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# Hitler, Anti-Semitism, and the Demise of the Third Reich

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Hitler, Anti-Semitism, and the Demise of the Third Reich

Jacob Mach

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Since the end of the Second World War, and the uncovering of the atrocities enacted by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis on the Jewish population of the European continent, many theories have been proposed as to how the “Final Solution” was accomplished. What is shocking, however, is the growing number of people, including historians, who deny the events of the Holocaust altogether. Given the preponderance of evidence, this conjecture is unfounded and irresponsible. The greater debate waging between historians today is who initially planned the “Final Solution” and who drove it to its completion. Two camps have arisen to explain the origins of the “Final Solution.” Intentionalists believe Hitler was directly responsible for the planning of the “Final Solution,” and purposefully gave the orders for the execution of said plan. In other words, he used his position as Fuhrer and Nazi leader to put his genocidal plan into motion, disguising them as Nazi policies.<sup>1</sup> He planned to exterminate the Jews from the beginning, and his position of power gave him the opportunity. German historian Klaus Hildebrand goes as far as to say “one should not speak of National Socialism, but of Hitlerism.”<sup>2</sup>

Functionalists, on the other hand, believe Hitler could not possibly be the major force behind the Holocaust, and that many factors contributed to the genocide. Some Functionalists, like Uwe Dietrich Adam, even believe mass extermination was not part of the original plan, arguing that Hitler and the Nazis “final resort” was the slaughter of the Jews.<sup>3</sup> Historians such as Gerald Fleming and Daniel Goldhagen see this approach nearing a dangerous conclusion: alleviating any and all accountability for the genocide of six million Jews, as if the Nazi’s just “stumbled” upon the idea of genocide. Such a debate should not and cannot be taken lightly. To better understand this debate, one must first study Hitler and his political evolution. A more well-

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

rounded, comprehensive view of Hitler before World War 1, during the First World War, and in the two decades leading up to the Second World War will allow for a more complete analysis of his part in the Final Solution.

Many recognize Adolf Hitler as the Fascist leader of Nazi Germany, running rampant through Europe on a quest for total domination. What many do not recognize, however, is the failed Austrian artist who made a name for himself in the grim, deadly trenches of World War I. The political juggernaut was not made overnight. His political leanings and ideologies were formed during and after his years of service in the military. World War 1 cannot be overlooked in the development of Hitler as a person, and his political/societal beliefs. Several of his wartime companions remembered how vehemently he would react to any talk of German defeat.<sup>4</sup> To him, they recalled, there could be no defeat. Germany must emerge victorious. Another interesting observation recorded by his compatriots noted the lack of anti-Semitic language exhibited by Hitler pre-1919.<sup>5</sup> This comes as a surprise, given the mission that consumed Hitler two decades later. What this does mean, however, is at some point between his release from the military and his rise as a predominant political figure in Germany, Hitler experienced a radical shift, altering his ideology in an encompassing manner, driving his political and personal decisions for years to come. But what precipitated this ideological evolution? A brief overview of Hitler's service in the German military is necessary to provide a backdrop for the tumultuous years following the war.

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 94

Numerous biographers and historians, including Hitler biographers Joachim Fest and Volker Ullrich, have assessed the “formative experience” of World War I.<sup>6</sup> Ullrich goes as far as to state that without the War, “Hitler would not have become that which he was to become; it made his whole career possible in the first place,”<sup>7</sup> while Ian Kershaw states the importance of World War 1 as a staging point for the political career of Hitler.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the experiences must be given a fair look, if so much study is attributed to this time period by Hitler historians. Even before his enrollment in the German (Bavarian) ranks, Hitler had made one important political decision: he spurned his native Austria in support of Germany. He seemingly disliked the multinationalism of the Austrian empire, and opted to align himself with Germany instead.<sup>9</sup> Heinrich Hoffman, who later worked with Hitler as a propagandist, unknowingly took a picture of Hitler cheering with a jubilant crowd in Munich after the announcement of Germany entering the First World War.<sup>10</sup> That being said, little else is known about his views about politics before the war, although some claims are made by Hitler himself in *Mein Kampf*. Such statements can be taken at face value, but given the utter lack of corroboration with other sources, they should be taken with a grain of salt.

