



Half a million troops belonging to the SA (Sturmabteilung or Stormtroopers), the SS (Schutzstaffel or protection service), and the SD (Sicherheitsdienst or intelligence service) gather at the great park in Nuremberg for the annual Nazi rally in November 1935. Choreographed by master propagandist Dr. Josef Goebbels, these shows of military strength and German rebirth were part of the mass mobilization effort that helped transform Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party from a motley group of eccentrics and thugs in the mid-1920s, to the most powerful dictatorship Germany had ever seen.

Exhausted by the war, wrecked by the peace, the Germans go Nazi

With inflation running wild and their savings lost,
they reject the Weimar democracy, blame the Jews,
and let a thug-enforced ideology take absolute power

In the hours following the armistice that ended the First World War on November 11, 1918, a twenty-nine-year-old Austrian-born corporal with a toothbrush mustache and a feverish belief in his own destiny was recovering from a British mustard gas attack in a German field hospital. Adolf Hitler had been a dispatch runner in a Bavarian regiment of the German army on the western front, had been wounded twice, and had received two Iron Crosses for valor. Now he was hearing that his kaiser had abdicated and Germany's new leaders had agreed to humiliating terms of surrender in French Marshal Ferdinand Foch's railway carriage in Compiègne. "And so," said Corporal Hitler, "it has all been in vain."

The remaining twenty-seven years of Hitler's remarkable career would be spent proving that Germany's 1914-1918 war of aggression had not been in vain. In doing so he would return his adopted country to the height of its power as an economic and military force and make himself the most powerful leader in the history of the German-speaking peoples. But in achieving this, Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi) Party would stamp out democracy, subjugate Christianity, and instigate a brutal, racially prideful brand of German exceptionalism that was to exterminate millions of Jews and others whom the Nazis and a sizable portion of Germany's sixty-six million citizens considered contaminants to the purity of the superior Germanic race. In the end, he would bring down upon Germany massive destruction inflicted on all its major cities by its Allied enemies upon whom he had declared war.



The ages of Hitler, clockwise from left: aged one in 1890; with his fourth grade classmates in 1899 and as a corporal with the comrades in the 16th Bavarian Regiment (far left, military ID tag inset). Disgusted by Germany's capitulation in 1918, Hitler would spend the rest of his life in a remarkable campaign of vengeance.

1. In 1919 Kaiser William, exiled in Holland, described his enforced abdication as the “deepest, most disgusting shame ever perpetrated by a person in history, the Germans have done to themselves...egged on and misled by the tribe of Judah... Let no German ever forget this, nor rest until these parasites have been destroyed and exterminated from German soil!” He expressed these views in a letter to a German general. The Jews were a “nuisance that humanity must get rid of some way or other,” he wrote. “I believe the best would be gas!” This was the first mention of the extermination method to be used in the Nazi death camps. Hitler himself only once mentions actually killing Jews. In *Mein Kampf*, he blames the Jews for stirring up the rebellion in 1919 and regretted they had not been forced to submit to poison-gas.

In effect, Hitler resumed Germany’s war for European domination that had ended so humiliatingly in Marshal Foch’s railway carriage. And if the two million German lives lost in the First World War had been in vain, the more than six million lost in the Second World War died for worse; for they had died defending Nazi totalitarianism, one of the two great and godless evils to tear bloody scars through the twentieth century.

The decidedly unchristian roots of Nazism can be found in the nationalist and anti-Semitic writings of nineteenth-century German intellectuals like Friedrich Nietzsche, who believed the mercies of Christianity to be weakness; they can be found in the eugenicist social Darwinism of racial evangelists like the Anglo-German Houston Stewart Chamberlain and the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau, who believed that Jews and other “inferior” races were tainting the purity of the Aryan race (see volume 11, pages 244-245); and they can be found in Norse mythology dredged up in the mid-1800s from Germany’s pre-Christian past and celebrated in the operas of Richard Wagner (Hitler’s favorite composer).

Such notions had been burbling in the streams of German consciousness for a half century, and rivulets of it had run through the higher levels of Kaiser William’s Second Reich.¹ But it took a convergence of fateful events, and a master exploiter of these events, to turn it all into the fiery torrent that was National Socialism.



Freikorps troops assemble in the northern German town of Wismar in 1920 during the time of the Kapp Putsch, an attempt to topple the Weimar Republican government, unsuccessful because this paramilitary corps withdrew its support. Soon afterward, however, members of the Freikorps, many of them Great War veterans unhappy with its outcome, would join Hitler and become the core of National Socialism.

Born and raised a Catholic in Austria near Linz, Adolf Hitler had grown up a restless romantic, with few friends, an addiction to the Wild West novels of the German pulp writer Karl May, and an aptitude for drawing. Resisting the intent of his father, a customs official, that he become a civil servant, Hitler left home at seventeen for Vienna. There he had hoped to become a painter, and later an architect, but was twice refused entry into the Academy of Fine Arts for lack of talent. So he lived in flophouses, took odd jobs, sold hand-painted postcards, and read those aforementioned authors whose call for a strong, Jew-free (*Judenfrei*), pan-Germanic nation would become the Nazis' main platform.

Hatred of Jews, though far from unknown elsewhere, proliferated in Germany and Austria, where the Jewish minority (about one percent of the population in Germany, three and a half percent in Austria) had achieved disproportionate representation in the arts, professions, and financial sphere, and tended to be blamed for every setback or threat to the nation. In his autobiography *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), the bible of the Nazi movement published in 1925, Hitler explained the genesis of his anti-Semitism during his time in Vienna, a cosmopolitan city with a substantial Jewish population:

Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity...Was there any form of filth or profligacy, particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it?...I didn't know what I was more amazed at: the agility of their tongues or their virtuosity at lying. Gradually I began to hate them.

As a boy, Hitler, by one account, had wanted to become a monk, but he abandoned his faith during his days of disappointment in Vienna. Henceforth, he denigrated Christianity in private, referring to it as the "satanic superstition," whose clergy were solely interested in "raking in the money" and "befuddling the minds of the gullible." In one of his dinnertime tirades (recorded by his personal secretary Martin Bormann), Hitler said, "The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity. Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jew."



Various factors facilitated the rise of Hitler and National Socialism, including a shambled economy with runaway inflation and degeneracy among the urban population.

In this 1920s Berlin club, one of one hundred sixty homosexual and transsexual cabarets in the city, the only woman in the picture is seated at the extreme left. Inset, a fifty-million mark note in 1923. At the time it would have taken more than three hundred such notes to buy one American dollar.



Politically, however, Hitler admired the Catholic Church for its longevity, its reach, and its tight control over its followers. During the rise of Nazism, he recognized the usefulness of the conservative and nationalistic elements in both the Catholic minority and the Protestants, whose church was the state church of Germany. He never did publicly renounce his Catholicism, and in speeches he often invoked God and “Providence” and paid dutiful homage to Martin Luther, whose anti-Semitic passages proved a propagandist windfall to the party.²

Hitler’s rise to power occurred during the fourteen-year span of the Weimar Republic, which provided him and his followers with both a foil and a political path to power. Germany’s capitulation in signing the armistice in November 1918, and the Versailles Treaty the following year, had occurred partly because of the threat of a Communist coup. The leaders of the Weimar government had made an alliance with the army to suppress the Communists, and the army created the *Freikorps*, a citizens’ militia comprised mostly of Great War soldiers who excelled at their task. They murdered the two principal Communists, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and they crushed the brief rule of a Communist soviet in Munich in 1919, lynching many of the would-be commissars.

It was such restless ex-soldiers, bitter over the German defeat and contemptuous of the flaccid liberal democracies that tried to shape the peace, who formed the core of the oncoming totalitarian movement. In particular, they were enraged at the Treaty of Versailles, which effectually held Germany fully responsible for the war, took away her overseas colonies, reduced her European territory by more than thirteen percent, separated from Germany the industrial region of the Saar, ceded to France resource rich Alsace and Lorraine, confined her army to one hundred thousand men, forbade her to have any U-boats, restricted her new naval construction to ten-thousand-ton coastal defense ships, and denied her any air force at all. Finally, it required Germany to make reparation payments to France and England totaling thirty-three billion dollars (close to half a trillion in 2012 dollars).

2. Martin Luther was originally sympathetic to Jews, believing their rejection of Christianity to be a result of Catholic theological error. He grew vehemently anti-Semitic in the last nine years of his life, however, following his failure to bring Jews to the Protestant faith. In his sixty-five-thousand-word treatise, *On Jews and Their Lies*, he portrayed Jews as “full of the devil’s feces...which they wallow in like swine,” and called on Christians to burn down synagogues and Jewish homes, confiscate Jewish writings, and put the Jewish population to work as slave labor.” The treatise was prominently displayed at Nazi rallies in the 1930s, was regularly cited in the party newspaper *Der Stürmer* (the *Attacker*), and its recommendations became one basis for the Nazi persecution.

The Weimar Republic soon proved unable to govern this emasculated land. Unable to achieve a majority in the Reichstag, the Social Democrats ruled through the twenties as a “grand coalition” with the slightly-rightist Catholic Center Party, the liberal German Democratic Party, and an assortment of smaller groups of the right and left. By 1923, the economy was in a shambles. When the government defaulted on its reparation payments, France occupied the industrial Ruhr region unopposed, a further humiliation. Hyperinflation ran rampant. Where in 1921 it had taken four German marks to buy one U.S. dollar, by late 1923 it took seventeen billion. Workers’ salaries were next to useless and savings were rendered worthless.

