

EUROPEAN HISTORY: THE HOLOCAUST & GENOCIDE

THE NAZI RISE TO POWER

Dr. Andrew Gottlieb

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Adolf Hitler's autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), offered a blueprint for Germany's future. Few took it seriously in 1923, although his beliefs began to resonate with many disaffected Germans by 1939, and its author came to the center of world attention. Hitler said Germany's crisis had been brought on by outsiders: the French, the "international Jewish conspiracy," and the Communists, who were receiving bad advice from Russian Jews.



His solution was to wipe out the Jews, destroy the Weimar Republic, and unite Germans through racial superiority doctrines. He said the duty of government was to protect the Volk (the national race), yet this could not be achieved so long as ideas of equality and majority rule continued.

Hett's text provides a detailed account of this narrative. From Amazon...

A riveting account of how the Nazi Party came to power and how the failures of the Weimar Republic and the shortsightedness of German politicians allowed it to happen.

<https://www.amazon.com/Death-Democracy-Hitlers-Downfall-Republic/dp/1250162505>

Why did democracy fall apart so quickly and completely in Germany in the 1930s? How did a democratic government allow Adolf Hitler to seize power? In *The Death of Democracy*, Benjamin Carter Hett answers these questions, and the story he tells has disturbing resonances for our own time.

To say that Hitler was elected is too simple. He would never have come to power if Germany's leading politicians had not responded to a spate of populist insurgencies by trying to co-opt him, a strategy that backed them into a corner from which the only way out was to bring the Nazis in. Hett lays bare the misguided confidence of conservative politicians who believed that Hitler and his followers would willingly support them, not recognizing that their efforts to use the Nazis actually played into Hitler's hands. They had willingly given him the tools to turn Germany into a vicious dictatorship.

Benjamin Carter Hett is a leading scholar of twentieth-century Germany and a gifted storyteller whose portraits of these feckless politicians show how fragile democracy can be when those in power do not respect it. He offers a powerful lesson for today, when democracy once again finds itself embattled and the siren song of strongmen sounds ever louder.



The Death of Democracy

Hitler's Rise to Power
and the Downfall of
the Weimar Republic

BENJAMIN CARTER HETT



The Volk needed a leader, a Führer, to guide them. The people were to follow him blindly, because only *he* understood what was good for them.



When prosperity returned to Germany in the mid-1920s, the Germans turned away from the radicals, and the Nazi party began shrinking. Inside the party, Gregor Strasser battled Hitler for the leader's role, although he was unsuccessful. As Hitler looked at the failure of the Beer Hall Putsch, he realized that the way to gain power was through politics, not revolution.