Hitler saw little, if any, actual front line action as a soldier during World War 1, though he spent much of his time in range of the front lines. He functioned as an orderly, running orders from the battalion command post to the leaders on or near the front lines.<sup>11</sup> Wounded for the first

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<sup>6</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Volker Ullrich, *Adolf Hitler: Biographie*, vol. 1: Die Jahre des Aufstiegs (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2013), pp. 64–89 at p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 73, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014): page 4

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 91.

time in 1916 when a British shell hit his dugout, Hitler spent two months in the hospital, until rejoining his unit in the spring of 1917.<sup>12</sup><sup>13</sup> While recovering in a Berlin hospital, Hitler was appalled at the conditions of his beloved Berlin, especially with the morale and attitude of its inhabitants. He noted in his account several years later the striking number, as he recorded, of Jewish clerks in Berlin, as opposed to the few number of Jewish soldiers at the front lines.<sup>14</sup> This assertion appears to be contradicted by historian Brendan Simms, who notes the disproportionately *high* numbers of Jews in Hitler's regiment.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not this assertion from Hitler is a call for blame on the Jews for their alleged non-involvement in Germany's struggle remains unknown. There is not enough evidence to point to this instance as being the launching of Hitler's ardent anti-Semitism. This instance should not be overlooked, however, as many such occurrences work together to solidify Hitler's ardent racism.

After returning to his regiment, the wear and tear of war began to show within the German ranks. Defeat was followed by retreat, depleting morale. Hitler, however, personally excelled, receiving several medals for his service, including the Iron Cross.<sup>16</sup> Hitler was wounded again in 1918 in a British gas attack near the end of the war. Separated from the front recovering in a hospital, he learned of Germany's surrender to the Allies. In light of Hitler's total devotion to Germany and his unwavering belief in the superiority of the nation at war, the news of surrender was crushing. Thomas Weber argues that this point proves pivotal in propelling Hitler to pursue a political career, as referenced by Hitler's own writing about the end of the

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<sup>12</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014): 7.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 95.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 95.

<sup>15</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014): 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 96.

war.<sup>17</sup> Both Kershaw and Simms, however, disagree, stating that the evidence outside of Hitler himself does not suffice to suggest this was his launching point.<sup>18</sup><sup>19</sup> His first real political endeavors were at least a year away, which follows the timeline given by Kershaw and Simms. The war was over, but the disgust for its conclusion and the rage carried as a result of Germany's disgrace would continue to drive him for years to come. The year 1919 chiefly contributed to the evolution of Adolf Hitler.

In the German homeland, however, the outlook during the last several months of the war took an unsettled and deadly turn. Many servicemen and workers became disillusioned with the leadership of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his regime. Around 200,000 union workers were striking as early as the spring of 1917, due to increased bread rations ordered by the government.<sup>20</sup> The first inkling of Socialist influence presented itself in these strikes, which will rear its head again at the end of the war. The German government under the Kaiser continued to be extremely unstable. Erich Ludendorff, one of the two highest officials under the Kaiser (along with Paul Hindenburg), petitioned to the Kaiser to continue the war as late as October 1918, a literal fight to the death.<sup>21</sup> The Kaiser refused to listen, and Ludendorff resigned, disgraced and deeply hurt. Germany was at its breaking point, and the actions of a rash Admiral broke the dam, unleashing a torrent of events encapsulating the furry and dissatisfied attitude of the soldiers and workers of Germany.

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Weber, *Hitler's first war: Adolf Hitler, the men of the List Regiment, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014): page 11.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham Jr, *Why Hitler? The Genesis of the Nazi Reich* (CT: Praeger, 1996), 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

Vice Admiral Franz von Hipper sent orders to his High Seas Fleet, defeated by the British in the battle of Jutland two years earlier, to make one last desperate attempt to break the British blockade preventing any movement from the fleet.<sup>22</sup> The navy men, however, saw that defeat was imminent, and rather than foolishly lose their lives for a lost cause, they decided that mutiny was a better alternative than death. They continued to resist until Hipper had no choice but to cancel the orders, leaving the mutineers to take to the streets, gathering more and more rebels to march to Berlin.<sup>23</sup> Socialist leaders used this mutinous mass to bring their revolution to Berlin, resulting in an attempted “red” (communist) revolution which lasted only a brief period of time.

While uncertainty reigned in Germany, Hitler had recovered from his wounds received in the gas attack near the front, and transferred to a different regiment. He managed to stave off immediate demobilization, which in his case was a stroke of good fortune, for he had little money to his name, and zero prospects outside of the military.<sup>24</sup> Hitler stayed clear of the revolutionary period of 1918-19, hesitant to place his support behind any of the forces vying for control in Germany.<sup>25</sup> He shrewdly played his cards to put himself in a position to stay in the military as long as possible. His patience was rewarded; in the spring of 1919 Hitler was elected as the representative for his new battalion.<sup>26</sup> This was Hitler’s first experience as a speaker, something he developed a great talent for in the coming years. Later that year, he was recruited as a propagandist for the new government.<sup>27</sup> He displayed a keen talent for discourse, and the infant government found him useful for their cause. Hitler spoke at various venues throughout

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<sup>22</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham Jr, *Why Hitler? The Genesis of the Nazi Reich* (CT: Praeger, 1996), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 110.