A mood of ennui and abandon set in. Nihilistic and absurdist art, pseudo-religious cultism, and pornography and sexual abnormality blossomed in the cities, especially in Berlin. The capital alone accommodated one hundred and sixty

A mood of ennui and abandon set in; nihilistic and absurdist art, pseudo-cultism, sexual abnormality blossomed; the ‘new woman’ made her debut.

homosexual and transsexual cabarets during the mid-1920s, nudism became a popular pastime, and the “new woman”—short-haired, short-skirted, and sexually liberated—made her debut on the streets of the big cities. However, by the mid-decade, a conservative backlash began to develop, and churches and nationalistic groups began speaking out against the moral degeneration of youth, calling for an end to the *Schmutz und Schund* (filth and trash). The result was the election of the rapidly ossifying Paul von Hindenburg, the Great War general, to the presidency in 1925. However, for all his monarchist sympathies and bellicose speechifying about the fatherland, Hindenburg agreed to abide by the Weimar constitution.

By 1923 Hitler was living in Munich and was head of the National Socialist German Workers Party, Nazi for short, founded in 1919 out of the extreme-right racist *völkisch* German nationalist movement and the Freikorps. In three years its membership rose from a few hundred to fifty-five thousand, thanks largely to Hitler’s oratory, which he had honed in front of the mirror and was delivering to crowds as large as six thousand in auditoriums and beer halls around Bavaria. Beginning in low, hesitant tones, and slowly building into an operatic crescendo, blue eyes bulging, hands carving and chopping the air, Hitler could mesmerize an audience. His speeches excoriated Jews and Marxists, whom he blamed for the “shame” of the Versailles Treaty, the degeneracy of the nation under the Weimar government, and the emasculation of Germany as a world power. His message of German rebirth appealed especially to the young, whose prospects under the Weimar Republic appeared dim.

By 1923, the Nazis were well established in Bavaria. They had adopted the swastika emblem and were publishing their own newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, (*People’s Observer*).³ Hitler had the support of the respected former Great War general Erich Ludendorff, and gathered around him the core of lieutenants who would accompany him through his rise and fall. These included the spectacled agronomist Heinrich Himmler, later to mastermind the extermination campaign against the Jews;

3. The swastika is an ancient and ubiquitous symbol occurring in artifacts and archaeological sites including those of the Persians, Greeks, Hindus, Vikings, North American Indians, and Medieval Christians. Its popularity in Germany surged in the 1870s following the excavation of ancient Troy by the German millionaire and amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered the symbol and associated it with the migrations of the Proto-Indo-Europeans who, according to dubious Nazi Aryan racial theory, were the ancestors of the superior Nordic races. Hitler used a black swastika on a white circle in a red field when he drew the Nazi flag in 1920. “A symbol it really is!” he enthused in *Mein Kampf*. “In red we see the social idea of the movement, in white the nationalist idea, in the swastika the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man.”

4. Hitler was not one of those quaffing beer. During his years in Vienna he had sworn off alcohol, having got drunk once and not liked it. He also became a vegetarian, and forbade smoking in his presence. Hitler showed little interest in women for the first four decades of his life. Although some of his detractors, pointing to effeminacy in his mannerisms, suggested he might be homosexual, there is no evidence of this. When he was thirty-eight he became infatuated with his pretty blonde twenty-year-old niece (through a half sister) Geli Raubal, who lived with him in Munich for two years until her suicide in 1931. Two years later Eva Braun, a flighty twenty-one-year-old photographer, became his mistress and, for forty hours before their mutual suicides in 1945, his wife. But Hitler confided to a friend that Geli was the only woman he had ever loved.

5. Hitler drew much of his “evidence” of a Jewish conspiracy from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, published in 1903 in Russia and widely translated and distributed around the world in the first decades of the century. The *Protocols* are the supposed account of a late nineteenth-century meeting of Jewish leaders at which they discussed how to achieve world hegemony by subverting the morals of gentiles, and gaining control of the world’s press and international finance. Once in power, the Nazis forced schools to use it as a textbook, even though the book had been conclusively proven a forgery by the *Times* of London in 1921.



Former General Erich von Ludendorff speaks to a crowd of would-be Nazi revolutionaries in Munich on the morning of November 9, 1923. The so-called Beer Hall Putsch, organized by Hitler the night before in the Bürgerbräukeller (a beer hall), failed when police fired on the Nazi marchers, dispersing them, and forcing Hitler to change tactics.

and Hermann Goering, the jolly and corpulent former First World War flying ace, who would head the air force (Luftwaffe) and become Hitler’s second-in-command. Ernst Röhm (the scar-faced former captain in the German army) was the homosexual commander of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA or Stormtroopers), a paramilitary group of fifteen thousand thugs, uniformed in brown army-surplus shirts from the Great War; he would be of great assistance in Hitler’s rise.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler attempted a coup. Backed by the SA and supported by Ludendorff, Hitler interrupted a speech being given by a Bavarian leader at the Bürgerbräukeller, one Munich’s capacious taverns, filled with three thousand stein-thumping Bavarians.⁴ Forcing at pistol point the acquiescence of the Bavarian leader for the takeover of government, he led a march on the Bavarian War Ministry the next day. But the Bavarian police met the Nazi rabble in the street and a brief fire fight ensued. Sixteen Nazi “martyrs” were created before the marchers dispersed. Hitler was given a five-year sentence, and pardoned after serving twelve months. His trial, however, had provided his movement with international publicity, and while in jail he dictated *Mein Kampf*.

The wordy tome, which became a bestseller in Germany, described Hitler’s hatred for Jews and went into great and dubious detail about the rise of “International Jewry” and its insidious conspiracy to gain world domination.⁵ Hitler was also quite forthright about his plans for furthering Germany’s “historic destiny” once he gained power: how he would dispense with the corrupt parliamentary system, defy the terms of Versailles, re-arm the country, ally with Britain and Italy, annex Austria and the Germanic regions of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and then move on the Soviet Union, creating a vast *Lebensraum* (living space) for an Aryan German *Völk*, free of the “verminous” Jewish (and Slavic) races. (Whether Hitler then, or indeed ever, intended the actual extermination

of Jews is something historians have argued about since.)

Ostensibly the putsch had made the Nazis ridiculous to respectable German society. The party was banned in Bavaria and all but disappeared during Hitler's incarceration. But driven by a single-minded belief in his "destiny," Hitler regrouped after his release, and changed his strategy to one of achieving power through constitutional means. As a result, the party's legal status was reinstated.

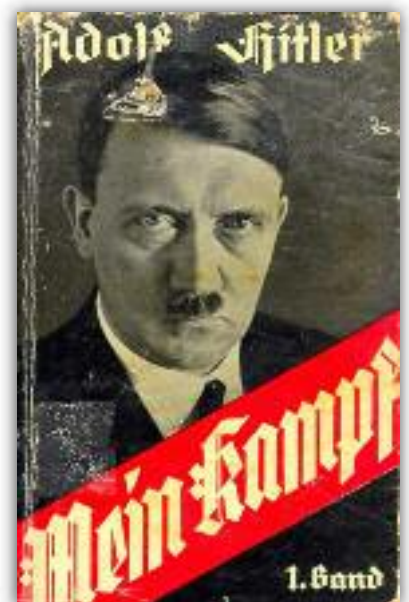
Hitler's followers now included Josef Goebbels, a thin, dark, pockmarked and club-footed intellectual from the Rhineland, with a doctorate in history and literature and a genius for promotion. He became the Nazis' master of propaganda. Rabidly anti-Semitic, he had emerged from the "socialist" side of the National Socialist Party, whereby capitalism—seen as rife with Jews—would be abolished and the wealth of the aristocracy redistributed in a peoples' revolution. This position, also held by SA commander Röhm, appealed to the working classes and, along with the organizational efforts of left-wing Nazi Gregor Strasser, helped the spread of Nazism outside of Bavaria.

But Hitler, who was to obtain much financial support from capitalists like the Krupp steel and armaments manufacturer, suppressed what he called the "National Bolsheviks," and wrested complete control of the party for himself. He had a talk with Goebbels that cemented the latter's undying fidelity. "I love him ..." Goebbels wrote in his diary after the meeting. "He has thought through everything. Such a sparkling mind can be my leader. I bow to the greater one, the political genius." Strasser, whose divergent views were to result in his elimination, called Goebbels "Satan in human form."

As the decade unfolded, the Nazi Party was transformed into a national organization. But it failed to win more than six percent of the vote or more than six seats in the 608-seat Reichstag. The economy improved, wrote journalist William Shirer in the *Chicago Tribune*.⁶ The Weimar Republic "seemed to have found its feet." However, it soon lost them as the U.S. stock market crashed in October 1929. Heavily dependent on American loans, Germany's economy crashed

6. The recovery of the Weimar Republic is widely laid to the success of Gustav Stresemann, its foreign minister between 1924 and 1929, who renegotiated treaties with France, England, and the United States that enabled Germany to regain the occupied Ruhr region, join the League of Nations, prolong the terms of the reparation payments, and secure American loans with which to make the payments and repair the economy. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926.

Hitler with some of his original lieutenants in 1927, including Heinrich Himmler (to the right of the banner), Herman Hess (to the right of Himmler) and Gregor Strasser (behind and to the right of Hitler). Strasser, part of the left-wing Nazi faction that sought a people's revolution and a redistribution of wealth, later fell victim to Hitler's 1934 purge, called the Night of the Long Knives. Inset: a first edition copy of Hitler's memoir and manifesto, Mein Kampf, and left, the swastika flag and symbol devised by Hitler in 1920.



with it. With the unemployed soon numbering more than six million, extreme solutions became more attractive. In the 1930 elections the Nazis polled eighteen percent of the vote, gained 107 seats in the Reichstag, and became a major party.

