

National Character, Collective Guilt, and Original Sin—The Goldhagen Controversy

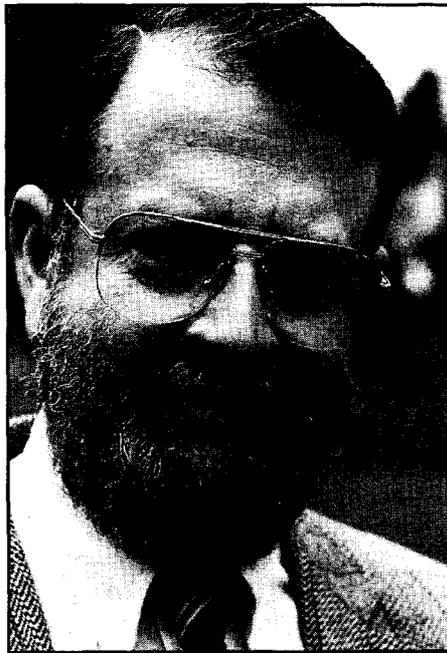
Edmund D. Cohen

Early in 1996, a young Harvard Government and Social Studies teacher published his dissertation. *Hitler's Willing Executioners* by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen¹ was touted as a groundbreaking work, shedding startling new light on the role of ordinary Germans in the mass murder of the Jews of Europe.² It received ecstatically favorable initial reviews. The cover kudos included review snippets from several major daily newspapers and an imprimatur from Elie Wiesel.

In early spring, longer reviews by experts in the field portraying the book as significantly flawed but still worthwhile began to appear.³ Numerous feature stories recounted devastating criticism Goldhagen's book was subjected to by senior Holocaust experts and the German press.⁴ More and more the book came to be portrayed as fundamentally flawed and misleading, the product of its author's visceral personal hatred for the Germans.⁵

What was it about this book that so beguiled a major publisher and many early readers, and kept it on the *New York Times* hardback best-seller list for eleven weeks? What does it take to keep discussion about a topic so fraught with emotion as the Holocaust sober and reasoned? Is it possible that reluctance to deal forthrightly with the significance of the Christian religion in the formation of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust—no less on his critics' part than on Goldhagen's—did more to bring about this sad spectacle than first appears?

If nothing else, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* ably tells the specific historical events Goldhagen studied in detail. Its cen-



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tral focus is Police Battalion 101. Police battalions were elements of the so-called Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*). These were actually light-duty military outfits composed of recruits who were overage or otherwise not considered fit for regular army duty. Men with extensive Nazi Party connections were unlikely to be found in these unprestigious police battalions.

Police Battalion 101, like many others, was assigned to rounding up, deporting, and sometimes killing Polish Jews. From the written records and correspondence,

Goldhagen demonstrates that members of police battalions could opt out of killing civilians without prejudice to themselves. Few did. Instead, they generally outdid what was ordered in their cruelty and brutality. Goldhagen correctly points out that refusal by Germans within the uniformed services to brutalize Jews during World War II as well as punishment for such refusal were all but nonexistent. For those confronted with the assignment of killing defenseless Jews, the typical response was to rationalize that killing to be justified and then go on to develop actual enthusiasm for the gruesome task. However, by no account were persons directly involved in perpetrating the Holocaust more than a fraction of a percent of the German population.⁶

Other aspects of the Holocaust Goldhagen tells well include the distorted concept of work arising from Nazi doctrine about the Jews. From all other types of internees, the Nazis sought to extract economically valuable work adding to the war effort. Amelioration of living conditions and rations just enough to allow the internees to be productive workers was the usual result. But even at times when need to supply the war was most pressing, the Nazis put Jewish prisoners to performing pointless busy work, meant only to increase the suffering and degradation preceding their deaths. Also, Goldhagen documents how the SS conducted Jewish prisoners on long, circuitous death marches for no conceivable rational purpose. The German officials' delusional and irrational hatred for the Jews is illustrated by example after example.