<https://youtu.be/cK0Yye3Sal0?si=8sbhWfOI1A7954mw>



TRANSCRIPT

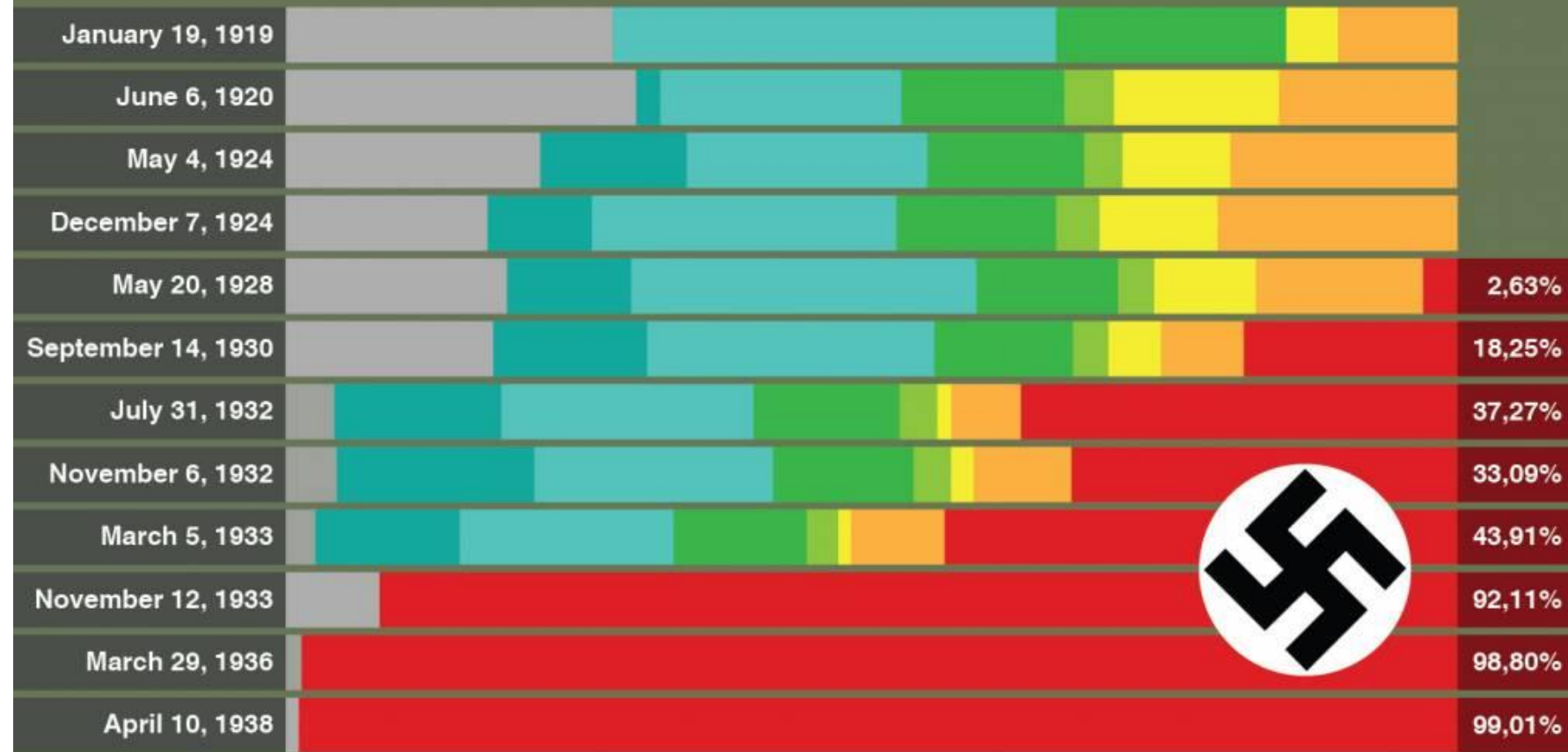
The Beer Hall Putsch was conceived at a time when the Weimar Republic was politically, socially and economically crippled. Hyperinflation had reached its worst level since the occupation of the Ruhr, and many 'patriotic associations' sought to emulate Mussolini's successful March on Rome that had taken place the previous year in order to wrest control away from the seemingly useless Weimar government. Having led a group of approximately 600 brown-shirted Nazi stormtroopers from their meeting point in the Bürgerbräukeller, Hitler burst into a meeting at which Gustav von Kahr, the state commissioner, was speaking. Threatening him at gunpoint, Hitler demanded support for the putsch. Having made a speech that was met with uproarious approval from the 3,000 members of the audience, Hitler then called on Ludendorff to further press Kahr to support the coup. The state commissioner eventually agreed, and he and his fellow politicians were allowed to leave. They immediately alerted the police and army who began to move against the putsch. Sixteen Nazis and four policemen were killed in a brief firefight the next day. Hitler was injured and escaped capture, but was arrested two days later and put on trial for high treason. He got revenge on Kahr eleven years later when he ordered his murder as part of the Night of the Long Knives.

When the German economy failed in 1929, he realized his time had come.

Hitler allied the Nazis with the Nationalist party, which was closer to the business leaders, financial support, & respectability.

In 1928, only 12 Nazis were in the Reichstag (the lower house of the German legislature); the 1930 election gave them 107 seats.