That same year, the Grand Coalition split, and Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, a conservative Center Party deputy, found it impossible to form a working majority. He had to rely on emergency decrees imposed by President von Hindenburg to roll back wages, tighten credit, and levy other unpopular austerity measures. Hitler soon saw in Hindenburg his ticket to power. In 1932 the old general replaced Chancellor Brüning with Franz von Papen, a colorful and aristocratic Center Party

Goering transformed a small department of the police force into the Geheime Staatspolizei, or Gestapo. It would become a primary agent of Nazi terror.

Field Marshal Paul Von Hindenburg, the Great War commander, elected president of the Reich in 1926. Although no fan of the man he disdainfully called “the Austrian corporal,” it was Hindenburg who eventually acquiesced and made Hitler chancellor in 1933.



deputy who also failed to form a workable government. The elections in July brought the Nazis 230 seats, making them the largest party, but one without a majority in an increasingly chaotic parliament. The Reichstag was dissolved and another election held in November, with the Nazis actually losing thirty-four seats. But von Papen was forced to resign by a cabinet revolt engineered by General Kurt von Schleicher, who took his place. Schleicher attempted to neutralize the Nazis by dividing their ranks, and offered to form a coalition with them.

He failed on both counts. Behind the scenes, von Papen, now a sworn enemy of Schleicher, joined Hitler in an intrigue with those close to Hindenburg to engineer a coalition of the Nazis and the leading right-wing German National People's Party, with Hitler as chancellor and von Papen as vice-chancellor. Although he'd never liked the “Austrian corporal,” Hindenburg, eighty-five years old and verging on senility, was convinced by his friend von Papen that the Nazis could be managed. Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor on January 30, 1933. There were to be certain safeguards, including a limit of three Nazis in the cabinet, with the other eight being old-school conservatives, including von Papen, who believed they could control Hitler. “Within two months,” von Papen confided haughtily to a friend, “we will have pushed Hitler so far into a corner that he will squeak.” Von Papen was neither the first nor the last to underestimate the Austrian corporal.

As part of the deal, Hermann Goering was made interior minister of Prussia. As such he was head of the police in this largest and most important of federal states. Goering used his power to purge the Prussian government of non-Nazis and to transform a small department of the police force, which served as a political intelligence gathering service for all of Germany, into a secret state police called the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Gestapo). It would soon become a primary agent of Nazi terror.



Heinrich Brüning



Reinhard Heydrich



Heinrich Himmler

Elsewhere, the Nazis were establishing control of the various provincial governments through their own Reich commissioners, who were appointed on the pretext of quelling “revolutions.” These fake uprisings were staged by members of the SA and its increasingly powerful spinoff, the black-uniformed, racially pure *Schutzstaffel* (SS or Protection Squad) under the command of Heinrich Himmler, and his tall, blond, stone-hearted second-in-command Reinhard Heydrich.

But the Reichstag was still not under Nazi control, and thus Hitler convinced the cabinet to dissolve the Reichstag, with an election called for March. During the campaign, a fire destroyed the Reichstag building. It might well have been set by the Nazis themselves.⁷ But Hitler blamed the Communists, who during the Weimar years had been stronger in Germany than anywhere else outside of the Soviet Union, and held a hundred seats in the Reichstag. Goebbels mounted a skillful propaganda campaign portraying the act as a diabolical attempt to reduce Germany to anarchy, with Hitler posing as the “reasonable man” appealing for national unity at the polls. Hindenburg was persuaded to issue the Reichstag Fire Decree, under the emergency powers of the constitution, suspending various freedoms, including security of the citizen from house searches, phone taps, or summary arrest. This enabled the Nazis to eliminate the German Communist Party and, with the help of the SA, now numbering half a million men, arrest four thousand of its members.

The Nazis won 288 seats in the election, but still lacked a parliamentary majority and were forced to rule in a coalition with the rightist National Peoples group. To gain full control, Hitler’s government brought forward the Enabling Act, which would give it full legislative powers for four years on the pretext of stabilizing the country. As a constitutional amendment, however, the act required a two-thirds majority to pass. Although the Communists were gone, the Social Democrats were expected to oppose the amendment.

7. Goering was able to blame the fire on a Communist plot because the Dutch Communist bricklayer Marinus van der Lubbe had been found in the burning building. However, a number of eminent historians claim Van der Lubbe was a Nazi dupe. William L. Shirer in his definitive *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1959), writes of Van der Lubbe as a “Dutch half-wit ...only had his shirt for tinder. The main fires, according to the testimony of experts at the trial, had been set with considerable quantities of chemicals and gasoline. It was obvious that one man could not have carried them into the building, nor would it have been possible for him to start so many fires in so many scattered places in so short a time.” Nonetheless the supreme court at Leipzig, subservient to the Nazis, sent Van der Lubbe to the guillotine.



The Reichstag building in flames on the night of February 27, 1933. Although the Nazis blamed the arson on the Communists and used it as a pretext to suspend civil liberties, it is suspected by some that they deliberately set the fire.

The Mussolini flop

By beatings, arson, vandalism, and assassination, Fascism takes power in Italy but its armies are repeatedly defeated, and its leaders wind up hanged in a gas station

In a daring daytime raid in September 1943, twelve gliders carrying Nazi commandos crash-landed on a rocky slope near a remote mountain hotel north of Rome. The object of their mission could be seen at a second-story window: five feet five inches tall, barrel-chested, massively lantern-jawed, dark-eyed, and pale of face. Storming the hotel, Otto Skorzeny's commandos found the deposed Italian dictator suitably grateful. "I always knew," declared Benito Mussolini, "that my friend Adolf Hitler would not let me down." With such a friend, however, the once undisputed leader of Italy now became indisputably a Nazi pawn.

He was not the man to relish a subordinate role. Born in 1883 in Predappio, Romagna, Italy, son of a socialist blacksmith and a Catholic school teacher, he became a scrappy freethinker. He refused to attend Mass, and was expelled from his Catholic boarding school for knifing another student. After a brief teaching career, at nineteen he became an eloquent Socialist agitator and reporter in Switzerland, undeterred by arrest.

Returning to Italy two years later, he fell in love with Rachele Guidi, sixteen, daughter of his widowed father's mistress. A strong-willed blonde peasant girl whose mettle matched that of her arrogant and volatile lover, Rachele moved in with him in 1910, the year their daughter Edda was born—first of their five children. They married in 1915, and biographer Jasper Ridley (*Mussolini*, 1997) writes that although Rachele furiously resented Benito's many infidelities, the marriage was remarkably stable.¹

With the First World War, Mussolini radically shifted his ideological stance. He resigned as editor of the Socialist paper *Avanti!* and was expelled from the party. Though many Socialists condemned the war as imperialist, he backed the Allies and enlisted in the army. Nearly six hundred thousand Italians would be killed, almost a million wounded, and Mussolini severely injured.

Post-war Italy, humiliated by its treatment at Versailles (see chapter 1, footnote 8) and wracked by political and economic chaos, proved amenable to Mussolini's thrusting rhetoric. In short, dramatic sentences, his right arm cleaving the air, he preached militaristic nationalism, authoritarian leadership, and contempt for socialism, liberalism, and unions. His newspaper, *Popolo d'Italia* (in whose office he stockpiled guns and bombs) appealed to ex-servicemen, students, the politically malcontent, and the generally disenchanted. In 1919, some two hundred such supporters met in Milan to form his first *Fasci di combattimento* (fighting bands).

The Fascists, lacking authority, relied on brute force. Action squads known as Blackshirts, often backed by landowners and industrialists, attacked Socialists, Communists, Catholic unionists, and left-leaning local councils, with beatings, arson, vandalism, and assassination. The Socialist Party, fractured by the war debate, and the Liberals, immobilized by anti-Socialist animosity and ties to business, offered scant opposition.

Meanwhile the Vatican policy "*non expedit*" (it is not

expedient), adopted in 1868 to protest Italy's seizure of the Papal States, had effectively banned Catholics from voting. In 1919, however, a gaunt Sicilian priest, Father Luigi Sturzo, founded the anti-fascist Italian Popular Party (PPI) with Vatican permission. The PPI won 101 seats that November, the Socialists 156, and the Fascists none.

But the setback was temporary; by 1922, the Blackshirts had crushed all opposition. That fall, Mussolini organized the March on Rome, exhorting some twenty-five thousand Blackshirts to take the government by force, while he left for Milan to distance himself from the consequent violence. On October 29, with Rome surrounded by belligerent Fascists, King Victor Emmanuel III summoned him to form a government. At thirty-nine, Benito Mussolini became Italy's youngest prime minister.

When the Fascists swept the April 1924 elections, the fiery lawyer and Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti accused them of fraud and intimidation. His body was found some weeks later. Leading Fascists were implicated in the murder and Mussolini himself brazenly claimed responsibility. He further proceeded to ignore the constitution, censor the press, form a secret police, and outlaw Freemasonry, unions, and political



The dead Benito Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci are displayed outside an Esso gas station in Milan following their capture by Communist partisans in April 1945. Having been shot by townsfolk, the bodies, hung upside down on meat hooks, were then stoned.

parties. More positively, he built infrastructure and subsidized grain production. By November 1926, Italy was a Fascist dictatorship, and Mussolini was *Il Duce*, its undisputed leader.