The problem with Goldhagen's book is in his interpretation and analysis—his extrapolation of the attitudes of Nazi officialdom to the German public at large—not his documentation of specific events. Goldhagen begins by declaring it his mis-

Edmund D. Cohen is the author of *The Mind of the Bible Believer* (Prometheus Books).

sion to dispel purported widespread misconceptions about the Holocaust:

This revision calls for us to acknowledge what has for so long been generally denied or obscured by academic and non-academic interpreters alike: Germans' antisemitic beliefs about Jews were the central causal agent of the Holocaust . . . not only of Hitler's decision to annihilate European Jewry (which is accepted by many) but also of the perpetrators' willingness to kill and to brutalize Jews. The conclusion of this book is that antisemitism moved many thousands of "ordinary" Germans—and would have moved millions more had they been appropriately positioned—to slaughter Jews. Not economic hardship, not the coercive means of a totalitarian state, not social psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about Jews that were pervasive in Germany and had been for decades induced ordinary Germans to kill unarmed defenseless Jewish men, women, and children by the thousands systematically and without pity.⁷

Is that indeed the form typically taken by misconceptions about the Holocaust? While responsibility displacement argumentation may frequently appear in the academic literature and in the legal parlance of war crimes trials, I must say that in more than thirty years of encountering this topic—both here and in Germany—I have rarely heard anyone take the tack Goldhagen indicates in an attempt to excuse Holocaust perpetrators. When someone does attempt to play down the terribleness of what the Germans did, it is nearly always Holocaust denial rather than displacement of responsibility to which they resort. "I was only followink orders"—especially if said in a "Hogans' Heroes" accent—reliably gets a knowing laugh from almost any North American gathering. That is why would-be defenders of the Nazis avoid that strategy. Goldhagen's main thrust consists of dispelling the wrong misconception—knocking a straw man down.

The popular misconception one does continually encounter is stereotyping of Germans—seeing no dimension to Germans other than as Nazis. The stereotype arises from attitudes understandably adopted while fighting the Germans in two world wars. That is how Goldhagen perceives them as well. Far from correct-

ing a popular stereotype as he claims to, Goldhagen reinforces the prevalent stereotype. While he does not overtly present a theory of collective guilt or reprobate national character, he seeks to furnish an academically respectable *Ersatz* for these.⁸ He engages in the one kind of ethnic broad-brushing not seen as an offense against political correctness.

Goldhagen's central premise—and the aspect of his book that drew the heaviest fire from the Holocaust Studies establishment and many other critics—is that Germany was a uniquely and unmitigatedly anti-Semitic place for generations prior to Hitler. His thesis calls for Germany to have been far more anti-Semitic than any other major European country or the United States. He presents no comparative information to back up the claim.

The contrasting generally accepted view—supported by overwhelming information—is that German anti-Semitism before Hitler was comparable to that found in other countries. After using his

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plurality election victory to become Chancellor in 1933, Hitler mounted a *coup'd état* and turned a parliamentary state into a totalitarian dictatorship. Years of intense and sophisticated propaganda instilled an anti-Semitic belief system different from the diverse but widespread anti-Semitic ideas preceding it in a banefully pliant public at large.

Goldhagen gives face plausibility to his thesis by neglecting or heavily downplaying vast areas of necessary information. From his book one gets no inkling that Germany had a flourishing literary and academic culture brought to a halt by the Nazis, with comparatively little anti-Semitism and no major author as anti-Semitic as Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot. One gets no idea of the extensive participation of Jews in that culture. The generally favorable and improving position of Jews in German society for many decades

before Hitler is likewise neglected. The periodic outpourings of anti-Semitic writings and agitation—sometimes even the formation of anti-Semitic political parties—throughout the nineteenth century are emphasized. But the way those manifestations usually followed in context as reactions against advances in Jewish position and integration in German society and the consistent relegation of anti-Semitism to the political losing side until Hitler are underplayed. Jews simply could never have risen to the positions of prominence they held, in the pre-Hitler Germany Goldhagen portrays. Neither could that Germany have had the right stuff for reconstruction as the tolerant, self-sustaining democracy Germany is today.

