Obsession, Separation, and Extermination: The Nazi Reordering of Germany

2. Nazi Germany is described as a "Racial State" by scholars. Explain the place of racism and in particular of anti-Semitism to the Nazi reordering of Germany and of Europe. In your analysis pay attention to both ideology and practice, to domestic and foreign policy, to culture and to politics.

Following the Nazi rise to power, officials declared that "hereafter the Reich will recognize only three classes: Germans (of German or related blood), Jews and 'Jewish mixtures'" (Birchall, "Reich Puts Laws on Jews in Force; Trade Untouched", in Moeller, 98). This quote lies in a source written in 1935, well before the mass extermination of the Jewish population began in the Third Reich. The politics of the Reich were built around a feeling of *Volk* and racial similarities; those who were declared to be outside of the *Volk* were ostracized by the practice of laws within the German culture. Racist ideology was formed and manifested quickly upon the rise of Nazi power, with racial laws causing an obsession with heritage and the split of Germans and Jews. Nazi racism spread internationally as well, particularly as the Nazis began the occupation of Poland, Austria, and other nations. This potent racism, especially toward Jews, fueled the manner in which the Nazis reordered the German nation into a race-obsessed state and spread their obsession into neighboring countries.

Politics were the origin of the extreme anti-Semitism in Nazi German. The politicians decided what the German people should believe and advertised it well enough to succeed in changing the outlook of the population. Politicians specifically aimed their tactics at women and youth in the Nazi era. In 1934, Hitler made a speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization saying that "the phrase 'women's liberation' is a phrase invented only by Jewish intellectualism…[and] the German woman never needed to be emancipated in the really good times of German life" (Hitler, "Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization", in

Moeller, 79). He pawned the dislike of women's liberation on the Jewish citizens in order to keep German women in their position of "complement[ing] man in this struggle…for [their] people's freedom equality, honor, and peace" (Hitler, Women's Organization, 79). Anti-Semitism and racial history were such a focus of Nazism that the German women would want nothing to do with something deemed Jewish. By creating a connection, albeit a nonexistent one, between Jews and female liberation, Hitler stifled the desire for women's liberation for the majority of the Nazi rule and therefore segregated the Jewish citizens further.

Hitler's creation of the Hitler Youth also helped widen the gap between Jews and Germans. The canon of the organization was "that Adolf Hitler [was] their starting point…but just as the times themselves were uncreative and without a style of their own, so the youth movement itself had no ideas of its own" (Rudiger, "On the League of German Girls", in Moeller, 85). They were taught to believe "that youth does not have the right to criticize and oppose" so that it would be easier to recruit them into the Nazi party and drill the Nazi beliefs into their minds (Rudiger, League, 85). By targeting women and youth, the Nazi party spread their racist ideology to all parts of society and made it easier to separate the Jews from the Germans. They caused Germans to see their duty of loyalty to the German state as being fulfilled by condemning the Jews and redesigning the nation into an Aryan culture, free of Jewish life.

German culture during the Nazi reign also served to alienate the Jewish population. At the opening of the House of German Art in Munich, an art gallery built to display Aryan art, Hitler claimed that "ability is the necessary qualification if an artist wishes his work to be exhibited here" (Hitler, "Opening Address at the House of German Art in Munich", in Moeller, 65). As Jewish artwork, along with Dada and other types of "degenerate" art, was not displayed in the gallery, Hitler inadvertently made his point that, in his eyes and the eyes of Nazis, Jewish

were lower forms of life than Germans. He also highlighted his desire for an Aryan *Volk* in saying, "The artist does not create for the artist. He creates for the people" (Hitler, German Art, 67). The Jewish population was seen as a threat to the *Volk,* not something that would better society, and therefore was excluded from this gallery. Germany also created a "degenerate" art exhibit, to further emphasize the fact that Jewish life was nothing more than a burden on the German people. Those included in this exhibit "were Germans associated with communism… [were] too modern and abstract… [or] were so labeled because they took up themes of Jewish culture", not only Jewish artists (Moeller, Introduction to German Art, 65). These exhibits were widely publicized so as to reach a large majority of the German population and to further show the German people that the Nazis wanted the German citizens and the Jewish citizens to be viewed as completely separate races. They utilize on something as simple as artwork in order to draw the line between German and Jewish art and exemplify that the Jewish way is wrong and useless. "Over 400,000 people viewed the exhibit 'The Eternal Jew' in Munich…from December 1937 through January 1938", confirming the popularity of these exhibits. (Fritzsche 92). "They allowed Germans to see contrasts, to make distinctions, to draw divisions", just as the Nazis wanted to draw lines between the Aryan race, the Jewish race, and other foreign races (Fritzsche 92).