He sought conciliation with the Catholic Church after the Vatican vetoed a proposed coalition between the PPI and the Socialists, the only possible political alliance that might challenge the Fascists. Father Sturzo of the PPI had resigned and was exiled in 1924, the same year the church endorsed the pro-Fascist party, the Union Nazionale. With the 1929 Lateran Treaty, Mussolini recognized Vatican City as an autonomous state, and compensated the Vatican for its lost papal lands. Pope Pius XI, naturally grateful, called him “a man sent by providence.”

However, Pius was to drastically revise his opinion, as would other western leaders who had lauded Mussolini for leading, as Churchill put it, a “triumphal struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.” But his 1935 invasion of Ethiopia became an eight-month terror, featuring massacres and poison gas, and making Italy a pariah among most western nations. Victory in Ethiopia brought Mussolini domestic popularity, however, and support from Germany’s bellicose Third Reich. His Ethiopian venture had wider implications. The failure of the League of Nations to respond effectively to the invasion saw the emperor Haile Selassie challenge the conscience of the world, and led to the effective end of the League.

Although Mussolini and many Fascists mistrusted the Nazis, Germany and Italy drew inexorably together in a “Rome-Berlin axis” that supported Francisco Franco in the 1936 Spanish Civil War (see page xxx). When Germany annexed Austria in 1938, Mussolini, although committed to Austrian autonomy—and not forewarned—nonetheless publicly endorsed the annexation. Not previously notable for anti-Semitism, he now banned Jews from the army, government, teaching or attending school, entering Italy, or marrying “Aryans.” This brought sharp rebuke from the pope, as did Il Duce’s efforts to supplant the lay association, Catholic Action, with Fascist youth groups.

Italy and Germany formed a military alliance in 1939 known as the Pact of Steel, but when Germany invaded Poland that September without Mussolini’s foreknowledge, he reluctantly held back. However, in June 1940, with France falling, he declared war on the Allies, despite the vehement objections of his son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, the foreign minister.

Italy’s wartime role would prove what Winston Churchill would call “a flop.” In 1940 Mussolini’s attempted invasion of Greece proved so disastrous that German troops had to be sent to rescue the invaders. So ill-equipped were Italy’s soldiers, so low their morale, and so incompetent their generals, that within three years the Italians had lost in every theater. They entered with German troops repeatedly called in to replace them.



Hitler and Mussolini walk before saluting troops during the German leader’s visit to Venice in 1934. Mussolini had thought Hitler an upstart and a buffoon in the early days of Nazi rule, an attitude that would soon change with Germany’s rapid rise to European domination. By the time of the German-Italian Pact of Steel during the Second World War, Mussolini and his poorly performing army would become the buffoons.

When the Allies landed on Sicily in July 1943, the Fascist Grand Council, including Ciano, had Il Duce imprisoned in the remote mountain hotel. After Skorzeny rescued him, the Germans installed Mussolini as puppet leader of the Italian Social Republic, headquartered near Lake Garda, where he proceeded to execute those who had ousted him. Ciano, despite his wife’s urgent pleas, was tied to a chair and shot. His wife, Mussolini’s daughter, refused to see her father ever again.

The new Italian government of Marshal Pietro Badoglio surrendered to the Allies in September 1944. The Germans took over northern and central Italy, occupied Rome, and deported nearly nine thousand Italian Jews to extermination camps. The entire country became a grimly chaotic war zone with Italian partisans battling Germans and Fascists. Mussolini, rarely seen, ordered all captured partisans shot.

In April 1945, with defeat clearly imminent, he and what was left of his government headed for Switzerland, with Il Duce in a German uniform, and were captured by Italian partisans. His mistress of nine years, Claretta Petacci, 28, refused to desert him; next day, the partisans shot them both.[FN#2] As a final indignity, their bullet-riddled bodies, along with those of twelve other executed Fascists, were hanged upside down in a gas station located in Milan’s public square. ■

1. An energetic womanizer, Mussolini fathered a son in 1914, Benito Albino, with one of his mistresses, Ida Dalser. After Ida sued Il Duce for alimony in the 1920s, she reportedly was confined in various mental hospitals and died in 1937 at age fifty-seven. According to historian Jasper Ridley, allegations that Fascists murdered her and her grown son remain unproven. Friends of Benito Albino claim he joined the navy and was lost at sea.

2. Rachele Mussolini, her son Romano, and her daughter Anna Maria, were arrested in Como by partisans and interned for several months. Rachele died in 1979, Romano, who became a jazz pianist, died in 2006, and Anna Maria died in 1968.

8. Formerly a Calvinist, Gerlich converted to Catholicism after reporting on a village stigmatic called Therese Neumann, about whom he wrote a book refuting her medical detractors. Fired as the editor of the *Münchener Neuesten Nachrichten* (Munich's Latest News) for over-imbibing wine in the office, Gerlich was made editor of a new Catholic newspaper *Der gerade Weg*, where his assaults on the Nazis mounted: homosexual infiltration of top Nazi ranks, and headlines such as "Lock up the Führer" and "Has Hitler got Mongol blood?" In March 1933, Gerlich was arrested by the SA, beaten, imprisoned in Dachau, and soon murdered.

Thus the approval of the Center Party, the third largest in the house, was seen as crucial by Hitler. Monsignor Ludwig Kaas, Center leader, must be persuaded to have his party vote with the Nazis.

Kaas, a priest and a professor, as well as a deputy, was a friend and adviser to Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the former papal nuncio to Germany and future Pope Pius XII (see subchapter xx). Kaas had helped conclude the successful Vatican concordat with Prussia in 1929, and had been working with Pacelli, who had since returned to Rome as the cardinal secretary of state for Pope Pius XI, on the formulation of a concordat with the German Reich as a whole—a concordat whose passage now depended on the Nazis. Thus Kaas was in a difficult position. On the one hand, he and most of his Center colleagues were wholly aware of what opposition to the Nazis might bring, having seen the random brutalities meted out to opponents by the SA. The Center Party—and the Vatican—were also anxious to preserve a common front against Communism. Moreover, since the Nazis were likely to achieve an authoritarian state, there would seem little future for an opposition party.

On the other hand, a growing number of Catholic bishops and writers opposed Nazi policy on race and religion. Fritz Gerlich, the acerbic editor of the Catholic newspaper *Der gerade Weg* (The Straight Path), had written "National Socialism means: Enmity with neighboring nations, tyranny internally, civil war, world war, lies, hatred, fratricide and boundless want," and spoken of Hitler's "unconditional propensity to evil."⁸ Bishops in several provinces had prohibited Catholics from joining the Nazi Party, and denied Nazis the sacraments. Ludwig Maria Hugo, bishop of the venerable diocese of Mainz, declared that Nazism and Catholicism were simply irreconcilable. "The Christian moral law is founded on love of our neighbor," he said. "National Socialist writers do not accept this commandment in the sense taught by Christ; they preach too much respect for the Germanic race and too little respect for foreign races."

Chief among the writers Hugo referred to was Alfred Rosenberg, the party's

chief racial theorist and editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Three years earlier he had produced *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, a book second only to *Mein Kampf* in its influence on Nazi ideology. In it, Rosenberg expounded on the superiority of the Nordic races, arguing that God had chosen them to rule. Like Houston Stewart Chamberlain and other *völkisch* writers before him, he declared that Jesus was not a Jew but a member of an isolated Nordic tribe, and that Christianity had been an "Aryan" religion until corrupted by the followers of Paul of Tarsus. He dismissed Catholicism and Protestantism as "negative" Christianity, and proposed a new, race-based version of the faith devoid of any

Hitler with Herman Goering (left) and Ernst Röhm (center) in 1931. Three years later Goering was Hitler's most powerful and trusted henchman; Röhm, whose Stormtroopers were eclipsing the German army in number and power, was shot.





Nazi ideologue, author, and publisher Alfred Rosenberg is shown seated in the bar at the Berlin Sportspalast in 1932 with propagandist Josef Goebbels whispering in his ear. The official Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* (the People's Observer, below), edited by Rosenberg, on the "historic day"—January 31, 1933—that Hitler became chancellor. The journal *Der gerade Weg* (the Straight Path, above), edited by the Catholic subversive Fritz Gerlich (top right), publishes one of its anti-Nazi spoofs, the main headline reading "Does Hitler have Mongol blood?" Gerlich was later disposed of at Dachau.



Judaic "contamination" or such "enfeebling" concepts as original sin or the brotherhood of man.

Such histrionics would in time help inspire the "German Christian Church," the short-lived Nazi institution designed to replace the old German Evangelical Church to which two thirds of the population at least nominally belonged. It was a union of Lutherans and Calvinists, and had been the state church of Germany since the early 1800s. In the new Nazi church, pictures of Hitler replaced crucifixes and *Mein Kampf* replaced the Bible. But for the time being, Hitler was portraying himself as a good, old-fashioned German Christian, having long believed that the support of the churches was a crucial component of his plans for total domination. Indeed many practicing Christians, including Catholics, had already been drawn to Nazism by its promises of political stability, national renewal, and the suppression of Communism.

Among the prominent Protestant clergy favorable to Hitler's ascension was the Reverend Martin Niemöller, a much-decorated First World War submarine commander, best-selling author of *From U-Boat to Pulpit*, and pastor of the Jesus Christus Kirche in the affluent Berlin suburb of Dahlen. Niemöller enthusiastically spoke out for the Nazi Party, believing Hitler to be a savior from the "years of darkness" of the Weimar Republic. Nazism, he wrote, offered "a renewal movement based on a Christian moral foundation." He would very soon see things differently, however.⁹

Meanwhile, Kaas and his colleagues in the Center Party, were coming around. Hitler, after all, had distanced himself from the more extreme elements of his party, and had stated that Rosenberg's religious ideas would not be put into practice. In the lead-up to the Enabling Act vote, he had promised, through Vice

9. Within a year after his declared support for Nazis, Niemöller began opposing them, joining with theologians Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer to establish the Confessional Church, distanced from the state church that generally supported the government. He also vigorously protested Nazi treatment of the Jews. He was arrested in 1937 and spent eight years in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. After the war he served a term as president of the World Council of Churches. Niemöller became famous for penning the self-condemnatory maxim: "First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me."