German society during the Third Reich is also cast in a false light through Goldhagen's systematic omissions. Since he would have us believe that Nazi attitudes were solidly in place before Hitler, he makes scarcely any mention of the Goebbels propaganda ministry, or of Nazi education⁹ or censorship.

The most glaring distortion comes out of Goldhagen's failure to fathom what totalitarianism is. Throughout the book, Goldhagen refers to the "public conversation" leading to the framing of Nazi policies. He describes the Nazi political system as "both dictatorial and consensual,"¹⁰ and he even refers to "Hitler's often non-interventionist leadership style."¹¹ For Goldhagen, the deprivation of the public's eventual right to vote leaders out of office and the vicious repression of dissent are only minor or perhaps cosmetic considerations. For him it somehow makes no real difference if public policy is formally made by a very few unaccountable people in a closed, "top-down" process, and back talk is relentlessly suppressed. Totalitarianism and democracy are but different alternatives for translating the popular will into public policy in Goldhagen's lofty Ivy League view. For him it is apparently only a myth that there have ever been nations where public policy was really contrary to popular will.

Goldhagen finds a semblance of confirmation for this naïve view in instances of successful internal protest against Nazi policies. He stresses a 1942 incident when Bavarian Catholics mounted demonstrations blocking replacement of crucifixes

with Hitler portraits in public school classrooms. Also the "T4" euthanasia program was brought to a standstill by massive complaints from relatives of the proposed victims.¹² While the disinclination of those same Germans to protest in behalf of Jews as well detracts from their valor, these protests involved great risk to those who mounted them and did demonstrate admirable bravery. Those protesters got away with behavior normally receiving draconian punishment. It is one thing for protests at fortuitous moments to achieve their aims, and another for the right to them to be anchored in law or custom. The former did not qualify Nazi tyranny as in any way "consensual." With that distortion Goldhagen avoids even considering the element of being beguiled by totalitarianism after an unsatisfactory experience with parliamentary democracy as a motive more immediate than anti-Semitism for Germans to embrace Hitler.

A serious problem that has not received much attention in print is Goldhagen's pretensions to behavioral science methodology. There is an implicit claim throughout, that the book has a psychological or anthropological dimension that makes it more than a mere history or political science work.

Early on, Goldhagen proposes a three-dimensional classification model for comparing different manifestations of anti-Semitism.¹³ If actually used, the model could be the basis for a valuable social psychology study. But he does not connect it with anything else in the book. It is only there as filler.

Goldhagen claims that his book overall is arranged as the test of a social science hypothesis. But what he sets out is a statement so broad that no set of facts could fail to fit it—a nondisconfirmable "hypothesis."¹⁴

He also claims to approach the Holocaust like an anthropologist studying a little-known preliterate people.¹⁵ This seems to justify his arbitrary disregard for the vast published record of pre-Hitler Germany—since a preliterate people would have no published record to consider.

And then there are the frequent mentions of "cognitive models," "mind-sets," and other psychology buzzwords.¹⁶ Repeatedly, Goldhagen refers to the more

preposterous Nazi doctrines as "hallucinatory," when he obviously means "delusional."¹⁷ His only attempts to illustrate the mental life of the Nazis consist of lists of their beliefs. Instead of taking us inside the perpetrators' experience, Goldhagen portrays them as incongruously pure and decent except when committing atrocities. (He apparently perceives human nature as requiring elaborate intellectualizations and rationalizations for people to bring themselves to brutalize one another.) He would have us believe that the Germans' racial prejudice against Jews was so evenly applied as to preclude the sexual coercion of Jewish women by men in the German uniformed services.¹⁸

Throughout the book Goldhagen uses the coined term *eliminationist* to charac-

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terize anti-Semitism. By it he means acceptance of the premise that there is such a thing as a "Jewish problem"—some bad outcome or outcomes necessarily resulting from contact of Jews with gentiles. To "solve" the "problem," Jews have to be eliminated or removed in some way. The possible means of elimination are assimilation, expatriation, and extermination. The terminology tacitly applies only to gentiles, since it is obviously not Goldhagen's intention to classify secular Jewish liberals (proponents of assimilation) and Zionists (proponents of expatriation) as "eliminationist antisemites."