<sup>25</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014): 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 12

Berlin, on topics ranging from the current circumstances in Germany, to the evils of communism.<sup>28</sup> It is worth mentioning that these public addresses often included attacks on two specific groups of people: the Allies (whom Hitler insisted did everything to prevent Germany from becoming a world power), and the Jews (whom Hitler blamed for many things, including losing the war).<sup>29</sup> He proliferated the unfounded accusation that Jews had purposefully exploited Germans during World War 1, hampering the war effort at home and abroad, eventually hastening the defeat of the German forces.<sup>30</sup> Hitler successfully used the anger that ensued from Germany's defeat in World War 1 and the subsequent unsettled attitude immediately following the war. He tacitly funneled that anger and directed it to a specific group of people - the Jews. These propaganda discussions are the first recorded public speeches where Hitler speaks negatively about the Jews, displaying anti-Semitic rhetoric. This becomes a theme for the infant public speaker, and his success as a speaker is noticed by a fledging party in Germany, the NSDAP (National Socialist Workers Party, or as it came to be known, the Nazi Party).

Hitler became a member of the NSDAP in late 1919, after the leader of the party, Anton Drexler, observed Hitler's skill as an orator and offered Hitler membership into the party. He was officially recorded as the 555<sup>th</sup> member of the party, contrary to his claims in *Mein Kampf* of being the 7<sup>th</sup> member.<sup>31</sup> Based on the success of his orations, Drexler promoted him to chief propagandist, and again, Hitler flourished in the spotlight. His speeches consisted mainly of anti-Semitic remarks, blaming the Jews for the loss in the Great War, and for poisoning the populous

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<sup>28</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 124-125.

<sup>29</sup> Brendan Simms, "Against a 'World of Enemies': The Impact of the First World War on the Development of Hitler's Ideology," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (03, 2014): 14.

<sup>30</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 81.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 127.

at home as well.<sup>32</sup> In a speech given in the Great Hall of the Hofbrauhaus, Hitler said to his audience, “If we wish to make these social reforms, this must go hand in hand with the fight against the enemy of every social institution: Jewry.”<sup>33</sup> More importantly, however, as early as 1920, Hitler suggested internment in concentration camps for all Jews, for the protection of the German people, and suggested the only permanent solution for the crisis was the “removal of Jews from our people.”<sup>34</sup> He continued to speak on what the people wanted to hear, whipping up cries of “Build a new Germany,” and “Cast out the Jew.”<sup>35</sup> The German people wanted a scapegoat, someone on whom to place blame for the loss of WWI, and, subsequently, the decline of German prestige in the West. Clearly, Hitler spoke heavily on the importance of a new nationalism, and to accomplish this goal he proposed to malign the Jewish people. This evidence contradicts any claims by functionalists that Hitler was not planning or suggesting any action against the Jews. This will be addressed more fully later. Hitler, however, continued to grow in popularity, quickly rising to become the leader of the party in July of 1921. A political hero in Munich, his impact could only reach so far. Something bigger needed to happen to grab the attention of the nation. In 1923, Hitler took his chance to make his mark.

The Versailles Treaty completely devastated Germany, resulting in huge inflation to the German *mark*, but also inflating the anger harbored by Hitler and his associates. His party vehemently opposed the so-called “treaty,” and Hitler desperately wanted power to fight against it. Germany failed to pay its reparations, and France moved in to take land as a result. With the government in disarray, Hitler, backed by Ludendorff, decided to take decisive, yet foolish

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>33</sup> National Socialist German Workers Party, Public meeting in the Great Hall of the Hofbräuhaus, Friday, 15 August 1920, Adolf Hitler “Why We Are Anti-Semites.”

<sup>34</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 151.

<sup>35</sup> Hitler speeches, April 13, 1923.

action.<sup>36</sup> His followers were no match for the police, however, and several of his cohorts were killed when police overwhelmed the unprepared riotous mass. Hitler and Ludendorff were arrested for their part in the attempted coup, but the incident was not a complete failure for Hitler. Although the movement failed, Hitler was no longer just a local hero, but a nationally known name. The Beer Hall Putsch was crucial to put both Hitler and the Nazi party on the political map in Germany. Most importantly, however, his jail time allowed for the writing of his political manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, which gave a detailed account of both his evolved anti-Semitism, and his deep, nationalistic rhetoric. The jail time proved to be one of the most decisive periods in the cementing of Hitler's ideology, and the articulation of it to the world.