In this detail from the official cabinet photograph of June 1932, Franz von Papen is seated to the left, with rival General Kurt von Schleicher standing behind him. Seated to the right is Foreign Minister Konstantin Neurath, who would play a major part in advancing Nazi policy to undermine the Versailles Treaty before he was replaced by the more compliant Joachim von Ribbentrop in 1938.



Chancellor von Papen, to respect the church's liberty; its involvement in the fields of culture, schools, and education; the concordats already signed by German states; and the continued existence of the Center Party itself. Hitler further vowed that a letter reiterating these promises was being drafted. On the assurance of this letter all thirty-one Center members voted for the Enabling Act on March 24, 1933. Only the Social Democrats voted against the bill—despite the intimidating presence of SA thugs inside the opera house that housed the Reichstag after the fire. The act passed easily by a vote of 441 to 94, thus extinguishing democracy in Germany for the next

twelve years. At forty-three, Hitler was the de facto dictator.

The Center Party's support of the Enabling Act would fuel criticism of German Catholicism for years to come. The Catholics, it would be charged, enabled Hitler to take power, implying that they agreed with him and supported him. Hitler, however, reneged on every promise he had made. Had he kept those promises and had a vibrant Christian presence survived in Germany, perhaps the whole course of world history might have been different. But he did not. He simply lied to the Center Party legislators and cheated them. This undoubtedly proves them foolish. But it does not prove them closet Nazis. The Protestant state church of Germany, meanwhile, appears to have offered no resistance to the Nazis whatever—unlike the Confessional Church, nearly eight hundred of whose pastors and laymen were arrested in a massive Nazi crackdown in 1936.

Instead of delivering on his promises, Hitler launched a charm offensive. "The national government," he said in a speech two days after the vote, "seeing in Christianity the unshakable foundation of the moral and ethical life of our people, attaches utmost importance to the cultivation and maintenance of the friendliest relations with the Holy See...The rights of the churches will not be curtailed; their position in relation to the state will not be changed." This seeming respect for their religion, along with Hitler's promise to negotiate a concordat with Rome, persuaded the bishops to give the National Socialist leader a chance. They released a joint statement supporting the Nazi government (with some reservations) and lifted all proscriptions against Nazis joining the Catholic Church or partaking of the sacraments.

With the Catholics pacified for the time being, and the Protestants (except for the Confessional Church) largely complacent, Hitler could continue implementing the blanket policy of *Gleichschaltung*, roughly translatable as "forcible

10. There was limited resistance to the Nazis among Germany's twenty-two million Catholics and forty-four million Protestants. True, there were undeniable martyrs like Bonhoeffer and Niemöller and numerous individual Catholics (see sidebar page xx), but the overwhelming majority of the German clergy, Protestant and Catholic, and their congregants acquiesced. Such resistance as there was tended to be regional—from the Bonhoeffer-Niemöller group in Berlin, from certain conservative Lutheran bishops in Bavaria, and from Calvinists in the Rhineland. The Calvinist theologian A.C. Cochrane, in *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (1962), describes the Christian response as "a sad tale of betrayal, timidity, and unbelief."

coordination.”¹⁰ It was the process of bringing every sphere of German society into line with Nazi ideology and putting every public body under the control of the Nazi government. In essence, the aim was to have the whole population marching in lock-step in preparation for the war ahead.

Part of the process was mass mobilization. This involved the huge, theatrical rallies at Nuremberg (Goebbels’ masterwork); the creation of the Hitler Youth to indoctrinate the young and prepare them to fight for the Reich; the quasi-religious deification of Hitler with oaths of allegiance, *Heil Hitler* salutes, and photos of the führer in every public office and classroom; and the suppression of all “degenerate” art, music, and letters.¹¹

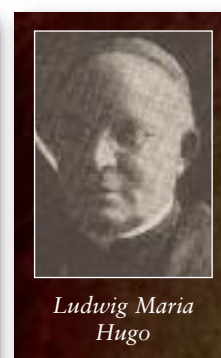
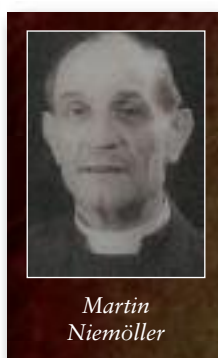
The synchronization of government institutions—carried out with the help of the SS and the Gestapo—put all eighteen state governments under the control of Nazi Reich governors, abolished state elections, replaced government officials and judges with Nazis, and outlawed labor unions and replaced them with the Nazi-controlled National Labor Front.

Policies relating to Jews and other “undesirables” began to be implemented soon after Hitler’s seizure of power. The Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases not only called for the sterilization of the mentally ill—a policy volubly condemned by the Vatican and by the defiantly outspoken Catholic Bishop von Galen of Muenster—but it also paved the way for a euthanasia program that involved the execution of about two hundred thousand “useless eaters” toward the end of the decade. The accompanying Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service, passed the same day, included the Aryan Clause, which excluded Jews from the bureaucracy as well as from universities, schools, courts, and the legal profession. Successive laws banned Jews from serving in any profession, from working in the cultural and entertainment industries, to owning or working for newspapers (which soon came under government control).

These Nuremberg Laws of 1935, aimed at preventing “racial pollution,” forbade marriage or sexual relations between Aryans and Jews. They also accorded Jews second-class citizenship status, prohibited them from displaying the national flag, and forbade them from employing female citizens of German blood younger than forty-five years of age. Penalties for breaking these laws ranged from fines to imprisonment in one of the new concentration camps. Similar proscriptions were also applied to Gypsies, mulattos, and homosexuals. But much worse was yet to come (described in the next chapter).

Meanwhile Hitler had his eyes on the not-too-distant horizon of war. For this he needed a second segment of the establishment on his side: the military. In order to earn their allegiance, however, he must first deal with the SA, which the veteran Prussian officers loathed. This private army of bullies had proven indispensable in Hitler’s rise to power, but was now an encumbrance. Its leader, Ernst Röhm, was looking to effect a “second revolution” to oust the capitalist classes, as well as the army’s generals whom he considered to be dotards and whose army he wished to replace with his four million Brownshirts. It was also strongly rumored that Röhm was planning a coup against Hitler, who, as he had confided to a member of his homosexual

11. Goebbels organized a famous book burning by the German Student Union in May 1933 in which the works of such pacifist, socialist, and Jewish authors as Karl Marx, Albert Einstein, Émile Zola, Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, and H.G. Wells were consigned to the flames by enthusiastic students in bonfires held in thirty-four university towns. In 1937, Goebbels staged an exhibit of “degenerate” art in a Berlin warehouse, featuring works that supposedly embodied the “perverse Jewish spirit” by such non-Jewish artists as Van Gogh, Picasso, and Gauguin. It was intended to unfavorably—and instructively—contrast with the approved Roman and Greek inspired works in the newly opened, palatial House of German Art. After four months, the degenerate art had attracted over two million visitors, almost three and a half times the number of visitors to the approved gallery.



Spain's bad man/good man

Hitler and Il Duce see strongman Franco as a certain ally and help him gain power, but he rebuffs them in the war, spares Gibraltar, and lays the ground for democracy

While the world cringed in pain, horror, and fear in the late 1930s and 1940s, Spain settled into what many onlookers considered an obscure, comfortable neutrality. But it had already gone through its own internal paroxysms, and the Spanish civil war is seen by some people, both Left and Right, as a preparation for the World War that was to come. Effectually, they say, it was a rehearsal for the greater conflict. It was an opening scene that set the stage and the players—Fascist and Democrat—for the war that would turn Europe and much of North Africa into a furnace of struggle and battle.

However, in many ways this is a falsely romantic and politicized interpretation of what was, in effect, a purely local conflict that hardly resembled the Second World War at all. While Fascists, Communists, and Democrats all participated in the Spanish civil war, it had little to do with the new Europe, and

far more to do with the old Spain and its divided history. The country had declined from imperial superpower in the seventeenth century to a nation conquered by Napoleon in the nineteenth, to an economically inferior state in the twentieth.

On the one side of Spanish society were the intrinsically conservative and deeply Roman Catholic peasants, led by similarly traditional landowners, and a military class that longed for former glories. Aligned with them were various regional interests ambitious for increased autonomy but often committed to ancient Spanish values as well. On the other were the urban working class, the labor unions, the Socialist, Communist, and Anarchist parties, and Catalan nationalists. It was an unwieldy and polarized state of affairs and one that simply could not be long sustained.

There were a number of elections and subsequent governments in the early 1930s. After Bourbon King Alfonso XIII abdicated in 1931, anticlerical violence broke out with rioters targeting churches and convents. This continued sporadically for the next five years. Then in February 1936, a strong, united front of left-wing parties won a majority, and promised to transform the country in its own image. This “Republican” government quickly proceeded to limit the role of the army and socialize the economy, which it had promised to do. But it also went further; tried to bar various religious orders from teaching, and banned many Catholic processions and holidays. This seemed to many Spaniards to be the shape of



These maps of Spain in 1936 and 1938 show the advances made by the Fascist-assisted Rebel (Nationalist) forces led by General Francisco Franco (top left, foreground) against the Communist-assisted Republicans (Reds). The Spanish civil war (1936–1939) began as a military coup against the coalition of Socialist and anti-religious parties elected in February 1939. The conflict is often portrayed as a prototype for the Second World War, but in many ways this is a false interpretation of a war that had far more to do with the old Spain and its divided history.





things to come. While the policies may have been popular with the government's most loyal supporters, they struck the rest of Spain as intolerable.