Goldhagen concludes that assimilation and expatriation are only intermediate steps in a progression that necessarily culminates in exterminationism. The impression is conveyed that the three are really approximately the same thing, and even liberal assiminationists are made to seem only marginally less bad than exterminationists. The bearer of latent, unexamined traditional anti-Semitic attitudes is made to appear about the same as the fully indoctrinated Nazi Holocaust perpetrator. But the three are distinctly different views

with different implications and different culpabilities. Lumping them together serves a rhetorical purpose only.

Goldhagen never attempts to distinguish those manifestations of pre-Hitler anti-Semitism that are peculiar to Germany or originated there from those with outcroppings and antecedents in several countries and in different languages. Attempting to do so myself, only two episodes strike me as exclusively German.

In 1542, Martin Luther published the pamphlet "Concerning the Jews and their Lies." It reflects the deep and abiding anger that Christian evangelists have regularly evinced after a campaign to convert Jews to Christianity has met with principled resistance and rejection. Luther portrayed the Jews as "vermin," "a plague," and "a pestilence." He advocated the confiscation and destruction of their property, the banning of their religious observances, and their expulsion from the country. This is the sole instance of a vicious, hard-edged attack on the Jews coming from a major figure in German history or literature before Hitler. The pogrom Luther sought to instigate did not take place.

Although Luther's diatribe is by far the most important single document in German anti-Semitism, Goldhagen heavily underplays it—as if he were reluctant to offend contemporary Lutherans. He gives a fairly full account of medieval Catholic anti-Semitism and then skips to the nineteenth century.¹⁹

The term *anti-Semitism* (*Antisemitismus*) was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr.²⁰ Marr was one of several self-styled disciples of Feuerbach and Nietzsche,²¹ taking those philosophers' criticisms of the rhetoric of submission and self-abnegation in Christianity as their starting point. Marr wanted to blame the Jews for placing what he regarded as the yoke of Christianity on the necks of Europeans. These fanciful anti-Semites were never more than a marginal influence. Their particular libel never became part of the Nazi canon. Of the myriad libels against the Jews, this was the only one definitely invented in Germany.²²

Nazi anti-Semitism appears on the surface to have little connection with religion. There is little in the Nazi's own

documentation pointing to such a connection. On one level, Nazism adopted a hodge-podge of conspiracy theories that had long been in circulation. On another level, it was a form of racism, taking the Jews as a distinct race with distinguishing physiognomic features. The two levels meet in the notion of a Jewish race genetically preprogrammed to engage in cabals against the gentile population.

The Nazis were no friends of Christianity. They tacitly recognized (as the other totalitarians, the Communists also did) that their system was a quasi-religion that could not coexist with an organized, supernaturalistic religion. Nazism ultimately takes the *paradigm* of the Christianity it displaced, and reassigns the roles in its allegory.

The paradigm of one ethnic group chosen by God and blessed, encountering others not similarly chosen and cursed—even exterminating other groups that get in its way from time to time—comes of course from the Old Testament. But the covenant between God and Israel is not kept, so in the New Testament the followers of Christ, who are not an ethnic group but rather consist of remnants of all the world's ethnic groups, become God's chosen people in place of the Jews. When the Nazis take the paradigm up, the "Aryans" become the chosen people, and to the Jews are ascribed not only the role of nonchosen, cursed group, but the role of Satan as well. Each usurper of the chosen-people mantle says in effect to the others preceding it, "You're not God's chosen people—we are!"