*Mein Kampf* was one of the few written works of Adolf Hitler, and it served multiple purposes. Not only did it function as a quasi-autobiography, explaining some instances of his childhood that might have been previously unknown, but it also functioned as the foundation of his political ideology.<sup>37</sup> In its pages, the mind of Hitler can be seen more clearly than ever before, and it is evident that his prejudices and beliefs were well established by his imprisonment in 1923. What caused this relatively fast shift in ideology is not completely clear, but the German loss in World War 1, the revolution in his "homeland," and his rise as a political leader combined to solidify what already began to form in his mind. The message underlying the majority of his political/societal treatise was his unabridged hatred and disgust for the Jewish people. Much of the early portion of *Mein Kampf* is spent lamenting the fall of Germany after their loss in World War 1, building to chapter eleven, which is titled "Race and People." In this particular chapter,

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<sup>36</sup> "Beer Hall Putsch," Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901-1940, Salem Press, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> "Mein Kampf Outlines Nazi Thought," Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901-1940, Salem Press, 2007.

the blame for Germany's socio-political demise during and after the war is placed squarely on the shoulders of the Jewish people.

Hitler began his treatise by describing the Aryan race and culture as the pinnacle of existence, contrasting his "superior race" to the Jews, who he described as "completely lack(ing) the most essential prerequisite of a cultural people."<sup>38</sup> He vociferously and prejudicially attacked Jewish efforts in art, architecture, music and the like, denouncing any creativity coming from their ranks.<sup>39</sup> His largely unsupported claims and raving accusations against the Jewish people seem like the ranting of a lunatic to outsiders, but to the German people, his words funneled their confusion and frustration toward a single group of people. Hitler spoke of the Jews as a "parasitic phenomenon," using the German populace as a tool to gain power and wealth, which was their ultimate desire.<sup>40</sup> He then attacked the basis of the Jewish identity, claiming their identity is based on deception, trying to "make people believe that Jewry is not a nation but a religion."<sup>41</sup> This "inferior race", he taught, was antithetical to everything Germany stood for, and the only way for the German people to take their proper place on the world's stage was to eliminate those who stood in the way. In Hitler's mind, the Jews must be eliminated. This language sounds harsher than what Hitler used before his arrest, but what he wrote in *Mein Kampf* is a logical procession based on his earlier prejudices. When Hitler was finally released from prison in December of 1924, anti-Semitism as the gateway to German nationalism. This obsession would continue to consume him for the remainder of his troubled life.

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<sup>38</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; Unabridged edition, 2014), 210.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pg. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; Unabridged edition, 2014), 212.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 214.

Hitler wasted little time after being released from prison, taking back the reins of his party, recruiting more members, and making another attempt to change the government. The German government, however, was ready for Hitler this time. After a Nazi rally drew unwanted attention for being too “anti-government,” Hitler was subsequently banned from public speaking in Bavaria until the year 1928.<sup>42</sup> The government officials foresaw what Hitler could become, and they wanted to prevent it. His followers hung on every word, and were willing to do anything he ordered them to do. Thus, his official public speaking role was temporarily suspended. In his time of sanctioned public muteness, however, Hitler stayed busy. He devoted much of his time to finishing the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, and worked hard to restructure his party.<sup>43</sup> Even though he was officially banned, Hitler still spoke in private to thousands of people throughout his ban, proliferating his dogma to anyone who wanted to hear. His speeches continued to grow increasingly ruthless, attacking Jews on an unprecedented stage. He stressed the need for the elimination of Jews, which was required for the imperialistic development of Germany.<sup>44</sup> In his mind, they posed a threat to the success of the nation. He no longer talked about internment camps for the Jews as he did in 1920, but now pushed elimination (murder) as the only possible course of action for Germany to rise again.<sup>45</sup>

Hitler continued to develop his rationale for eradication of the Jews: first, Hitler equates Marxism and Judaism as two sides of the same coin; second, he seems to either forget or purposely avoid discussion the other tenants of the Nazi Party. The idea of “Jewish-Bolshevism” was unheard of in Hitler’s dialogue until 1920.<sup>46</sup> The roots of this ideological statement,

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<sup>42</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham Jr, *Why Hitler? The Genesis of the Nazi Reich* (CT: Praeger, 1996), 114.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 243.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 286-288.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 246.

however, can be traced back to the Red Revolution of 1918 in Bavaria. Many of the influential leaders of the failed revolution were Eastern European Jews, looking to implement a Bolshevik government in Germany.<sup>47</sup> Hitler used these facts and blew them to monstrous proportions. He blamed the Bolshevik movement in Russia on the Jews, and as early as 1920, identified the groups as synonymous, calling for the removal of both of them.<sup>48</sup> Thus, his hatred for Jews and for communism were for all intents and purposes blended together, forming one message of ardent hate and disgust. This will effect many of the foreign policy decisions Hitler makes, especially in Russia.<sup>49</sup> Also, as is the theme for many of Hitler's speeches for the rest of his life, he never strays far from anti-Semitic and nationalist remarks, for he knew the people responded well to those issues. He indoctrinated the people, and they began to crave his message. It was an ingenious plan, one that eventually wraps all of Germany around the finger of Adolf Hitler.