A military coup occurred in July 1936, and the bloody war that followed would be fought until April 1939. Neither side was particularly surprised that it came to arms, and both had been preparing for such an outcome. The actual fighting began when a group of generals led by Jose Sanjurjo declared its opposition to the government, and refused to observe its legislation or recognize its authority. It was supported by organized conservative Catholic groups, the small but well-armed Fascist Falange Party, monarchist activists and, importantly, the Carlists, a large group with a militia loyal to the memory and tradition of the Bourbon monarchy. The generals formed and led a Nationalist bloc, used Muslim African troops from Spain's colonies, and were supported to varying degrees by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The Republican Left also formed a coalition of supporters, and were backed by the governments of Mexico and the Soviet Union, and thousands of volunteers, usually Socialist or Communist, from Europe and North America, known as International Brigades.

There were brutalities and massacres on both sides, civilians were sometimes targeted, and the country was used by both Soviets and Fascists as a testing ground for their military and propaganda. From the Nationalists, the war saw one of the first examples of mass bombing on nonmilitary targets. From the Republicans, there were numerous examples of groups of priests, nuns, and monks being indiscriminately murdered.

General Francisco Franco became the dominant military and political figure on the Nationalist side, and by 1939 he had largely exhausted his enemies. It was also, of course, the year that the world had other issues on its mind and Spain was forgotten, thrown into the corner room of selective historical and political memory; it simply didn't matter very much anymore. Both German Nazis and Italian Fascists tried to persuade Franco to form an alliance with them in the Second World War, but in spite of their support for his cause during the civil war, he insisted on neutrality.

In truth, Spain had neither the economic strength nor the armed forces capable to participate in a global conflict, but Franco's refusal to allow German troops and ships access to



The remains of the Basque town of Guernica (left), bombed by the German Luftwaffe's squadron of Condor bombers in 1937 on behalf of the Nationalists, killing as many as four hundred civilians, greatest civilian mortality from bombing to date, but a mere trifle against the civilian slaughter in the world war that lay ahead. The Spanish cubist artist Pablo Picasso's famous representation of the event, entitled Guernica (top), painted at the behest of the Republicans. During the Spanish civil war, both the Soviet Communists and the German and Italian Fascists, supporting the Republicans and the Nationalists respectively, took the opportunity of testing their military weaponry.

Spanish harbors was vital—Gibraltar may well have fallen otherwise, and the Mediterranean and perhaps the whole war lost to the Allies. He also allowed Jewish refugees of Sephardic or Spanish origin to escape into Spain, and showed more compassion to fleeing Jews than some in other countries. A Canadian government official allegedly said of Jewish refugees that "none is too many."¹ While no particular friend of the democratic powers, Franco was singularly detested by Hitler.

He became the self-styled "Caudillo," or leader of Spain, and established a government of various conservative and right-wing interests. Much to the annoyance of the Fascist leaders, he gained personal control of their party, though he was not a Fascist himself. In effect, he made Spain more a reactionary country looking to the past, than some communal, eugenicist state looking to some darkly utopian future. He



Franco's Nationalist soldiers, bearing food, march into Barcelona in February 1939, and are greeted by a war-weary and hungry populace. Franco's forces had little trouble capturing this Republican government stronghold, and two months later would achieve total victory.



By April 1939 the Republicans had surrendered, and Franco's conservative, Catholic, and militaristic regime would sit out the Second World War and survive until Franco's death in 1975. Franco inspects his victorious troops in Madrid on May 19, 1939 (below).

ruled as a pragmatic authoritarian, and made anti-communism and nationalism the cornerstones of his period in power.

While numerous opponents of the regime were exiled or left the country—and there was certainly persecution and prosecution of those who remained—this was not a society of concentration camps and mass slaughter. In other words, Franco was no Hitler and Spain no Nazi Germany. There was a commitment to what were considered Catholic values and social conservatism, but even many Catholics, Spanish and otherwise, questioned the authenticity of all this.

The country was, however, isolated after 1945, resembling some geopolitical anachronism, an international museum piece. The civil war had seen the departure of many of the country's intelligentsia and business class, and the economy was effectively stagnant. Largely because of this, and much to the chagrin of Spain's Fascists, Madrid entered into an alliance with the United States in 1953. U.S. investment began to improve Spain's economy, and tourism and foreign trade at last brought the country's finances into the post-war world. But when Franco died in 1975, Spain was still the poor man of Western Europe, and would not come close to reaching the level of the rest of most other countries outside the Soviet sphere.

Later in Franco's regime, he abandoned most of the final vestiges of a tightly controlled society and economy and looked to technocrats to propel the economy forward. Some of these men were members of Opus Dei, an orthodox Roman Catholic lay organization, and because of this a mythology has developed that serious Catholics were universally supportive of General Franco. This was untrue. Opus Dei members were also exiled during the Franco years, and those who were recruited into his government were advocates of a new and not old form of government.

Within Spain, non-government trade unions as well as Liberal, Socialist, and anarchist parties, and Basque and Catalan separatists were banned or tightly supervised. Homosexuality, prostitution, and public lewdness were illegal, and the notion of Catholic Spain, imbued with the Christian qualities of faith, family, country, and service dominated cul-

tural and public discourse. In some ways it was remarkable, but in many others a sham. When Franco's grip loosened and finally disappeared, the country was exposed as a nation not fundamentally different from the rest of the Western world, and embraced abortion, same-sex marriage, and much else that would have shocked Francisco Franco.

However, the Generalissimo was far from unblemished. Without doubt he allowed atrocities to be committed during the civil war, had enemies murdered after the war (though nowhere even remotely close to the scale of slaughter in the Soviet Union), and suppressed basic freedoms for decades. He also resisted the demands of the European Fascist powers, and stood firm against the Soviet Union.

The novelist George Orwell, who went to Spain to fight for the Republicans, was swiftly disabused of sympathy with it. He described how the Communist Party tried to commandeer the Republican movement, how it lied about its supposed allies among the Socialists and anarchists, and would certainly have formed the government if Franco had lost the war. Would such a pro-Moscow administration have allowed the German army marching rights during the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact? Moscow had certainly been openhanded to the Germans in Poland and elsewhere. If so, this would have been a disaster for the free world.

Franco preserved Spain in the past, but he also kept it from becoming a puppet of either of the social engineering dictatorships, whether Communist or Fascist. On retirement he handed power to King Juan Carlos, grandson of Alfonso XIII, who instituted a constitutional monarchy and a constitutional democracy, with hardly a fist or gun raised in anger. The transition was smooth and effective, and by the twenty-first century the years of dictatorship would be forgotten—a remarkable achievement that stands tall in the Generalissimo's record. ■

1. The remark, "None is too many," is attributed to an unnamed Canadian immigration official in a book with that title, published in 1983 by Canadian writers Irving Abella and Harold Troper. They contend that Canada did less than other countries to help Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1948.

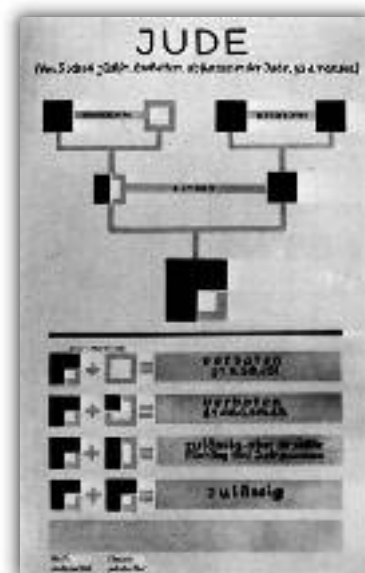
coterie, was becoming too cozy with the conservative elites and letting the whole heart and soul of the movement disintegrate. Hitler, however, moved first. With the assistance of Goering, Himmler, and Hess, he prepared a hit list. In the early hours of Sunday, July 1, 1934, Hitler, Goebbels, and a contingent of SS officers traveled in three black Mercedes-Benz automobiles to the resort town of Bad Wiessee and descended on the hotel where Röhm and his closest lieutenants were vacationing. Röhm's deputy Edmund Heines and an eighteen-year-old youth with whom he was sleeping were taken outside the hotel and shot. Röhm was driven to Dachau and offered a revolver. When he

refused to take his life, an SS guard shot him. Assorted other SA leaders met similar ends that same weekend, along with other perceived “enemies of the Reich” who were not in the SA, including the Catholic editor Gerlich. About eighty-five people died in the slaughter that became known as the Night of the Long Knives.

In one brutal weekend, Hitler had curtailed a possible rival, won over the generals, and forged a reputation for himself as a man who was not to be disobeyed. Himmler's SS, as a reward for its help, was split off from the SA and would soon become more powerful than its predecessor had ever been. Speaking on July 13 in the Reichstag (now meeting in an opera house near the derelict building), Hitler described his actions as an emergency measure against treasonous forces, and received thunderous applause when he declared, “in the state there is only one bearer of arms and that is the army.”

Most Germans felt relief, believing the end of SA terror meant a return to law and order (the message was broadcast on Nazi-controlled radio and crafted by Goebbels, who accentuated the SA's homosexual culture). Even Hindenburg, two weeks away from death, sent Hitler a telegram congratulating him for having “nipped treason in the bud and having saved the nation from serious danger.”