Nazism also adapts from Christianity its notion of a messiah with a divinely appointed eschatological mission to play out. The suffering servant of all, transfigured by struggle, is Hitler. Instead of "Original Sin," it is the "Jewish problem" from which Hitler is divinely mandated to redeem his people. Note well how a supposititious solution for a nonexistent problem is used as a rhetorical ploy in each scheme. He rules with a rod of iron while setting up his thousand-year reign. The sign he triumphs under is a twisted cross.

The most disturbing parallel is the way that Nazi policy for obliterating the Jewish people—after passing through a number of other iterations—finally settled on coming as close as is terrestrially possible to emulating New Testament Hell.²³

As if disappointed that abandoning Christianity meant no longer being able to derive silent gratification from the prospect that those whom one demonizes would be tormented eternally in Hell, the Nazis made the replication of Hell on earth for the Jews—even if it could only be for a little while—their highest priority. The method of batch execution by poison gas—death-dealing at a distance without touching—preceded by treatment calculated to maximize suffering, torment, and degradation rivaling crucifixion on a cross and followed by incineration of the bodies is at once full of biblical symbolism and without resemblance to anything in the secular literature or history of Germany.²⁴

The match of the particular group chosen to bear the brunt of the Nazis' scape-

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goating and the form taken by their "final solution to the Jewish problem" to biblical Christianity is obvious and speaks for itself. Any attempt to understand Nazism without fear or favor must consider the influence of Christianity—albeit Christianity in pilfered and corrupted form. Some risk of offending contemporary religious sensibilities must be run to study it properly. The failure to incorporate the question reduces Holocaust Studies to an exercise in euphemism and circumlocution.

It is truly remarkable that so much attention has been paid to a book with no better aspiration than to agitate a generation of Jews and Germans born after World War II—Goldhagen's generation—to relate to each other nourishing the preceding generation's sense of grievance. It is as if some contrarious scholar set out to write a book about the Holocaust devoid of any useful lessons for a later time or another situation.

What are those lessons? First, after the

Nazi experience one sees democratic institutions and the rule of law in a different light. Those institutions might easily be less robust than they seem. Unlike religions and totalitarian political ideologies, there is no eschatology purporting to guarantee the continuation of democratic institutions or the attainment of some perfect end state. It becomes possible to imagine the society around one undergoing a malignant transformation through the complicity of one's intellectually passive and morally cowardly friends and neighbors because that actually happened in Germany. When extremists attempt to gain political power, it is essential to oppose them early. Non-participation is no honorable option.

By making Germany's experience with Hitler strictly a matter of national culture Goldhagen implies that no comparable thing could happen anywhere else. He could not have written as he did had the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism and anti-democratic attitudes in such places as France, England, and the United States in the 1930s had any immediacy for him. By collapsing the distinction between law-based representative democracy and totalitarianism, he forecloses learning anything pertaining to politics or government elsewhere from the Hitler era. A hazardous complacency—or perhaps a needless sense of futility—follows from Goldhagen's argument.

Second, an unforeseen later repercussion of the Holocaust has been the emergence of a significant social movement organized around denial that the Holocaust happened. After World War II, it is impossible to be a fascist or an anti-Semite without a certain defensiveness and embarrassment. So, closet fascists and anti-Semites have found an outlet in pseudoscholarly revisionist history claiming that the Holocaust either did not happen, or is exaggerated—a hoax supposedly perpetrated by the evil Jewish cabal.²⁵ These Holocaust deniers, together with armed militias, mock common law courts neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, and so-called Identity Christians, make up a populous alienated extremist "Hate Group Right" in North America. Its formidable energy and general ferment are the likely harbinger of future trouble.

Holocaust denial operates very much

like neurotic denial of troublesome personal issues. If the denier finds Nazis attractive, then he would have it that they are unfairly maligned. There is an undertone of fundamentalist Christian apologetics, tacitly appreciating that the occurrence of the Holocaust has raised a compelling new objection to the proposition that a just and omnipotent God rules the universe. If the Holocaust did not happen, the objection goes away.

Paradoxically, the Holocaust deniers have had a salutary effect. Before they came on the scene, it seemed that Holocaust commemoration tended to include political subtexts that—to say the least—might or might not have spoken for actual mute Holocaust victims. Ten years ago one could legitimately question whether or not Holocaust commemoration was serving any forward-looking purpose.