During this time, Germany had elected a new President, Paul von Hindenburg, whom Hitler and the Nazi's supported. Hindenburg served from 1925 until his death in 1934, serving through some of the most tumultuous years in Germany's history. His role in Hitler's rise to power cannot be downplayed. Before the pivotal elections in 1930-32, Germany plunged into one of the greatest depressions in the history of the country. Millions of people were unemployed, and the German *mark* had plummeted to the point where bread cost millions of *marks* per loaf. Times were beginning to look very bleak, and the people grew desperate. The stage was set for someone to take control, and Hitler knew the time had come to make a move. He campaigned hard throughout Germany before the election of 1930, appealing to each class throughout the land. His efforts were rewarded, as the Nazi party garnered the second most votes

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<sup>47</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 112.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

and gained 107 seats in the Reichstag.<sup>50</sup> This wasn't good enough for Hitler, however, and preparations began immediately for the next phase of dominance.

As the elections of 1932 rolled around, Hitler and the Nazi party were poised for the next step. Again, the Nazi party fared very well in the Reichstag elections of 1932, this time taking in 37% of the vote, almost 16 points higher than the second largest party.<sup>51</sup> This came as a shock to the government in Germany, and Hindenburg began to worry about Hitler and his power hungry attitude. He stood firm, however, and refused to give the Chancellery to Hitler, and instead instated Franz von Papen. Hindenburg understood the force he could be and refused, "A presidential cabinet lead by you would develop into a party dictatorship..."<sup>52</sup> Von Papen even suggested that Hitler join the cabinet as Vice-Chancellor, but again, Hitler refused.<sup>53</sup> After several months of bitter in-fighting, the Reichstag voted a resounding "vote of no confidence" for the Papen government, and General Kurt von Schleicher was eventually chosen (at Hindenburg's bidding) to succeed him.<sup>54</sup> Von Papen, however, wanted another chance, and decided to work with Hitler to gain entrance back into the cabinet of the German cabinet. They convinced Hindenburg to allow a joint-cabinet, mostly made of moderates, with Von Papen as the Vice-Chancellor and Hitler as the Chancellor.<sup>55</sup>

When Hitler finally arrived at his desired position, he began enacting his terrible hatred against the Jews. This came through a series of legislative commands given by Hitler, persecuting Jewish people and limiting their capabilities as citizens of Germany. Soon after his

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<sup>50</sup> Samuel W. Mitcham Jr, *Why Hitler? The Genesis of the Nazi Reich* (CT: Praeger, 1996), 136.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>52</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 394-395.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 373.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 387.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 421-422.

ascension to the head of Germany's government, Hitler sponsored sanctions boycotts of Jewish goods, in an effort to push "true" Germans to understand the unpassable divide between the two ethnic groups. The German people responded accordingly, eager to follow their Fuhrer's wishes in the war against the Jews. Anti-Semitism was hardly a new concept in Germany.<sup>56</sup> It was a common sentiment, yet Hitler made it his obsession. He preyed on the masses, already inclined to hate the Jews, and shrewdly drew them into his plan for annihilation of the "inferior race."

It is important to note that from Hitler's rise to power in 1933 until his death in 1945, he actively persecuted the Jewish people, through legislation originating from his desk. Although Goering, Himmler and Heydrich are involved in the outer workings of many of these anti-Semitic legislations, especially during the execution of the Final Solution, Hitler ultimately directed what they did.<sup>57</sup> He was the epicenter of the Jewish persecution. In 1935, through what became known as the Nuremberg Laws, Hitler took away the citizenship of all Jewish-Germans, and severely limited their rights.<sup>58</sup> Not only did it eliminate their citizenship, but it eliminated their right to intermarry between Jews and Germans. The "Reich Citizenship Law" and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor" was received well by the German people, as reported by one newspaper, "the population regards the regulation... as an emancipatory act... in the protection of the racial interests of the German people."<sup>59</sup> This typified the reaction of the Germany citizens to the increasingly hostile vernacular dictated Hitler, and the more brutal legislation that followed. In essence, the Nuremberg Laws created a socio-political (and also an ethnic) rift between the true, "Aryan" Germans, and the Jewish-Germans, a rift

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<sup>56</sup> Derived from: "Kristallnacht." *Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901-1940*. Salem Press. 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), xxx.