Hitler had thus eliminated the final threat to his power, secured the loyalty of the army, sent a deadly warning to potential opponents, and convinced an increasingly pliant populace that he not only stood for law and order but was, as he told the Reichstag, “the highest judge of the German people.” With Hindenburg's death and the merging of the offices of chancellor and president on August 2, 1934, Hitler became commander in chief of the armed forces. Thereafter all soldiers—and all civil servants—were required to swear a sacred oath promising “unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler.” Alan Bullock, who



In April 1933, the Nazis instigated the first of their programs against Jews by organizing a boycott of Jewish businesses. During that boycott, Stormtroopers, seen here in uniform, forced Jews to march in the streets. They bore anti-Semitic signs emblazoned with such statements as “Don’t buy from Jews” and “A good German doesn’t buy from Jews.” The anti-Semitic measures grew progressively more severe, culminating with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 that forbade marriage or sexual relations between Aryans and those considered too Jewish. A chart from the Nuremberg marriage laws (above) laying out the degrees of Jewishness that preclude marriage.



Although Germany won most medals at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, the black American athlete Jesse Owens put the lie to "Aryan" supremacy by winning four gold medals in the 100-meter and 200-meter sprints, the 4x100-meter relay, and the long jump. Shown here receiving his gold for long jump, Owens gives the American salute while silver-medal-winning German Luz Long delivers the Nazi version. To the right, the Canadian Olympic team receives autographs from Hitler and Goebbels. The postcard below shows Hitler turning the earth for the construction of an autobahn, part of the world's first freeway system that by 1940 would stretch to 2,300 miles). Such events and projects, high employment, burgeoning production, and an openness to outside scrutiny (unlike Soviet Russia), convinced many in the world that Germany and Hitler were to be applauded, not feared.



wrote *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1952), saw all this in another light: "The street gangs had seized control of a great modern state. The gutter had come to power."

Hitler and his generals, at first surreptitiously, embarked upon the road to war, creating an army in the guise of a domestic security force and building warplanes and warships ostensibly within the limitations of the treaty. Arms manufacture and the construction of major public works like the autobahns, together with the elimination of trade unions and the ingenious monetary manipulations of finance minister Hjalmar Schacht, had a near miraculous effect on the German economy. Between 1932 and 1936 unemployment dropped from six million to less than one million,

national production rose 102 percent, and the national income doubled.

The Germany that the world viewed during the glittering 1936 Olympic Games was, as the journalist Shirer noted, a seemingly sublime land. "The visitors, especially those from England and America, were greatly impressed by what they saw: apparently a happy, healthy, friendly people united under Hitler..."¹²

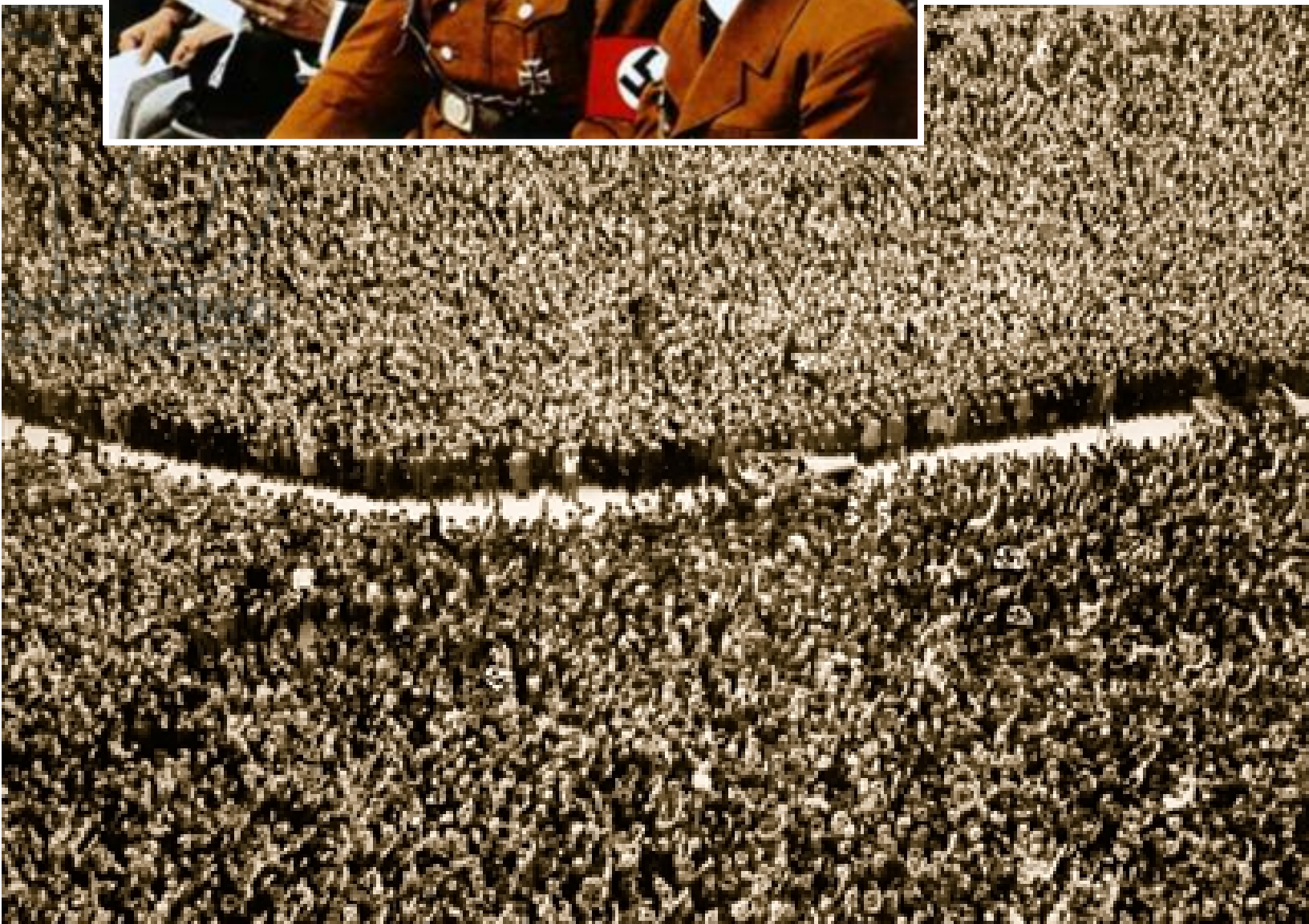
In his speeches, Hitler professed himself a man of peace, who merely wished for defensive equilibrium with the other European members of the League of Nations. Germany had been admitted to the League in 1926. When it became known, however, that France had no intention of acquiescing in European disarmament and was maintaining a huge army, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League in October 1933, afterward submitting his decision to the people in a plebiscite to provide the patina of democracy. The vote was ninety-five percent in favor. And in case the world might perceive this as a belligerent act, he proceeded

to sign a nonaggression pact with Poland, which had acquired Posen and Silesia from Germany under the Versailles Treaty and which Hitler and the generals longed to repatriate. "All of our agreements with Poland have a purely temporary significance," Hitler told a confidant, with a wink.

Such subterfuge largely lulled the leaders of Britain and France into believing that Germany posed no threat to world peace. Indeed Britain was actively pursuing a policy of disarmament. One man, however, remained firmly undeceived. This was Winston Churchill, by now a backbench MP widely viewed as a worn-out war-monger by the pacifist Ramsay MacDonald cabinet. Churchill repeatedly warned against the idiocy of British disarmament in the face of a resurgent Germany. Few paid him any heed until Hitler's war machine roared into Poland in 1939. ■

12. Among the more illustrious visitors was David Lloyd George, who had campaigned for Britain's prime minister in 1918 under the slogan "Hang the Kaiser." He visited Hitler at his mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden in 1936, and came away charmed, calling Hitler "the George Washington of Germany" and declaring: "The Germans have definitely made up their minds never to quarrel with us again." Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, after meeting Hitler in 1937, wrote in his diary, "My sizing up of the man as I sat and talked with him was that he is really one who truly loves his fellow-men, and his country, and would make any sacrifice for their good."

A mass of exultant Berliners greet Hitler as he arrives for the Olympics. (Inset) Hitler and Goebbels watch a Nazi parade in Stuttgart in an early color photograph. Having successfully suppressed all opposition and resurrected the economy, Hitler could now move on to the next phases of his plan: a war of expansion and the complete elimination of the Jews.



The ancient question: Why the Jews?

Persecutions and hatred of this gifted people predate the Christian era, but never was it more sweepingly efficient than in the Nazi Holocaust

1. The word “Semitic” is derived from Shem, one of the three sons of Noah, rendered in Greek as *Sem*. It refers to all the peoples, including Arabs and some Ethiopians, that use one of the languages in the Semitic language family. That is, in addition to Hebrew, Arabic and five Ethiopian languages are also Semitic languages. “Anti-Semitism,” however, refers only to hostility toward the Jews. The term was coined in the late nineteenth century in Germany as a more scientific-sounding term for *Judenhass* (Jew-hatred.)

It seemed literally beyond imagination that in twentieth-century Europe there could occur a genocide so immense and so grotesque that the world would have serious trouble believing it really happened. But happen it did, when Germany became the scene of the Holocaust (in Hebrew, the *Shoah*), in which some six million European Jews were rounded up to be tortured, abused, and finally murdered. Moreover, as was clearly acknowledged at the time, this was nothing less than an overt attempt to expunge the Jewish people from human history—to be remembered, if remembered at all, as exhibits in museums.