The Holocaust deniers exemplified how the average mind recoils from the concentrated horror of those events and naturally tends to slough them off. Because the Holocaust has its special property of fading from mind sooner than other historical events, and because there is a busy community of liars denying that it took place and needing to be refuted Holocaust Studies found its proper mission. The Holocaust deniers brought home to the rest of society the urgency of preserving testimony while the last Holocaust survivors still live. Holocaust commemoration in the nineties has taken on a dignity and sense of forbearance that had earlier been lacking.²⁶

Hitler's Willing Executioners will inevitably open up opportunities for the Holocaust deniers' bad-faith critiques, and complicate the task of refuting them. Goldhagen will forever have to share with the Holocaust deniers the accolade that they triggered a worthwhile discussion by putting out faulty scholarship requiring refutation into the marketplace of ideas.

Third, we now have the benefit of a body of experience that includes the Holocaust, allowing us to reflect on the very nature of prejudice and of the remedies for prejudice. The overthrow of the political status quo in a nation can just as easily provide an opportunity for a concentrated outburst of prejudice as it can for its diminution. From post-cold war outbursts of wholesale murder motivated by

prejudice—especially the ones in former Yugoslavia—we learn that prejudiced attitudes do not simply go away while inactive or suppressed. They remain dormant unless concerted effort is made to discuss them, work them through, and replace them with good information. This has been done at great effort in the United States as to racial prejudice as well as anti-Semitism, and in post-Hitler Germany as to anti-Semitism. Wherever traditional prejudices have been overcome, it has been through the effort and sacrifice of people of good will. The notion that one could do or ought always to be doing something to alleviate ethnic prejudice seems somehow lost on Goldhagen.

Goldhagen fails to show why all those pre-World War II commentators who thought Germany a relatively unlikely place for a serious outbreak of anti-Semitism ought to be second-guessed. He provides no help for contemporary commentators who share the earlier ones' blind spots. If one has too much staked on a theory of human nature emphasizing innate goodness, Nazis are inexplicable. Goldhagen's antagonists do indeed make too much of social influence and group pressure as explanations for the failure of innate human goodness to mitigate Hitler. But Goldhagen evades the same problem in a different manner by setting the Germans somehow fundamentally apart from the rest of humanity. It is as if he were getting even for the Germans' Manichaeic stigmatization of the Jews with an opposite Manichaeic stigmatization of his own. While he is busy doing that, the rest of us continue to be appalled by how easy it is proving to be anywhere in our present world to recruit the like of the police battalions.

Also, academics would typically rather not give credence to a geopolitical indeterminism so loose as to permit a completely changed historical outcome because of one dynamic individual. That issue may be closest to the core of the difficulty.

Students of any academic field know that German accomplishments in their respective subjects—in all the science, art, and literature of that day—were the *sine qua non* before Hitler, and that we are all very much the poorer for the destruction and scattering of the communities that pro-

duced those achievements. In former East Germany today, one can visit the ruined sites of great long-ago accomplishments trodden down by fifty-seven disastrous years of totalitarianism: Leipzig, Weimar, and Dresden, among others. If one lets one's imagination work, one can get a glimpse of the vibrant scene and the extraordinary people inhabiting it that might have been if history had taken a different turn. Even after visiting Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, and contemplating their meaning, what seemed infinitely tragic turns out not to be the entire tragedy. Then one imagines how one man stopping one bullet or slipping on one banana peel may be all it would have taken for the vibrant scene glimpsed momentarily in imagination to have been real.

That is the German contradiction at its most stark. Goldhagen evades it with his ridiculous broad-brushing. Even in our day of grade inflation and deconstructionism, Goldhagen's basic education cannot be so lacking as to let him be unimpressed by the ruined greatness he so easily dismisses. With such a wide chasm between the content discussed and the underlying issues that really drive the discussion—between text and subtext—it appears that clarity about the Hitler Holocaust will take a lot longer than fifty years to achieve.

