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## *Demonizing the Germans: Goldhagen and Gellately on Nazism*

*Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

*Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* by Robert Gellately (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The common denominator of these two works—one relatively new, one already a great commercial success—is the attempt to place responsibility for Hitler's 1933-1945 policies upon the spontaneous preferences of the German people, while virtually nullifying the role of official coercion and manipulation. To be sure, much may be properly said about Hitler's popular following. He was the winner of substantial pluralities in three consecutive national elections under the Weimar Republic. It is obvious that the policies of the Third Reich could not have been carried out without the active involvement and cooperation of millions of Germans. But both authors push their case well beyond the bounds of both logic and historical evidence, and both do so in contravention of a substantial literature which, directly or indirectly, disputes their claims. This "unfriendly" literature they either omit or grossly marginalize in their accounts.' In short, we are confronted by new misrepresentations of history with some morally disquieting consequences, especially with respect to the destruction of European Jewry.

During the twelve-year period of Nazi rule, one could reasonably speculate ("speculate," because Hitler did not allow free

elections or First Amendment freedoms which would provide an evidentiary base) that substantial majorities of Germans were for Hitler-on various issues and at various times. But the idea of a spontaneous national unanimity over the whole period of Nazi rule, and especially on the wholesale murder of the Jews, quite untinged by heavy-handed manipulation from above-by propaganda and information controls, and by terror-is a grotesque, simplistic, and stereotypical assumption. Like most stereotypical assumptions about all kinds of people, it is at once unrealistic and unjust.

One shudders at the term, but Goldhagen's characterization of German anti-Semitism is almost racist in its sweeping and exclusivist character. By implication, however-and this may explain some of the appeal of the work-it lets the rest of the world very nicely and very conveniently "off the hook." The Germans let Hitler and his minions, soldiers, policemen, and bureaucrats, kill the Jews because they fundamentally agreed with Hitler that this was a good idea, Goldhagen maintains. In fact, in Germany "the cultural cognitive model of Jews was the property of Nazis and non-Nazis alike" (116). Thus, Hitler was not so much a criminal innovator but an enabler. He merely actualized the German people's collective and universal preference with respect to liquidating the Jews. Any non-German who reads Goldhagen's account can experience a reassuring reaction. Since "we" are not German, "we" would not have behaved the way the Germans did if "we" had lived in the Third Reich during those terrible years, or if analogous challenges confronted us elsewhere. To Goldhagen, the Holocaust was uniquely German. For this reason it would be reasonable to conclude on the basis of his analysis that "it could not possibly happen here," wherever that "here" might be.

### Goldhagen Lapses

For all the seeming scholarship of Goldhagen's book-its archival references, the use of German-language sources, its voluminous footnotes, and its lengthy arguments-the whole work sits atop a huge logical lapse, one that virtually nullifies the entire enterprise. By any reasonable reckoning, the portion of the German population

tangibly involved in the execution of the Final Solution—the planning, the transportation, the gassings, the shootings, the guard duty, the construction and the supply and re-supply of the extermination camps, and all such ghastly chores, was relatively small. Out of about 80 million inhabitants in Hitler's 1940 Reich, it probably could not have been close to even 5 percent of that total. The fault of the rest, the overwhelming majority of the German people who were not actively killing Jews, was in Goldhagen's view that they did absolutely nothing to stop the killings. They did not raise their voices. They did not demonstrate. They did not publicly mourn. They did nothing to help the Jews. They were passive. They were apathetic.

Accepting Goldhagen's "facts" fully, the most parsimonious and logical explanation of apathy would not be vitriolic, murderous hatred. It would be indifference, most naturally articulated by Clark Gable's remark to Vivien Leigh in *Gone With the Wind*, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

Actually, Goldhagen manages to lump all kinds of Germans under one label: those who could not care less; those who rejoiced in Hitler's policies; those who were appalled by those policies but feared the risks of speaking out; those who had a variety of doubts and reservations about Hitler's treatment of the Jews but who also were not willing to jeopardize their lives, their careers, and their families to voice them; and, finally, the many Germans confused and misled by Nazi propaganda and information controls. After all, the Nazis never admitted publicly that they were exterminating the Jews. They were just resettling them in the East.

Many European Jews did not know what fate awaited them even as late as 1942 and 1943. Many Jews outside Europe were "in denial" of what they knew or probably should have known.<sup>2</sup> Why would we expect more of non-Jewish German civilians? Did not the Nazis give the German people clear disincentives, an obvious "downside," to any conspicuous involvement in the Jewish question?

According to Goldhagen, "Had ordinary Germans not shared their leadership's eliminationist ideals, then they would have reacted to the ever-increasing assault on their Jewish countrymen and brethren with at least as much opposition and non-cooperation as

they did to their government's attacks on Christianity and to the so-called Euthanasia program" (418).

But in saying this, Goldhagen violates the canons of logic. Without some other evidence, all one can say is that more Germans cared-or were less indifferent and less risk-averse-about the treatment of the Christian religion and the handicapped than they were about the Jews. They might be said to have cared *less* about Jews; or, perhaps they believed that it was more dangerous to defend Jews than to defend some other causes. How does all this get us to "eliminationist anti-Semitism," which would place all these people in Hitler's company? Passivity does not establish the case for murderous hate anymore than falling asleep on the job proves that the culprit hates his employer.

If "eliminationist anti-Semitism" is evidenced by apathy toward the fate of the Jews, as Goldhagen would tell us, another interesting absurdity arises. To most survivors of the Holocaust, including the present writer, the behavior of the Nazis and the Germans was only one part of the tragedy. Another very important aspect of the Final Solution was the cooperation, and in many cases simply passivity and silence, on the part of various communities, institutions, and individuals whom Raul Hilberg classified as the "by-standers" of the Holocaust. Many of these entities and individuals helped the Nazis in their ghastly "work"-sometimes by turning Jews over to them, by socially isolating them, by physically attacking Jews on occasion, and also often by the simple refusal to help or make any effort to impede the Nazi machinery of death.

Among prominent persons who belong to this category are undoubtedly Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.<sup>3</sup> How many interdepartmental conferences did Roosevelt and Churchill convoke between 1939 and 1945 asking their aides: "Is there something we could do for the Jews of Europe that we have not done and that we might be able to do?" How many public speeches on behalf of the Jews addressed to Germany and Eastern Europe did these leaders make?

Now, it should be noted that these particular individuals were far more capable of doing a great deal of good on behalf of European

Jews than any number of "average Germans." These were men with great powers—moral, political, diplomatic, economic, and military. Unlike some German grocer or flower shop clerk in Hamburg or Leipzig, these men received streams of information from diplomatic and official, as well as unofficial, channels about the real fate of European Jewry—not just rumors or gossip or constructs based on private inference. And unlike the "average German," these men had nothing to fear from the Gestapo. So did these great leaders share Hitler's "eliminationist anti-Semitism"? Few people would agree with a proposition this absurd. They had all sorts of reasons for what they did, or did not do, but murderous hatred of the Jews on the Hitler model was not one of them.

#### Comparing Anti-Semitisms?

In demonizing the Germans, Goldhagen resorts to accusation as evidence, or, put in another way, he not only suggests proof that he does not supply, but does not even specify criteria by which a 'reasonably objective observer could test his assertions about Germans. An excellent example is the following statement:

The unmatched volume and the vitriolic and murderous substance of German anti-Semitic literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alone indicate that German anti-Semitism was *sui generis*. (419)

How could one validate this statement? Goldhagen himself does not provide any comparison of the anti-Semitic literatures of different countries. We have to take his word for it. Assuming someone else wanted to test this proposition, how could "volume" be measured against "vitriol"? Would one "vitriolic" book with huge circulation be more important than several "vitriolic" books with modest individual circulation? Would a more "moderate" book with huge circulation be more important than a more "vitriolic" one with lesser circulation? Could we measure out "vitriolic"?

Ultimately, of course, one would have to measure the *impact* of any such literature on the given society, which brings the whole argument back to its starting point: the need of some reasonable

comparative dimension. If Goldhagen were really serious, he would have needed to be intensely interested in the works of the leading Polish anti-Semite, Roman Dmowski (1864-1939). As a publicist and author, Dmowski, by all commonsense criteria, matched for more than three decades before the Second World War some of the most anti-Jewish literature from Nazi sources. When Dmowski died in January 1939, the conservative and prestigious Krakow newspaper *Czas* wrote:

His influence on public views, on the psychology of the nation is enormous. The ideals propagated by Dmowski are believed by a very substantial portion of the whole society, and are particularly adhered to by the great majority of the youth. ... The greatest ideological triumphs have been Dmowski's in the last years of his life. Let us be frank. For all of us who have belonged to the camp of Marshal Pilsudsla the national ideology which Dmowski enunciated has exerted a great influence. [Dmowski's] heritage has become the general treasury of the nation.'