<sup>58</sup> Derived from: "Kristallnacht." *Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901-1940*. Salem Press. 2007.

<sup>59</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 98.

which would only grow in the coming years, and would come to a violent head three years later.<sup>60</sup>

In November of 1938, a young, vengeful Jew named Herschel Grynszpan killed a German diplomat by the name of Ernst vom Rath, in response to the deportation of Grynszpan's family.<sup>61</sup> Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister under Hitler at that time, used the murder as the scapegoat for the violent persecution of the Jewish people, in what became known as *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass). Under direct orders from Goebbels, members of the SS and the SA (Nazi police forces) wreaked terrible vengeance upon the Jewish people of Germany, breaking, burning and vandalizing hundreds of synagogues, businesses, and homes.<sup>62</sup> But the atrocities did not stop there. Over one hundred Jews were murdered, and tens of thousands were arrested and taken away, transported to concentration camps. Some Germans participated in the mayhem, many others approved of the damage done in the name of anti-Semitism.<sup>63</sup> Although Hitler was not directly involved, his policies leading up to 1938 set the stage for what occurred during *Kristallnacht*, and ultimately, Goebbels was subject to the order of Hitler himself. The situation had taken a murderous turn for the Jews in Germany, but 1939 would mark the advent of a wholesale war against the Jewish race, in Germany and throughout Europe. The first stages of Hitler's "Final Solution" were being put into motion.

1939 typically marks the beginning of World War II, which began with the German and Soviet joint-invasion of Poland. This year also marks two large developments in Hitler's fight against "European Jewry." In January of 1939, Hitler, in a speech given to the members of the

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<sup>60</sup> Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), xxx.

<sup>61</sup> Derived from: "Kristallnacht." *Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901-1940*. Salem Press. 2007.

<sup>62</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 100.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

Reichstag, defiantly declared that in the event of a European or world war, “the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!”<sup>64</sup> This bold “prophecy” clearly defined Hitler’s goals, should a world-wide conflict emerge. In September of that year, he brought his own words into fruition. After the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Hitler began his quest for both control of Europe, and for the extermination of European Jews, without the fear of Soviet interference.<sup>65</sup> In a direct act of defiance against the “Allied” powers, Hitler displayed his new *blitzkrieg* war machine for the first time, quickly overrunning the country of Poland. Immediately after their surrender, the 2 million Jews throughout Poland were being rounded up and thrown into ghettos. On orders from Reinhard Heydrich (ultimately from Hitler), the ghettoization of the Polish Jews was merely the “first step,” meant to keep the Jews centrally located for the time being.<sup>66</sup> Thousands of Poles and Jewish Poles were killed during the following months, most were shot by killing squads stationed throughout the country.<sup>67</sup> These killings, however, were only the beginning. A wholesale genocide was still two years away.

Concentration and death camps were central to the Nazi’s completion of the “Final Solution.” As early as 1933, the year of Hitler’s ascension to power, the first concentration camp, Dachau, was built. Its original purpose was to hold political prisoners, namely Communists and Marxists, those who vehemently opposed the Nazi system, or any persons that Hitler deemed dangerous to his cause.<sup>68</sup> The path from Dachau to extermination camps like Treblinka and Auschwitz is not a terribly difficult conclusion. Ian Kershaw noted that the “astonish(ingly) swift

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<sup>64</sup> Hitler speech to the Reichstag, January 30, 1939.

<sup>65</sup> "Germany Invades Poland." Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901-1940. Salem Press. 2007.

<sup>66</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 145.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>68</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 464.

jettisoning of constraints on inhumane behavior” culminated in the creation of such inexpressibly horrific inventions.<sup>69</sup> The incorporation of extermination camps did not happen overnight, however, and an overview of the process must be detailed. Although Hitler did not begin his ultimate goal of direct “elimination” of European Jews at the onset of his rise to power in Germany, the process which would lead to the annihilation of millions was actively pursued from that fateful day in 1933. The string of legislative commands legitimizing, even encouraging anti-Semitic behavior and practices paved the way for the atrocities of the 1940’s.