In August 1996, Goldhagen went to Germany to promote the German translation of his book.²⁷ He was interviewed in every conceivable publication, and appeared on every imaginable talk show. In the larger German cities, he debated some of his critics in concert halls before audiences who paid admission. He received much polite applause, and the press accounts report no untoward incident.²⁸ Undoubtedly, his tour helped contemporary Germans to clarify the issues and identify the boundaries of this grave topic. Often it takes a sensationalist, crassly exploiting a topic that others more admirable than he treat with reverence, to make that happen. How sad.

Notes

1. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.
2. Goldhagen, himself, claims, "Explaining why the Holocaust occurred requires a radical revision of what has until now been written. This book is that revision," p. 9.
3. Cf., Gordon A. Craig, "How Hell Worked," *The New York Review of Books*, April 18, 1996, p.

4ff. and V. R. Berghahn, "The Road to Extermination," *The New York Times Book Review*, April 14, 1996, pp. 6-7.

4. The U. S. Holocaust Research Institute Conference, held on April 8, 1996, in Washington, D.C. (broadcast live on C-SPAN II) resulted in major Holocaust Studies experts, including Yehuda Bauer, Christopher Browning (the other major expert on Nazi police battalions), Konrad Kwiet, Lawrence Langer, and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, ganging up on Goldhagen with reproach after reproach. Goldhagen acted the part of a man with head bloodied but unbowed delivering his rebuttal.

5. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* was typical in its changing view. Its first coverage was an utterly credulous Sunday review by Susan Miron, a freelance writer: "Hitler's Partners in Genocide," March 24, 1996, p. K1 ff. But it counterbalanced that review in two feature stories: Julia M. Klein, "Book Blaming Ordinary Germans for Holocaust Draws Praise, Scorn," April 21, 1996, p. E1 ff. and Barbara Demick, "Holocaust Book Raises a German Storm," April 26, 1996, p. A3.

6. See Goldhagen's review of the numbers of perpetrators, pp. 166-168. He establishes tens of thousands with evidence, and guesses at the larger numbers. The population of Germany at the beginning of World War II was approximately eighty million.

7. P. 9.

8. The German press clearly understood Goldhagen's thesis to be collective guilt and reprobate national character. *Der Spiegel*, the premier weekly news magazine, made the controversy its cover story on May 20, 1996. The cover art has Hitler greeting a crowd in the foreground, with the infamous Auschwitz train reception terminal in the background, and the cover copy, "New dispute about collective guilt—The Germans: Hitler's Willing Accomplices to Murder?" See also, Heinrich Jaenecke, "Die Deutschen: ein Volk von Antisemiten?," *Stern*, July 18, 1996, pp. 128-132.

9. He does refer to defamatory portrayals of Jews in two Nazi era childrens' books.

10. P. 132.

11. P. 133.

12. Goldhagen stressed these more in National Public Radio interviews summarizing his thesis, than in the book itself.

13. Pp. 35-36.

14. This is made clear in "Appendix 1—A Note on Methods" pp. 463-468. The "hypothesis" is also stated in the quotation with Note 7, above.

15. P. 28 ff.

16. Aaron T. Beck, the founder of Cognitive Psychotherapy, a school of psychotherapy popular in the eighties, wrote a testimonial letter in support of Goldhagen to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 5, 1996, p. E4.

17. See pp. 28, 140, 422, 446, and 594. There are other malapropisms. Repeatedly, Nazi anti-Semitic doctrine is referred to as having been "common sense" for Germans—begging the question as to what common sense is. See Chapter 3 generally. On p. 74, assimilationism is described as "philosemitic antisemitism." On p. 402, the subjection of Jews to death marches by the SS is referred to as "chaperoning." And on p. 152, we learn that Heinrich Himmler was a "pragmatist." On pp. 178, 204, and 321, the "immiseration" of the Jews is referred to: there is no such English language word.