In an extensive contribution on the subject, Dora Litani-Littman reviews voluminous and clearly very vitriolic Rumanian anti-Semitic literature in her article in *Encyclopedia Judaica*.<sup>5</sup> How can we be sure that this Rumanian literature was *less* serious and, above all, *less* influential than its German equivalent? Certainly not from the treatment of the Jews up until 1933!

Goldhagen says that "Whatever the anti-Semitic traditions were in other European countries, it was only in Germany that an openly and rabidly anti-Semitic movement came to power-indeed was elected to power..." (419). But here we encounter several issues unfavorable to Goldhagen's interpretation of the German people. First of all, Hitler's *Nazis* got only 43.9 percent of the vote in the March 1933 Reichstag elections, and in this election there already was considerable intimidation practiced by Goering, Himmler, Rohm, and the rest. In two earlier contests, Hitler had managed pluralities of only 37.3 and 33.1 percent respectively. This certainly does not support the proposition that virtually everyone in Germany agreed with Hitler.

An even more serious question, however, arises with respect to the motivations of those Germans who did vote for the Nazis in 1932 and 1933: The rabid nature of Hitler's anti-Semitism could not be denied. The pages of *Mein Kampf* gave all the testimony that anyone might have wanted. It is perfectly reasonable to say that people who simply read *Mein Kampf* *should* not have voted for Hitler. That the physical annihilation of the Jewish people is really the *most desirable* solution of "the Jewish problem" is a reasonable inference from a careful reading of Hitler's book. Perhaps virtually any thoughtful person *should* have understood the Führer's total unfitness for national leadership then and there. But did German voters read *Mein Kampf*? And if they did, did they take it seriously? Many probably did not.

The reality of the situation was described well-nigh perfectly by the eminent historian Gerhard Weinberg when he wrote:

Certainly one should not overlook the belief of many [Germans] that the National Socialists did not necessarily mean precisely what they said; that Hitler's more extreme ideas should not be taken seriously; that once in power, the movement would find itself forced into a more reasonable course by the impact of responsibility and reality. Many of those who deluded themselves in this opinion were to argue after World War II that Hitler had deluded them. But he had not lied to them; they had misled themselves.'

As political scientists know-and Goldhagen won the American Political Science Association's 1994 Gabriel Almond Award for the best dissertation in the field of comparative politics-inferring voter intent from the aggregate results of a national election is no simple matter. Granted that many Germans who went to the polls in 1932 and 1933 were "anti-Semites," it is clear that not all forms of anti-Semitism-or anti-"anything"-are one and the same. Approval of mass murder is not a standard feature of all forms of anti-Semitism. Mass murder is not the logical implication of all forms of anti-Semitism. Among "religious anti-Semites," for example, the operative "remedy" to the perceived "Jewish problem" has generally been

conversion, not killing. Did the German electorate generally support Hitler and the Nazis *because of* their eliminationist anti-Semitism? Or simply with no particular concern for the issue *of* anti-Semitism? Or even despite anti-Semitism? Were voter motivations perhaps mixed?

### Issue of Motives

People vote for all sorts *of* different reasons. Clearly, no exit polls were being taken in Germany of the early *1930s*.<sup>7</sup> Something *of* a clue to this question, however, was offered by the work *of* emigre German sociologist Theodore Abel. Abel advertised a contest in the Nazi newspapers, after Hitler's seizure *of* power, asking members *of* the NSDAP to submit life-stories explaining why they had joined the Nazi Party and offering prizes for the best contributions. Ultimately, he collected some 600 essays. Most importantly, Abel succeeded in assembling a fairly demographically representative group *of* Nazi Party members.<sup>8</sup> Among this group *of* party members-obviously more "ideological," one would assume, than the category *of* "Nazi voters" in general, not to mention the German electorate as a whole-sixty percent of the respondents made "no reference whatsoever to indicate that they harbored anti-Semitic feelings," while four percent expressed various degrees *of* disapproval *of* anti-Semitism. Thus, only thirty-six percent *of* Party members seemed to share-to any degree-Hitler's anti-Semitic passions. *If* this was the case with Nazi Party members, what does it suggest about the general population-a fanatical national consensus on the physical extermination *of* the Jews? Not very likely. Analogous inference may be drawn from a later study by political scientist Peter Merkl.<sup>9</sup>

Without the benefit *of* freely expressed views during Hitler's dictatorship, especially in public opinion polls, it is difficult to tell what levels *of* genuine popular support the Nazis enjoyed in the 1933-1945 period. It is likely that such support varied considerably over time and with respect to different issues, especially as between 1933-1939, *for* example (a period *of* peace and renewed economic well-being in Germany) and, say, 1942-1945 (when constant bombing, consumer shortages, huge manpower losses, and a sequence *of*

military defeats dominated the horizon of German public life).

One of the more interesting and authoritative studies, barely mentioned by Goldhagen, was Sarah Gordon's *Hitler, Germans and the Jewish Question* published by Princeton University Press in 1984. The perspective presented here was very much at odds with the simplistic Goldhagen caricature of Germany.

According to Gordon, even among members of the Nazi Party, "There was considerable diversity in the...attitudes toward Jews, and only a small percentage (sic!) appear to have been paranoid anti-Semites of Hitler's ilk" (293). As for the larger German society, Gordon believed that if Hitler had actually *abandoned* anti-Semitism altogether, his regime would have appeared "more respectable and lawful," and therefore more attractive to the German people (311). In Gordon's view, more Germans actually *disapproved* of Hitler's violent measures against the Jews during the 1930s—random attacks on property and persons, and, above all, *Kristallnacht*—than felt gratified by them. Some Germans, she noted, opposed violence against Jews not so much because of their sympathy for the Jews, but because they saw these attacks as undermining the important values of law and order and private property. "Sporadic violent attacks on Jews before 1939 had to be curtailed because the public expected the state to perform its function of law and order" (306). "Hitler's central role in the persecution and mass murder of Jews cannot be overestimated" (312).

Unlike Goldhagen, however, Gordon recognized the realities of Hitler's police state. "That only a minority of Germans acted openly to aid Jews or to oppose Nazi racial policies concertedly implies...the fear of reprisals and the improbability of evading detection" (308). Gordon pointed out that a two-year term in a concentration camp for aiding Jews or publicly supporting their cause was a more chilling punishment than an equivalent jail term in America would be for several reasons. The regimen of the concentration camps was a more severe risk to life and health; the arbitrary power of the Gestapo was such that neither the duration of imprisonment nor the treatment that one got. there was reasonably predictable (being killed "while trying to escape" was not out of the question); there might also be

adverse consequences for one's family and close associates.<sup>10</sup>

William Sheridan Allen, another author neglected by Goldhagen, wrote a study about the Nazis' assumption of power in a microcosm: in the small town of Thalburg, in the province of Hanover, with a population of about ten thousand in the early 1930s. The work appeared as *The Nazi Seizure of Power, The Experience of a Single German Town 1930-1935*.<sup>11</sup> Allen's observations about the links between Nazism and anti-Semitism are worth quoting at some length here:

... an ambivalent aspect of Nazism for most Thalburgers was the party's anti-semitism. Social discrimination against Jews was practically non-existent in the town. Jews were integrated along class lines: the two wealthiest Jewish families belonged to upper class circles and clubs, Jews of middling income belonged to the middle class social organizations, and working class Jews were in the Socialist community. Yet abstract anti-semitism in the form of jokes or expressions of generalized distaste was prevalent, approximately to the extent that these things exist in contemporary America. If Nazi anti-semitism held any appeal for the townspeople, it was in a highly abstract form, as a remote theory unconnected with daily encounters with real Jews in Thalburg. Thalburg's NSDAP leaders sensed this, and in consequence anti-semitism was not pushed in propaganda except in a ritualistic way. (The chief exceptions to this were the chalked or shouted slogans of the SA and their acceptance by peasants and by some of the rowdier employees of the artisan shops.) Thalburgers were drawn to anti-semitism because they were drawn to Nazism, not the other way around. Many who voted Nazi simply ignored or rationalized the anti-semitism of the party, just as they ignored other unpleasant aspects of the Nazi movement. (77)

Writing about Nazi transformation of the social and political organization and atmosphere of the town, Allen noted that "If enthusiasm was not voluntarily forthcoming, there were other means of evoking it. The most effective was the system of terror..." But after a few years, Allen noted, arrests of "deviants" were no

longer "necessary." "[T]hreats, allusions and rumor served to maintain control... A sort of equilibrium existed whereby Thalburgers did what was expected of them and in return were spared the potential rigors of the police state..." (248-249).

