

4. *The Nazis Take Power*

Anyone who interprets National Socialism as merely a political movement knows almost nothing about it. It is more than a religion. It is the determination to create the new man.

ADOLF HITLER

OVERVIEW

Within weeks of taking office, Adolf Hitler was altering German life. Within a year, Joseph Goebbels, one of his top aides, could boast:

The revolution that we have made is a total revolution. It encompasses every aspect of public life from the bottom up... We have replaced individuality with collective racial consciousness and the individual with the community... We must develop the organizations in which every individual's entire life will be regulated by the Volk community, as represented by the Party. There is no longer arbitrary will. There are no longer any free realms in which the individual belongs to himself... The time of personal happiness is over.¹

How did Hitler do it? How did he destroy the Weimar Republic and replace it with a totalitarian government – one that controls every part of a person's life? Many people have pointed out that he did not destroy democracy all at once. Instead, he moved gradually, with one seemingly small compromise leading to another and yet another. By the time many were aware of the danger, they were isolated and alone. This chapter details those steps. It also explores why few Germans protested the loss of their freedom and many even applauded the changes the Nazis brought to the nation. Historian Fritz Stern offers one answer. “The great appeal of National Socialism – and perhaps of every totalitarian dictatorship in this century – was the promise of absolute authority. Here was clarity, simplicity.” To achieve that clarity, the German people gave up “what for so long they had taken for granted: the formal rule of law, a free press, freedom of expression, and the elementary protection of habeas corpus.”²

British historian A. J. P. Taylor answers the question by focusing on a unique quality in Adolf Hitler: “the gift of translating commonplace thoughts into action. He took seriously what was to others mere talk. The driving force in him was a terrifying literalism. Writers had been running down democracy for half a century. It took Hitler to create a totalitarian dictatorship... Again, there was nothing new in anti-Semitism... Everything which Hitler did against the Jews followed logically from the racial doctrines in which most Germans vaguely believed. It was the same with foreign policy... Hitler took [the Germans] at their word. He made the Germans live up to their professions, or down to them – much to their regret.”³

Other scholars note that upon taking office, Hitler stirred up a whirlwind of promises and demands, terrorizing opponents and dividing the German people. There was, as one man recalled, “no time to think... The dictatorship, and the whole process of its coming into being, was above all diverting. It provided an excuse not to think for people who did not want to think anyway.”⁴ Hannah Arendt, a scholar who left Germany in the 1930s, spent years reflecting on totalitarian regimes. She concluded, “Of all the forms of political organization that do not permit freedom, only totalitarianism consciously seeks to crowd out the ability to think. Man cannot be silenced, he can only be crowded into not speaking. Under all other conditions, even within the racing noise of our time, thinking is possible.”⁵

READING 1

The Democrat and the Dictator

In the early 1930s, a severe depression threatened nations around the world. As unemployment mounted, a number of people came to believe that it was not just their leaders that had failed but government itself. Virtually every election around the world brought to power new leaders. Many of them, like Adolf Hitler, were enemies of democracy.

Three years before Hitler came to power, he publicly declared, “We National Socialists have never claimed to be representatives of a democratic point of view, we have openly declared that we would deploy democratic means only to attain power, and after our assumption of power we would deny our enemies all those means which are allowed to us while in opposition... For us, parliament is not an end in itself but a means to an end.” Few chose to take Hitler at his word. Many preferred to “overlook and excuse what was ominous and radically evil in National Socialism. They clutched at the pseudo-religious aspect of it, the promise of salvation held out so cleverly and on so many levels.”⁶

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Bernt Engelmann was only twelve years old on January 30, 1933 – the day Hitler became chancellor of Germany – but he never forgot the events of that day. He heard the news at noon. That evening when he and his parents gathered around the radio, they heard the voice of a new announcer.

It was entirely different from the ones I was familiar with: no longer calm and objective, but full of a fanatic fervor... Many years later, when the Third Reich was a thing of the past, I dug around in the archives of the Cologne broadcasting station and found the very text read by the announcer that evening of January 30. As I perused it, I felt the same amazement and disgust that had filled me as a twelve-year-old boy.

There it was, in black and white, and the announcer had spoken the text as an overwhelmed eyewitness might describe the finish of the Monaco Grand Prix auto race:

“A procession of thousands of blazing torches is streaming up Wilhelmstrasse... They have marched through the Brandenburg Gate, the brown columns of the SA, victors in a long and arduous struggle, a struggle that claimed many victims. The banners glow blood-red, and against a white ground bristles the swastika, symbol of the rising sun! A glorious, an inspiring sight!

“And now – yes, it is! At this moment we hear from the south the thud of marching feet. It is the divisions of the Stahlhelm. The crowd listens with bated breath, the torches sway... Everywhere torches, torches, torches, and cheering people! A hundred thousand voices shout joyously, ‘Sieg Heil! Heil Hitler!’ into the night!

And there, at his window, high above the cheering throngs and the sea of flaming torches stands Reich President von Hindenburg, the venerable field marshal... He stands erect, stirred to the depths by the moment. And next door in the Reich Chancellery, the Fuhrer – yes, it is the Fuhrer! There he stands with his ministers, Adolf Hitler... the unknown soldier of the World War, the unyielding warrior, the standard-bearer of freedom...!”⁷

Melita Maschmann, then fifteen years old, was one of thousands of Germans who attended the parade. She later said, “Some of the uncanny feeling of that night remains with me even today. The crashing tread of the feet, the sombre pomp of the red and black flags, the flickering light from the torches on the faces and the songs with melodies that were at once aggressive and sentimental.”⁸

The next day, Hitler told the German people:

[The] new national government will consider it its first and supreme duty to restore our nation’s unity of will and spirit. It will safeguard and defend the foundations on which the strength of our nation rests. It will firmly protect Christianity, the basis of our entire morality; it will safeguard the family, the nucleus of our body politic and our state. It will, beyond estates and classes, make our people aware again of its national and political unity, and the duties that evolve therefrom. It wants to base the education of Germany’s youth on a reverence for our great past, on pride in our old traditions. It will thus declare war on spiritual, political, and cultural nihilism. Germany must not and will not become prey to anarchic Communism.

In place of turbulent instincts, the government will once again make national discipline our guide. In so doing, it will consider with great care all institutions which are the true guarantors of the strength and power of our nation.

Max von der Gruen listened to that speech with family and friends.

On February 1, Hitler proclaimed his new government officially in power. He did not do so before the Reichstag, the elected Parliament, but over the radio. The meaning was clear enough. Now everyone knew that Hitler no longer needed a parliament.

Were the people clearly aware of his contempt for the parliament? I doubt it. In any case, my family considered it quite proper that Hitler had ceased to address “that crowd,” i.e. the deputies of the Reichstag, and turned directly to the people. My grandmother regarded this procedure as a great step forward.⁹

On March 4, 1933 – just a month after Hitler took office – Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president of the United States in an election marked by doubt and uncertainty. As reporter Thomas L. Stokes noted, “People were voting more ‘agin’ than for.”

As anxious Americans gathered around their radios on Inauguration Day, Roosevelt reassured them. “This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance... We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action... They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.”

So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance... We do not distrust the future of essential democracy.

Stokes said of the president’s first weeks in office, “Roosevelt could have become a dictator in 1933. He did not... His first job was to do something, and do it quickly to save the nation’s banking structure... This he could have accomplished in one bold stroke by taking over the banks at the time and nationalizing them. But he did not take this way, though he was urged to do so. Instead he turned the banks back to their owners and operators and tried to realize his ends by the slow process of reform of the system through law.”¹⁰

CONNECTIONS

Even though Fritz Stern was not quite seven years old in 1933, he, like Bernt Engelmann, never forgot the things he saw and heard the day Hitler took office. How do you account for the fact that most Germans never forgot the events of that day? Stern has called it the “beginning of my political education.” What lessons do you think he learned that day and in the days that followed about the relationship between leaders and their followers? About the role of citizens in a democracy?

→What kind of spell does a parade cast – particularly one held at night and lit by torches? What happens to the individual in the crowd? Why do you think parades and rallies have this effect? How did Hitler use it to his advantage? Walter Bieringer, an American businessman, witnessed the torchlight parade described in the reading. His reminiscences, available from the Facing History Resource Center, are summarized in *Elements of Time*, pages 72-73. Other accounts of the day can be found in two video montages *Childhood Experiences of German Jews (Elements of Time, page 136)* and *Friedrich (Elements of Time, pages 157-159)*.

What did Hitler mean when he vowed that his new national government would “protect Christianity”? Jesus taught his followers to “love thy neighbor as thy self.” How is it possible, then, for someone to protect Christianity by turning neighbor against neighbor?

Hitler vowed to declare war on “spiritual, political, and cultural nihilism.” *Nihilism* is usually defined as the systematic denial of the reality of experience and the rejection of all value or meaning attributed to it. Whose “spiritual, political, and cultural” experiences did Hitler want acknowledged? Whose experiences did he wish to deny? How did he use language to hide meaning? To divert attention from his goals? How can listeners become more alert to the way some speakers use language to hide meaning?

The day after Hitler took office, newspaper editors around the world commented on the event. The *New York Times* printed an editorial entitled “The Tamed Hitler.” Although it recognized the lawlessness of Hitler’s past, it was hopeful about the future. The editors wrote, “Always, we may look for some such transformation when a radical or demagogue fights his way into responsible office.” They argued that “the more violent parts of his alleged program” would be softened or abandoned. In your experience, do people change when they are given a responsible position? How likely was it that Hitler would change? Why do you think many chose to believe he had changed? What would they have had to do if they did not believe in his “transformation”?

What did Roosevelt mean when he said, “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror?” How did Hitler use that fear?

Compare the themes of Hitler’s February 1 proclamation with Roosevelt’s inaugural address. What values were reflected in each man’s speech? In each leader’s approach to change?

In the 1930s, the invention of the radio brought world leaders closer to the people than ever before. For the first time, citizens could hear world leaders for themselves. Bill Moyers, a television journalist, can still recall the voices of Hitler and Roosevelt. In an interview with Margot Stern Strom, the executive director of Facing History, he noted, “I could sense even though no one said anything about it, this demonic fury that drove [Hitler] – this blind passion and this mesmerizing madness that had come over him, over his followers, and over much of Germany. Then, in listening to Franklin Roosevelt, I would hear that broadminded, magnanimous, and somewhat paternalistic individual who, although reared in circumstances of affluence and privilege, was still in touch with the deeper values of society.” Moyers went on to note, “The human voice carried with it its own revelation about character and personality.”¹¹ Today we can see as well as hear world leaders. How telling is that view? What can you learn about a person from the sound of his or her voice? From the way he or she appears on television?

→Bill Moyers’s television documentary, *The Democrat and the Dictator*, compares and contrasts the way Hitler and Roosevelt attacked the problems of their respective nations. How was the United States able to pre-

serve its democracy at a time when Germany could not? Moyers' documentary and his interview with Margot Stern Strom are both available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 2

Threats to Democracy

As the worldwide depression deepened in the 1930s, some people turned to communism. Others were attracted to fascism – a political system that seemed to offer an alternative to both democracy and communism. Fascists opposed democracy, because it is “too slow” and divides a nation against itself. Democrats, they insisted, put selfish individual interests before the needs of the state. Fascists, on the other hand, place their faith in a strong, charismatic leader who expresses the will of the nation and satisfies the desires of the masses.

Benito Mussolini, a former socialist, established the first fascist government in Italy in 1922. It served as a model for Germany's. In both systems, the leader's or *Fuehrer's* word was law. He was not dependent on a legislature, courts, or voters. Whenever he changed his mind, public policy changed. According to Hitler, a *Fuehrer* is a leader “in whose name everything is done, who is said to be ‘responsible’ for all, but whose acts can nowhere be called into question,” because “he is the genius or the hero conceived as the man of pure race.”

Such a leader is not an emperor nor an aloof dictator. He knows what is going on around him. Again, in Hitler's words, he is a “practical psychologist and an organizer – a psychologist in order that he may master the methods by which he can gain the largest number of passive adherents, and an organizer in order that he may build up a compact body of followers to consolidate his gain.” Among those followers are an elite group of advisors who are the “racially fittest” and who have been formed from “the struggle for power which is characteristic of nature.”

This glorification of the nation's leader is based on the belief that people are “capable neither of heroism nor intelligence.” They are “swayed only by gross and violent feelings like hatred, fanaticisms, and hysteria.” So the “simplest arguments” must be “repeated again and again.” They must be “fanatically one-sided and with unscrupulous disregard for truth, impartiality, or fair play.”

Both Mussolini and Hitler maintained that only a few people were intelligent enough to rise in the world and that those men had the obligation to rule. Decision making was too important to be left to the people. It required a “man of the people” who could control the people. They, in turn, would give him unquestioning obedience.

Fascism was not solely a German or Italian aberration, nor a historical phenomenon confined to the 1930s and '40s. It recurs “wherever the immune system of a society is weakened by economic decline and political exhaustion, whenever democratic politicians try to fend off a challenge from the far right by acceding to the political mythology of racial or cultural purification.”

