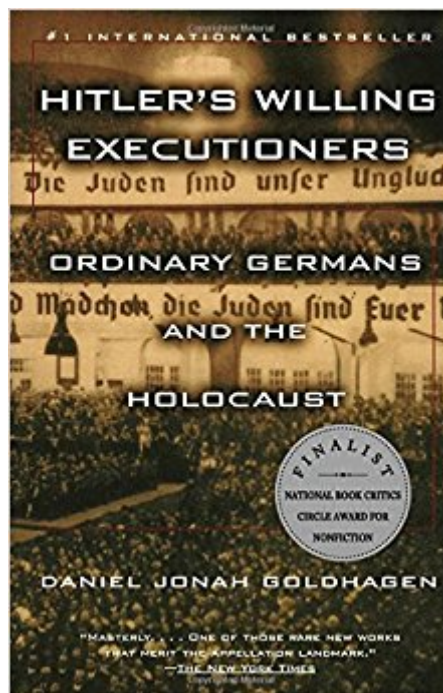




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# Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans And The Holocaust



## Synopsis

This groundbreaking international bestseller lays to rest many myths about the Holocaust: that Germans were ignorant of the mass destruction of Jews, that the killers were all SS men, and that those who slaughtered Jews did so reluctantly. Hitler's *Willing Executioners* provides conclusive evidence that the extermination of European Jewry engaged the energies and enthusiasm of tens of thousands of ordinary Germans. Goldhagen reconstructs the climate of "eliminationist anti-Semitism" that made Hitler's pursuit of his genocidal goals possible and the radical persecution of the Jews during the 1930s popular. Drawing on a wealth of unused archival materials, principally the testimony of the killers themselves, Goldhagen takes us into the killing fields where Germans voluntarily hunted Jews like animals, tortured them wantonly, and then posed cheerfully for snapshots with their victims. From mobile killing units, to the camps, to the death marches, Goldhagen shows how ordinary Germans, nurtured in a society where Jews were seen as unalterable evil and dangerous, willingly followed their beliefs to their logical conclusion. "Hitler's *Willing Executioner*'s is an original, indeed brilliant contribution to the...literature on the Holocaust."--New York Review of Books "The most important book ever published about the Holocaust...Eloquently written, meticulously documented, impassioned...A model of moral and scholarly integrity."--Philadelphia Inquirer

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In a work that is as authoritative as it is explosive, Goldhagen forces us to revisit and reconsider our understanding of the Holocaust and its perpetrators, demanding a fundamental revision in our

thinking of the years between 1933-1945. Drawing principally on materials either unexplored or neglected by previous scholars, Goldhagen marshals new, disquieting primary evidence that explains why, when Hitler conceived of the "final solution" he was able to enlist vast numbers of willing Germans to carry it out. A book sure to provoke new discussion and intense debate. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Goldhagen's gripping and shocking landmark study transforms our understanding of the Holocaust. Refuting the widespread notion that those who carried out the genocide of Jews were primarily SS men or Nazi party members, he demonstrates that the perpetrators--those who staffed and oversaw the concentration camps, slave labor camps, genocidal army units, police battalions, ghettos, death marches--were, for the most part, ordinary German men and women: merchants, civil servants, academics, farmers, students, managers, skilled and unskilled workers. Rejecting the conventional view that the killers were slavishly carrying out orders under coercion, Goldhagen, assistant professor of government at Harvard, uses hitherto untapped primary sources, including the testimonies of the perpetrators themselves, to show that they killed Jews willingly, approvingly, even zealously. Hitler's genocidal program of a "Final Solution" found ready accomplices in these ordinary Germans who, as Goldhagen persuasively argues, had absorbed a virulent, "eliminationist" anti-Semitism, prevalent as far back as the 18th century, which demonized the Jews and called for their expulsion or physical annihilation. Furthermore, his research reveals that a large proportion of the killers were told by their commanders that they could disobey orders to kill, without fear of retribution--yet they slaughtered Jews anyway. By his careful estimate, hundreds of thousands of Germans were directly involved in the mass murder, and millions more knew of the ongoing genocide. Among the 30 photographs are snapshots taken by the murderers of themselves and their victims. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

In its genius, truth and humanity it gives voice to the victims and their descendants. It also reconfirms the decency of the human endeavor in the face of unimaginable horror inflicted by the Nazis, the fascists, their European collaborators and the legions of 'willing executioners'

We need to face up to the reality of evil in the world. Why did so many participate in the killing? Because they wanted to is very convincing thesis. The failure to accept the thesis of this book blinds us to the reality of why such genocides happen. Anti-semiticism is a gross blemish on human history

that is so stained in the blood of human beings by human beings. I've read the rebuttals to this thesis and I feel that they fail to answer and refute Dr. Goldhagen's thesis. This book raises the question of what is right and wrong in a culture that seldom acknowledges the moral quality of political activity. As a member of the Catholic Church I accept the challenge of the verdict of the tortured history between the Jewish people and the Church. There are NO excuses for the anti-Judaism of Christianity if the Church is to be true to its founder. We can't change history, but only learn from it. Goldhagen tells it the way we need it told. Amen.