18. See p. 169.

19. Goldhagen does give a full account of the failure of the German churches as institutions to oppose the Third Reich.

20. Marr expected "Antisemitism" to become an

honorable label, instead of the derogatory one it betimes became. This parallels the coining of the term *Fundamentalism* by Curtis Lee Laws in 1920 and its entry into the language with the opposite of the intended connotation.

21. Nietzsche vehemently opposed the anti-Semites. Richard Wagner, however, did espouse their cause.

22. For a timeline of significant developments in anti-Semitism, see Paul E. Grosser and Edwin G. Halperin, *Anti-Semitism: Causes and Effects* (Rev. ed.; New York: Philosophical Library, 1983).

23. Cf. Matt. 25:41, 46; Luke 3:9, 17; 12:47-48; 16:24; John 15:6; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Heb. 10:27; Jude 7; Rev. 2: 8-11, 14:10, 19:20, 20:4-6, 9-10, 12-15, and 21:8.

24. The word *holocaust* is a synonym for the expression "burnt offering," found several dozen times in the Old Testament. It denotes the burning of an animal—usually a lamb—as a sacrifice for presentation on God's altar. Only after World War II did "Holocaust" become a proper noun denoting the Nazi genocide of European Jewry.

The grave and reverential connotations of the word have seemed well fitting. But its use encourages attempts to put the real events into a theological context. This inevitably leads to absurd and offensive results, arising from the impossibility of reconciling the persecution and extermination of the Jews of Europe with the omnipotence and goodness of God. That reconciliation would require attributing a righteous purpose to God in decreeing or at least condoning the Holocaust. In an Orthodox Jewish context, that reduces to God's righteous wrath on a people who collectively fail to observe his rules perfectly. To the Zionist, it reduces to God's righteous wrath on Jews who do not emigrate to Israel, or who persist in speaking languages other than Hebrew. The notion that God deliberately used the Holocaust to achieve his purpose of regathering and reconstituting the Jewish People in Israel has become an Israeli civil religion of sorts, distinct from Judaism. See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang 1993). The notion of the Holocaust as God's devious way of accomplishing an eschatological purpose feeds into

the unending spinning of fundamentalist Christian end-times scenarios involving either the conversion of all the Jews or their extermination in a final cataclysm after they are all gathered in Israel.

25. See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: the Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press 1993).

26. The film *Schindler's List* seemed to set a subdued tone that continued in the ceremonies accompanying the opening of the National Holocaust Museum, replacing an earlier unfortunate tendency toward bellicosity and exploitation.

Vivid images with a minimum of rhetoric seem best. The 1995 skating programs of Paul Wylie and Katarina Witt—to the *Schindler's List* musical score—especially impressed me as a tasteful expression with no ulterior motive and not unduly commercial.

27. *Hitlers willige Vollstrecker. Ganz gewöhnliche Deutsche und der Holocaust*. Berlin: Seidler Verlag, 1996).

Note that the German title translates as "Hitler's willing executors . . ." inverting the book's theses. It seems to speak of the German People as Hitler's passive instruments, when Goldhagen's thesis is that Hitler was merely the tool of the German People's collective will—as Hitler himself claimed.

Der Spiegel ran a second cover story on the Goldhagen controversy in its August 12, 1996, issue. The cover line read "Hitler: Executor of the Will of the People?" picking up on the misleading German title. A page was devoted to examples of inaccurate translation in the German edition, softening some of Goldhagen's most controversial assertions. Goldhagen was accorded the rare privilege of being interviewed personally by the magazine's senior editor and founder, Rudolf Augstein. Goldhagen obdurately evaded Augstein's most pertinent questions. The two men talked past each other.

28. See Josef Joffe, "Goldhagen in Germany," *The New York Review of Books*, November 28, 1996, p. 18 ff. See also Alan Cowell, "Author Goes to Berlin to Debate Holocaust," *The New York Times*, September 8, 1996, p. 4, and Mary Williams Walsh, "Holocaust author draws applause in Berlin," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 6, 1996, p. A32. •

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