John Weitz in his book *Hitler's Diplomat, the Life and Times of Joachim von Ribbentrop*<sup>12</sup> described the atmosphere in Berlin in early 1938 in these terms:

Only a few Germans were openly distressed by Hitler, although the Nazis' control over "Aryan" Germans had tightened. Many people learned to glance over their shoulders in cafes, restaurants, theaters, and hotels. Had anyone overheard what one had said? Could it be misunderstood? One could get into a lot of trouble, even at a friendly dinner party. (171)

In a book which appeared one year after Goldhagen's, the distinguished historian Saul Friedlander, in his *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Vol. I, *The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939*<sup>13</sup> observed that "German society as a whole did not oppose the regime's anti-Jewish initiatives.... Yet, during the thirties, the German population, the great majority of which espoused traditional anti-Semitism in one form or another, did not demand anti-Jewish measures, nor did it clamor for their most extreme implementation...outside party ranks there was no massive popular agitation to expel [Jews] from Germany or unleash violence against them " (324). In a very telling footnote, Friedlander observed that Goldhagen's "eliminationist" anti-Semitism was adhered to only by "a segment of the party and its leaders, not by the majority of the population" (336n).

### Historical Revisionism

Apart from Goldhagen's undifferentiated, stereotypic definition of German anti-Semitism and the problematic issue of Hitler's popular support under conditions of dictatorship, there was still another massive historical distortion underlying Goldhagen's whole work. Simply put, if the Germans adhered, *en masse*, to the Hitler brand of anti-Semitism during the 1930s and 1940s, there would have to be some evidence of this in three periods: the period before Hitler

came to power; the period of his dominance; and, without a doubt, also in the post-Hitler period of German history. This would have to be the case, unless we could somehow believe that the Germans had suddenly developed a murderous hatred of the Jews in 1933; and this hatred lasted until 1945; and then, somehow, it miraculously, vanished from German society. Since Goldhagen pays a lot of attention to the development of the allegedly lethal German anti-Semitism prior to Hitler's assumption of power, it would seem that at least the relevance of the pre-Hitler Germany is conceded. The post-Hitler phase is suggested by logic, if not by Goldhagen.

In brief summary, and keeping in mind comparative criteria, the Jews of Germany from the time of German unification under the Empire in 1871 until the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933 constituted one of the best integrated; prosperous, and successful Jewish communities in Europe and the world. The conditions of Jews in Germany—all evidence of anti-Semitic literature and beliefs among Germans notwithstanding—were far better than in most of East-Central Europe or Russia: whether in terms of access to education, socio-economic status, rates of intermarriage, participation in the military and civil service, or religious and cultural freedoms, among many criteria. If the Germans had been as rabidly anti-Semitic as Goldhagen asserts, it would have been Germany, and not Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe, which would have been the home of the *pogrom*.

In fact, of course, the word has a Russian origin. How many pogroms—defining the event as a mass assault on the persons and property of Jews by local civilian populations—occurred in Germany between 1871 and 1933? The answer is none. In imperial Russia, there were many. In the early twentieth century, the names of Kishinev, Zhitomir, Odessa, and Yekaterinoslav are all linked to pogroms. It is not really surprising that the Jews of Poland, who had lived under Russian rule during the First World War, warmly welcomed the entry of German troops into areas inhabited by them. Some of those friendly feelings and perceptions still lingered during the Second World War and prompted amazement and incredulity among many Jewish victims of Hitler's mass murder. It is also worth

pointing out that no German government leaders prior to Hitler, including even the likes of von Papen and von Schleicher, ever took the position that Germany had a "Jewish Problem" which required the removal of Jews from the country. Yet this was precisely the position of the non-Nazi government of interwar Poland, whose Foreign Minister, Colonel Jozef Beck, went to Geneva to demand that the League of Nations assist Poland in getting rid of its Jews.<sup>14</sup>

The pre-1933 fate of the Jews of Germany does not support the Goldhagen interpretation. The policies of the Hitler regime obviously dwarf every wrong suffered by the Jewish people in its long history. But even in this terrible period there were certain events which cast doubt on the Goldhagen thesis. There are literally no instances of pogroms against the Jews even during this era. We know, for example, that in the Ukraine and in Lithuania there were large-scale, spontaneous mob attacks on the Jewish population which inflicted not merely hundreds but actually thousands of casualties on the victims-and these occurred even before the Nazis reached the relevant areas or at least established control in them. Nothing of the sort happened in Germany. Relevant to German opinion during the War, Sarah Gordon reported the interesting results of a poll among about five hundred German P.O.W.'s carried out under Allied auspices in 1944. Among men under 30 years of age, 33 percent agreed that anti-Semitism was "helpful" to Germany but 44 percent saw it as "harmful." Among men over age 30, only 17 percent saw anti-Semitism as "helpful" but 60 percent saw it as "harmful." In each category, 23 percent of respondents did not reply to the question."

When it comes to large numbers, whether in Kristallnacht or otherwise, the killers of Jews were *not* non-Party German civilians. It was generally the police, the SS and the S.A. and even at times the military, but never frenzied, out-of-control German civilian mobs." And what of the post-Hitler period? Goldhagen showed no interest in the number of public opinion polls taken in Germany right after the war as discussed by Sarah Gordon. They strongly contradicted his claims." There have been Skinheads and neo-Nazis since the 1940s, and there have been some attacks on Jewish synagogues,

cemeteries, and occasionally persons. But post-war Germany never experienced what happened in Poland in Kielce in 1946 and elsewhere, where random civilians killed hundreds of Jews returning from concentration camps; forests, and hiding places to the areas of their former domiciles.

Moreover, with great relevance to the Goldhagen (and also the Gellately) thesis, political groupings espousing or defending anti-Semitic ideas in the post-war era have done rather poorly in German national or even local elections-not nearly as well as neo-Fascists of Italy or Austria, or even France, for example.

#### The Gellately Link

Goldhagen's crucial connection with Robert Gellately stems from the latter's previous work, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing the Racial Policy 1933-1945*.<sup>18</sup> Goldhagen anchored his cavalier views of the Gestapo on Gellately with the illustrative assertion that,

Within German society, enforcement of "racial" laws and regulations depended greatly on voluntary information supplied to the Gestapo, since-contrary to the mythological image of it-it was a terribly (sic!) undermanned institution, incapable of policing German society on its own. (117)

Obviously, if the Gestapo was just a straw man, fear was no factor in German obedience to Hitler. It is ironic that in an era of "political correctness" in America, where many people on college campuses seemingly fear to publicly voice doubts about such policies as "affirmative action," or "compensation for slavery," some American scholars are willing to suggest that defying the Gestapo in Nazi Germany was just a little short of a "walk-in-the-park" exercise. The notion that the Gestapo was *not* a formidable institution because it did not have many employees or was "undermanned" is absurd, as is the notion that denunciation by the "people" made it into a largely "reactive" instrument of popular will.

Actually, the power of the Gestapo was not based on the size of its personnel but on its vast powers over individual lives and the

manner in which these powers were exercised; its arbitrary and capricious operations; its complete lack of public accountability; its contempt for the rule of law; its record of vicious brutality in the treatment of suspects; and, above all, its association with torture, murder, and for all practical purposes, kidnapping. The power of the Gestapo was supported by virtually all the resources of coercion and violence at the command of the Nazi state. Perhaps Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Oranienburg, Ravensbruck, and Auschwitz were all "undermanned"-with possibly not enough typists and receptionists and recreational directors-but they were an important part of the Gestapo's network of resources. So was the SS and all manner of police formations. When Reinhard Heydrich, the Protector of Bohemia and Moravia and one of the principal agents of the Final Solution, was mortally wounded by two Czech patriots in late May 1942, the Gestapo investigated. But it was the SS which launched an all-out assault on the church in which the two perpetrators had found refuge.

In the immediate aftermath of Heydrich's death on June 4; some 1300 Czechs, men and women, were executed, in addition to the 120 persons already killed in the Karl Borromaeus Church in Prague; 152 Berlin Jews were additionally slaughtered "in reprisal"; finally, on June 9, 1942, squads of German Security Police massacred all the men and boys in the village of Lidice, about 200 in all, while women and small children were hauled off to a concentration camp in Gneisenau, many never to be seen again. Of course, if the Gestapo or the RSHA, Reich Security Main Office, had not been so woefully understaffed it presumably would have been able to coordinate even more mayhem than all this!