Many people found fascism appealing in the 1930s. There were fascist groups not only in Italy and Germany but also in England, France, and the United States. Zabedi Barbi, a social psychologist, argues that many people were attracted to fascism because it “promised to solve the problems and give the people purpose and power.” Other experts trace the rise of fascism to economics. They note that fascists were often brought to power by the rich and powerful people who saw democracy as a threat to their prestige, wealth, and influence. Still others, like Fritz Stern, believe the attraction lay in the clarity and simplicity of the solutions fascists offered.

CONNECTIONS

Draw a diagram showing how power is divided in a democracy. Who holds power? What role do the people play? What part do laws play? Draw a diagram showing the division of power in a fascist state. Where does power lie? What role do people play? What part do laws play? How well does either diagram square with reality?

Was the society described by Kurt Vonnegut in “Harrison Bergeron” (Chapter 2, Reading 1) a fascist society?

Reread the views of Carl Schurz and Otto von Bismarck (Chapter 2, Reading 6). Which of Hitler’s ideas might each find attractive? Which would he disapprove of? Would either man be likely to join the Nazis?

In the early 1900s, people used words like *man* and *mankind* in two ways. Sometimes these terms referred to all of humankind, women as well as men. At other times, they referred only to men. When Hitler speaks of a fascist leader as “the man of pure race” or “the man of the people,” in which sense was he using the word *man*? How was he linking racism with leadership? Research Mussolini’s ideas about race and leadership. How were they similar to Hitler’s? What differences seem most striking?

Hitler claimed that the people are “capable neither of heroism or intelligence.” He insisted that they are “swayed only by gross and violent feelings like hatred, fanaticisms, and hysteria.” How did the parade and the speech described in Reading 1 build on these beliefs?

In 1993, many people were surprised by the rise of fascism in the former Soviet Union. Editorial writer Alan Berger does not believe it should have been a surprise. In his view, “fascism was not solely a German or Italian aberration, nor a historical phenomenon confined to the 1930s and ’40s.” It can recur “wherever the immune system of a society is weakened by economic decline and political exhaustion, whenever democratic politicians try to fend off a challenge from the far right by acceding to the political mythology of racial or cultural purification.”¹² According to Berger, why

are people attracted to fascism? How do you explain the appeal of fascism? Record your ideas in your journal so that you can refer to them as you continue reading.

What is the best way to combat fascism? Journalist I. F. Stone believed that it is by keeping alive “the tradition of freedom; it must be freshly taught, explained, and fought for in every generation.” He went on to say that a “society in which men are not free to speak their minds is not a good society no matter what material benefits it may offer the few or the many. The only absolute value I would affirm is freedom of the mind. Without it there cannot be social justice which is our duty toward others.”¹³ Compare his views to those of Hannah Arendt in the overview. What connection do they both see between thinking and social justice? Why do they see that link as critical to fighting fascism?

READING 3

Targeting the Communists

From the start, Hitler sought and found opportunities to abolish civil rights. The first came less than a month after he took office. A fire broke out in the building where the Reichstag met. Hitler rushed to the scene and amid the smoke and confusion, he vowed to punish those responsible. It did not take him long to decide who they were. That night, he screamed, “Now we’ll show them! Anyone who stands in our way will be mown down! The German people have been soft too long. Every Communist official must be shot. All Communist deputies must be hanged this very night. All friends of the Communists must be locked up. And that goes for the Social Democrats... as well!”

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The German people have been soft too long. Every Communist official must be shot. All Communist deputies must be hanged this very night. All friends of the Communists must be locked up. And that goes for the Social Democrats... as well!

Hitler immediately ordered the arrest of leaders of the Communist party, Communist labor unions, and anyone with ties to the Communists. Within days, Nazi storm troopers dragged off to prison camps four thousand Communists and other radicals. The rest went into hiding. Among them was Wolfgang Roth, a young artist who had nothing to do with the fire. But as a radical, he was under suspicion. He later recalled the days he and a friend spent “underground.”

Meta and I lived in different parts of the city from night to night. We hardly trusted anyone, often not even good friends, for in the meanwhile they could have become Nazi informers. Daily existence had become dangerous for us, and we never knew whether we would live to see the next night, the next day as free people... The illegal groups consisted mostly of four to five people, who often hardly knew one another. Some of these cells were busted, since informers were

hanging around everywhere. We met in coffeehouses, pretended to be playing chess, without even knowing how. But this made it possible to meet and talk with one another.¹⁴

The police later picked up Roth for questioning. He was released only when officers from his old neighborhood vouched for him. His friends were not as fortunate. A number of them were murdered. Were they to blame for the fire? Hitler did not bother to find out. He saw an opportunity to get rid of his opponents and he took it.

The day after the fire, the chancellor issued two decrees. The titles – “For the Defense of Nation and State” and “To Combat Treason against the German Nation and Treasonable Activities” – reveal exactly how Hitler planned to use the fire to achieve his goals. He suspended, until further notice, those parts of the constitution that dealt with personal freedom. The government now had the right to censor mail, listen to private telephone conversations, and read telegrams. It could also search homes and confiscate property.

Although Germans no longer had the civil rights their constitution guaranteed, they still had the right to vote. And elections were held on March 5 as previously scheduled. Although the Nazis got 44 percent of the vote, they did not have a majority in the Reichstag. And even though they had singled out the Communists as “enemies of the state,” the Communist party received about 12 percent of the vote, thus entitling it to 81 deputies in the Reichstag. But those representatives were never able to claim their seats. If they appeared in public, they faced arrest. Other opposition parties also held their own. The Social Democrats captured 119 seats and the Catholic Center party increased its representation from 70 to 73. On the other hand, the People’s party and other conservative groups did poorly.

The election results did not stop Hitler. He continued to carry out his plans for the nation as if the election had not occurred. On March 11, he made Joseph Goebbels head of a new department in the government, the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. It was, in Hitler’s view, a critical step in building a fascist state. Goebbels and his deputies would tell people whom to hate and why. Less than two weeks later, on March 23, the government announced the opening of the nation’s first concentration camp at Dachau. The first inmates were two hundred Communists.

That same day, the Reichstag overwhelmingly approved, by a vote of 441 to 94, a bill entitled “Law for Terminating the Suffering of People and Nation.” Also known as the Enabling Act, it was short and to the point. It “enabled” Hitler to punish anyone he considered an enemy of the state. The act also stated that “laws passed by the government may deviate from the Constitution.” Only the Social Democrats voted against the law. deputies that opposed Hitler were on the run. With the new law in the Nazis began their slow but systematic destruction of democracy.

CONNECTIONS

Helen Fein, the author of *Accounting for Genocide*, has argued that the effects of singling out a group can not be overestimated. She writes that in every case of genocide, “the victims have previously been defined as outside the universe of obligation of the dominant group.” What does she mean by the “universe of obligation”? Who is a part of yours?

Imagine the police arresting four thousand people in a large city in a matter of days. How many people probably heard the police arrive at one building after another? Watched as four thousand men and women were herded into police vehicles? Noticed the unexplained absence of co-workers, neighbors, or friends? Why didn’t anyone speak out? How do you think the fact that the storm troopers came for the Communists affected the way individuals responded? Did Germans consider Communists part of their “universe of obligation”?

The decrees proclaimed in February suspended the parts of the constitution that protected individual rights. The government could now read mail, listen to all calls, and search homes without warning. Why would Hitler call decrees that suspended personal freedom “For the Defense of Nation and State” and “To Combat Treason against the German Nation and Treasonable Activities”? Why would he call a statute that allows him to punish anyone he considers an enemy without a trial the “Law for Terminating the Suffering of People and Nation”? How is he using language to mask his goals? What was the atmosphere in the Reichstag when these laws were passed? How did that help Hitler?

In Chapter 3 Molly Ivins was quoted as saying that it is the “funniest idea” that “if we are less free we could be safer.” How do her comments apply to the German people in February of 1933? Did they really believe that they were safer now that they were less free? Were they safer?

Why did the Reichstag agree to pass the Enabling Act? Why did people accept it? What were the consequences of their decision in the short run? In the long run?

Roth noted that “We hardly trusted anyone, often not even good friends, for in the meanwhile they could have become Nazi informers.” What does that suggest about the way the Nazis won obedience?

What does it take to create a dictatorship out of a democracy? What are the steps? Record your answer in your journal.

Review the identity chart you created in Chapter 1. Imagine that you, with your particular strengths and weaknesses, associations and background, were transported to Germany in 1933. How do you like to think you would have responded to the events of the day? What would you know for sure about Hitler and the Nazis in March? What would not be as clear? Whom

might you trust? What policies might you support? Oppose? Be sure to include your feelings as well as your stand on the issues. Are you scared? Uncertain? Confident? Record your comments in your journal.

READING 4

Targeting the Jews

To bring about his revolution, Hitler had to isolate and then eliminate his opponents. Once the Communists were outside the protection of the law, he turned his attention to the Jews. He ordered Nazi leaders to “bring up the Jewish question again and again and again, unceasingly. Every emotional aversion, however slight, must be exploited ruthlessly. As a basic rule among the education professions the Jewish questions should be discussed from the standpoints of the findings of the science of race, of higher ethics, etc. While among members of the labouring classes one must seize on the purely emotional; the emotional aversion to Jews is to be heightened by all possible means.”

As part of its campaign, the government announced a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses. On Saturday, April 1, Germans were to refuse to shop or do business at any company owned by Jews. Julius Streicher, the man in charge of the boycott and the publisher of the antisemitic *Der Stuermer*, created the lie that would be repeated constantly, just as Hitler instructed.

To me the whole thing was inconceivable. It would not sink in that something like that could even be possible in the twentieth century, for such things had happened, at most, in the Middle Ages. And yet it was the bitter truth that outside, in front of the door, there stood two boys in brown shirts, Hitler's executives.

The same Jew who plunged the German people into the blood-letting of the World War, and who committed on it the crime of the November Revolution (Weimar) is now engaged in stabbing Germany, recovering from its shame and misery, in the back... The Jew is again engaged in poisoning public opinion. World Jewry is engaged again in slandering the German people... At 10 A.M. Sat., 1 April, the defensive action of the German people against the Jewish world criminal will begin. A defensive fight begins, such as never has been dared before throughout the centuries.¹⁵

Although the boycott was not as successful as the Nazis had hoped, it offered many Jews a frightening glimpse into the future. Edwin Landau described the boycott in his hometown in West Prussia.

In the morning hours the Nazi guards began to place themselves in front of the Jewish shops and factories, and every shopper was warned not to buy from the Jews. In front of our business, also, two young Nazis posted themselves and prevented customers from entering. To me the whole thing was inconceivable. It would not sink in that something like that could even be possible in the twentieth century, for

such things had happened, at most, in the Middle Ages. And yet it was the bitter truth that outside, in front of the door, there stood two boys in brown shirts, Hitler's executives.

And for this nation we young Jews had once stood in the trenches in cold and rain, and spilled our blood to protect the land from the enemy. Was there no comrade any more from those days who was sickened by these goings-on? One saw them pass by on the street, among them quite a few for whom one had done a good turn. They had a smile on their face that betrayed their malicious pleasure...

I took my war decorations, put them on, went into the street, and visited Jewish shops, where at first I was also stopped. But I was seething inside, and most of all I would have liked to shout my hatred into the faces of these barbarians. Hatred, hatred – when had it become part of me? – It was only a few hours ago that a change had occurred within me. This land and this people that until now I had loved and treasured had suddenly become my enemy. So I was not a German anymore, or I was no longer supposed to be one. That, of course, cannot be settled in a few hours. But one thing I felt immediately: I was ashamed that I had once belonged to this people. I was ashamed about the trust that I had given to so many who now revealed themselves as my enemies. Suddenly the street, too, seemed alien to me; indeed, the whole town had become alien to me. Words do not exist to describe the feelings that I experienced in those hours. Having arrived at home, I approached the one guard whom I knew and who also knew me, and I said to him: “When you were still in your diapers I was already fighting out there for this country.” He answered: “You should not reproach me for my youth, sir... I've been ordered to stand here.” I looked at his young face and thought, he's right. Poor, misguided young people!¹⁶

CONNECTIONS

What lies does Streicher tell in his speech? To what emotions did his speech appeal? Why did he use the word *defensive* to describe the action he would like Germans to take?

The night before the boycott, Joseph Goebbels, the newly appointed Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, gave a speech in which he referred to the Jews of Germany as “guests.” He told his audience, “If they believe they can misuse our hospitality they are sadly mistaken.” What is Goebbels implying about German citizens of Jewish descent? About their right to live in Germany?

Write a working definition of the word *boycott*. Research its use in American history. For example, how did the colonists use boycotts to express their disapproval of British taxes in the 1770s? How did civil rights

workers use boycotts to express their disapproval of a particular company's racist policies in the 1950s and 1960s? How was the boycott of Jewish businesses similar to these boycotts? What differences seem most striking?

Make an identity chart for Edwin Landau before and after the boycott. How did the way he viewed himself change? How do you account for the change? Why did he think such a boycott was possible only in the Middle Ages? What was different about life in the twentieth century – the people or their government?

What choices were open to “Aryan” Germans when the Nazis announced the boycott? What choices were open to German Jews? How may what happened to the Communists have affected those decisions? What were the short-term consequences of each option? What do you think the long-term consequences may be? Did most Germans in 1933 regard Jews as part of their “universe of obligation”?

The boycott was voluntary. Although “Aryans” who entered a shop owned by Jews were harassed, no one was punished for doing so. Do you think Germans who chose to buy from Jewish merchants knew they would not be punished? Was it fear of punishment that kept other Germans from entering Jewish shops?

