

CAUSES OF THE HOLOCAUST

I. A COMMON EXPLANATION: VIRULENT GERMAN ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-semitic lunatics--Hitler and the Nazis--took over in Germany, murdered the Jews. The key mystery is: why did they get away with it? What allowed it?

Daniel Goldhagen variant (Hitler's Willing Executioners): an "eliminationist anti-semitism" was widespread among Germans and predisposed them to favor Hitler and help him with his Holocaust project.

Some important predictions of the "eliminationist antisemitism" explanation fail:

1. Anti-semitism was no more virulent in Germany than in Rumania, Poland, Russia, and Hungary during the 1930s. Why was there no holocaust by these other governments?
2. Hitler murdered millions of non-Jews as well as Jews--a fact that neither variant of the "eliminationist anti-semitism" theory predicts.
Summary of point 1: Goldhagen predicts too many holocausts vs. the Jewish people.
Summary of point 2: Goldhagen predicts too few holocausts vs. non-Jewish people.
3. Had the German public been infused with the eliminationist anti-semitism that Goldhagen sees, German Jews would have seen the holocaust coming, in the eyes and words of their German non-Jewish neighbors. But clearly they didn't see it coming--this is why many did not flee Germany, or fled only late in the game.
4. Spontaneous acts of anti-Jewish violence should have been common in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s--e.g., like the lynching of black people in the American south during 1880s-1930s--but were not.
5. Hitler should not have hidden the holocaust from the German people if Goldhagen is correct. Instead he should have been proud to tell Germans about it. But in fact he hid it carefully. (Counter-argument: Hitler may have concealed the holocaust from Germans to hide it from the wider world, whose reaction he feared.)

Also consider:

1. The "anti-semitic lunatics" explanation is unsatisfying. What or who made the Nazis into lunatics? What brought them to power? Likewise the "eliminationist anti-semitism" theory. If eliminationist anti-semitism was the cause, where did it come from?

II. THE SVE EXPLANATION:

Organized Christianity --> Anti-semitism in Germany -----> holocaust

x

Anti-semitism throughout Europe--hence Ukrainians, Lithuanians, etc. helped Germans do the holocaust; and Americans, British didn't offer haven.

x

Highly effective German state

x

German militarism, social Darwinism, general talk of empire and the -----> need to seize it, especially by pan-Germans and the army during 1900-1919.

"Eliminationism" became normalized in German discourse. During 1900-1918 Germany saw much general public discussion of mass expulsions and murder as an appropriate way to deal with disliked others, especially conquered Slavs in the future empire. This legitimated the idea of mass murder, made it thinkable.

x

The Protocols of the ----> Nazi anti-semitism, fueled by fear, goes on Elders of Zion infect steroids.
Nazi elites.
See Kelly Greenhill, *Whispers of War*

This repaired theory explains where Germany's lunatics came from, and predicts what we actually see: (1) mass murder of both Jews and non-Jews (although focused on Jews); and (2) mass killing by Germany and not by other anti-semitic states.

How could the Holocaust have been prevented? How could future Holocausts be prevented? By creating an NGO ("Religious Hate Watch"?) to name and shape the use of religious authority to purvey hate? By creating a Christian Truth Commission that would identify the wrongs of the Christian church against others, and embed awareness of and apology for these wrongs in Christian religious practice? Just a thought.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu/>

17.42 Causes and Prevention of War
Spring 2018

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.