

Paper 3

In this extract discussing normal German citizen's motivations and attitudes towards killing people, the author utilizes a top-bottom approach, emphasizing the importance of the government in making it possible for the genocide that occurred during World War II to be implemented and performed by ordinary Germans that had never killed anyone or even served in the German army. The author utilizes two key points to make his argument; many German soldiers chose to simply follow orders without thinking of the consequences and the situation and ideologies surrounding Germany in the 1930's and 40's turned normal and compliant citizens into machine killers, enabling a mass genocide and Holocaust of any undesirables living in Germany.

One of the main ideas the author utilizes to prove his point is the idea that many soldiers simply were obeying orders given by their superiors and carried them out without thought or consequence. In an example taken from a battalion, this historian attempted to find how these soldiers behaved and their motivations behind the events of World War II. There were the eager killers, and non-shooters, drastically different in their own rights, but largest in number was the group of people who did whatever they were asked to do. For example, a policeman in Germany during World War II stated, "Truthfully, I must say that at the time we didn't reflect about it at all. Only years later were we truly conscious of what had happened then." This quote displays one of many who felt that during the Holocaust and World War II that they simply had to follow orders given by their superiors, because contrastingly to what many people believe the job of these normal citizens was just that a job. With the help of propaganda put out by Goebbels since 1933, Jewish people were portrayed as thugs and murderers who pillaged and raped their way through Germany. The implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 only intensified the brainwashing, certifying through the Protection of German Blood and Honor that Jewish people could not even be associated with Germans. By doing this the superiors in charge of the Holocaust were able to set a tone in Germany that everyone believed, so when it came time to serve in the army, subconsciously these people knew what they were doing was morally wrong, but the job itself outweighed the ethics, creating an army of citizens with no thought about what they were doing. In another example, the author attempts to make these soldiers of Germany people even if they did not have a choice given to them by the leaders of the Nazi Party. Just because these people were serving in the German army, this did not mean that they agreed with all of the ideals or positions. For example, "That these policemen were willing executioners does not mean that they wanted to be genocidal executioners." This quote displays the attitude of in all likelihood the majority of German soldiers who performed what they were informed to but did not enjoy it in the sadistic way that a few soldiers and handpicked officials running the party did. After horrific events such as Kristallnacht and permission from Heydrich for normal citizens to attack Austrian Jews after the Anschluss in 1938, violence was a normal day to day occurrence in Germany and the surrounding states. The author suggests that these soldiers fighting were people too, and they cannot be entirely blamed for the mass genocide that occurred during World War II because they were simply not the main instigators.

Another main idea that the author utilizes to prove his point is the situations and ideals taking over Germany during this time period had the ability to turn people into killing machines. Not only was there a war going on in Germany during this time period, the rise of anti-Semitism, the Aryan Race, and the conformity being pressured by the Nazi Government was an extremely difficult state to live in, vastly different from the government run by Hindenburg. There were so many distracting factors occurring that a frenzy was brought upon the entire country of nationalism and pride, and for each citizen to prove their worth to the government that they were worthy of being an Aryan German. For example, the author brings up the point, “I noted the importance of conformity, peer pressure, and deference to authority, and I should have emphasized more explicitly the legitimizing capacities of government...the mutually intensifying effects of war and racism.” In this quote the author displays that the government was able to turn normal citizens into killing machines by simply shaping their own ideologies and a Germany that lived in a situation of superiority and pride. The Nazis took advantage of Anti-Semitism that had been occurring in Europe for centuries and shaped it into what they willed. Anti-Semitism had roots all the way back to pre-biblical times when the Germans killed Christ, then later in Romania when Jews were banned from naturalization, and finally in 1914 when Germans banned the Jews for losing World War I. By shaping these already present ideologies into something bigger than life, the leaders of the war were able to distract their soldiers with a viable reason for so much killing, and make it pleasurable and enjoyable. These soldiers were simply doing what they wanted to aid their country, and enjoying it along the way. Another example that the author uses to prove this point is the idea that these people did not have to total sadist masterminds to carry out this killing, they simply had to believe what the government was telling them, an easy feat, and a reason as to why so many people were willing to aid the Nazi Party in their goal of the Final Solution. For example, the author states, “Ordinary Germans did not have to be of one mind with Hitler’s demonological view of the Jews to carry out genocide.... enemy status and dehumanization of the victims was sufficient to turn ordinary men into willing executioners.” In this quote the author suggests that the superiors in Germany had implemented so many policies and ideologies into the minds of the German people that they were almost like a clean slate, willing to perform anything their superiors wrote on their slates. With heads of the party like Heydrich who had a party that slaughtered almost 2 million people, these superiors were able to accomplish their genocidal goals through ordinary soldiers.

The author in this extract argues a top to bottom approach, and through this ordinary soldiers were able to fulfill their orders without even thinking and digesting their actions. In addition, the situational and ideological factors implemented by the Nazi Party turned normal citizens into killing machines.