Hilda G., a young Jew living in rural Germany in 1933, recalls that the boycott suddenly turned her German neighbors against their Jewish neighbors. Peter Gay, a Jew who then lived in Berlin, remembers little antisemitism at the time of the boycott. (Their testimonies appear on the video *Childhood Experiences of German Jews* available from the Facing History Resource Center.) Why do you think Jews in rural communities were isolated more quickly than those in large urban areas?

READING 5

Legalizing Racism

The boycott set the stage for yet another step in carrying out Hitler's “racial” policies. People were whispering about those plans long before they were made public. President Paul von Hindenburg was among those who heard rumors of anti-Jewish legislation. On April 4, he asked Hitler to exempt Jewish veterans, their fathers, and sons from the new laws. Over one hundred thousand Jews had served in the German army during World War I and twelve thousand had died in the line of duty. About thirty-five thousand had been awarded medals. Mindful of that record, the president noted, “If they were worthy to fight and bleed for

Germany, then they should also be considered worthy to continue serving the fatherland in their professions.”

Hitler responded to Hindenburg’s letter with praise for his “noble motives.” He promised to incorporate the president’s suggestions into laws under consideration. But he did not back down from his position. Instead he reminded the president of why the laws were needed:

The first is the glaring wrong created by the incredible discrimination against the German element that supports the state. For there are a whole number of intellectual professions today – medicine and the law, for instance – where in several places in Germany, in Berlin and elsewhere, the Jews hold up to 80 percent and more of all positions. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of German intellectuals, including countless war veterans, subsist on unemployment insurance, or are being ruined by finding themselves in some entirely subordinate position.

The second is the great shock to the authority of the state which is being caused by the fact that an entirely alien body, which has never really become one with the German people, and whose talent is primarily a business talent, is pushing its way into government positions and providing the mustard seed of a kind of corruption of whose extent people to this day are not even approximately aware. One of the major reasons why the old Prussian state was such a clean one was that the Jews were granted only a very limited access to the civil service. The officer corps kept itself almost entirely pure.¹⁷

On April 7, a new law known as the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” went into effect. It removed non-Aryans from their jobs in order to “restore” the civil service to “true Germans.” The only Jews to keep their positions were Jewish veterans, their fathers, and their sons. Another law, proclaimed the same day, dismissed Jewish prosecuting attorneys. Before the month was over, Jewish doctors who worked within the National Health System also lost their jobs. At about the same time, the government sharply limited the number of Jews who could attend a public high school or teach in one. As a result of these decrees, 20 percent of all German Jews lost their jobs. In the months that followed, the laws were expanded to include more and more people. By the end of the year, one-third of all Jews in Germany did not earn enough money to pay taxes. The new laws marked the beginning of the economic isolation of German Jews.

CONNECTIONS

The exchange of letters between Hindenburg and Hitler in April 1933 offers insights into political attitudes of the two German leaders. What prompted Hindenburg to write? Who was within his “universe of obligation”? How did Hitler respond? What was the tone of his letter?

Hitler described the Jews as an “alien body” and the German officer corps as “pure.” What was he implying about the Jews? The people he called “Germans”? Was either view based on reality?

Was Hitler right? Were most doctors and lawyers Jews? In 1933, a census revealed that 16.2 percent of the nation’s lawyers were Jews, 10.8 percent of its doctors, and 2.7 percent of its judges. Some historians say that the truth is less important in understanding the past than what people think is true. What do they mean by that statement? Do you agree? Would Hitler have agreed?

How is Hitler’s use of the word *restore* similar to Streicher’s use of the word *defensive* in Reading 4?

What does it mean to be “economically isolated”? How does economic isolation turn the victims into “marginal people”?

→ *Elements of Time* contains summaries of interviews with Walter Bieringer, an American businessman (page 72), and Peter Gay, a young Jew from Berlin (pages 100 and 136). The two recall what life was like for Jews in Germany just after Hitler came to power. Gay noted that many assimilated German Jews, especially those who were veterans of World War I, did not feel threatened by the Nazis because they thought of themselves as Germans rather than as Jews.

READING 6

Dismantling Democracy

German Jews were not the only ones affected by the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.” The government could now dismiss any civil servant who was politically undesirable or who would not “support the national state at all times and without reservation.” Indeed the government no longer needed a reason to dismiss a worker. It could now do so without cause.

The law had other effects as well. Judges were no longer expected to be impartial. Instead they were to approach a case with “a healthy prejudice” and “make value judgements which correspond to the National Socialist legal order and the will of political leadership.” The message was clear: “In the everyday practice of law, genuine National Socialism is certainly best represented where the idea of the Fuehrer is silently but loyally followed.”

Bernhard Rust, the new minister of education, argued that “it is less important that a professor make discoveries than that he train his assistants in the proper view of the world.” Other officials agreed. Hans Schemm, the

In the everyday practice of law, genuine National Socialism is certainly best represented where the idea of the Fuehrer is silently but loyally followed.

Bavarian minister of culture, declared that the value of study lay not in a dedication to truth but in an adherence to “the spirit of the National Socialist revolution.” Civil servants had to accept the new rules or lose their positions. Very few resigned. Horst Krueger’s description of his father’s response was typical of many bureaucrats.

All his life he left home for the ministry at 8:23 A.M., traveling second class. At home, he read the old-line newspaper and the local daily, never joined the party, never knew anything about Auschwitz, never subscribed to the *Voelkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi party organ – but for twenty minutes, until the train pulled into Friedrichstrasse Station, he held it up before his face so that others might recognize his loyalty to the new people’s state. At Friedrichstrasse he left the paper behind...

All his life he came home at 4:21 P.M., always on the same train, always in the same second-class compartment, if possible always at the same corner window, always holding a briefcase full of work in his right hand, with his left showing his monthly commutation ticket – he never jumped off the moving train. He had achieved his goal; he was a German civil servant. And no matter whether the government was headed by Noske or Ebert, Scheidemann or Bruening, Papen or Hitler, he was obligated to faith and loyalty. His office was his world.¹⁸

CONNECTIONS

What is the purpose of laws? How did the Nazis use laws to limit free speech? To disenfranchise people? Who supported their efforts?

Notice that yet another of Hitler’s key advisors explains that truth is not the goal of the National Socialist revolution. What was the goal? Why do you think “truth” was the first victim of the revolution?

Create an identity chart for Horst Krueger’s father. Why was he able to work for people who supported democracy as well as those who opposed it? To whom was he loyal? How was he like the bureaucrats described in “*the bear that wasn’t*” (Chapter 1, Reading 1)? What differences seem most striking? Do such people exist today?

READING 7

Turning Neighbor Against Neighbor

An aide to Hitler once expressed the new government's attitude toward its opponents. "The government will brutally beat down all who oppose it. We do not say an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. No, he who knocks out one of our eyes will get his head chopped off, and he who knocks out one of our teeth will get his jaw bashed in."

According to Rudolf Diels, the chief of the political department of the Berlin police, that attitude could clearly be seen on city streets. "Every SA man was 'on the heels of the enemy'; each knew what he had to do. [The storm troopers] cleaned up the districts... Not only Communists but anyone who had ever expressed himself against Hitler's movement was in danger." Some were confined to concentration camps like the one at Dachau. Others found themselves in "private prisons" that Diels described as "hellish torture."¹⁹

Although the storm troopers operated outside the law, they encountered very little opposition. Indeed, many openly supported their efforts. In a short story, Christopher Isherwood, a British writer, described the way the Germans he met responded to the Nazis.

They smiled approvingly at these youngsters in their big, swaggering boots who were going to upset the Treaty of Versailles. They were pleased because it would soon be summer, because Hitler had promised to protect the small tradesmen, because their newspapers told them that the good times were coming. They were suddenly proud of being blond. And they thrilled with a furtive, sensual pleasure, like schoolboys, because the Jews, their business rivals, and the Marxists, a vaguely defined minority of people who didn't concern them, had been satisfactorily found guilty of the defeat and the inflation and were going to catch it.²⁰

The government will brutally beat down all who oppose it. We do not say an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. No, he who knocks out one of our eyes will get his head chopped off, and he who knocks out one of our teeth will get his jaw bashed in.

By April 26, the Nazis felt confident enough to take their campaign of terror and intimidation one step further. They created a special bureaucracy that would be responsible for all executive actions against their political enemies. Under the leadership of Hermann Goering, the Gestapo (an acronym created by the initial letters of *Geheime Staatspolizei*, or Secret State Police) was authorized to "protect public safety and order" by using methods that ranged from interrogation to consigning individuals to "private prisons" and later to concentration camps. According to historians Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippenmann, neither practice was "based upon judicial decisions or subject to judicial review."²¹

CONNECTIONS

How did the Nazis use the language of warfare to describe their political enemies? To create an atmosphere of terror and intimidation?

Earlier you were asked to consider what it takes to create a dictatorship out of a democracy. What are the steps? How important was this one? How does Isherwood's account explain why many people chose to remain silent? How do you explain it?

Fritz Stern and other historians argue that Hitler was "ever anxious about the reaction to him at home and abroad." But in the first few months of Hitler's rule there was very little active opposition. And at every point he was emboldened by "silence, acquiescence, or support."²² What other choices did ordinary people have in the spring of 1933? What could they have done? What might have been the short-term consequences of their actions? The long-term consequences?

READING 8

Taking Over the Universities

Even as the Gestapo was organizing its program of terror and intimidation, one group after another was pledging its support to National Socialism. That process could most clearly be seen in the nation's universities, which had always boasted of their autonomy. Peter Drucker, an Austrian economist, was then a lecturer at Frankfurt University. Fearful of Hitler's plans for Germany, he was prepared to leave the country but hoped that it would not be necessary to do so. An incident convinced him otherwise.

What made me decide to leave right away, several weeks after Hitler had come to power, was the first Nazi-led faculty meeting at the university. Frankfurt was the first university the Nazis tackled, precisely because it was the most self-confidently liberal of major German universities, with a faculty that prided itself on its allegiance to scholarship, freedom of conscience and democracy. The Nazis therefore knew that control of Frankfurt University would mean control of German academia. And so did everyone at the university.

Above all, Frankfurt had a science faculty distinguished both by its scholarship and by its liberal convictions; and outstanding among the Frankfurt scientists was a biochemist-physiologist of Nobel-Prize caliber and impeccable liberal credentials. When the appointment of a Nazi commissar for Frankfurt was announced (around February 25 of

When Hitler arrived in 1933, the tradition of scholarship in Germany was destroyed, almost overnight... Europe was no longer hospitable to the imagination – and not just the scientific imagination. A whole conception of culture was in retreat: the conception that human knowledge is personal and responsible, an unending adventure at the edge of uncertainty.

that year) and every teacher and graduate assistant at the university was summoned to a faculty meeting to hear this new master, everybody knew that a trial of strength was at hand. I had never before attended a faculty meeting, but I did attend this one.

The new Nazi commissar wasted no time on the amenities. He immediately announced that Jews would be forbidden to enter university premises and would be dismissed without salary on March 15; this was something no one had thought possible despite the Nazis' loud anti-Semitism. Then he launched into a tirade of abuse, filth, and four-letter words such as had been heard rarely even in the barracks and never before in academia. He pointed his finger at one department chairman after another and said, "You either do what I tell you or we'll put you into a concentration camp." There was silence when he finished; everybody waited for the distinguished biochemist-physiologist. The great liberal got up, cleared his throat, and said, "Very interesting, Mr. Commissar, and in some respects very illuminating: but one point I didn't get too clearly. Will there be more money for research in physiology?"

The meeting broke up shortly thereafter with the commissar assuring the scholars that indeed there would be plenty of money for "racially pure science." A few of the professors had the courage to walk out with their Jewish colleagues, but most kept a safe distance from these men who only a few hours earlier had been their close friends. I went out sick unto death – and I knew that I was going to leave Germany within forty-eight hours.²³

Other professors chose a different course. Martin Heidegger, a noted philosopher whose thoughts on freedom inspired students like Hannah Arendt, now told his students and colleagues that Germany's soul needed fresh air to breathe and National Socialism would provide it. He argued that freedom of inquiry and free expression were negative and selfish ideas. Instead he encouraged his students to live up to their obligations to the national community in both "thought and deed."

CONNECTIONS

What does Drucker suggest about the way the Nazis won control over his university? About the way the Nazis were likely to take over other parts of German life? A liberal is one who favors individual freedom and tolerates differences. Why do you think the Nazis chose to take over the most liberal university first?

Max Planck, a German physicist, asked Hitler to let Jewish scientists keep their jobs. Hitler replied, "If the dismissal of Jewish scientists means the annihilation of contemporary German science, then we shall do without science for a few years." What does Hitler's response suggest about his priorities? What does Planck's question suggest about his?

Students often look to their teachers to set an example. Heidegger provided one kind of example. Max Planck and a few of his colleagues offered another when they arranged a memorial service for Fritz Haber, a non-Aryan chemist who died in exile. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education to keep professors from attending, many chose to pay their respects to a former colleague. Planck summed up their position. “Haber remained loyal to us; we will remain loyal to him.” How did Heidegger define loyalty? How did Planck define it? What kind of example did each man set for his students? For the nation?