The Gestapo's system of denunciations was hardly a vehicle of popular will because the control of the whole process was not with the citizenry but with the Gestapo. On one end of the process, the Gestapo had full discretion on what "tips" it would pursue-to a much greater degree than a prosecutor in a constitutional democracy-ultimately because it was not subject to any public accountability or supervision by an independent judiciary. Reinhard Heydrich or Heinrich Muller could not be subject to a recall election, and no

one could possibly publish a letter in a German newspaper of the Nazi era accusing Muller or Heydrich of flouting the law and violating people's rights. The Gestapo could freely use "bad" evidence, or even "manufactured" evidence, if it wanted, because it had power to arrest people and put them in concentration camps, or even kill them, without any reference to, or interference by, the courts of law with all the safeguards common in constitutional democracies.

On the other hand, the system of anonymous denunciations served to intimidate the citizenry and all actual or potential opposition. One never knew who was watching or listening. People also knew that they could be arrested on very slim pretexts, and if arrested the only rights they would have would be at the complete discretion of the Gestapo. The Gestapo could act as prosecutor, judge, jury, jailer, and executioner, all in one. It did not need judicial warrants to enter homes, seize mail, or monitor conversations. Neither judges nor lawyers could protect people from the Gestapo's grip.

As for getting information from the public, it is obvious that the Gestapo, in a society of 60 or eventually 80 million people, did not need "majority support" or "social consensus" in order to get many thousands of people, ranging from Nazi sympathizers (even 10 percent Nazi popular support in Germany would have yielded several million potential informants) to all types of scoundrels acting out of unsavory, private motives.

Part of the reason why the Gestapo inspired fear was that it operated out of the shadows. Its organization and activities enjoyed an important and very functional degree of mystery. One could not be sure who its agents and informants were. How many people in Berlin would know whether the Gestapo office had a work force of one thousand or five hundred employees or actually perhaps only two hundred employees? Did the Nazis publish anything akin to the annual reports of the U.S. General Accounting Office? Obviously not. Given the vast powers and enormous resources at the disposal of the Gestapo, it would not have been reassuring to anyone living in Berlin in, say, 1943, to learn that the Gestapo headquarters in the city possessed only half as many employees as they might have

imagined. It would only take one phone call from this headquarters to get the SS or SD or Kripo to do all "the heavy lifting" necessary.

### Hitler's Popularity

In his latest book, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, Gellately has broadened the perspective of a decade earlier—mainly in the same direction. Like Goldhagen, Gellately amassed lots of archival references and the kind of scholarly apparatus which is apt to impress people. Unfortunately, it was what he made of this material, his analysis, which seriously undercut the whole enterprise.

One of Gellately's main analytical problems is substantial lack of familiarity with the literature of totalitarianism. This is suggested in part by his own presentation of the subject, and in part by the bibliography and the index of his book. Particularly missed is Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*.<sup>20</sup> This book, probably the best ever to survey the subject of Nazi, Fascist, and Communist regimes under one cover, could have saved Gellately from many missteps—including "reinventing the wheel," and making misleading comparisons among totalitarian systems.<sup>21</sup>

Granted that the German electorates of the 1930s were worn down and frustrated by the Depression, by political stalemate in the Reichstag, by seemingly endless violence in the streets, by a sense of diminished national prestige—roughly one in three voters in 1932 saw salvation in Hitler's seemingly "no nonsense" authoritarian nationalism. Looked at superficially, here was a man who had promised to put "nation" above "class," "party," and "interest group," and to bring on a strong government ready to battle chaos and perhaps even an incipient revolution from the Left. But even in 1932, Hitler's support had fallen from 37.3 to 33.1 percent of the vote in the second parliamentary election of the year—prior to his fatal appointment as Chancellor by President von Hindenburg in January 1933. In a highly advanced, changing and heterogeneous society, could Nazism have been a preferred, long-term political option for *all* Germans, or even *most* Germans?

In *Backing Hitler*, Gellately addresses a complicated question. Why did the German people, by and large, follow Hitler from 1933 to 1945, given all the terrible crimes and failures of his regime? He identifies some of the major factors, especially the impact of favorable regime performance, propaganda and communication controls, and terror or coercion. His conclusion on all this is generally reminiscent of Goldhagen: Hitler's regime was solidly supported by the German people; it was, in effect, consensual. Coercion was used only against marginal elements in German society and coercion itself was actually welcomed by most Germans as a means of keeping "bad elements" out. (257, 258) Most Germans were apparently not afraid of the "Big Bad Wolf." Ignoring many of the same sources neglected by Goldhagen, he produces an analogously unbalanced and flawed account.

In clarifying his notion of Hitler's plebiscitarian dictatorship, Gellately says that "Hitler never set out to confront large segments of his social world and to break them to his will, as did Stalin...he wanted...popular backing" (256-257). There is a certain obvious difficulty in this view. All rulers like to have popular backing, Stalin included, no matter their objectives, but the objectives may frustrate the hope of voluntary popular support. In Hitler's case, he wanted, among other things, to abolish the right to strike and to prohibit German workers from having autonomous, potentially strike-wielding, trade unions. Would not such an objective bring Hitler, sooner or later, into conflict with a "large segment of his social world"? How about the abolition of political freedoms for the whole nation—the rights of association, expression, and assembly? Could such abolition be realized without ultimately "confronting large segments of [Hitler's] social world"?

To indicate, seemingly, how the Nazis differed from Stalin's Communists, Gellately says: "Germans were not expected merely to adjust and accommodate themselves to the new system but to become 'idealistically' motivated, to reflect back to the Nazis that what the Third Reich stood for was in the 'best' German traditions, to get involved in displays of affection for Hitler and his vision of 'community,' and in practical terms, to help bring about the new order by actively cooperating with the police and the Party" (257).

"Many Germans went along, not because they were mindless robots [!] but because they convinced themselves of Hitler's advantages and the 'positive' side of the new dictatorship" (257). Indeed, in the Friedrich and Brzezinski chapter on "Terror and the Passion for Unanimity," Gellately would find virtually the same generalizations applicable to Stalin's regime as well. As these authors note, "[M]ere absence of opposition to the regime is insufficient as proof of devotion...it is no accident that secret police files in the USSR stress, first of all, whether a given individual is passive or active.... The Communist Party of the Soviet Union particularly stresses that *partiinost* demands active, very active, support of the regime, measured by concrete achievements.... The same was true in the Fascist and Nazi dictatorships" (167). Certainly, the Germans were not robots, but neither were the Russians or the other inhabitants of the former USSR. What human beings are?

Gellately relies on some highly questionable indices of Hitler's alleged support throughout Germany *after* 1933. Illustratively, he writes that Germany's increased acceptance of Hitler could be illustrated by the rise in Nazi Party membership from 129,583 in 1930 to 849,009 in 1933 and the SA from 77,000 in 1931 to nearly 3 million in 1934. (16) Of course, Germany had a population of about 62 million at the time. That such figures could take us toward a national consensus behind Hitler is doubtful. The same kinds of figures—even "better" ones—could be produced on behalf of Joseph Stalin,<sup>22</sup> whom Gellately sees as a confrontational dictator, while Hitler was a presumably consensual one. Stalin, too, won many elections with 99 percent of the popular vote. Millions of people *seemed* to support his rule. When Stalin died in March 1953, many people across the Soviet Union—not "all people," and not the "vast majority of people," but certainly "many people"—were crying in public in response to the bloody dictator's demise. That is a well-documented fact—by Western journalists among others. Was Stalin's rule also "consensual"? Hardly.

If Gellately had delved into comparative totalitarian experience, he would have recognized, no doubt, that mass organization figures need to be taken with the proverbial "grain of salt." In 1944,

Communist Party (PPR) membership in Poland was only 20,000 but in 1948 when with Soviet backing the Party had seized power throughout the country-it rose to one million. Did this happen because Communism in Poland suddenly became much more popular, and more quickly popular than Nazism in Germany in the early 1930s? Perhaps not. Were people joining for reasons other than heartfelt allegiance and enthusiasm?

In 1943, the membership of Mussolini's Fascist Party stood at about 4.8 million while Hitler's Nazi Party stood at close to 9 million-about equivalent proportions of the respective populations. But, on the eve of the war, the Fascist Youth Movement with 6.05 million members was proportionally larger than the Nazi movement with 8.7 million. Did this mean that Mussolini's support among Italians was really more solid and more enthusiastic than was Hitler's among the Germans?

In fact, Gellately himself claims that "a characteristic feature of the Third Reich, one that set it apart from Italian Fascism [was] that the regime found no difficulty in obtaining the collaboration of ordinary citizens" (261). Obviously, some qualitative issues were involved in all these organizational expansions.

