetition of the Holocaust. Until everyone can be led to believe that someone else, not sharing his or her beliefs, customs, skin color, sexual orientation, etc., is not a human being, hate would sooner or later appear legitimated or necessary. Perhaps under climatic, economic, demographic pressure accepting co-existence with groups close but different to our own, is difficult. Perhaps to make this co-existence possible is the – as yet unfulfilled – goal of civilization. The struggle for righteousness is as yet a lonesome struggle – as it was at Schindler's time.

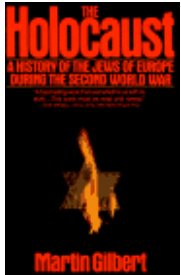
. . . man, the more he gains freedom in the sense of emerging from the original oneness with man and nature and the more he becomes an “individual.” Has no choice but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else to seek a kind of security by such ties with the world as destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self.<sup>(6)</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Erich H. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, An Owl Book, (New York: Henry Holt & Co.), 1994, p. 21



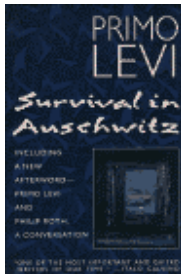
## 11 SUGGESTED READINGS



Martin Gilbert,  
*The Holocaust – A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War*



André Schwarz-Bart,  
*The Last of the Just*



Primo Levi,  
*Survival in Auschwitz*



Elie Wiesel,  
*Night*



Leonard Dinnerstein,  
*Anti-Semitism in America*



Hannah Arendt,  
*Eichmann in Jerusalem – An essay on the Banality of Evil*

Figure 13 A few of the works cited in this booklet and available at the [exhibition bookstore](#).

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