Fritz Stern writes, “We must not forget... that in the first weeks of the new regime the possibility of cautious criticism still existed without the price of martyrdom. It was a period in which the National Socialists themselves were still uncertain, in which the new wielders of power attacked Communists, Social Democrats, and prominent Jews with massive violence but were cautious and experimental in their dealings with ‘respectable’ people.”²⁴ He goes on to note that even though a few individuals and groups did protest, most did not. How do you account for their failure to do so? What part did obedience play in their responses? The need to conform? Fear? Racism? Career aspirations?

Scholars share research and ideas by publishing their findings in books and journals and speaking at international meetings. By the summer of 1933, a few American and British scholars feared that academic freedom in Germany was being subordinated to “political and other considerations ulterior if not irrelevant to true scientific research and scholarship.” They then had to decide whether to cut ties to their German counterparts. They chose not to do so. What may have motivated them? Were they right?

→Jacob Bronowski said, “When Hitler arrived in 1933, the tradition of scholarship in Germany was destroyed, almost overnight... Europe was no longer hospitable to the imagination – and not just the scientific imagination. A whole conception of culture was in retreat: the conception that human knowledge is personal and responsible, an unending adventure at the edge of uncertainty.”²⁵ Drucker was one of many scholars who left Germany in 1933. The others included Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Max Born, and Leo Szilard. How did their leaving affect German scholarship? German society? Bronowski discusses the shift from a search for truth to blind obedience in “From Knowledge to Certainty,” a part of a series of documentaries entitled *The Ascent of Man*. Individual programs as well as the series as a whole are available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 9

Changes at School

Ellen Switzer, a student in Nazi Germany, later recalled how a classmate named Ruth responded to attempts at isolating the Jews.

Her most appealing qualities were her total sincerity and her willingness to share whatever she had with a classmate in need. If the school was cold... Ruth would always lend you her sweater; she insisted that the cold air made her feel more alive. If you forgot your lunch, Ruth shared hers; she was not very hungry that day. Out of the same generosity that prompted her to share her clothing and her food, she also shared her ideas. Ruth was a dedicated Nazi.

She always had a large number of pamphlets, booklets, newsletters and other materials in her book bag, along with her school supplies. If one wanted to discuss clothes or one's problem with a teacher or a parent with Ruth, she was always willing to do so. But somehow, the discussion tended to turn political... "Here, take this booklet, it will explain what I'm talking about," she would often say, pressing in our hands yet another piece of literature, which often seemed surprisingly relevant to the problem we have been discussing...

Some of us, especially those of us who were called "non-Aryan" (and therefore, thoroughly evil) in Ruth's booklets, often asked her how she could possibly have friends who were Jews or who had a Jewish background, when everything she read and distributed seemed to breathe hate against us and our ancestors. "Of course, they don't mean you," she would explain earnestly. "You are a good German. It's those other Jews, pacifists, socialists and liberals who betrayed Germany that Hitler wants to remove from influence..."

When Hitler actually came to power and the word went out that students of Jewish background were to be isolated, that "Aryan" Germans were no longer to associate with "non-Aryans" (i.e., those who were either Jewish or who had one Jewish ancestor, even though they themselves were Christians), Ruth actually came around and apologized to those of us to whom she was no longer able to talk. "The whole thing may be a misunderstanding," she explained, "Maybe it will all be straightened out later. But meanwhile, Hitler must know what he is doing, and I'll follow orders," Not only did she no longer speak to the suddenly ostracized group of classmates, she carefully noted down anybody who did, and reported them.²⁶

CONNECTIONS

How is it possible for a person to be as kind as Ruth and still be a Nazi? What does her story suggest about those who found the Nazis' teachings so attractive? What did Ruth mean when she said "Of course, they don't mean you"? Have you ever said or heard a similar remark when the stereotype of the group doesn't fit an individual within the group?

After the war, in talking to the headmistress of her school about Ruth, Switzer learned that Ruth served as a nurse in a concentration camp where "so-called experiments were carried out on helpless inmates." The headmistress said of Ruth: "She was not really a bad person, she was what I call an ideologue. Once she had come to believe in an idea – no matter how perverted, illogical and evil – she couldn't let go. She's now in prison and she's probably still sure that what she believed was right." Do you agree with that assessment? A guide to teaching *How Democracy Failed* by Ellen Switzer is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

→ See *Childhood Memories*, available from the Facing History Resource Center, for Carl H.'s description of the power of Nazi racial theories. A summary appears in *Elements of Time*, pages 56-63 and 217-220.

READING 10

Teaching a Lesson

By late spring, some Germans were openly turning on their neighbors. American journalist Quentin Reynolds reported a disturbing incident that took place in the "new" Germany:

It happened when Bill and Martha Dodd, the son and daughter of our Ambassador, invited me to drive to Austria with them to attend the Salzburg music festival. We stopped in Nuremberg to spend the night. I had been there once before and knew it as a town that went to sleep early. When we arrived at our hotel on the Koenigstrasse about midnight, and found the street filled with an excited, happy crowd, we wondered if we had stumbled into a toymakers' festival.

"Is there going to be a parade?" I asked the hotel clerk as we registered.

He was a pleasant fellow, and he laughed until the tips of his mustache quivered. Then he said, "It will be a kind of parade. They are teaching someone a lesson."

Martha and Bill and I walked out and joined the crowd. Everyone was keyed up, laughing, talking...

We began to hear music, loud and brassy. The people around me pressed to the curb, laughing in anticipation. We could hear the roar of the crowd three blocks away, a laughing roar that swelled toward us with the music.

The band, I now saw, was one of Storm Troopers, not doll makers. Preceded by torchlights and swastika banners, it marched past. Behind it came two six-foot troopers, half supporting, half dragging a human figure. I could not at first tell if it was a man or a woman. Its head had been clipped bald, and face and head had been coated with white powder. Even though the figure wore a skirt, it might have been a man dressed as a clown. The crowd around me roared at the spectacle of this figure being dragged along. And then, as the SA men suddenly lifted it to its full height, we could read the placard hung around its neck: I wanted to live with a Jew.

I still could not be sure if it was a man or a woman, and the people around me were too busy laughing to hear my questions. After the figure had passed, I was propelled into the street with the crowd. A two-decker bus lumbered up and got stalled in the crush, the driver good-naturedly holding up his hands in surrender. Faces poked from the windows of the bus. On the upper deck people laughed and pointed. The SA men lifted their toy so that they could see it better.

Then someone got the idea of marching the thing into the lobby of our hotel. In it went, followed by part of the crowd. In the street the band played on. By now I had learned that the thing was a girl, and that her name was Anna Rath. The troopers brought her to the street again, and the mob surged forward, toward the next hotel.

Then, suddenly, everyone seemed a little tired of the fun. It was getting late. There were toys to be made tomorrow. The band began to play the Horst Wessel song. Up and down the Koenigstrasse perhaps five thousand people stood at attention, with right arm thrust out, their voices massed. Then the party was over. The banners and the band and the marchers disappeared down the street.

In the bar attached to our hotel, after the late drinkers had left, the Dodds and I asked the bartender about Anna Rath. He whispered her story and the part played in it by Herr S. "You have heard of Herr S., whose home is here?" he asked.

We nodded. He was speaking of Julius Streicher, Hitler's circus master of anti-Semitism. In Berlin it was said that Jews and other undesirables were tortured in the basement of the police building, near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. If so, their cries did not reach the street. In Nuremberg, the astute Streicher gave the people the entertainment they wanted.

Anna Rath, we learned, had made the mistake of attempting to marry her Jewish fiance after the ban on Aryan-Jewish marriages.

I went up to my room and telephoned Hawley in Berlin. The Nazis had all along been denying the atrocities that were occasionally

reported abroad, but here was concrete evidence. No other correspondent had witnessed any atrocities. Hawley agreed that I had a big story but doubted that it would be allowed to go out on the wire. He recommended that I mail it. Further, he suggested that I should leave out mention of the Dodds, so as not to involve the Ambassador.

Writing the story, I found myself trembling. The grotesque white face of Anna Rath haunted me. In the morning, I posted the story to Barry Faris.

We drove on, then, and had our week in Austria. Among the messages waiting for me when I returned to Berlin was a cable from Barry saying that my story had received a big play. There was also a request for me to report immediately to the office of Ernst Hanfstaengl [Known as Putzi, he was a Harvard-educated Nazi].

Putzi, not to my surprise, was furious. "There isn't one damned word of truth in your story!" he shouted at me. "I've talked with our people in Nuremberg and they say nothing of the sort happened there."

This was a moment to enjoy. I grinned at Putzi. "You're dead right," I said. "I just wanted to impress my New York office so I faked that story from beginning to end."

Putzi began raving the way he played the piano – loud. I stopped him with the announcement that I had watched the affair in the company of two unimpeachable witnesses. When I told him their names, Putzi looked stricken. He slumped into his chair and clutched his head, grumbling that I should not have led him on. When I asked if he wouldn't like to telephone the Dodds and confirm it, he said it would not be necessary.

A few days later, Dr. Goebbels held a press conference. It drew at least forty reporters. Goebbels, who could be very disarming when he wanted to make the effort, himself brought up the question of atrocities against the Jews, saying that they were only isolated examples of behavior by irresponsible individuals.

In the front row of reporters I saw Norman Ebbutt, the head of the *London Times'* Berlin bureau, a mild-mannered man but relentless at follow-ups. "But Herr Minister," I heard him say, "you must surely have heard of the Aryan girl, Anna Rath, who was paraded through Nuremberg just for wanting to marry a Jew?"

Goebbels smiled. "I know that the Hearst Press and your paper, among others, has been interested in that story. Let me explain how such a thing might occasionally happen. All during the twelve years of the Weimar Republic our people were virtually in jail. Now our party is in charge and they are free again. When a man has been in jail for twelve years and he is suddenly freed, in his joy he may do something irrational, perhaps even brutal. Is that not a possibility in your country also?"

"If it should happen," Ebbutt said calmly, "we would throw the man right back in jail."

Goebbels' face clouded. Then he smiled again and asked, "Are there any more questions?"

That was the end of the press conference, but not quite the end of the Anna Rath story. Norman Ebbutt gave me that when he told me that one of his men had gone to Nuremberg and found her confined in a hospital for the insane.²⁷

CONNECTIONS

What does Quentin Reynolds's story suggest about life in Nazi Germany? How would you describe the people who went to the parade? Why do you think that there was so much laughter?

According to the hotel manager, a lesson was taught. What was that lesson? At whom was it aimed: the victims or the bystanders?

Could the incident Reynolds describes happen here?

Photographs of carnivals held in Germany between 1934 and 1938 are reprinted in *Elements of Time*, pages 146-147. Compare those images. What similarities do you see in the way Jews are portrayed in the four photos? What differences seem most striking? Is there a connection between the way Jews are depicted at the various carnivals and the escalation of antisemitic measures?

READING 11

Killing Ideas

By May, the Nazis were burning books. The first book burning took place on May 6, 1933. Students from the Berlin School of Physical Education demolished the Institute of Sexual Science, one of the first scholarly groups to study homosexuality, ceremonially hung a bust of the institute's founder, and then burned twelve thousand books as they sang the nation's anthem. Four days later, the Nazi German Students' Association set up more bonfires, this time to burn books written by Jews and other "undesirables." At one gathering, Joseph Goebbels told a cheering crowd, "The soul of the German people can again express itself. Those flames not only illuminate the final end of an old era; they light up a new!" Lilian T. Mowrer, an American who lived in Germany, described what happened next:

The books we were reading – whether by Thomas Mann, Bernard Shaw, Stefan Zweig, Werner Bergengruen, or Paul Claudel – like modern art – turned into bills of indictment against society. They made us confront National Socialism. They mobilized our defiance.

I held my breath while he hurled the first volume into the flames: it was like burning something alive. Then students followed with whole armfuls of books, while schoolboys screamed into the microphone their condemnation of this and that author, and as each name was mentioned the crowd booed and hissed. You felt Goebbels's venom behind their denunciations. Children of fourteen mouthing abuse of Heine! Erich Remarque's *All Quiet On The Western Front* received the greatest condemnation... it would never do for such an unheroic description of war to dishearten soldiers of the Third Reich.²⁸

Of all the events that took place in Germany in the spring of 1933, the book burnings made the greatest impression abroad. Helen Keller, an American writer, sent the organizers of the event a letter. "History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas. Tyrants have tried to do that often before, and the ideas have risen up in their might and destroyed them. You can burn my books and the books of the best minds in Europe, but the ideas in them have seeped through a million channels and will continue to quicken other minds."²⁹

Others quoted the words of the great German poet, Heinrich Heine, whose family was Jewish. Referring to book burnings in the nineteenth century, the poet had said: "Where they burn books, they will soon burn people." Yet even those who quoted Heine could not truly believe that anyone would go that far.

CONNECTIONS

Why do you think the Nazis began the book burnings by casting books about gays into the flames? What other books were cast into the fire? Why were they singled out? Who made the decision?

Lilian T. Mowrer recalled that "the burning of books affected me more deeply than anything else. I could not have been more shocked by the sight of martyrs at the stake, for although torturing people was revolting enough, regimentation of the individual was ultimately more sinister and the Nazis were beginning to apply their racial theory with ruthless efficiency." For her full account of the event, see the packet on *Kristallnacht* available from the Facing History Resource Center. Why do you think she responded to the book burnings with such emotion? How do you account for Helen Keller's response? How do you think you would have responded?