Results of German federal elections 1919-1938



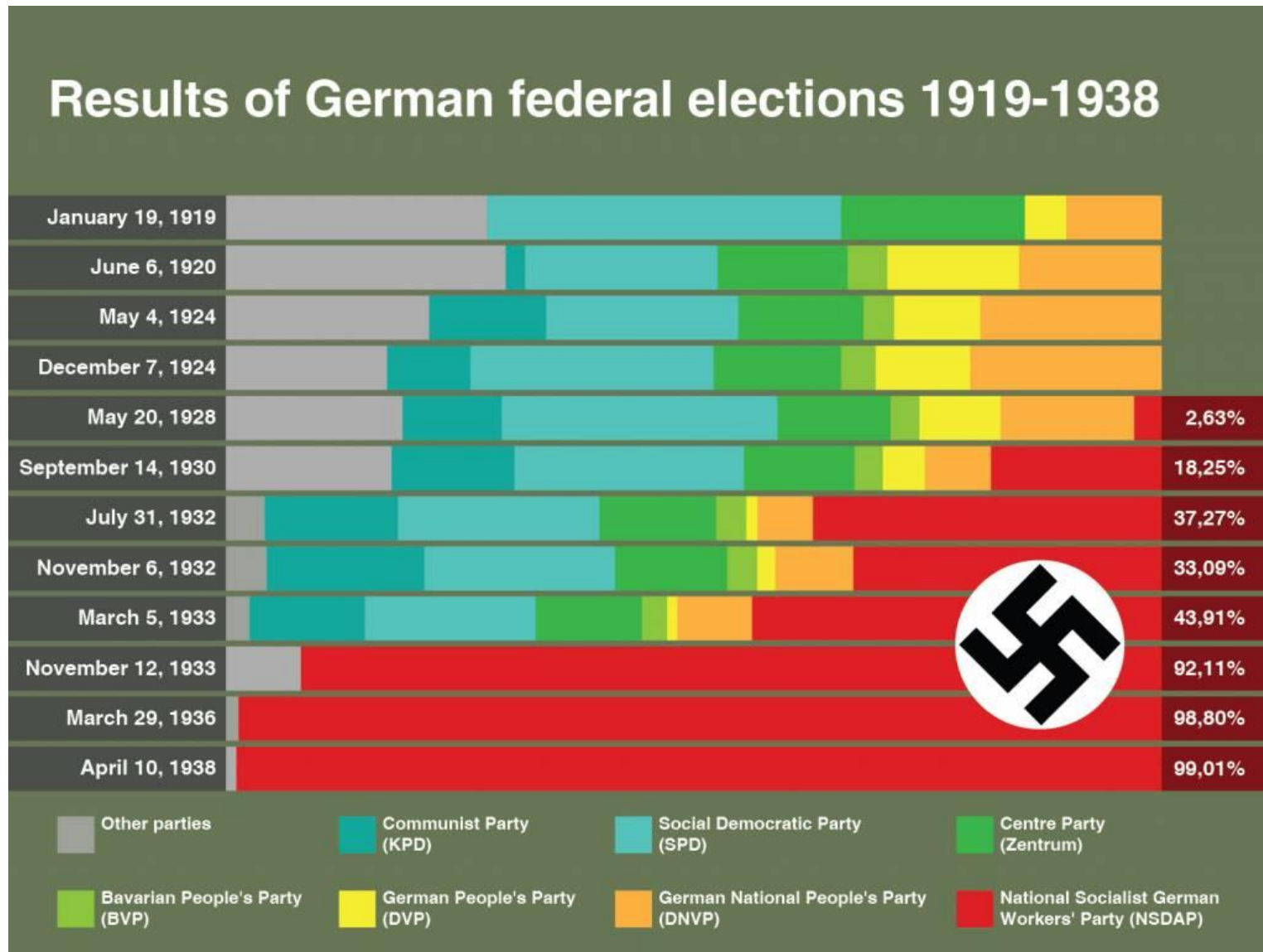
Reichstag sessions were interrupted by unruly Nazi members, and street battles were common between the SA and Communists. Affairs were so unsettled that three elections were held in 1932 for seats in the Reichstag.

In those elections, Nazis won 33, 37, & 32 % of the seats.

Had the Communists and Socialists united, they would have ruled with a majority.

However, Chancellor Von Papen, a moderate, offered a deal to the Nazis.

Hitler would become chancellor, Von Papen would become vice-chancellor, and Von Papen's friends were to have Influential posts in the new government.



<https://histoire.museeholocauste.ca/en/timeline/nazi-path-power>

On January 30, 1933, President Hindenburg reluctantly accepted the arrangement and appointed Hitler as chancellor. It was a tragic mistake. Hitler called for new elections in March and used every trick to win. A fire at the Reichstag was blamed on a Dutch Communist. Opposition parties were denied radio time, their political rallies were broken up, and Nazi militants threatened voters on their way to the polls. Hitler received 43 percent of the vote. He would not have had a majority in the Reichstag, but Communists who had been elected were not allowed to take their seats.