Citing the election of 1933 as proof that the Germans in their "vast majority" accepted Hitler's use of concentration camps and the "new police" is both inaccurate and intellectually questionable. (60) Hitler became Chancellor on January 30, 1933, and the 1933 election occurred less than five weeks later on March 5. This was not much time for the electorate to evaluate Hitler's penal system. In any case, Hitler's party only got 43.9 percent of the popular vote, and that, under conditions of considerable Nazi thuggery against the oppositionists, especially those on the Left. As for the plebiscites of November 1933 and August 1934, Gellately does not seem to remember that by then all organized opposition was dissolved; no one could publicly campaign against Hitler; no one opposed to Hitler could access the radio or the press; or put up wall posters; or hold public meetings; or enjoy immunity from arrest by the Gestapo. No independent monitors supervised these plebiscites. None could challenge the vote count in the aftermath.

On July 14, 1933 Hitler had issued a decree announcing that The National Socialist German Workers' Party constitutes the only political party in Germany.... Whoever undertakes to maintain the organizational structure of another political party or to form a new political party will be punished with penal servitude up to three years or with imprisonment of from six months to three years, if the deed is not subject to a greater penalty according to other regulations.

Gellately's assertion that Nazi views about Jews "had taken root" among the German people by the time of the War is very questionably supported by literally "one letter" and "another suggestion." (254) It is, of course, reasonable to give examples of opinions or attitudes, but there has to be a context. How did these particular, private letters, written to Nazi authorities (if negative, exposing the writers to reprisal) reflect the thinking of some 80 million citizens of Hitler's 1940 Reich?

It would seem that these items are not nearly as interesting with respect to German attitudes about Jews as a couple of contemporaneous diplomatic reports which Sarah Gordon cites in her book. How the German people reacted to the November 9, 1938, Nazi assault on the Jews of Germany was appraised in the official comments of two senior British and American diplomats stationed in Berlin. According to the first, we learn that:

Inarticulate though the mass of the people may have been, I have not met a single German of whatever class who in varying measure does not, to say the least, disapprove of what has occurred. But I fear it does not follow that even the outspoken condemnation of professed National Socialists or of senior officers in the army will have any influence over the insensate gang in present control of Nazi Germany.<sup>23</sup>

According to the second:

In view of this being a totalitarian state a surprising characteristic of the situation here is the intensity and scope among German

citizens of a condemnation of the recent happenings against Jews. This sentiment is variously based upon two considerations. One of utter shame at the action of the Government and of their fellow Germans and the other on the conviction that the happenings constitute bad policy in the internal and more particularly in the external field. Such expressions are not confined to members of the intellectual classes but are encountered here throughout all classes-taxi drivers, servants, et cetera-and it is understood among the peasantry in the country.

Granted that definitive evidence of what people *really* believed in a very repressive dictatorship may be elusive, the perceptions of two official diplomatic monitors, not subject to Nazi police pressures, are worthy of notice. But Gellately seems to share an aversion with Goldhagen-to contrary evidence.

#### Nazi Self-Disclosure

What Gellately considers to be a major contribution of his book is the discovery that the Nazis' coercive regime was not really a secret. It was widely publicized and reported upon in the Nazi press. Those Germans who read newspapers and magazines and listened to radio, and most did, could learn all about it. But could they?

Nazi reporting about their coercive apparatus-concentration camps, for example-fell very short of the proposition about "truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." According to his own evidence, much of the Nazi reporting about the camps presented a misleading picture of fairly benign educational institutions, places where Communists and Socialists could be taught how to be good Germans. (54-55 e.g.) There may have been some real discipline, but nobody was starving here, and nobody was subject to brutal and arbitrary beatings, let alone whimsical killings.

German newspapers did not discuss the methods by which the Gestapo would "break" witnesses-or show pictures of the medieval-looking instruments so frequently helpful in these processes. German readers would have been surprised to read in their legally sanctioned press that the Gestapo was never too troubled about

evidence concerning people whom it didn't like, because it could always manufacture all the evidence it needed. After all, suspicion was evidence enough to arrest people, and, after that, the interrogators could always conduct what one might term "extended and reasoned dialogue" at close quarters with such persons.<sup>2s</sup>

The only way for people to learn about some of these critically important "details" of the coercive system would be by word-of-mouth, from friends, neighbors, relatives, co-workers, and other personal contacts. Most people probably learned enough in this manner to want to avoid contacts with the Gestapo.

Analogously, Germans could read all sorts of stories in the official press about anti-Jewish legislation and anti-Jewish measures-but only up to a point. Gellately mentions all the speeches Hitler made "predicting" the destruction of European Jewry. There were official admissions about the expulsion of the Jews from the Reich, and also about their alleged resettlement in the East. But there were no official admissions about shooting and gassing of men, women, old people, children-and babies. Not even a general admission of extermination. That critical information Hitler denied to the German people and to the world.

Once again, whatever knowledge one might glean about such matters would generally have to come from personal contacts, usually by word of mouth. It could come from foreign broadcasts but, contrary to Gellately's suggestion, there was not much that anybody could learn about the Final Solution from Allied radio transmissions. The Allies were not very fond of this subject. As people say nowadays, they had "other priorities." In any case, all the "information" that Gellately purports to have discovered in published Nazi sources does not take us one foot past any of the critical thresholds obvious before the appearance of his book.

The most meaningful information available to the German people could generally come not from media but from soldiers and policemen employed in Hitler's death factories, just as there was surreptitious information coming from German victims of Hitler's terror. There were certainly people who had had concentration camp experience behind them, and people who had undergone

Gestapo interrogations. And people could always make inferences from what they knew to what they did not know. For example, if Jews were being "resettled" in the East, did anybody ever hear from them? How much was known by whom from all these sources is still a matter of some uncertainty.

### Nazi Propaganda

Gellately's view of Nazi propaganda-allegedly winning over the Germans to Hitler-is distinctly naive. It attacks a less than credible notion. The author says that "Nazi propaganda is poorly understood if we think of it as simply brainwashing or mere emotional manipulation.... [Actually, it] was not...crudely forced on the German people. On the contrary, it was meant to appeal to them [?!] and to match up with everyday German understandings" (259).

In one sense, this is a rediscovery of the wheel. Few treatments of German propaganda fail to heap praise on Dr. Goebbels for the relative skill of his efforts.. In fact, most "propaganda," not only in Nazi Germany, seeks to appeal to what people already believe, or want, or fear, or find credible, in some way, or to some extent, at least. Otherwise it could not be persuasive. Stalin's propaganda in World War II appealed to love of country and fear of Nazis, both pretty credible themes at the time. But, of course, propaganda also seeks to manipulate people, move them from X to Y, to make them believe or to act as the regime would desire. To think of Nazi propaganda as merely "an indicator of what people sincerely hoped to be true"-in other words, a mirror image of German public opinion-is absurd. Could the roughly 30 percent of the German electorate of 1933 made up of Communist and Socialist voters listen to Dr. Goebbels, or read Nazi newspapers, and say, "Gee, this is what I always hoped would be true"? Not very likely. If they did, Dr. Goebbels might have thought of himself as somewhat redundant. But if they could be made to believe that (a) most other people in the society at least outwardly seemed to agree with Nazi propaganda and (b) any deviation from its norms, if discovered and reported by someone, would likely bring severe punishment, behavior could be much more effectively controlled.

Without a solidly convincing system of coercion, the regime could not have had a communication-propaganda monopoly. Individuals and groups within the society would offer their own interpretations of all the subjects that official propaganda addressed-but only if they had nothing to fear by doing so. It would be, in effect, only natural for them to do this. On the other hand, propaganda could not only persuade people to see things the way the regime wanted, but it could identify the targets of coercion. As in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, those who did not say "four legs good; two legs bad" would identify themselves as deviants. If deviants were seen to be "appropriately" punished, everyone else would "stay in line."

Here one needs to take note of the symbiotic relationship between "propaganda" and "terror" in order to appreciate why the balance of these factors would predispose a great many people in Germany to deny and repress knowledge of Nazi crimes. At the top of the political system, Hitler and Goebbels set the norms of what it was that made a "good Nazi" and a "good German." These norms were constantly replayed by the mass of official media-everything from radio to wall posters. Certainly, an "uncompromising hostility" to the Jews was one of the most important norms; ultimately, in Hitler's view, they were Germany's most implacable and dangerous enemy. Any conspicuous, publicly, or even privately, manifested deviation from the norms could potentially bring significant punishment to those involved.

Indeed, Gellately tells the reader that "in cities like Wiirzburg in Lower Franconia, through which the Jews were marched on their way to the trains, anyone who showed signs of sympathy or who dared to shed a tear, was denounced, brought to the police, and punished by the Special Courts" (142). Under these circumstances, the person who was concerned with his own safety, career, and the welfare of spouse and children, would almost instinctively understand that solicitude about Jews and concern about their fate were not very functional attitudes. Officially inspired fear made it difficult to communicate with other people about such matters. It would have been unwise, certainly risky, to approach strangers, even relatives sometimes, with questions and comments that reflected a treason-

ous attitude of a "Jew lover": one who was worried that the Reich was perhaps "too tough" on the Jews.