In what respects is a book burning like a rally or a parade? What differences seem most striking? How do individuals make decisions at such events? How do you think the atmosphere that surrounds a book burning affects what is written? What is published?

Compare the book burnings in 1933 with the one in 1813 (Chapter 2, Reading 5). What similarities seem most striking? How do you account for differences?

Inge Scholl provides a different perspective on the book burnings. Although she, her brother, and her sister were attracted to the Nazis, they continued to read and exchange forbidden books:

The books we were reading – whether by Thomas Mann, Bernard Shaw, Stefan Zweig, Werner Bergengruen, or Paul Claudel – like modern art – turned into bills of indictment against society. They made us confront National Socialism. They mobilized our defiance.

These books, however, were not gifts from heaven – they came from the hands of young friends... They came to grasp that experience arises not from what you read, but from what you do. Books could stimulate, could impart an insight, could light a candle. But all of this would be relevant to your own life, your true self, only when you put into practice what you had determined was right.³⁰

In most authoritarian regimes, books are smuggled in and out of the country. Is reading a revolutionary act? Were Hitler and other authoritarian rulers right to believe that books are dangerous?

Ludwig L. Lenz, a physician who worked at the Institute of Sexual Science, raised a number of questions about the first book burning.

[Our] Institute was used by all classes of the population and members of every political party... We thus had a great many Nazis under treatment at the Institute. There was, for instance, a lady from Potsdam who, in referring to Dr. Hirschfeld [Magnus Hirschfeld, the director of the Institute] invariably said “Dr. Kirschfeld.” When I drew her attention to this mistake, she replied blushing and glancing at the swastika on her breast: “Oh, Doctor, if you don’t mind I should rather say ‘Dr. Kirschfeld,’ it sounds more Aryan.”

Why was it then, since we were completely non-party, that our purely scientific Institute was the first victim which fell to the new regime? “Fell” is, perhaps, an understatement for it was totally destroyed; the books from the big library, my irreplaceable documents, all the pictures and files, everything, in fact, that was not nailed down or a permanent fixture was dragged outside and burned. What explanation is there for the fact that the trade union buildings of the socialists, the communist clubs, and the synagogues were only destroyed at a much later date and never so thoroughly as our [peaceful] Institute? Whence this hatred, and what was even more strange, this haste and thoroughness?³¹

Lenz believed it was because “we knew too much.” He insists that many Nazi leaders consulted the Institute for help or were known to doctors there through their victims. An historian argues that “if the Institute

did indeed keep tens of thousands of confessions and biographical letters, does it make sense to assume that they were all thrown into the fire? Is it not rather more likely that they were saved for use by the Gestapo? Indeed, is it not possible that the entire event was staged to deceive, and that the apparent destruction of Institute was really a cover operation to retrieve Hirschfeld's case histories and other incriminating evidence against prominent Nazis and their opponents?"³² What do you think? Was the Institute targeted because it was associated with homosexual activity? Because the doctors knew too much? Or to acquire evidence that could be used against opponents?

READING 12

Whenever Two or Three Are Gathered

Throughout the spring and early summer of 1933, the Nazis terrorized one group after another in Germany. By May, they had eliminated the nation's trade unions. Workers now had to join a new organization called the Nazi Labor Front. It was to integrate workers, many of whom had supported the Social Democrats or the Communists, into the Nazi state. Then in June, Hitler outlawed the Social Democratic party. By mid-July, the Nazi party was the only political party in a country where the Reichstag no longer passed laws and the constitution no longer protected civil rights. These changes did not take place behind closed doors. They were loudly proclaimed and celebrated.

The desire to live one's life as best one can, to do one's own work and raise one's own children, is not a contemptible emotion. And to understand the ordinary Berliner in 1933, one can only try to imagine what one might do in a similar situation.

Other organizations were also brought into line. Not even special interest groups – glee clubs, soccer teams, historical societies, and so on – were allowed to function independently. As historian William Sheridan Allen put it, "Whenever two or three were gathered, the *Fuehrer* would also be present." Not everyone accepted the changes. Over twenty-seven thousand people went to prison. Thousands of others, including sixty-three thousand Jews, left the country by 1934. But most of the nation's sixty million people stayed and adapted to life in the "new Germany."

CONNECTIONS

Write a working definition of *totalitarianism*. You may wish to include a picture of a totalitarian government as part of your definition. Does totalitarianism mean that whenever two or three are gathered, the *Fuehrer* is also present? Why do you think the Nazis tried to turn every get-together into a "Nazi gathering"?

What kinds of resistance were needed in the summer of 1933? What might have been the consequences of such resistance?

In *Before the Deluge*, Otto Friedrich, notes that “the desire to live one’s life as best one can, to do one’s own work and raise one’s own children, is not a contemptible emotion. And to understand the ordinary Berliner in 1933, one can only try to imagine what one might do in a similar situation.” How do you think you might have responded?

Make a timeline of Nazi laws. Think about which laws were announced first and why. How did the order in which the laws were announced set the stage for those which followed? Then reread the plan the Nazis issued in 1920 (Chapter 3, Reading 5). Which parts had been put into effect by 1933? What do you think will happen next?

How does the First Amendment to the United States Constitution protect the right of Americans to form clubs, political groups, unions, and other associations? To find out, consult *Choosing to Participate* (particularly Chapters 2 through 4) and other books that discuss the right to associate in a free society.

READING 13

Breeding the New German “Race”

In July of 1933, the Nazis moved against yet another group. They announced the “Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring.” It permitted the government to sterilize anyone who suffered from such “genetically determined” illnesses as feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive illness, genetic epilepsy, Huntington’s Chorea, genetic blindness, deafness, and some forms of alcoholism. The purpose of the law was “to have at all times a sufficient number of genetically sound families with many children of high racial value. At the core of the idea of a healthy race is the notion of breeding. Future upholders of the law must be clear about the breeding aims of the German people.”

The law was an attempt to create a racially pure society of “Aryans” by isolating and eliminating Germans the Nazis considered inferior. As Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf*, “Everything we admire on this earth today – science and art, technology and inventions – is only the creative product of a few peoples and originally perhaps one race (the Aryans). On them depends the existence of this whole culture. If they perish, the beauty of this earth will sink into the grave with them.” To accomplish that goal, the Nazis planned to sterilize women “tainted” by the blood of an inferior race. That is, they planned to make it impossible for the daughters of mixed marriages – marriages between “Aryans” and Jews, Africans, or “Gypsies” – to

have children. The Nazis also wanted to sterilize “Aryan” women who had disabilities or deformities. The idea was not a new one. A 1929 work of “scientific racism” stated that “the number of degenerate individuals born depends mainly on the number of degenerate women capable of procreation. Thus the sterilization of degenerate women is, for reasons of racial hygiene, more important than the sterilization of men.”

The Germans modeled their new sterilization laws after similar laws in the United States. Between 1907 and 1930, twenty-nine states passed compulsory sterilization laws and about eleven thousand people were sterilized. Many states also had laws that banned marriages between whites and blacks, Native Americans, and Asians. Both sets of laws were prompted by a desire to eliminate “strains that are a burden to the nation or to themselves, and to raise the standard of humanity by the suppression of the progeny of the defective classes.” The Nazis now took that goal much further than the Americans ever did.

Gregor Ziemer, an American educator, observed the results of the law when he toured a German hospital where sterilizations took place. A guide informed him that the patients were “the mentally sick, women with low resistance, women who had proved through other births that their offsprings were not strong. They were women suffering from defects... some were sterilized because they were political enemies of the State.” He was told, “We are even eradicating color-blindedness in the Third Reich... We must not have soldiers who are color-blind. It is transmitted only by women.” When Ziemer asked who made the decision, the guide boasted: “We have courts. It is all done very legally, rest assured. We have law and order.”³³

Eugenics is not a panacea that will cure human ills, it is rather a dangerous sword that may turn its edge against those who rely on its strength.

To enforce the law, the Nazis created a Department for Gene and Race Care and “genetic health courts.” There doctors and lawyers worked together to decide who would be sterilized. The individual had no say in the decision. Between 1933 and 1939, about 320,000 German women, some as young as fourteen, were sterilized under the law. By 1945, the number may have grown to as many as three million.

The Nazis, like the Americans, regarded sterilization as “negative eugenics.” They also encouraged what they called “positive eugenics” – breeding a superior race. Heinrich Himmler, as head of the SS, was particularly concerned about the “racial quality” of his men. Each recruit was carefully screened. He had to prove that his family was “Aryan” dating back to at least 1750. In addition, Himmler and “the chiefs of the race offices inspected photographs of every applicant to make sure his face bore no sign of taint, such as ‘orientally’ prominent cheekbones, ‘mongolian slit eyes, dark curly hair, legs too short in relation to the body, a body too long in relation to the arms, a bespectacled Jewish intellectual look.” They were seeking “genuine descendents of the Indo-European tribes that had emigrated from Jutland (Denmark) and been settled in Germany since the third century B.C. These were to be the stock from which the new Teutonic race was to be bred and the SS to be recruited.” Not only did every member of the SS have to pass the test but so did his prospective bride.

CONNECTIONS

After studying fascism, Irving Horowitz concluded, “The precondition for mass extermination was engineered dehumanization: the conversion of citizens into aliens.” What evidence of that process of dehumanization can you find in this reading? Write a working definition of the word *dehumanize* in your journal.

How do you think old prejudices about the disabled and “less worthy races” affected the way people responded to the new law? How do you think the fact that the law was the work of doctors and professors affected the way people responded to it? Did those doctors and professors betray the German people?

Nazi officials often maintained that National Socialism was “nothing but applied biology.” What aspects of biology were being applied? For what purpose?

What is “negative genetics?” How does it differ from “positive genetics?” How important is that difference?

Between 1907 and 1930, about 11,000 people in the United States were sterilized; about 53,000 by 1964. Germany had no sterilization law before 1933. Yet in just six years about 320,000 people were sterilized and in twelve years the number may have reached as high as three million. How do you account for the differences in numbers? How do you account for the fact that the United States was the first to practice “negative genetics”?

In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision of the lower courts to permit the sterilization of Carrie Buck, an eighteen-year-old white woman. Noting that she, her mother, and her child were all “feebleminded,” the court ruled sterilization of “mental defectives” promoted the health of the patient and the “welfare of society.” Compare the language used in this case with the language the Nazis used to justify their sterilization laws. What similarities do you notice? What differences seem most striking?

On his visit to a German hospital, Ziemer was told, “We have courts. It is all done very legally, rest assured. We have law and order.” What right did victims have to protest? To whom could they protest? The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution, protects the rights of all Americans. Yet, even with that protection, hundreds of Americans were sterilized. What do these incidents say about why many perceive minorities as “vulnerable”?

Franz Boas, a professor of anthropology at Columbia University, argued in 1916, “Eugenics is not a panacea that will cure human ills, it is rather a dangerous sword that may turn its edge against those who rely on its strength.” Why do you think he viewed eugenics as a “dangerous sword”? Where does the danger lie?

→ Robert Lifton discussed the way Nazi doctors responded to sterilization measures in a panel on medical ethics at the First Facing History Conference. For a summary of his presentation, see *Elements of Time*, page 376. A videotape of the event is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 14

“One Nation! One God! One Reich! One Church!”

As the Nazis increased their control over the German people, they targeted the nation’s religious groups. National Socialism would have no competition. Among the first religious groups to be singled out were the nation’s Catholics. They made up about one-third of the population. As a minority in a country with a Protestant majority, Catholics had always felt vulnerable to accusations that they were not “true Germans” because they “took orders from Rome.” Over the years, they had protected their rights by organizing and supporting the Catholic Center party. Now Catholics, individually and as a group, had to decide whether to support the Nazis.

As early as 1931, a number of bishops warned Catholics that “what the National Socialists describe as Christianity is not the Christianity of Christ.” Others urged a boycott of Nazi activities. But by the spring of 1933, such attitudes were changing. Some Catholic leaders now seemed to admire Hitler’s call to “overcome the un-Germanic spirit.” Others continued to oppose the regime but urged caution. That July, Hitler and Pope Pius XI signed a concordat. Historian Fritz Stern said of that agreement:

On the face of it, the Vatican had scored a great triumph. No government under Weimar had been willing to sign such a concordat, which would recognize the principal rights of the church – rights that presumably would render it immune from the kind of persecution it had suffered [in the past]. By the terms of the concordat the church renounced all political activities and in turn the state guaranteed the right to free worship, to circulate pastoral epistles, to maintain Catholic schools and property. The Vatican had reason to be satisfied: Catholic rights had been put on a new basis and at the same time a regime had been strengthened that seemed to correspond to the Vatican’s sense that Mussolini and Hitler were indispensable bulwarks against Bolshevism.

Hitler had even more reason to be satisfied. The concordat was his first international agreement, and it vastly enhanced his respectability in Germany and abroad. A great moral authority had trusted his word.

But did the Vatican... really believe that National Socialism would abide by the concordat, was there really much likelihood that the regime would leave untouched a rival organization with its own dogmas and with such sweeping power over education?³⁴

Ten days after the agreement was signed, the Nazis set out to destroy the Catholic Youth League. In the months that followed, a number of Catholic leaders were arrested and several murdered. Yet the pope did not openly criticize the Nazis until 1937. By then it was too late. Roman Catholic opposition was limited to isolated individuals who could easily be removed from their positions.