Adolf Hitler bows and shakes the hand of Paul von Hindenburg, March 21, 1933 (photo credit: Theo Eisenhart/Federal German Archive)



THE NAZI RULERS. Everyone in the German government became the obedient servant of the Führer; as long as they worshipped him, they were free to commit any crimes they wanted, if they weren't too embarrassing. Herman Göring stole valuable art for his private collection. Joseph Goebbels had love affairs. Heinrich Himmler became wealthy by renting out concentration camp inmates to be slave laborers for big companies. Reinhard Heydrich was a cruel man who enjoyed watching others suffer, and Ernst Roehm enjoyed food and drink almost as much as torturing and killing a Jew or Communist. All of these people were part of the story of war, brutality, and murder that followed.



**Goering, left, was found guilty of war crimes, as well as crimes against peace
And humanity at the Nuremberg Trials in 1946. Sentenced to death by hanging,
instead he committed suicide by taking a cyanide pill.**



HERMAN GÖRING had been a pilot during World War I and had received the highest military honor, the *Pour le Merite* for heroism. After the war, he became a commercial pilot. Joining the Nazis in 1922, he was wounded in the "Beer Hall Putsch," but escaped arrest. Pain from his wounds caused him to become a morphine addict.



<https://youtu.be/ck0Yye3Sal0?si=8sbhWfOI1A7954mw> **TRANSCRIPT**

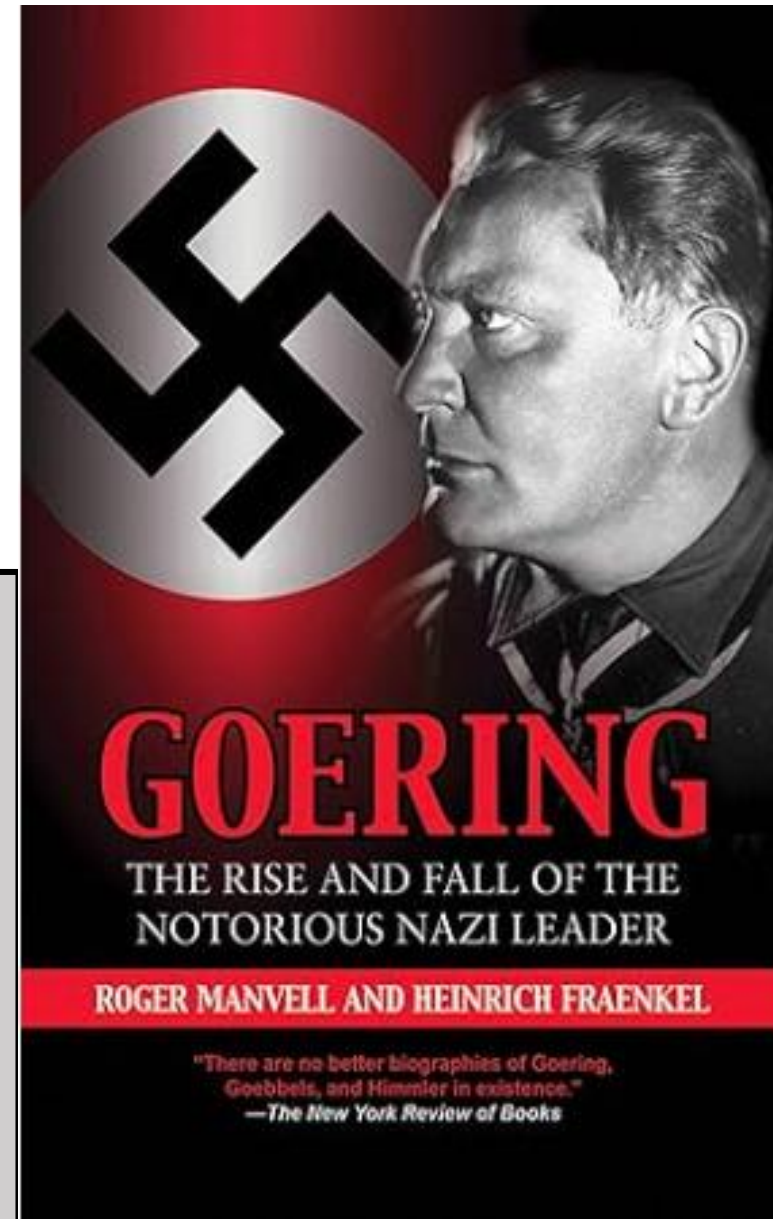
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In 1932, he became president of the Reichstag. He often held several high positions at the same time. As the Prussian minister of the interior, he organized the political police (the Gestapo). In 1934, he transferred the position to Himmler, and became the leader of the newly militarized Luftwaffe (German Air Force). Göring had qualities most Nazi leaders lacked: he was polite, interested in culture, and had a jolly appearance.