And, though this is a more conjectural point, denying to oneself knowledge of what was, or probably was, happening to the Jewish victims of Nazism-by discussing "gossip" and "rumors"-made psychological sense for many people. It made it easier for them to maintain a sense of personal rectitude and inner tranquility-one less thing to worry about in the middle of a desperate war, and one less thing to disturb their sleep or their conscience. In the interest of one's own welfare, it may have been better not to know than to know.

#### Popular Sources of Policies

Gellately does his best to emphasize "popular input" in the Nazi State. But his illustrations are exceedingly questionable. He uses the example of thousands of letters written daily to Hitler and other Nazi authorities. He asserts that German citizens under Hitler's rule were not "merely passive, dependent or powerless" (200). He maintains that "in Hitler's dictatorship, the German state and Nazi Party were repressive and highly invasive, but even so citizens made necessary adjustments" (199).

Does this suggest that Hitler's dictatorship was not what it seemed? That the "adjustments" somehow could or did overcome the "dictatorship"? Gellately alleges that the "authorities could be...manipulated from below" (200). But from Gellately's own discussion, it would seem that the mail sent to Hitler and other Nazis consisted largely of requests for personal favors, petty complaints, protestations of loyalty, and denunciations of other people. Barring some unforeseen disclosures-not found in Gellately's book-this might mean that Hitler was manipulated from below about as well as Stalin was manipulated from below.<sup>26</sup> Unless one analyzed the content of the letters and the responses to them, how would we know? How many of these letters wound up in the "circular" file? How many letters got the Nazis to do anything that they did not want to do?

All of Gellately's Tables in the book relating to the Gestapo, on pp. 134; 156, 161, 167, and 187 are very disappointing. They all

follow a pattern: telling us virtually nothing about the extent of popular support for Nazism. Illustratively, there were 210 cases in Gestapo files, according to Gellately (134), concerning the social isolation, of Jews in Lower Franconia between 1933-1945; 123 of these were "reports from the population." Gellately does not say if any of these cases involved multiple entries—did some people contact the Gestapo more than once? Perhaps even several times in some instances? Were all the denouncers Nazi sympathizers? Were any of these people, if not full-time Gestapo employees, persons who were part of a Gestapo network because of financial or other rewards which the agency may have occasionally or periodically bestowed upon them? Superintendents of large apartment buildings, for example, or hotel employees, were the kinds of people whom the Gestapo had reason to cultivate for their information potential.

Even on the assumption that *all* 123 reports were given by 123 different individuals with different backgrounds, what does that say about Nazi support in Lower Franconia? Over a twelve-year period, this figure amounts to about 10 citizen contacts per year. Is this even one one-hundredth of one percent of the population of Lower Franconia? All of Gellately's Tables put together disclose 403 reports to the Gestapo attributed to the general population of Germany. Considering that it would take 800,000 people to constitute 1 percent of Germany's 1940 inhabitants and 620,000 for 1 percent of the 1933 figure, the question of Hitler's popular support is not significantly advanced by any of this.

How much this tells us about the Gestapo itself is unclear. Assuming that Gellately's selective Tables are actually representative of all of Germany, four of the five cover social isolation of Poles and Jews. The last Table deals with listening to foreign broadcasts. But the jurisdiction of the Gestapo clearly covered many more areas of activity, everything from espionage and sabotage to bad-mouthing the Fiihrer. Did the Gestapo have other sources of information than those Gellately reports? Were the patterns shown in Gellately's five Tables replicated across the whole Gestapo caseload? This is far from clear in his pages. Did the Gestapo have files of "suspect categories" of people whom it had under surveillance, and whom

from time to time it questioned and arrested? In any case, what the author attempts to extrapolate from his slim body of evidence is highly problematic.

On occasion, Gellately seems not quite up to the task of making any kind of generalized sense of the Gestapo. He says, "Although the Gestapo as an institution was generally reactive or even passive, we should not forget that at times it was very active. For example, the Gestapo pulled out all stops in the wake of the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler" (191). If that was the case, does it not suggest that the Gestapo may have had different approaches to different matters? A difference in dealing with "big stuff" as opposed to "petty stuff"? And does this not validate the proposition that it was not some amorphous "public" out there which brought the Gestapo into action but rather its own discretionary judgments? Is doing what one wants, how one wants, and when one wants, "passive" and "reactive"?

Among the great oddities of Gellately's interpretation, we find the following characterization of Gestapo informers:

In the Third Reich, the official stance and attitude towards denunciations was ambivalent. On the one hand, if informing was sincere, came from the heart, and especially if it was based on Nazi convictions and was aimed selflessly at those who were defined as Germany's enemies, then it was welcomed.... In running to the police as a way of benefiting from [their] knowledge, the denouncers were causing concern and disruption and Hitler wanted them stopped. (139)

So Hitler and the Nazis were virtuous men worried about the sincerity of their informers? Not about the usefulness of the information for their particular purposes, regardless of denouncers' motives?

Among some of the more infamous cases, Alan Bullock recalls the Gestapo's cynical frame-up of General Werner von Fritsch in early 1938, completely at odds with Gellately's absurd interpretation.<sup>27</sup> One wonders just how many oppositionists or/and Jews the Gestapo had arrested on the basis of denunciations motivated by little more than personal spite, vengeance, or greed.

The reader finds Gellately, at the top of page 191, conceding most of what has been said about the powers of the Gestapo in this essay, but in the next to last paragraph, as if the admission were quite meaningless, he once again offers his paradoxical and misleading conclusion:

The findings about the role of denunciations in the everyday operations of the police, and my characterization (sic!) of the Nazi police as generally being reactive and greatly reliant upon help from the outside, does (sic!) put into further question at least some of our understanding of the notion of a "police state" and the usefulness of that concept in helping to explain what Hitler's dictatorship was all about.

### Major Problems

There are two problems with this kind of interpretation. One is that it does not match up well with the historical record. And, unfortunately, none of it is based on research from the perspective of the Gestapo's "clientele." What would those who lived at the time, and perhaps those who had been arrested by the Gestapo, have to say about its methods? Was the Gestapo's historic reputation in wartime Europe one giant mirage? A misunderstanding? Hardly.

After all, what did the Gestapo do when Colonel von Stauffenberg's bomb exploded at the Fuehrer's headquarters on July 20, 1944? Did it sit and wait for letters and telephone calls from citizen informers? Or did it launch an instantaneous wave of arrests, brutal interrogations, terroristic reprisals, and sadistic murders? As Hans Adolf Jacobsen noted in his book, *July 20, 1944: The German Opposition to Hitler As Viewed by Foreign Historians2s* :

The accused were spared nothing...torture, lashes with the whip, privation of sleep, reprisals on their families, the most degrading insults. There was no appeal against the verdict, and hanging was done on the spot. No priest was present to give solace to the men in their agony.... (33)

The author estimated that 5,000 people, 2,000 of them army

officers, were killed in the aftermath of July 20. Actually, only a small fraction of those killed were sentenced by the People's Court, while the rest were dispatched by "administrative fiat" without recourse to the public theatre of Rudolf Freisler's judicial circus. While many were killed immediately upon the "verdict" being rendered, many "even more unfortunate, had for many months to submit to the severest cruelties and were then massacred by the SS at Flossenburg in April, 1945, only a few hours before the arrival of American troops" (34).

In Alan Bullock's account:

With a handful of exceptions, saved largely by luck, all those who were at all active in the plot, on the civilian as well as the military side, some 200 in all, were arrested, subjected to torture, and executed. Another 5,000, including the entire families of the principal conspirators, such as Goerdeler, von Stauffenberg, von Tresckow, Oster, as well as leading figures not directly connected with the plot, but associated with the past or suspected of independence of mind were arrested and sent to concentration camps-among them Schacht, Helder, and Konrad Adenauer.<sup>30</sup>

But much of Gellately's explanatory discussion is mystifying. He tells the reader that:

If we take a broader view, one sign that the German people accepted or were willing to tolerate the [concentration] camps and the new police can be seen in the plebiscite and election of 1933, and the plebiscite of August 1934. The vast majority (sic!) of Germans had dropped their reservations about Hitler, and it would be surprising if many (!) were outraged by the [concentration] camps or the Gestapo. (60)

On the next page, Gellately says that it "made perfect sense to close the [concentration] camps, because by 1934-5 the country was positively inclined towards Hitler's dictatorship. Organized opposition was silent or as good as dead. [!] The surprise was that for all Hitler's popularity and the social consensus [!] that supported the new regime, the [concentration] camps did not disappear" (61).