Catholics were united into one church. Germany's forty-five million Protestants were not. They differed not only in their religious practices but also in their political views. A few openly opposed the Nazis, while others saw themselves as neutral. Still others actively supported fascism, even going so far as to call themselves "storm troopers of Jesus Christ." Hitler encouragement of these "German Christians" led to conflicts with a number of Protestant ministers.

The first conflict arose when Hitler urged that Germany's 28 regional Protestant churches be united into one Reich church. Many church leaders supported the idea but did not approve of the man Hitler wanted to head the united church. The ministers preferred Freidrich von Bodelschwingh, the director of a large institution that served the mentally ill and the disabled. Hitler and the "German Christians," favored Ludwig Mueller, a little known pastor and a long-time member of the Nazi party. When Muller was defeated, the Ministry of Culture ordered the firing, suspension, or arrest of a number of pastors. Soon after, Bodelschwingh was forced to resign.

A new election was held in July 1933. This time the Nazis took no chances. When Protestants entered their church to elect representatives to a regional synod, or church assembly, they found themselves face to face with SA members wearing sandwich boards that bore the names of "German Christian" candidates. The intimidation worked. "German Christians" won two-thirds of the vote in regional assemblies, thus paving the way for Mueller's election.

By January of 1934, Mueller was vowing to purge Christianity of all Jewish influence and foster the growth of the "German Christian movement." He claimed that "the eternal God created for our nation a law that is peculiar to its own kind. It took shape in the Leader Adolf Hitler, and in the National Socialist state created by him. This law speaks to us from the history of our people... It is loyalty to this law which demands of us the battle for honor and freedom... One Nation! One God! One Reich! One Church!"

To a number of Protestants, Mueller's words were blasphemy. They were also alarmed by the state's growing involvement in church matters. It now required that churches ban all Christians of Jewish descent. In protest,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemoeller and other ministers started the Confessing Church. It taught that Jewish Christians had an “inviolable” right to remain in the church.

Soon after the group was formed, Niemoeller and three other leaders met with Hitler and his top aides. Hermann Goering, the head of the Gestapo, opened the meeting by revealing the details of a telephone conversation that Niemoeller had had earlier that day. He then divulged the contents of the Gestapo’s files on all four ministers and their associates. The religious leaders responded by reaffirming their support for Hitler’s domestic and foreign policies. They asked only for the right to dissent on religious matters. Furious, Hitler screamed, “You are traitors to the *Volk*. Enemies of the Fatherland and destroyers of Germany!”

Hertha von Klewitz, Niemoeller’s daughter, later said that Hitler’s outburst should have led to open resistance, but it did not. Although 7,000 of the nation’s 16,500 clergymen openly supported the Confessing Church, they limited their opposition to defending Protestant teachings against Nazi influence. Klewitz noted sadly, “It was a church resistance and not political.”

Only one group of Christians firmly opposed Hitler from the start. Members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to cooperate in any way with the new regime. Even after the Gestapo destroyed their national headquarters and the sect itself was outlawed, they refused to compromise their beliefs by even saying “Heil Hitler.” Nearly half of the group’s members ended up in concentration camps. Yet those same beliefs that fostered such firm opposition to the Nazis did not permit them to even vote during the years of the Weimar Republic. Their opposition was limited to witnessing for their faith.

CONNECTIONS

A *concordat* is a formal agreement or pact. It comes from a Latin word meaning “harmony.” What did the Catholic Church hope to gain from the concordat it signed with Germany? What did Hitler hope to gain? What compromises did the pope make? What compromises did Hitler make? The Church kept its side of the bargain. What did the Church do when Hitler broke his promises? What other options did it have? What were the short-term consequences of those options? The long-term consequences?

From the start, Hitler saw the Confessing Church as a political threat even though its members promised to support his domestic and foreign policies. Kurt Scharf, a pastor in the Confessing Church, later explained why, “When a group within a totalitarian system resists on one single point, then they have come into political opposition to the total demands of such a system.”³⁵ What is Scharf trying to say about the separation of church and state in totalitarian regimes? Do you agree? How might history have been

altered if ministers in the Confessing Church had understood totalitarianism better in 1933?

As a Jehovah's Witness, Elizabeth Dopazo's father described his position this way, "We have already pledged allegiance to God, we cannot pledge allegiance to a mortal man, and certainly not someone like Hitler!" Many Americans agreed. Yet a few years later, they were troubled when a group of young Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States refused to pledge allegiance to the American flag. How similar are the two cases? The differences?

→ Additional information about Elizabeth Dopazo and her father can be found in Chapter 5, Reading 8 and *Elements of Time*, pages 220-227. A video of one of her talks is also available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 15

No Time to Think

Milton Mayer, an American college professor, wanted to find out how ordinary people reacted to Hitler's policies and philosophy. Seven years after the war, he interviewed German men from a cross-section of society. One of them, a college professor, told Mayer how he responded.

So Much Activity

[My] Middle High German was my life. It was all I cared about. I was a scholar, a specialist. Then, suddenly, I was plunged into all the new activity, as the university was drawn into the new situation; meetings, conferences, interviews, ceremonies, and, above all, papers to be filled out, reports, bibliographies, lists, questionnaires. And on top of that were demands in the community, the things in which one had to, was "expected to" participate that had not been there or had not been important before. It was all rigamarole, of course, but it consumed all one's energies, coming on top of the work one really wanted to do. You can see how easy it was, then, not to think about fundamental things. One had no time.

Too Busy to Think

... The dictatorship, and the whole process of its coming into being, was above all diverting. It provided an excuse not to think for people who did not want to think anyway. I do not speak of your "little men," your baker and so on; I speak of my colleagues and myself, learned men, mind you. Most of us did not want to think about

If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes millions, would have been sufficiently shocked... But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between come all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next.

fundamental things and never had. There was no need to. Nazism gave us some dreadful, fundamental things to think about – we were decent people – and kept us so busy with continuous changes and “crises” and so fascinated, yes, fascinated, by the machinations of the “national enemies,” without and within, that we had no time to think about these dreadful things that were growing, little by little, all around us. Unconsciously, I suppose we were grateful. Who wants to think?

Waiting to React

One doesn't see exactly where or how to move. Believe me, this is true. Each act, each occasion, is worse than the last, but only a little worse. You wait for the next and the next. You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow. You don't want to act, or even talk alone; you don't want to “go out of your way to make trouble.” Why not? – Well, you are not in the habit of doing it. And it is not just fear, fear of standing alone, that restrains you; it is also genuine uncertainty.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is a very important factor, and, instead of decreasing as time goes on, it grows. Outside, in the streets, in the general community, “everyone” is happy. One hears no protest, and certainly sees none. You know, in France or Italy there would be slogans against the government painted on walls and fences; in Germany, outside the great cities, perhaps, there is not even this. In the university community, in your own community, you speak privately to your colleagues, some of whom certainly feel as you do; but what do they say? They say, “It's not so bad” or “You're seeing things” or “You're an alarmist.”

And you are an alarmist. You are saying that this must lead to this, and you can't prove it. These are the beginnings; yes; but how do you know for sure when you don't know the end, and how do you know, or even surmise, the end? On the one hand, your enemies, the law, the regime, the Party, intimidate you. On the other, your colleagues pooh-pooh you as pessimistic or even neurotic. You are left with your close friends, who are, naturally, people who have always thought as you have.

But your friends are fewer now. Some have drifted off somewhere or submerged themselves in their work. You no longer see as many as you did at meetings or gatherings. Informal groups become smaller; attendance drops off in little organizations, and the organizations themselves wither. Now, in small gatherings of your older friends, you feel that you are talking to yourselves, that you are isolated from the reality of things. This weakens your confidence still further and serves as a further deterrent to – to what? It is clearer all the time that, if you are going to do anything, you must make an occasion to do it, and then you are obviously a troublemaker. So you wait, and you wait.

Small Steps

But the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds of thousands will join with you, never comes. That's the difficulty. If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes millions, would have been sufficiently shocked – if, let us say, the gassing of the Jews in '43 had come immediately after the "German Firm" stickers on the windows of non-Jewish shops in '33. But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between come all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next. Step C is not so much worse than Step B, and, if you did not make a stand at Step B, why should you at Step C? And so on to Step D.

Too Late

And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. The burden of self deception has grown too heavy, and some minor incident, in my case my little boy, hardly more than a baby, saying "Jew swine," collapses it all at once, and you see that everything, everything, has changed and changed completely under your nose. The world you live in – your nation, your people – is not the world you were born in at all. The forms are all there, all untouched, all reassuring, the houses, the shops, the jobs, the mealtimes, the visits, the concerts, the cinema, the holidays. But the spirit, which you never noticed because you made the lifelong mistake of identifying it with the forms, is changed. Now you live in a world of hate and fear, and the people who hate and fear do not even know it themselves; when everyone is transformed, no one is transformed. Now you live in a system which rules without responsibility even to God. The system itself could not have intended this in the beginning, but in order to sustain itself it was compelled to go all the way.

Suddenly it all comes down, all at once. You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven't done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing.)

Living with New Morals

You have gone almost all the way yourself. Life is a continuing process, a flow, not a succession of acts and events at all. It has flowed to a new level, carrying you with it, without any effort on your part. On this new level you live, you have been living more comfortably every day, with new morals, new principles. You have accepted things you would not have accepted five years ago, a year ago, things that your father, even in Germany, could not have imagined.

Suddenly it all comes down, all at once. You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven't done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing). You remember those early meetings of your department in the university when, if one had stood, others would have stood, perhaps, but no one stood. A small matter, a matter of hiring this man or that, and you hired this one rather than that. You remember everything now, and your heart breaks. Too late. You are compromised beyond repair.³⁶

CONNECTIONS

Why did the professor obey? What factors led to his decision? How did he evaluate that decision nearly twenty years later? How do you evaluate it? Why does he emphasize the small steps he took? How do each of those small steps make it easier to take no action at all?

Draw an identity chart for the professor. What aspects of his identity may have influenced the decisions he made in 1933? How do you think life in a world dominated by fear affected the choices he made?

Reread Peter Drucker's decision (Reading 8). Compare it to those described in this reading. Does an individual have the responsibility to take a stand? When? Under what circumstances?

How might "thinking" have made a difference in the professor's decisions? At what point did the state take on so much power or the person give up so much power that human qualities were suppressed in the name of patriotism? Is it possible to think too much? Can thinking too much paralyze one's responses?

READING 16

A Refusal to Compromise

In 1933, Helene Jacobs was a high-school student and one of the few Germans to refuse to make even the smallest compromise with the new government. She later recalled:

I had begun to study during that time. You received an obligatory book which you had to sign; I didn't do it. At the technical high school where I last studied, I couldn't take any exam. But I didn't want to get involved in that. It was so obvious to me that [the Third Reich] wouldn't last. I thought, I'll just wait that long and then I'll continue. As a result, I didn't have any steady position. I worked for very little money for a Jewish attorney, and wasn't a member of any organization. Anywhere it said, "For Aryans only," I said, "What's that? There's no such thing." I kept myself away from such requirements.

The point that aroused me from the beginning was that we as a people had to show our unwillingness in some fashion, not just when the crimes began, but before, when, it started, with this so-called "Aryan" ancestry. They distributed questionnaires and you had to say whether you had "Aryan" ancestors. Everyone filled them out. I said, "We can't go along with this; it's not legal. We must do something against this and throw the questionnaires away."

But today – the other people my age, they behaved totally differently at that time. Most of them built their careers then. When I said, “I’m not going to have anything to do with this,” I isolated myself.³⁷

CONNECTIONS

Why do you think Helene Jacobs was willing to isolate herself? Why were so few others willing to take the kind of stand she did? Why do people feel a need to belong to something?

Compare Jacobs’s stand with those described in Readings 8 and 15. What similarities do you see? What differences are most striking?

→The novel *Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter describes how the antisemitic laws that went into effect between 1933 and 1939 severed the friendship of a German boy and his Jewish friend, Friedrich. An accompanying videotape, also entitled *Friedrich*, includes the video testimonies of survivors who recall incidents similar to those described in the novel. The video and class sets of the novel are available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 17

Eliminating Opposition

Hitler was determined to put down all opposition, even opposition within his own party. His main critic among fellow Nazis was Ernst Roehm, the leader of the SA – the Nazi storm troopers. Roehm and a few of his supporters felt that Hitler was not doing enough to promote socialism. They were also suspicious of his relationship with powerful industrialists and generals.

By June of 1934, Hitler was convinced that Roehm and the SA had outlived their usefulness. Too many Germans regarded the stormtroopers as thugs. So it was time to take action. In doing so, Hitler had the backing of military leaders who resented the fact that the army was limited to a hundred thousand men by the Treaty of Versailles while the SA’s membership numbered in the millions. Rich industrialists supported the move as well. They did not approve of Roehm’s socialist leanings or the violence they associated with the SA. They were also bothered by the fact that he was gay – a disgraceful practice in their view, one that weakened the German people.

On June 30, Hitler ordered the SS and the regular army to eliminate all opposition within the party. During what was later called the “Night of the Long Knives,” they murdered over two hundred SA leaders, including

Unpleasantnesses, of course there were unpleasantnesses; but such things, if talked about at all, must be seen in perspective. There were so many more positive aspects of the regime to chat about.