Racial ideology took an extreme form in the practice of the ideas, furthering the reformation into a racially-charged nation. Prior to Nazi rule, Jews became targets and the scapegoat group for why Germany lost World War I. Anger at the humiliation incurred after the war was directed at Germany's Jewish population. The Nazis promulgated the beliefs that "Jews were the misfortune of the people…the vermin [that] had caused the ruin of the German people" (Appel, "Jewish Life after the Nazi Seizure of Power in 1933", in Moeller, 101). The Jews were

treated as lower forms of life than their full-blood German counterparts. A key example of these ideas put into action was the racial passport all German citizens were required to prepare and carry on them to prove their heritage. “The *Ahnenpass* enabled the Nazi regime to enforce the September 1935 Nuremberg racial laws, according to which people in the Third Reich belonged officially to one of four groups”, these groups being full-blood Germans, full-blood Jews, half-Jews with two Jewish grandparents, and half-Jews with one Jewish grandparent (Fritzsche 76). The Nuremberg Laws put the racial ideology into the public view, but the requirement of the *Ahnenpass* brought race obsession into actual practice. “After 1933 there were few people in Germany who had not confronted in unambiguous ways the racial and biological categories”, exemplifying the power of laws being put into action (Fritzsche 82). A Jewish woman living during the rise of the Nazis wrote, “Friends whom we had loved for years did not know us anymore. They suddenly saw that we were different from themselves. Of course we were different, since we were bearing the stigma of Nazi hatred” (Appel, Jewish Life, 101). The Nuremberg Laws put a divide between old friends and increasingly pitted the Germans against Jews.

Racial separation evolved into more extreme practices later in the Nazi reign, especially in incidents such as Kristallnacht and, in the most extreme form, the Holocaust. Kristallnacht was “the pogrom [that] confirmed that Jews in Germany were not simply a persecuted minority but a racial enemy… [and that] heightened the belief that the Jews were ‘different’” (Fritzsche 133). Jewish shops were burned and destroyed; firemen were instructed only to put out fires if they spread to adjacent buildings. The Nazis attacked Jews publicly so that all the German citizens could watch and learn how the Nazis expected German Jews to be treated. Anti-Semitic ideologies were not the only racist ideas put into action during Nazi rule; the Nazis also looked

down upon the "Rhineland Bastards", the children born of French African American soldiers and German women. They were part of the group which "included all those who for racial reasons had no place in the '*Volk* Community'" and which was subjected to mandatory sterilization (Benz 113). This obsession with the sterilization and extermination of "racially unfit" people prefaced the events that defined the Holocaust. Extermination happened on a much larger scale, but for the same reasons as in the beginning: to weed out the "weaker" races. The murder and sterilization of these people interwove with the Nazis' foreign racial policies, where the persecution and hatred of Jews and other non-Aryans became even stronger.

Domestically, Nazis targeted the German Jewish population, amongst other minorities such as gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally handicapped, and other "weaker" forms of life. Himmler addressed the "homosexual issue" in 1937, stating that "the lack of about four million men capable of having sex, [had] upset the sexual balance sheet of Germany" and when he discovered any subsequent homosexual cases, "these people [would] naturally be publicly degraded, expelled, and handed over to the courts…and they [would] be shot in the concentration camp" (Himmler, "On the Question of Homosexuality", in Moeller, 95). While homosexuality does not constitute a separate race, this was a group that the Nazis publicly denounced and rejected, along with the Jews. The Nazi idea of race reached far beyond the basic definition. Anti-Semitism remained the main focus within Germany and then became the main focus of Germany's conquests into other nations as well.

The Germans invaded Poland in 1939 with the main order "that persons of German blood in these territories must be regained for the German nation, even if those of German blood [were] Polonized" (Reich Commissioner, "On the Re-Germanization of Lost German Blood", in Moeller, 113). Hitler was determined to recover all those of German descent, though the racially

German Poles were still looked down upon to an extent. “It is critical that at least their children do not devolve anymore to the Poles, but are brought up on a German environment,” the Reich Commissioner for the strengthening of the national character of the German people informed German citizens (Reich Commissioner, Re-Germanization, 113). The Polish Jews were placed even lower than non-Jewish Poles in the eyes of the Nazis as well. During the mass shootings of Jews in Jozefow, a man “discovered to his dismay that his second victim was a German Jew…he too then asked out” (Browning 308). German Jews were still treated with brutality but received more empathy from German citizens than Jews of other races.

Nonetheless, domestically and internationally, the Germans viewed anyone outside of their ideal Aryan race to be a lower life form and not worthy of living. Therefore, they grouped the Jews together in ghettoes, German or not, and eventually in the concentration camps. In the camps, Jews were further divided into weak or strong: the strong were sent to labor camps and the weak exterminated immediately. In one account, an Austrian Jew recalls her experience of “sorting” at Auschwitz, reporting that the SS officer “condemned [her] as if [she] had stolen [her] life and had no right to keep it” (Kluger, “A Young Girl’s ‘Lucky Accident’ at Auschwitz in 1944”, in Moeller, 149). Ruth Kluger still ended up being sent to Auschwitz, her Jewish heritage trumping her Austrian lineage. Foreign Jews may have been viewed more disdainfully than German Jews in the eyes of the Nazis, but in the end, all Jews were seen as a threat and a population in need of extermination.

The Nazis employed every aspect of society they could fathom to achieve their goal of reorganizing Germany into a fully Aryan nation and clear Europe of any other “degenerate” races – namely Jews. “Race defined the new realities of the Third Reich…it influenced how you consulted a doctor, whom you talked to, and where you shopped” (Fritzsche 82). A German

culture focused on ridding the nation of Jewish works, a government teaching even women and children that their duty to the nation is to help get rid of the Jewish population, and a set of laws that, when put into practice, gave Jewish citizens no freedom – all of these situations combined enabled the Nazis to smoothly transition to the systemized killings of Jews during the Holocaust while still receiving the support of their citizens. The race obsession spread throughout the nation and entered other nations through Nazi occupation, slowly wrapping its deathly fingers around Europe's throat.