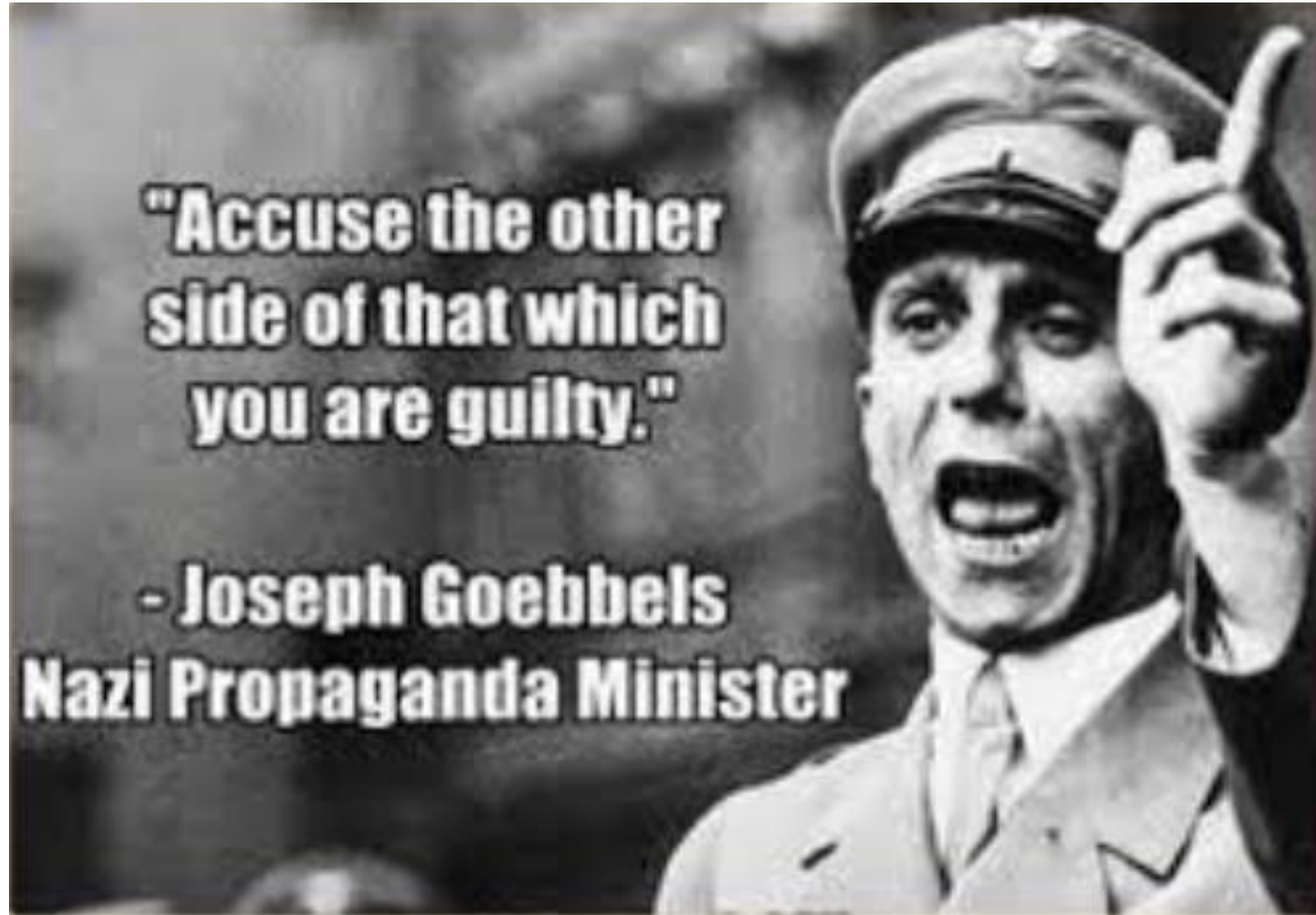
As good-natured as he looked, however, he was a ruthless, greedy man.