Roehm. They also killed Kurt von Schleicher and his wife. Neither was connected to Roehm or the SA. Schleicher, a friend of Hindenburg, was chancellor before Hitler took over in 1933.

Most people did not know about the events of June 30 until days later. The news came out only when Hitler's cabinet declared the purge "legal" retroactively. The papers then reported that Hindenburg had "congratulated the Fuhrer and the Reich Chancellor" on his "courageous personal intervention." Two weeks later, on July 13, Hitler justified the murders: "If anyone reproaches me and asks why I did not resort to the regular courts of justice, then all I can say to him is this: in this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I became the supreme Justiciar of the German people... And everyone must know for all future time that if he raises his hand to strike the State, then certain death is his lot."

According to Hannah Arendt, the massacre was misunderstood within Germany and without. She wrote that instead of realizing that the country was being run by "a gang of criminals," "many Germans believed that the purge of the SA represented Hitler's wish to halt the arbitrary terror of the SA in the streets and to restore a measure of legality to the country." Christabel Bielenberg, a British woman who became a German citizen shortly after her marriage, agreed. She was out of the country on June 30. When she returned a few weeks later, she found growing support for Hitler.

It was considered that... with the murder of Roehm and the eclipse of his storm troopers (although the manner in which it had been carried out had not been exactly savoury), the Revolution had to all intents and purposes become respectable. Once everything distasteful had been neatly swept under the carpet, there was something almost touching about the anxious childlike pleasure with which so many tried to share in what they seemed to hope was a newly discovered respectability. Unpleasantnesses, of course there were unpleasantnesses; but such things, if talked about at all, must be seen in perspective. There were so many more positive aspects of the regime to chat about.³⁸

CONNECTIONS

What does it mean that Hitler's actions were "legal retroactively"? How was he using language to obscure his actions? He justified the Night of the Long Knives by saying, "If anyone reproaches me and asks why I did not resort to the regular courts of justice, then all I can say to him is this: in this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I became the supreme Justiciar of the German people." *Justiciar* was a word used in the Middle Ages to describe the leader responsible for justice in a country. What is Hitler saying about his relationship to the law? Is he the defender of justice? The guardian of the nation's laws? Or does he see himself as above the law?

Review your identity chart. How might you have responded to the events of the Night of Long Knives? Record your responses and feelings in your journal.

How do you account for the fact that the massacre turned Hitler's regime from "a gang of criminals running the country" to "a newly discovered respectability?"

Many Germans believed that you had to overlook the bad in the new Nazi regime to get the good. How is that idea reflected in their response to the Night of the Long Knives?

Would the Night of the Long Knives have been possible in February 1933? What earlier events prepared the nation to accept Hitler's version of what happened that night? Earlier you were asked, "What does it take to create a dictatorship out of a democracy?" Review your answer. How important was the Night of the Long Knives to the process?

READING 18

Isolating Gays

After the Night of the Long Knives, the Nazis increased their attacks on gay men. Many Germans applauded the move. Hitler began by enforcing and then later strengthening a law passed at the turn of the century. It defined a homosexual act as "indecent" behavior that diminishes "the health of the state." During the Weimar Republic, the government did not pay much attention to the law. When Hitler took over, that policy changed. A man who lived near Hamburg recalled:

We lived like animals in a wild game park, always sensing the hunters.

With one blow a wave of arrests of homosexuals began in our town. One of the first to be arrested was my friend, with whom I had had a relationship since I was 23. One day people from the Gestapo came to his house and took him away. It was pointless to enquire where he might be. If anyone did that, they ran the risk of being similarly detained, because he knew them, and therefore they were also suspect. Following his arrest, his home was searched by Gestapo agents. Books were taken away, note- and address books were confiscated, questions were asked among the neighbours... The address books were the worst. All those who figured in them, or had anything to do with him were arrested and summoned by the Gestapo. Me, too. For a whole year I was summoned by the Gestapo and interrogated at least once every fourteen days or three weeks... After

four weeks my friend was released from investigative custody. The fascists could not prove anything against him either. However the effects of his arrest were terrifying. Hair shorn off, totally confused, he was no longer what he was before... We had to be very careful with all contacts. I had to break off all relations with my friend. We passed each other by on the street, because we did not want to put ourselves in danger... We lived like animals in a wild game park, always sensing the hunters.³⁹

CONNECTIONS

The gay men described in this reading were “Aryans.” Yet they were not a part of the German people’s “universe of obligation”?

What does the German mean when he says “We lived like animals in a wild game park, always sensing the hunters”? What other Germans lived in similar ways?

What insights does the reading offer concerning the way the Nazis used fear to paralyze bystanders? The way they dehumanized those they isolated and arrested?

Many gays, like other enemies of the state, were sent to concentration camps. There inmates were defined by a cloth triangle sewn onto their clothing. Homosexuals wore pink triangles, criminals green, political prisoners red, Jehovah’s Witnesses purple, emigrants blue, anti-socials black, and Gypsies brown triangles. Jews wore two yellow triangles arranged to form a Star of David. Why do you think the Nazis separated prisoners in this way?

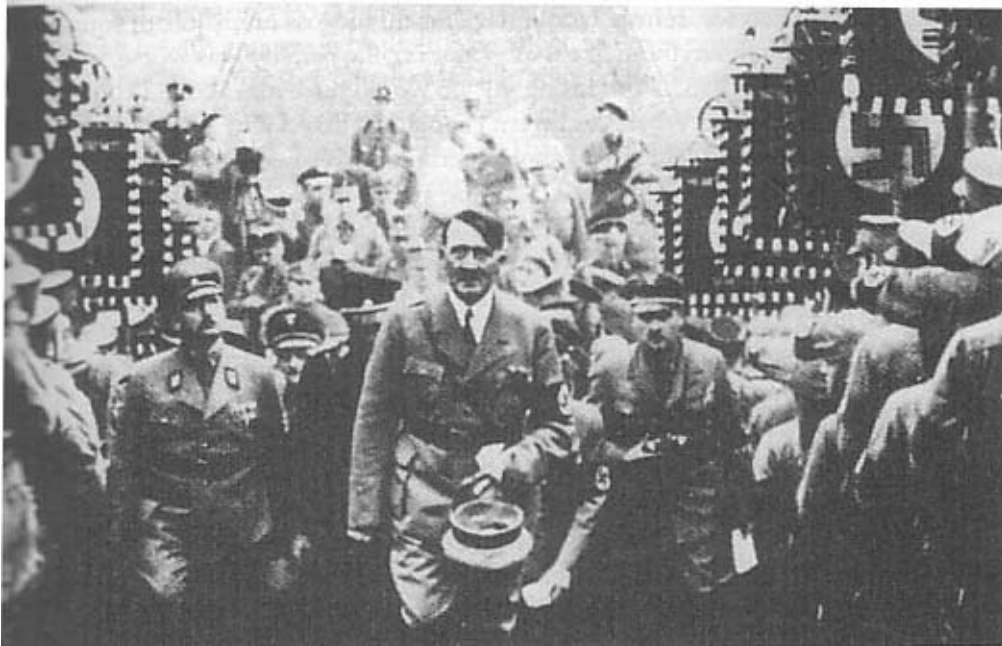
READING 19

Pledging Allegiance

When Paul von Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934, Hitler combined the positions of chancellor and president. He was now the Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor, the Head of State, and the Chief of Armed Forces. In the past, German soldiers had taken this oath: "I swear loyalty to the Constitution and vow that I will protect the German nation and its lawful establishments as a brave soldier at any time and will be obedient to the President and my superiors." Now Hitler created a new oath. "I swear by God this sacred oath, that I will render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Fuehrer of the German Reich and people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath."

The new oath "enabled an even greater number of officers to excuse themselves from any personal responsibility for the unspeakable crimes which they carried out on the orders of the Supreme Commander whose true nature they had seen for themselves."

In his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, William Shirer said the new oath "enabled an even greater number of officers to excuse themselves from any personal responsibility for the unspeakable crimes which they carried out on the orders of the Supreme Commander whose true nature they had seen for themselves... One of the appalling aberrations of the German officer corps from this point on rose out of this conflict of 'honor' – a word... often on their lips... Later and often by honoring their oath they dishonored themselves as human beings and trod in the mud the moral code of their corps."⁴⁰



CONNECTIONS

Summarize the two oaths. What is the main difference between the two? How significant is that difference? What are the implications of swearing an oath to an individual leader rather than to a nation?

What oaths do people take today? For what reasons? Have you ever taken an oath? Did it make you feel part of something larger than yourself? Did it make you tell the truth? Make you keep your word?

Which comes first – one’s military duty or his or her moral duty? Can an oath excuse one from personal responsibility?

READING 20

Do You Take the Oath?

Soldiers were not the only ones required to take the new oath. A German recalled the day he was asked to pledge loyalty to the regime.

I was employed in a defense plant (a war plant, of course, but they were always called defense plants). That was the year of the National Defense Law, the law of “total conscription.” Under the law I was required to take the oath of fidelity. I said I would not; I opposed it in conscience. I was given twenty-four hours to “think it over.” In those twenty-four hours I lost the world...

You see, refusal would have meant the loss of my job, of course, not prison or anything like that. (Later on, the penalty was worse, but this was only 1935.) But losing my job would have meant that I could not get another. Wherever I went I should be asked why I left the job I had, and when I said why, I should certainly have been refused employment. Nobody would hire a “Bolshevik.” Of course, I was not a Bolshevik, but you understand what I mean.

I tried not to think of myself or my family. We might have got out of the country, in any case, and I could have got a job in industry or education somewhere else.

What I tried to think of was the people to whom I might be of some help later on, if things got worse (as I believed they would). I had a wide friendship in scientific and academic circles, including many Jews, and “Aryans,” too, who might be in trouble. If I took the oath and held my job, I might be of help, somehow, as things went on. If I refused to take the oath, I would certainly be useless to my friends, even if I remained in the country. I myself would be in their situation.

The next day, after “thinking it over,” I said I would take the oath with the mental reservation, that, by the words with which the oath

began, “*Ich schwore bei Gott,*” “I swear by God,” I understood that no human being and no government had the right to override my conscience. My mental reservations did not interest the official who administered the oath. He said, “Do you take the oath?” and I took it. That day the world was lost, and it was I who lost it.

First of all, there is the problem of the lesser evil. Taking the oath was not so evil as being unable to help my friends later on would have been. But the evil of the oath was certain and immediate, and the helping of my friends was in the future and therefore uncertain. I had to commit a positive evil there and then, in the hope of a possible good later on. The good outweighed the evil; but the good was only a hope, the evil a fact... The hope might not have been realized – either for reasons beyond my control or because I became afraid later on or even because I was afraid all the time and was simply fooling myself when I took the oath in the first place.

But that is not the important point. The problem of the lesser evil we all know about; in Germany we took Hindenburg as less evil than Hitler, and in the end, we got them both. But that is not why I say that Americans cannot understand. No, the important point is – how many innocent people were killed by the Nazis, would you say?... Shall we say, just to be safe, that three million innocent people were killed all together?... And how many innocent lives would you like to say I saved?... Perhaps five, or ten, one doesn't know. But shall we say a hundred, or a thousand, just to be safe?... And it would be better to have saved all three million, instead of only a hundred, or a thousand? There, then, is my point. If I had refused to take the oath of fidelity, I would have saved all three million...

There I was, in 1935, a perfect example of the kind of person who, with all his advantages in birth, in education, and in position, rules (or might easily rule) in any country.

If I had refused to take the oath in 1935, it would have meant that thousands and thousands like me, all over Germany, were refusing to take it. Their refusal would have heartened millions. Thus the regime would have been overthrown, or, indeed, would never have come to power in the first place. The fact that I was not prepared to resist, in 1935, meant that all the thousands, hundreds of thousands, like me in Germany were also unprepared, and each one of these hundreds of thousands was, like me, a man of great influence or of great potential influence. Thus the world was lost...

These hundred lives I saved – or a thousand or ten as you will – what do they represent? A little something out of the whole terrible evil, when, if my faith had been strong enough in 1935, I could have prevented the whole evil... My faith, I did not believe that I could “remove mountains.” The day I said, “No,” I had faith. In the process of “thinking it over,” in the next twenty-four hours, my faith failed me. So, in the next ten years, I was able to remove only anthills, not mountains.

The fact that I was not prepared to resist, in 1935, meant that all the thousands, hundreds of thousands, like me in Germany were also unprepared, and each one of these hundreds of thousands was, like me, a man of great influence or of great potential influence. Thus the world was lost.

My education did not help me, and I had a broader and better education than most men have had or ever will have. All it did, in the end, was to enable me to rationalize my failure of faith more easily than I might have done if I had been ignorant. And so it was, I think, among educated men generally, in that time in Germany. Their resistance was no greater than other men's.⁴¹

Not everyone was willing to take the oath. Among those who refused was Ricarda Huch, a poet and writer. She resigned from the prestigious Prussian Academy of Arts with this letter.