Obviously, Hitler understood better than Gellately that a brutally silenced opposition is not the same thing as "consensus," and also that if he wanted to maintain his dictatorship, he could not afford to let up on terror because-absent fear-the German people would probably sooner or later turn on him.

Speaking of Hitler's anti-Semitism, Gellately has no qualms. He says "[Hitler] knew that in spite of reservations by the beginning of the war at the latest most Germans agreed with Nazi anti-Semitism and the exclusion of the Jews from national life, and pushing that policy had gained support for the dictatorship. The Nazis fostered a new anti-Semitic consensus in the war, one that would tolerate, if not support, and at least acquiesce in a radical solution that went far beyond 'mere' legal discrimination" (147).

And further:

"[T]here is evidence in this book that the majority more or less accepted racist teachings, and at the very least showed few signs of being troubled by them..." (261).

"[T]he regime had no difficulty in obtaining denunciations from the population about suspected breaches of the racist system..." (*Ibid.*).

"On balance, the coercive practices, the repression and persecution won far more support for the dictatorship than lost" (259).

Thus, in what is a persistent pattern, Gellately puts forward several rather substantial propositions about Nazi Germany without offering sufficient, credible; or even relevant evidence to support the case.

Gellately's ultimate conclusion is nothing short of incredible because it does not acknowledge, even in the slightest degree, that terror did or probably did, inhibit, directly and indirectly, unsubtly and subtly, all manner of opposition to Hitler, especially in 1944 and 1945 (264). It is incredible in light of the evidence which the author

himself cites (85-87), including the fact that by 1944 German military courts handed out eight times as many death sentences as they did in 1939, while the so-called People's Court meted out 60 times as many death sentences in 1944 as it did in 1939. Can one really believe that measures of this sort did *not* generate some fear throughout the society? And can one really believe that this fear had *no* socio-political consequences whatsoever? No inhibiting effects? Didn't coercion have *some* role in Germany after people's conditions became increasingly harsh, say, at least from 1942 or 1943 onwards?

Assuming, quite arbitrarily, that 60 percent of Germans "sincerely" supported Hitler, even after Stalingrad, did not terror have *some* impact on the ability of the remaining 40 percent, or even 30 percent, to attempt to persuade the rest that Germany was on a course toward disaster? Is it not likely that in a free society, such as the U.S. or Britain, many of these thirty or forty percent would have taken to the streets and seriously impeded Hitler's control of Germany's social and economic infrastructure?

### On Gellately's Conclusions

The debate about the "true will" of the German people during the Third Reich is not just about numbers. It never is only about numbers in any functioning democracy. No reasonably well-informed person who lived in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s would say that the War in Vietnam was a "consensus war" on behalf of the American people. But certainly even during the Lyndon Johnson administration, in mid- and late-1960s, there were public opinion polls showing significant majorities of the American people in support of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. The real problem, however, was the intensity of the opposition in what was a substantial segment of the nation.

During 1967, the year when Senator Eugene McCarthy challenged incumbent Lyndon Johnson for the Presidency, a Harris poll in July showed 72 percent of the public supporting U.S. military participation in Vietnam; in August, 61 percent approved; and in October the numbers sank to 58 percent. In February 1968, Senator Eugene McCarthy polled 42 percent of the Democratic primary

vote in New Hampshire, and in March President Johnson announced that he would not stand for re-election.

Democracies do not function well with cataclysmic divisions of opinion. If the costs of opposition in Germany had been lowered from what they were under Hitler to what they might be in the U.S. or Western Europe in recent years, so that dissidents could freely organize, assemble, advocate and publicize their claims, and participate in free elections, the possibility of anyone carrying out a Final Solution on the Hitler model would have been, in all likelihood, nil. How plausible would it have been for Hitler, even with the support of, say, 55 percent of the electorate, to stand up in a freely elected, freely functioning, German parliament and say: "Let me explain to you all why we need to kill over one million Jewish children." Is it likely that opposition deputies would have welcomed such a proposal as an excellent idea bringing profit and honor to Germany?

As long as the Nazis could maintain a communication monopoly supported by terror, the issue of their Jewish policy could be framed for public consumption in such euphemistic terms as "removal of Jews from Germany" and "resettlement of Jews in the East." An opposition, however, if permitted to operate, would have framed the issue as mass murder and state-sponsored criminal mayhem: far more incendiary propositions. Much is to be said for Sarah Gordon's view that Hitler carried out his Final Solution not by responding to German public opinion, but by neutralizing it, relying on the institutions of the dictatorship, magnified by the pretended and real emergencies of war.

According to Gellately, there were in 1945 Germany "optimists"-that is, people who believed Hitler might still win the war, perhaps with new "wonder weapons;" "pessimists"-those who feared consequences of a Soviet invasion of Germany; there were even those who hoped that the Western Allies themselves would actually join the Nazis against the Russians to stop Bolshevism in Europe; and there were also those who thought only of their "duty to Germany." What all these people had in common-Gellately calls them optimists, pessimists, idealists, and fatalists-was that they all voluntarily supported the Nazi war effort. In the very last sentence

of the book, the author tells us: "Many people apparently could not afford to let themselves see the situation, including the brutalities, for what they really were, and could do nothing more than to be for Hitler or at least for Germany." But how about many *other* people? Was there anyone in the Third Reich of 1945 who, privately at least, despised Hitler and did not think that being "for Hitler" and being "for Germany" was one and the same? After all, even Albert Speer in March of 1945 did not believe that "Germany was Hitler" and "Hitler was Germany"!"

Given Germany's 1945 situation, and also the terror which Hitler mounted against "traitors and defeatists" in the last months of his regime, is it really reasonable to assume that *all* those former Socialist, Communist, Catholic, liberal, and even Conservative or Nationalist voters and sympathizers were giving unwavering voluntary support to the Nazi regime and were uncritically accepting all the postulates of Nazi propaganda? Or would it be more reasonable perhaps to assume that *many* of those people—from among more than half of the electorate of 1933—looked over their shoulder in 1945 knowing that if they openly defied the regime they would probably not live to see the end of a disastrous and senseless war?

Gellately's conclusion is especially troubling since we find him citing a Gestapo report of March 1945 contradicting his interpretation: "Even though many citizens were still prepared to support Hitler's dictatorship, some had enough. An expression that made the rounds in Hamburg stated simply 'Better an end with horror than horror without end'" (226). Alternatively, we find the author saying that "social support for Hitler and for National Socialism steadily eroded as the war encroached more and more into Germany, and many people were certainly fed up. What is remarkable, however, was how resilient public opinion was, and, in spite of one defeat or major setback after another, the surveyors [?!] found innumerable statements [!] to indicate that morale held, in the sense that many people from all ranks of life were willing to continue the fight, even in the face of great hardships" (253).

Obviously "innumerable statements" is a dodge in a situation

where the author does not know what proportion of German public opinion is represented by any such statements. In a country the size of 1945 Germany, even if only five percent of the population strongly backed Hitler, one could harvest thousands, not to say millions, of statements expressing the willingness to fight on to victory no matter the odds, expressing love of the Fuhrer, adherence to Nazism, etc., etc.

A methodological filter which Gellately fails to apply to his data is a substantial discount on Gestapo reports. No matter how eager to learn what people were *really* thinking, the Gestapo researchers had a vested interest in the survival and success of the Nazi regime. Moreover, they were likely to feel at least somewhat constrained in what they reported to their superiors. It would have been hard to tell the "boss" whether Muller or Himmler or Hitler, or all the above, that most Germans didn't think highly of them. It would have been a lot easier to *say* that there were some unfortunate pockets of discontent in society and to describe the thinking of those discontented-for purposes of desired "realism." On the other hand, it would have been more difficult to say "no one believes in all this propaganda anymore" or "hardly anyone believes" or even "most people, etc." On the other hand, the citizens of Germany might have been naturally somewhat inhibited in expressing their opinions to the Gestapo, or even to mere strangers who might just possibly report them to the Gestapo. Widespread suspicion is an unfortunate byproduct of any seriously coercive dictatorship.

#### A Moral Question

Apart from disputed factual matters, there is an important moral objection to the Goldhagen-Gellately thesis of German consent-to-Hitler. Among other things, it gratuitously, and oddly, validates a Nazi or neo-Nazi interpretation of the Fuhrer. He was a great leader of the German people because he carried out, or at least attempted to carry out, the most sincere and universal wishes and aspirations of the whole German nation.

In remembrance of Oskar Schindler, Hans and Sophie Scholl, Monsignor Bernhard Lichtenberg, Claus von Stauffenberg, and

Konrad Adenauer, Hitler is not entitled to this presumption. Some facts about German public opinion in the Third Reich may perhaps forever remain in dispute. But holding a pistol to the head of a captive has certain moral, and in most western countries also legal, consequences for the assailant which cannot be removed by the argument that the pistol was not very large, and that if the captive had only been a little braver and more enterprising, it could have been dislodged.