There was much debate amongst the Nazi command concerning the exact method of carrying out the “Final Solution.” Different ideas were suggested, some were seriously considered while many were quickly scrapped. The “Madagascar plan”, as it came to be known, was among the most highly debated of the time. The idea centered around the mass deportation of all European Jews to a location off continent, specifically Madagascar, where they would be situated in a reservation-like area, unsuitable for human survival.<sup>70</sup> The Jews would then die off, ridding the Nazis of the “problem,” and keeping their hands relatively clean at the same time. It is important to note, however, that such a plan was not in place of ethnic genocide; it was genocide, just not by direct methods. The plausibility of transporting tens of millions of Jews from Europe to the southern part of Africa was logistically impossible. As Holocaust historian Leni Yahil put it, the proposed Madagascar plan was only a “phantom of a solution.”<sup>71</sup> A more feasible plan would have to be suggested, one that ultimately accomplished the goal which Hitler had set- the destruction of Jewry.

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<sup>69</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 434.

<sup>70</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 146.

<sup>71</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 146.

In 1941, Hitler made a decision that would have grave consequences for the Third Reich, and ultimately would lead to the demise of the Nazi war machine. Operation Barbarossa was Hitler's plan to conquer Russia, something which he had secretly desired to do for many years.<sup>72</sup> Many historians believe this operation to be the greatest of Hitler's follies, for Russia was an enormous piece of land with inhospitable weather. Rolling through such a large expanse of enemy land would be extremely costly, and the blitzkrieg technique which helped the Nazis occupy most of Europe would prove ineffective in Russia. Barbarossa is universally recognized as a categorical failure, but what is less certain is the reason behind such an egregious error in military tactics. Why would Hitler purposefully awaken the Soviet Union? Why would he want war on the Eastern and Western fronts? Some historians claim that his hatred for communism and bolshevism drove Barbarossa.<sup>73</sup> Others, like Yaron Pasher, believe Hitler had a more sinister motive. Five to six million Jews lived in Russia during the Second World War, and Hitler was not going to let them escape his genocidal wrath.

Pasher contends that Barbarossa and the Final Solution coincide nearly perfectly.<sup>74</sup> This gives credence to the assumption that Hitler pushed into Russia for the purpose of eliminating the Jewish population. The mass movement of Jews throughout Europe began during the Barbarossa engagement. One of the first things the German forces did when they pushed into Russia was build railways. Conventionally, these rail lines would transport supplies such as ammunition, tanks, horses, guns, and fuel to the front to keep the attack from stalling out. These lines should have allowed the Nazis to keep their troops well supplied for the long campaign in

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<sup>72</sup> John Graham Royde-Smith, Ed., Operation Barbarossa, Encyclopedia Britannica, September, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Yaron Pasher, *Holocaust versus Wehrmacht: How Hitler's Final Solution Undermined the German War Effort* (University Press of Kansas, 2014), 3.

Russia. This was not the case, however, because Hitler diverted many train cars for the sole purpose of transporting Russian Jews to concentration camps that were being built throughout occupied Europe.<sup>75</sup> Even while his soldiers died of starvation and exposure during the Russian winter, Hitler diverted valuable resources to transporting captured Jews to his concentration camps. Pasher argues that even before the first shots were fired in the battle against the Red Army, “the lines between military and ideological doctrine had already been erased.”<sup>76</sup> Military tactics were thrown aside in favor of Hitler’s anti-Semitic obsession. Racist, vengeful ideology drove Operation Barbarossa, not sound strategy. Hitler attacked the Soviet Union for the purpose of eliminating the Jewish population in Russia, jeopardizing the integrity of his military, and ultimately leading to the downfall of the Third Reich.

It is clear, especially in the Soviet campaign, that Hitler defied any advice given by his military advisors. Fedor von Bock, leader of Army Group Center during the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, clearly communicated his frustration to his superiors during November of 1941. Not only were trains being used by the SS to transport Jews that could be transporting supplies to his men, but also his vehicles were short on fuel because Hitler refused to allow fuel to be transported from German occupied territory in Romania.<sup>77</sup> Instead, von Bock was ordered to capture Russian oil fields to get fuel for the army. Understandably, von Bock and other Nazi military leaders were miffed by the purposeful slighting of Nazi forces in favor of the execution of Hitler’s Final Solution. He was eventually replaced because of the lack of cooperation.<sup>78</sup> Also, tens of thousands of *regular* Nazi soldiers were being used to execute the Final Solution orders

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<sup>75</sup> Yaron Pasher, *Holocaust versus Wehrmacht: How Hitler’s Final Solution Undermined the German War Effort* (University Press of Kansas, 2014), 5.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>77</sup> Yaron Pasher, *Holocaust versus Wehrmacht: How Hitler’s Final Solution Undermined the German War Effort* (University Press of Kansas, 2014), 38

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 92

behind the advancing Wehrmacht army. It is estimated that by the end of 1941, almost 65,000 men had been involved in the mass executions throughout Eastern Europe.<sup>79</sup> These were men that Hitler could ill-afford to not have at the front lines, but his blood-lust for the Jews overrode any kind of advice his military advisors gave him.