That Germany, the nation of Beethoven and Goethe, should be the scene of this extraordinary manifestation of obsessive Jew-hatred was a major part of the shock. For centuries, Jews in Russia, Poland, and Eastern Europe had generally lived on suf-

ference, a barely tolerated foreign element subject to intermittent persecution, seldom fully accepted. Elsewhere, in Britain and Scandinavia, for example, by heroic striving to become model citizens they would often achieve limited acceptance, although challenges and social difficulties usually would persist. But in Germany, by contrast, life for most Jews was not significantly different than for anyone else. They typically regarded themselves as Germans first and Jews second, volunteered for military service in the First World War, won Iron Crosses, represented Germany in diplomacy and in sports, and became politicians and notable public figures.

But perhaps this acceptance was not all that it seemed. Hitler’s Nazis, deliberately pumping the toxins of anti-Semitism into the national bloodstream, were able to pursue with remarkable ease the task of denigrating,



Left, two members of the Nazi SA (Sturmabteilung, or Stormtroopers) stand in front of a Jewish store in Berlin in 1933 with signs reading “Germans, defend yourselves against Jewish atrocity propaganda, buy only at German shops!” Below, a chart from 1935, an adjunct to the racial Nuremberg Laws, was an aid in determining who was an Aryan and who was a Jew. For example, only people with four German grandparents (four white circles in top row left) were of “German blood.” Such measures marked the halfway point between the Nazis’ campaign of marginalization, and their “Final Solution” to the “Jewish question” in the 1940s—that is, extermination.





An aerial view of the Nazi's Auschwitz death camp in Poland with the various departments labeled; and, above, a cart with bodies removed from the Gusen Concentration Camp after the war. The effort and organization that went into this machine of mass death indicated how important the German government believed the killing of Jews to be. It was an eternal struggle between two superpowers: Aryans and Jews. For the former to survive, the latter needed to disappear.

arresting, and finally decimating Europe's Jews.¹ First came a public campaign of abuse and marginalization, when they were blamed for unemployment, defeat, and even disease. Then came incidents of casual violence, escalating to organized brutality. Finally there were the legal attacks: removal of citizenship, firing from government posts, and forced segregation.

All this culminated in what the Nazis termed their Final Solution, which aimed to systematically identify and eliminate anyone who had even a single Jewish grandparent. When shootings proved inadequate for such a mammoth task, they began to force Jews into ghettos, and later into concentration camps, there to be used as slave labor and in dubious medical experiments, and then ultimately gassed and incinerated. As the Second World War progressed, German-occupied countries also became part of a gigantic system for eliminating the Jewish race.

Arguably more amazing yet is the fact that this enormous project was carried out while Germany was fighting a war on two fronts, and was desperately short of food, fuel, and materiel of every sort. Yet time, effort, and scarce resources were devoted to loading millions of Jews on railroad cars and transporting them many miles to specifically built concentration camps where they

were housed, fed, clothed (even if minimally), and systematically tattooed and inventoried—all to kill them.

One explanation attributes this to Nazi ideology. The Hitler government clearly believed that killing Jews was as important as winning the war, maybe more important. This was an eternal struggle, they contended, between two superpowers: the Aryans and the Jews. For the former to survive and prosper, the latter must disappear. Nor was this presented as mere gutter racism or street thug prejudice. There were intellectuals, doctors, scientists, and scholars involved in the Holocaust, every aspect of which was planned and organized. The children, who numbered more than a million, were usually killed first, followed by the elderly and the sick. Able-bodied men and women survived longest, to be used in various ways, but their fate was inevitable. Some few people tried to help the Jews (see sidebar anti-Nazi), and the response of one nation was exemplary.²

The Holocaust, of course, is unique in scope but not in kind. Other twentieth-century examples were provided by the Soviets in Ukraine, the Turks in Armenia, the Communists in Cambodia, and the Hutu in Rwanda. That it could happen in twentieth-century Germany, however, made many conclude that similar persecution of Jews can occur anywhere. The pattern might be inter-

2. In October 1943, Hitler ordered the arrest of all the Jews in Denmark, which was under Nazi occupation. The Danish resistance movement, aided by the citizenry, successfully evacuated eight thousand Danish Jews to neutral Sweden. Danish intercession also secured the release of other Danish Jews already in transit to Nazi extermination camps. Because of these two initiatives, ninety-nine percent of Danish Jews survived the Holocaust.

German civilians from nearby towns are forced to witness the corpses at one of the concentration camps liberated by the Allies in 1945. Few German Jews in the 1930s could have predicted such horrors. They assumed Hitler to be a vulgar little Austrian corporal who was being used by the German ruling class to destroy Communism, and that he would be done away with as soon as possible. Unfortunately for many of them, Hitler's demise would come only after their own.



rupted, the eras of coexistence might lengthen, but in the end a scapegoat would be needed again, and no people have fulfilled that role better than the Jews—from Rome to Moscow, from Cairo to Berlin, from ancient to modern. This argument is difficult to refute.

It is sometimes assumed that the hatred of Jews originated with Christianity, but this is by no means so. Persecutions of the Jews recur in pre-Roman history. In the first century of the Christian era, long before Christianity was strong enough to persecute anybody, Sejanus—who was effectively the ruler of Rome under Tiberius Caesar—developed a visceral hatred of the Jews. After they had twice rebelled against Roman rule in Jerusalem, they were forced out of Palestine. Later there were Christian people and Christian states that treated Jews badly, sometimes very badly, but they just as often lived unpersecuted for centuries in Christian countries, generally to the mutual profit of themselves and the Christians. Anti-Semites often argue that persecution was due to Jewish behavior. But no “typical Jewish behavior” has been in fact traceable, and Jews demonstrably have often been stellar citizens in their countries of birth.

Or could it perhaps have something to do with their biblical role as a chosen people? The Jewish precept is that God chose one initially insignificant people in the Middle East to hear his divine message, to

carry it through the world, and to remain steadfast and faithful even and especially when all around were sinful and disobedient. Therefore, the Jews religiously separate themselves as special, and in that way arouse antipathy.

To the Christians, however, the Jews were chosen to produce the *Messiah*, in Greek *Christos*, the “designated one.” They were not chosen to serve themselves, but for all the nations, for the whole world. They were the carriers of the Word of God. But when the Messiah appeared among them in the first Christian century, he was slain—just as the Jewish prophets had foreseen, say the Christians, and the death of the Messiah and his subsequent Resurrection redeemed the fallen human race, Jews as well as non-Jews. However, the Jews, his own people, rejected him and still await the Messiah. Even so, the great Christian teacher Saint Paul warned Christians to respect and love the Jews who, he said, have been rendered “blind” until “the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in” (*Romans 11:25*).

Moreover, the chosen people concept was never meant to indicate that Jews were better than everyone else. It only meant that they were different from everybody, not in respect of goodness or excellence of character, but in being given a burden to carry for all time. This burden—preservation of God’s Word—necessitated that they not marry non-Jews, not break the dietary laws given

them in Scripture, and not behave in many other ways like the people around them. They were to be a living reminder that God has given his people a code and vocation that must never die. They must reflect absolute truth and act as a mirror held up to the rest of society. Thus their differentness, their insularity, and their separation from the society around them were inescapable, and frequently resented.

Thus when disease strikes, crops fail, and armies invade, these people who live differently from the rest of society, who pray and wash and eat and sing and speak and believe in a different way, can become the first targeted for persecution and blame. If, as is frequently the case, they have also become prosperous because their religion commands education and hard work, it is all the easier to hate them as opportunistic profiteers. Contrary to anti-Semitic lore, Jews have never dominated any one field, but because they are known as Jews, it is easy and tempting to generalize. As one Hungarian aphorism puts it, “Anti-Semitism is hating Jews just a little more than is absolutely necessary.”

The American author Mary McCarthy, who was raised a Catholic but later became an atheist, wrote that “anti-Semitism is a horrible disease from which nobody is immune, and it has a kind of evil fascination that makes an enlightened person draw near the source of infection, supposedly in a scientific spirit, but really to sniff the vapors and dally with the possibility.” This is an instructive comment in that it shows how a non-Jew sees the potential for anti-Semitism in everybody, including the informed and intelligent.

German Jews in the 1930s had certainly assumed that culture cured racism. Many of

them despised the idea of Zionism, of establishing a Jewish state, because they deeply resented the idea that they were anything other than German, and that they had any need for a home outside of the fatherland. People marvel at how late the Jews of Germany waited before fleeing the country, and many seem never to have considered it. This was because they, and many of their gentile friends as well, assumed Hitler to be a vulgar little tin pot dictator who was being used by the German ruling class to destroy Communism, and that they would get rid of him as soon as possible.

There was even resentment among some German Jews at coreligionists arriving as refugees from Poland, who were regarded as foreign, odd, and alien. German Jews were acutely aware that twelve thousand of their number had died in the First World War, fighting for Germany and the kaiser. Many of them were angry at

Britain and France for the way Germany had been treated after 1918, and many sided with the Nationalists when the country seemed on the brink of civil war between Right and Left. By the time the Nazi extermination policy engulfed them, and could not be stopped, they were in shock as much as terror.

One consequence of the Holocaust was to rouse surviving Jews, indeed sympathetic people all over the Western world advance the cause of Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (see chapter xx). The early twenty-first century found Israel prosperous, yet still under siege from enemies intent on its destruction. So while the Jew is not secure in Israel, nor anywhere else in the world, the burden of “the chosen” remains. ■

*Adlaudabilis rures
senesceret pretosius ora
tori. Medusa praemuniet
optimus utilitas umbra
culi. Matrimonii sa*