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#### NOTES

1. Although Goldhagen mentions various scholars in the index to his book—for example Arendt, Weber, Milgram—he does not mention Sarah Gordon's work, full of fascinating data challenging his whole interpretation of the subject. Nor does he mention Abel, Allen, Childers, Falter, Merkl, Conradt, or Dmowski. Each of them, in various ways, presents a serious challenge to Goldhagen's crude German stereotype.

2. Note Arthur J. Goldberg and Arthur Hertzberg, "Commentary from Commission Members on American Jewry and the Holocaust" in Appendix Three, 1-4 in Seymour M. Finger, (ed.) *American Jewry During the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984); Roger Manvel and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The Incomparable Crime, Mass Extermination in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Guilt* (New York: G P. Putnam's Sons, 1967) 228, 299.

3. For some illustrative literature, see, among others, Verne W. Newton (ed.) *FDR and the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), especially essays by Richard Breitman "Roosevelt and the Holocaust," 109-127 and Michael M. Marrus, "Bystanders in the Holocaust," 151-158; Michael J. Cohen, *Churchill and the Jews* (London: Frank Cass, 1985); Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

4. Note Alexander J. Groth, "Dmowski, Pilsudski and Ethnic

Conflict in Pre-1939 Poland," *Canadian Slavic Studies*, Vol. III, No. 1, Spring 1969, 69-91. When considering the impact of anti-Semitic literature, one might also want to take into account German defenses of Jews and German attacks on anti-Semitism. An outstanding example is the work of the writer Carl Christian Bry, originally published in 1924 and republished in 1964 as *Verkappte Religionen* by Edmund Gans Verlag in Lochham. Alas, Goldhagen "homogenizes" German opinion into a stereotype fundamentally no less misleading than the official Nazi stereotype of the Jew.

5. Jerusalem: Ketter Publishing House, 1972, Vol. 14, 418-419.

6. See Gerhard L Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler, and World War II, Essays in Modern German and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52.

7. William W. Hagen recently summarized the relevant literature: The empirical point seems firm that agitation against the Jews was peripheral to the Nazis' pre-1933 electoral campaigns and membership recruitment." Obviously, this is a matter of some relevance to the issue of why many Germans voted for Hitler. Note his "Before the 'Final Solution': Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Inter-War Germany and Poland," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (June 1996), 363.

8. See Joseph Nyomarkay, *Charisma and Factionalism in the Nazi Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), Table 3, 94. In 1933, workers and employees constituted 32.5 and 20.6 percent of the membership, respectively, or 53.1 percent in all. Independent businessmen accounted for 17.3 percent; farmers constituted 12.5 percent and "officials" 6.5 percent; "other" categories evidenced smaller percentages. Among Abel's respondents, farmers constituted only 7 percent, but in other categories, e.g., employees and workers at 51 percent the numbers were relatively comparable.

9. See Theodore Abel, *The Nazi Movement: Why Hitler Came to Power* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966), 196. Note also Peter Merkl's study, *Political Violence under the Swastika: 581 Early Nazis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). This work, also unreferenced by Goldhagen, establishes much the same point as

Abel's. Hitler's Nazi Party was by no means monolithic in its various shades of anti-Semitism. The real "ultras," most comparable to Hitler himself, were a small minority: If this was true of Nazi Party, what chance could there be that the whole German electorate would be *more* monolithic and actually *closer to* Hitler? Virtually none!

10. Illustrative of the Gestapo's "proceduralism" is a circular by Ernst Kaltenbrunner, head of the RSHA, on June 30, 1943, about crimes committed in Germany by Russians and Poles. "All criminal proceedings were to be handled by the Gestapo and the *Kripo*; the Reich Minister of Justice and the German courts would be excluded, except in those cases where for reasons of general political morale a court verdict seems desirable and where it is arranged beforehand that the court would impose the death sentence." Kaltenbrunner suggests that the Security Police handle the prosecutions on the following principle: "one must consider...that the Pole or Soviet Russian represents by virtue of his very existence a danger for the German racial order [*Volksordnung*] and that it is therefore not so important to find a suitable punishment for the crime committed... as to prevent him from presenting any further danger to the German racial order." Peter R. Black, *Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 140-141.

11. New York: New Viewpoints, 1965.

12. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992.

13. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

14. Note Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939, The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 467-469. See also *The New York Times* for Minister Beck's position on Jewish emigration from Poland, March 6, 1939, p. 5 and March 7, 1939, p. 13. See also William W. Hagen, "No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935-1939," in *Central European History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 2000), 154-158. See also Raymond L. Buell, *Poland: Key to Europe* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1939), 307: On December 21, 1938, "General Skwarczynski, head of the [politically dominant] Camp of National Unity...reiterated previous declarations that the Jews were an ob-

stacle to the development of the Polish nation and asked the government to take energetic measures to reduce the number of Jews in the country.... Colonel Wenda, Chief of Staff of the Camp of National Unity, declared that the departure of the Polish Jews was a necessity on account of national defense. The economic structure of the country should be placed in the hands of patriotic elements which in case of crisis would support the national cause." See also William W. Hagen, "Before the 'Final Solution': Toward a Comparative Analysis of political anti-Semitism in interwar Germany and Poland," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (June 1996), 351-381.

15. Gordon, *op. cit.*, 205, Table 6.4.

16. *Ibid.*, 197-206.

17. *Ibid.*, 197-209. According to public opinion data presented by David P. Conrard, in 1956, when memories of the Third Reich were still fresh but the Gestapo (or Allied occupation) was no longer a factor, 43 percent of German respondents viewed Hitler as one of Germany's greatest statesmen while 37 percent did not; 20 percent did not express an opinion. In the same survey, however, when asked if they would support a new Nazi Party, only 15 percent said yes; 61 percent said no; 23 percent described themselves as indifferent. When asked if it was better for a country to have one political party or several parties, only 11 percent opted for one party; 66 percent preferred several; 23 percent said they were indifferent. *The German Polity* 2nd Edition (New York: Longman, 1982), Table 3.1, p. 55.

18. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

19. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

20. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.

21. Among names *not* found in this account of the Nazi political system are, in addition to Friedrich and Brzezinski, Arendt, Barber, Bullock, Curtis, Germino, Gleason, Inkeles, Lasswell, Lifton, Moore, Neumann (Sigmund and Franz), Salvemini and Tucker, just focusing on a few of the major ones.

22. See Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 437.

23. Gordon, *op. cit.*, 175.

24. *Ibid.*, 176.

25. Note George C. Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 65. Browder has a view of the Gestapo quite similar to Gellately's. Thus, we find him saying: "As Gellately has concluded, one must question the degree to which the Gestapo should be seen as an instrument of terror imposed on German society. The Nazi police state represents not so much an aberration of modern policing as the police powers of the modern state, carried to a logical extreme based on the dominant world view. This is a perspective through which it must (sic!) be studied" (70). The Gestapo, says Browder, generally used "good, basic police procedures" in interrogations; it preferred "subtle" means." (*Ibid.*) Even when it comes to its dealings with Jews, Browder says that Gestapo mistreatment "resulted more from overflowing hostility than from Gestapo technique." "None of this minimizes the significance of Gestapo brutality (!) but rather places that brutality in the context of modern police problems, especially those involving minority out-groups and racism" (71). The author's disclaimers duly noted, it still seems as if he were trying to picture the Gestapo as perhaps the NYPD, operating in the South Bronx.

26. Among people who wrote letters to Stalin were the victims of his purges-begging for mercy, usually to no effect whatever. Note Dimitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1988), 294-295, 337-338, 519; Alan Bullock *op. cit.*, 487, 503. See also Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 484-485.

27. Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1992), 561.

28. In this area, we seem to have at least a little more in the case of the Soviet experience. Note Donna Bahry and Brian D. Silver, "Intimidation and the Symbolic Uses of Terror in the USSR," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (December 1987), 1061-1098. In this research, conducted among Soviet emigres, the authors found that Soviet citizens who had constituted the pre-

1941 generation, with roots in the Great Terror era, were substantially *less* likely to see the KGB as a paper tiger, the post-Stalin generation substantially *more so*. (Table 5, 1082). As the authors conclude "For witnesses of the Great Terror in the late 1930s, the message is still clear: the KGB can still get you, and you should not trust other people" (1090).

29. Bonn: FRG Press and Information Office, 1969.

30. A. Bullock, *op. cit.*, 844-845.

31. See Albert Speer, *Inside The Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 519-540; Matthias Schmidt, *Albert Speer: The End of a Myth* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 123-127.