

both this book and his. But Goldhagen minimizes or denies other layers of behavior that are important to understanding the dynamics of genocidal killing units and that cast doubt on his assertion that the battalion was uniformly pervaded by "pride" in and "principled approval" of the mass murder it perpetrated. His portrayal is skewed because he mistakes the part for the whole.

This is a flaw that appears repeatedly throughout the book. For instance, I agree that anti-Semitism was a strong ideological current in nineteenth-century Germany, but I do not accept Goldhagen's assertion that anti-Semitism "more or less governed the ideational life of civil society" in pre-Nazi Germany.⁸⁹ I agree that by 1933 anti-Semitism had become part of the "common sense" of the German right without thereby concluding that all German society was "of one mind" with Hitler about the Jews, and that the "centrality of antisemitism in the Party's worldview, program, and rhetoric . . . mirrored the sentiments of German culture."⁹⁰ I agree that anti-Semitism—negative stereotyping, dehumanization, and hatred of the Jews—was widespread among the killers of 1942, but I do not agree that this anti-Semitism is primarily to be seen as a "pre-existing, pent-up" anti-Semitism that Hitler had merely to "unleash" and "unshackle."⁹¹

In short, the fundamental problem is not to explain why ordinary Germans, as members of a people utterly different from us and shaped by a culture that permitted them to think and act in no other way than to want to be genocidal executioners, eagerly killed Jews when the opportunity offered. The fundamental problem is to explain why ordinary men—shaped by a culture that had its own particularities but was nonetheless within the mainstream of western, Christian, and Enlightenment traditions—under specific circumstances willingly carried out the most extreme genocide in human history.

Why does it matter which of our portrayals of and conclusions about Reserve Police Battalion 101 are closer to the truth? It would be very comforting if Goldhagen were correct, that very few societies have the long-term, cultural-cognitive prerequisites to commit genocide, and that regimes can only do so when the population

is overwhelmingly of one mind about its priority, justice, and necessity. We would live in a safer world if he were right, but I am not so optimistic. I fear that we live in a world in which war and racism are ubiquitous, in which the powers of government mobilization and legitimization are powerful and increasing, in which a sense of personal responsibility is increasingly attenuated by specialization and bureaucratization, and in which the peer group exerts tremendous pressures on behavior and sets moral norms. In such a world, I fear, modern governments that wish to commit mass murder will seldom fail in their efforts for being unable to induce "ordinary men" to become their "willing executioners."

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Ordinary Men, 1993, 1998.