(See right) *Goering*, Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel use first-hand testimonies and a variety of historical documents to tell the story of a monster lurking in Hitler's shadows. After rising through the ranks of the German army, Hermann Goering became Hitler's right hand man and was hand-picked to head the Luftwaffe, one of history's most feared fighting forces.

As he rose in power, though, Goering became disillusioned and was eventually shunned from Hitler's inner circle. Alone at the end, he faced justice at the Nuremberg trials and was convicted of war crimes and crime against humanity. He committed suicide in prison before he could be hanged. Within these pages, Manvell and Fraenkel bring to life one of history's most complicated and hated characters.



JOSEPH GOEBBELS was small in stature and disfigured, condemned to walking with a limp, which had prevented him from serving in World War I. His job was Minister of Propaganda, and he boasted: "Propaganda made the Third Reich." It was said of him: "He lies in everything and admires himself for it, and he mocks the masses who fall for him." To stir up opinion, he repeated the same lie over and over. He accused Jews of being at the heart of Germany's problem, and said they deserved anything that was done to them.



All German newspapers became "racially clean" after the Reich Press Law was passed in October 1933. No journalist could be Jewish or married to a Jew. Jewish publications were shut down.



A pedestrian stops to read an issue of the antisemitic newspaper *Der Stuermer* (The Attacker) in a Berlin display box. "Der Stuermer" was advertised in showcase displays near places such as bus stops, busy streets, parks, and factory canteens throughout Germany. Berlin, Germany, probably 1930s.

HEINRICH HIMMLER was a poultry farmer who joined the Nazi party in 1925, became one of the elite SS in 1927, and within two years, rose to become its leader. When he took over, the SS only had 280 members and was a branch of the SA. By 1933, the SS had 50,000 members and had begun "security checks" on all Nazis, except Hitler. In appearance, there was nothing unusual about Himmler, but his talent for organization and his secret files made him the second most powerful leader in Germany.



Heinrich Himmler (seated, center), chief of the SS, with Reinhard Heydrich (standing, left), chief of the Security Police and SD. Berlin, Germany, 1938.

Himmler was devoted to creating the "master race" and destroying the "inferior races." He said: "Nature is cruel; therefore, we may be cruel, too." Himmler divided the police into the Orpo (regular order police) and SiPo (security police). The SiPo were divided into Gestapo (secret political police) and Kripo (criminal police). The Gestapo was feared by everyone: Jews, political opponents, or anyone daring to complain about Nazi rule.



The best political weapon is the
weapon of terror. Cruelty
commands respect. Men may hate
us. But, we don't ask for their love;
only for their fear.

— *Heinrich Himmler* —

AZ QUOTES

REINHARD HEYDRICH, Himmler's choice to lead the Gestapo, and ERNST ROEHM, head of the SA (Stormtroopers), were men without conscience. Heydrich functioned out of the public eye, but Roehm's role was more public. His SA had been useful in putting Hitler in power, but when their street brawling was no longer needed, Roehm and other SA leaders were shot in June 1934, ending the role of the SA. All of these men were ambitious, clever, and never to be trusted, by supposed ally or enemy.



Heydrich →

SS General Reinhard Heydrich was chief of:

- The Security Service of the Reichsführer-SS (*Sicherheitsdienst*; SD) from 1931 until 1942.
- The German Secret State Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei*; Gestapo) from 1934 to 1936.
- The German Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*; SiPo), which consisted of the Gestapo and the criminal police detective forces (*Kriminalpolizei*; Kripo), from 1936 until 1942.
- The Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*; RSHA); after September 1939, the Security Police and SD were formally unified under Heydrich's command in the RSHA. The RSHA was the SS and police agency most directly concerned with implementing the Nazi plan to murder the European Jews during World War II.