The first records of mass killings of the Jews began in 1941, carried about by Himmler and his SS (specifically the Einsatzgruppen), on orders from the Fuhrer.<sup>80</sup> As the Wehrmacht made its way through the Soviet controlled Eastern European provinces, Himmler and his “death squads” followed closely behind, policing the occupied territories and initiating the final steps of Hitler’s genocidal wishes. Eastern Europe was the first to witness the terrible “wish of the Fuhrer.” Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed in the latter half of 1941 and the first half of 1942 at the hands of Himmler and his death squads.<sup>81</sup> Although these efforts were “successful,” and it is quite possible that the Nazis could have continued to kill the Jews via mass shooting indefinitely, the means of genocide shifted from mass shootings to extermination camps in mid-1942. The exact reason for this shift is debated. Some historians, like Danial Goldhagen, argue the shift was meant to preserve the psychological wellbeing of the Nazi soldiers, as gassing in extermination camps can be considered much less personal.<sup>82</sup> Others have suggested that gassing was more efficient. Whatever the reason, from 1942 till the end of the war, death camps contributed to the majority of Jewish deaths during the Holocaust. At the Wannsee conference which convened on January 20, 1942, Reinhard Heydrich, who is considered the architect of the

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<sup>79</sup> Yaron Pasher, *Holocaust versus Wehrmacht: How Hitler’s Final Solution Undermined the German War Effort* (University Press of Kansas, 2014), 88.

<sup>80</sup> Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), 50-51.

<sup>81</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 154.

<sup>82</sup> David Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, INC., 1996), 157.

Holocaust, outlined the plan for the utter destruction of the Jews, which was designed only with the agreement and approval of Hitler himself. In fact, Adolf Eichmann, organizer of the deportation of Jews during the Final Solution, reported that Heydrich had been ordered by Hitler himself to oversee “the final evacuation of the Jews from German occupied territory.<sup>83</sup> “Evacuation,” “resettlement,” and several other expressions were used within the communications of the Nazi High Command as colloquial phrases for the murder of Jews within the camps and ghettos.<sup>84</sup> Thus, Hitler was intimately involved with actions before and after the Wannsee conference, delegating to his subordinates what should be done.

Critics of the intentionalist position would generally not argue with the concentration/death camp design, or its role in the annihilation of the Jews. They would most likely disagree with the assertion that Hitler was directly involved with the planning and implementation of wholesale genocide. There are no physical orders from Hitler showing his consent and involvement in the murder of the Jews, which for some historians is good enough evidence to suggest that he was not intimately involved. This assertion, however, is absurd, as Himmler himself stressed the importance of disassociating both Hitler and the Wehrmacht from any mass killing that was occurring.<sup>85</sup> It was essential for Hitler to appear clean of this matter. If this was true, historians should expect no physical evidence of orders originating from the desk of Hitler. The overwhelming evidence, displayed heavily in the writings of Heinrich Himmler, speaks against the non-involvement of Hitler, showing without a doubt that Hitler was the driving force behind every turn. In a testimony given at the Nuremberg Trials, Rudolf Höss

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<sup>83</sup> Yaron Pasher, *Holocaust versus Wehrmacht: How Hitler's Final Solution Undermined the German War Effort* (University Press of Kansas, 2014), 30.

<sup>84</sup> Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), 137 and 143.

<sup>85</sup> Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), 59.

recalled a detailed conversation with Himmler in which he told him that Hitler “had ordered ‘the Final Solution to the Jewish Question’ and that now ‘whatever Jews we can reach’ were to be eliminated ‘without exception’ during the war.”<sup>86</sup>

All told, Hitler and the Nazis killed more than 6 million Jews, not to mention millions of handicapped people (including children), Gypsies, Poles, and other ethnic minorities. Hitler, unwilling to face the wrath of the world after the inevitable defeat of his beloved Germany, committed suicide on April 30, 1945. His death came as a relief for many throughout the free world, but did little to ease the suffering and loss that countless millions throughout Europe had experienced during his reign of terror. The Jewish Holocaust precipitated by Adolf Hitler must always be remembered. From the end of World War 1, until death in 1945, Hitler lived with the sole purpose of one day having the power to destroy the Jewish race from the face of the earth. His words and actions from 1919 till 1945 displayed the ever present hatred toward the Jews. He must be held accountable in the annals of history for what he did, and any attempt to alleviate that accountability should be scrutinized to the greatest detail. Adolf Hitler pursued his “Final Solution” because of his intolerable, paranoiac, and hate-filled racism toward the Jewish people. This hatred drove everything he did, from *Mein Kampf*, to the Beer Hall Putsch, to the “Final Solution.”

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 47.

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