That a German should feel German, I should take almost for granted. But there are different opinions about what is German and how German-ness is to be expressed. What the present regime prescribes as national sentiment, is not my German-ness. The centralization, the compulsion, the brutal methods, the defamation of people who think differently, the boastful self-praise I regard as un-German and unhealthy. Possessing a philosophy that varies so radically from that prescribed by the state I find it impossible to remain one of its academicians. You say that the declaration submitted to me by the Academy would not hinder me in the free expression of my opinion. Apart from the fact that “loyal collaboration in the national cultural tasks assigned in accordance with the Academy's statutes and in the light of the changed historical circumstances” requires an agreement with the government's programme that I do not feel, I would find no journal or newspaper that would print an oppositional view. Therefore, the right to express one's opinions freely remains mired in theory... I herewith declare my resignation from the Academy.⁴²

Huch could not publicize her stand by publishing her letter. She lived in Germany throughout the Nazi era as a silent dissenter in “internal exile.”

CONNECTIONS

What did the man mean when he said his education failed him? That “no human being and no government had the right to override my conscience?” Did he have a conscience – that is, did he know right from wrong? If so, did his conscience also fail him? Milton Mayer wrote that there was a time in Nazi Germany when teachers could have made different decisions. Why was the decision of most teachers to take and obey the new oath to Hitler a crucial step toward totalitarianism?

What is the “problem of the lesser evil”? Find examples of it in this reading and in other readings in this chapter. Look for examples in your own experience.

Compare the decisions described in this reading with those detailed in earlier readings. What issues influenced each decision? What values and beliefs? The man quoted in this reading states, “I had to commit a positive evil there and then, in the hope of a possible good later on.” Do you agree? Is it possible to distinguish among evils? Who today face similar dilemmas? How are those dilemmas resolved?

What is “silent dissenter”? “Internal exile”? How meaningful is either?

READING 21

Defining a Jew

The Nazis passed forty-two anti-Jewish measures in 1933 and nineteen more in 1934. Each was designed to protect “Aryan blood” from contamination with “Jewish blood.” Then in 1935, Hitler announced three new laws at the party rally in Nuremberg. The first two stripped Jews of citizenship. The third law isolated them from other Germans.

Realizing that the purity of the German blood is the prerequisite for the continued existence of the German people, and animated by the firm resolve to secure the German nation for all future times, the Reichstag has unanimously passed the following law...

1. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are hereby forbidden. Marriages performed despite this ban are void, even if, to contravene the law, they are performed abroad. Suits for annulment can be brought only by the district attorney.
2. Extramarital intercourse between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood is forbidden.
3. Jews are not permitted to employ female citizens of German or kindred blood under 45 years of age as domestic help.

Being a Jew was no longer a matter of self-definition or self-identification. Now a person was considered a Jew because of what his or her grandparents had chosen to believe. Who you were no longer depended upon you.

The law raised a question that had not yet been resolved: Who is a Jew? On November 14, the Nazis answered that question by defining a Jew as a person with two Jewish parents or three Jewish grandparents. The children of intermarriage were considered Jewish if they practiced the Jewish religion or were married to a Jew. They were also Jews if one parent was a practicing Jew. A child of intermarriage who was not Jewish according to these criteria was considered a Jewish *Mischling* – a person of “mixed race.” By isolating Jews from other Germans and forbidding any mixing of races, the Nazis hoped that the problems of defining a *Mischling* would eventually disappear.

The Nazis passed over four hundred additional laws between 1933 and 1945. Being a Jew was no longer a matter of self-definition or self-

identification. Now a person was considered a Jew because of what his or her grandparents had chosen to believe. Who you were no longer depended upon you. After noting that by 1935, “at least a quarter of the Jews who remained had been deprived of their professional livelihood by boycott, decree, or local pressure,” historian Martin Gilbert noted:

More than ten thousand public health and social workers had been driven out of their posts, four thousand lawyers were without the right to practise, two thousand doctors had been expelled from hospitals and clinics, two thousand actors, singers and musicians had been driven from their orchestras, clubs and cafes. A further twelve hundred editors and journalists had been dismissed, as had eight hundred university professors and lecturers, and eight hundred elementary and secondary school teachers.

The search for Jews, and for converted Jews, to be driven out of their jobs was continuous. On 5 September 1935 the SS newspaper published the names of eight half-Jews and converted Jews, all of the Evangelical-Lutheran faith, who had been “dismissed without notice” and deprived of any further opportunity “of acting as organists in Christian churches.” From these dismissals, the newspaper commented, “It can be seen that the Reich Chamber of Music is taking steps to protect the church from pernicious influence.”⁴³

CONNECTIONS

Most Christians in Germany supported the Nuremberg laws. Dietrich Goldschmidt, a Jew who converted to Christianity and later joined the Confessing Church, suggests why.

The guilt of the Christians and church rests in the fact that the commandment to love your neighbor was interpreted or taken to mean one looked after the Christian brothers and sisters – those who had been baptized. That means that when Christians came into conflict with the state or with the police, the church or the parish took care of them as long as it had to do with the church... When a Christian attended to politics, that was no longer something with which the church concerned itself... In this sense, the responsibility for society, the responsibility for the Jews, Social Democrats, communists, gypsies, atheists, the responsibility for all these was not a responsibility of the church.⁴⁴

Define *neighbor*. What responsibility do you have to your neighbors?

Being a Jew was no longer a matter of self-definition or self-identification. What does it mean to lose the right to define yourself? How was the dilemma confronting Germans of Jewish descent in 1935 similar to that of the Bear in *the bear that wasn't* (Chapter 1, Reading 1)? How did it differ?

In the United States in the years after the Civil War, many states isolated or segregated African Americans from other Americans. Each tried to define a “Negro” or African American according to the “race” of his or her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Those laws were still in effect when Germany was struggling to define who was a Jew. And those laws remained on the books in some states until the 1980s, despite the efforts of African Americans to overturn them. Research segregation laws passed in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. How was their definition of an African American similar to the Nazis’ definition of a Jew? What differences seem most striking?

READING 22

The People Respond

Marta Appel, like many Germans of the Jewish faith, found that the Nuremberg Laws affected even old friendships. For years, she had been getting together once a month with women from her old high school. In 1935, she stopped attending, mainly because she did not want to embarrass her non-Jewish friends.

One day on the street, I met one of my old teachers, and with tears in her eyes she... tried to convince me that [the women] were still my friends, and tried to take away my doubts. I decided to go to the next meeting. It was a hard decision and I had not slept the night before. I was afraid for my gentile friends. For nothing in the world did I wish to bring them trouble by my attendance, and I was also afraid for myself. I knew I would watch them, noticing the slightest expression of embarrassment in their eyes when I came. I knew they could not deceive me; I would be aware of every change in their voices. Would they be afraid to talk to me?

It was not necessary for me to read their eyes or listen to the changes in their voices. The empty table in the little alcove that had always been reserved for us spoke the clearest language. It was even unnecessary for the waiter to come and say that a lady phoned that morning not to reserve the table thereafter. I could not blame them. Why should they risk losing a position only to prove to me that we still had friends in Germany?⁴⁵

CONNECTIONS

Suppose you were one of Appel's school friends. What might you have done? Might you have attended the lunch in 1933? In 1935? What might the consequences of attending be in 1933? In 1935? Of not attending? Suppose you were in Marta Appel's position. Do you like to think you would have gone to lunch?

How were the decisions Appel's friends made similar to one Milton Mayer described in Reading 15? What differences seem most striking?

Franklin Roosevelt told Americans in the 1930s that the only thing they had to fear was "fear itself." Does it take courage to face one's fears and do the right thing? What was the right thing in 1933? In 1935? When did it take more courage to do right?

READING 23

"The Hangman"

1.

Into our town the Hangman came,
Smelling of gold and blood and flame –
And he paced our bricks with a diffident air
And built his frame on the courthouse square.

The scaffold stood by the courthouse side,
Only as wide as the door was wide;
A frame as tall, or little more,
Than the capping sill of the courthouse door.

And we wondered, whenever we had the time,
Who the criminal, what the crime,
That Hangman judged with the yellow twist
Of knotted hemp in his busy fist.

And innocent though we were, with dread
We passed those eyes of buckshot lead;
Till one cried: "Hangman, who is he
For whom you raise the gallows-tree?"

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye,
And he gave us a riddle instead of reply:
"He who serves me best," said he,
"Shall earn the rope on the gallows-tree."

And he stepped down, and laid his hand
On a man who came from another land.
And we breathed again, for another's grief
At the Hangman's hand was our relief.

And the gallows-frame on the courthouse lawn
By tomorrow's sun would be struck and gone.
So we gave him way, and no one spoke,
Out of respect for his hangman's cloak.

2.

The next day's sun looked mildly down
On roof and street in our quiet town
And, stark and black in the morning air,
The gallows-tree on the courthouse square.

And the Hangman stood at his usual stand
With the yellow hemp in his busy hand;
With his buckshot eye and his jaw like a pike
And his air so knowing and businesslike.

And we cried: "Hangman, have you not done,
Yesterday, with the alien one?"
Then we fell silent, and stood amazed:
"Oh, not for him was the gallows raised..."

He laughed a laugh as he looked at us:
"...Did you think I'd gone to all this fuss
To hang one man? That's a thing I do
To stretch the rope when the rope is new."

Then one cried "Murderer!" One cried "Shame!"
And into our midst the Hangman came
To that man's place. "Do you hold," said he,
"With him that's meant for the gallows-tree?"

And he laid his hand on that one's arm,
And we shrank back in quick alarm,
And we gave him way, and no one spoke
Out of fear of his hangman's cloak.

That night we saw with dread surprise
The Hangman's scaffold had grown in size.
Fed by the blood beneath the chute
The gallows-tree had taken root;

Now as wide, or a little more,
Than the steps that led to the courthouse door,
As tall as the writing, or nearly as tall,
Halfway up on the courthouse wall.

3.

The third he took – and we had all heard tell –
Was a usurer and infidel, And:
"What," said the Hangman, "have you to do
With the gallows-bound, and he a Jew?"

And we cried out: "Is this one he
Who has served you well and faithfully?"
The Hangman smiled: "It's a clever scheme
To try the strength of the gallows-beam."

The fourth man's dark, accusing song
Had scratched out comfort hard and long;
And "What concern," he gave us back,
"Have you for the doomed – the doomed and
black?"

The fifth. The sixth. And we cried again:
"Hangman, Hangman, is this the man?"
"It's a trick," he said, "that we hangmen know
For easing the trap when the trap springs slow."

And so we ceased and asked no more,
As the Hangman tallied his bloody score;
And sun by sun, and night by night,
The gallows grew to monstrous height.

The wings of the scaffold opened wide
Till they covered the square from side to side;
And the monster cross-beam, looking down,
Cast its shadow across the town.

4.

Then through the town the Hangman came
And called in the empty streets my name.
And I looked at the gallows soaring tall
And thought: "There is no left at all
For hanging, and so he calls to me
To help him pull down the gallows-tree."
And I went out with right good hope
To the Hangman's tree and the Hangman's rope.

He smiled at me as I came down
To the courthouse square through the silent town,
And supple and stretched in his busy hand
Was the yellow twist of them hempen strand.

And he whistled his tune as he tried the trap
And it sprang down with a ready snap –
And then with a smile of awful command
He laid his hand upon my hand.

“You tricked me, Hangman!” I shouted then,
“That your scaffold was built for other men....
And I no henchman of yours,” I cried.
“You lied to me, Hangman, foully lied!”

Then a twinkle grew in the buckshot eye:
“Lied to you? Tricked you?” he said, “Not I
For I answered straight and I told you true:
The scaffold was raised for none but you.

“For who has served me more faithfully
Than you with your coward’s hope?” said he,
“And where are the others that might have stood
Side by your side in the common good?”

“Dead,” I whispered; and amiably
“Murdered,” the Hangman corrected me;
“First the alien, then the Jew...
I did no more than you let me do.”

Beneath the beam that blocked the sky,
None had stood so alone as I –
And the Hangman strapped me, and no voice
there
Cried “Stay!” for me in the empty square.⁴⁶

CONNECTIONS

What choices were open to the townspeople when the Hangman arrived? By the time he had finished his work in the town? Was there a way to stop the Hangman? If so, how? If not, why not?

How does the poem relate to Germany in the 1930s? To society today?

In 1933, Martin Niemoeller, a leader of the Confessing Church, voted for the Nazi party. By 1938, he was in a concentration camp. After the war, he is believed to have said, “In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and 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 for me.” How is the point Niemoeller makes similar to the one Maurice Ogden makes in “The Hangman?”

What is the meaning of the Hangman’s riddle: “‘He who serves me best,’ said he, ‘shall earn the rope on the gallows-tree’?”

→”The Hangman” is also available on video from the Facing History Resource Center. Teachers who have used the film have indicated a need to

show it several times to allow their students time to identify the various symbols and reflect on their meaning. After seeing it, think about why the filmmaker turned the animated people into paper dolls. Why did the shadow grow on the courthouse wall? Why did the gallows-tree take root?

A student who watched the film wrote, “The Hangman was to me strange. The ‘hidden message’ of this is harder to find than any other movie or section we have seen so far. I understand, now that instead of standing as a bystander all the time, I should voice my opinion before it is worthless.” Another noted, “I guess most people would be like the man who stood by and watched the townspeople being hung. I mean who would really have the guts to stand up and say “stop”... especially if you got no support from the crowd. I don’t think I could.” Which opinion is closest to your own?

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- ²¹ Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 60.
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- ³⁵ Quoted in Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 63.
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