In the depths of World War II the British government contracted with noted historian A.J.P. Taylor to write a book on the Germans- one of those "why we fight" tomes that was supposed to provide context for the war. What the government wanted was a story explaining how the ordinary Germans were simply the victims of their leaders, and we're bad people at all. What Taylor provided was a book arguing that Nazism was the almost inevitable consequence of German history, and the book was never issued to troops although you can (and should read it for its excellent insights. (The Course of German History (Routledge Classics)). After the war the Allies set up the Nuremberg tribunals to apportion guilt, but after two years, the public demand for retribution and justice faded, and the desire to build West Germany and Austria up as a buffer against Soviet expansionism, along with the growth of the US Space Program, resulted in the rapid de-Nazification of the records of many who had served the Reich, like Werner von Braun and Austrian Prime Minister Kurt Waldheim. In Germany, the desire to erase any trace Nazism from their nation- a well-intentioned plan- led to a state of affairs where by the early 1960s, most young Germans knew almost nothing of the Nazi years, and if they had any knowledge at all of Adolf Hitler, it was a kindly old man who had once been the leader in Grandfather's day. This was followed by a swing in the other direction, in which those too young to have had any culpability in the actions of the Nazi state sought to confront their nation's history, and so a great many books were published and a great many debates were staged. And so the history of Germany in the 30s and 40s, and the interpretation of that history, has swung back and forth over the years. The general position taken by most Germans, and a good many historians, was that once the Nazis seized power they so effectively suppressed dissent that ordinary Germans- most of whom were not Nazi sympathizers- were powerless to stop the juggernaut. Into this stepped Daniel Goldhagen with two dissenting theses: The first, which has stirred the most contentious debate, is his thesis that antisemitism was not just a policy of the Nazis, but a characteristic of German society. How true that is I cannot judge, not being a historian, and not having access to the original records. I do find it a reasonable contention, given what history I have

read. This is not to say by any means that all Germans were anti-Semites, and I don't think Goldhagen makes that argument, but only that it was a commonly held belief. After all, it was, in fact, a commonly held belief through most of the world. One not need look much farther than the United States to see how common antisemitism was in that era. Goldhagen's more important thesis, and the one that he argues most effectively, is that the horrors of the Holocaust were not performed exclusively by the SS or even by government forces, and that few if any troops had to be coerced into executing Jews, Gypsies and other victims. Goldhagen documents a great many examples of ordinary citizens, and not Germans, happily participating in mass execution. He also notes, as have other authors, that there are plenty of examples of German soldiers who could not bear to perform these duties being assigned other ones. The great majority of German citizens may not have participated directly in mass executions, but they willingly presented a blind eye to the disappearance of their neighbors, the seizure of property, the enslavement of captured soldiers and civilians, and the public humiliation of Jews and others in the street. They did so in large part because they profited greatly from the seizure of private property and the appropriation of the wealth of captured nations. It is particularly notable that this book was far better received in Germany, where it served to spark a re-interest in the Nazi years, and a number of new debates on morality and the responsibility of the citizen, than it was in the US. Whether or not you will accept all of Goldhagen's theses regarding the root causes of the Holocaust and Nazism, this is a valuable addition to the literature and a worthwhile read for students of the era. Those who doubt its thesis should read another book on this topic that makes use of recent released transcript from captured German soldiers during WWII: *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing, and Dying*.

Most enlightened book on the Holocaust I have read!!! Disturbing to say the least in light what we have been told about the involvement of ordinary Germans.

A look at reality and not wishful thinking. I'm just one of the lucky ones.

never look at Nazi era Germans the same way again!

After visiting Cambodia I wanted to understand genocide, so I bought this book. This book makes a significant contribution toward understanding genocide.

Consider perhaps more people are outraged at this scholar actually calling some Germans

"anti-Semitic" than did publically criticize the Germans when they were allowing the extermination the entire Jewish population of Europe. These severe book critics show the obsession with the balancing act, where "one side is as bad as the other, all are equal". Goldenhagen tells it straight, ask many WWII Vets. Goldenhagen didn't cave in to the PC myth that "no country's people could ever act badly only governments". Anyone who has studied European history knows that pogroms of killing the Jewish population was not new by any means. Most of his criticism comes from those who see the world through their 21st Century view rather than from real historians. The author does not mention the other Europeans enough in the book. Most countries had sections of their populations that were equally guilty, such as France, the Former Soviet Union, and even some North African populations and many others. Ironically, while of course the SS set up the Holocaust infrastructure, it could not have been accomplished with the cooperation of other countries. While Goldenhagen may not be technically wrong, the focus on Germans is only part of the entire story. Ironically some Axis countries refused to hand over their Jewish populations. The book does not implicate the entire German population. Note in the 1960s a German prosecuting attorney believed he could prosecute millions of Germans and others countries' populations, under German law for their part in the Holocaust. The German government made sure it never happened on a large scale. Mark Zangara WWII Historian

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