

## Enemies of the People

How do terror and popularity merge under a dictatorship? How did the Gestapo deal with critics of Nazism? Based on hundreds of secret-police case files, *Enemies of the People* explores the day-to-day reality of political policing under Hitler. Examining the Gestapo's policy of "selective enforcement," J. Ryan Stackhouse challenges the abiding perception of the Gestapo as policing exclusively through terror. Instead, he reveals the complex system of enforcement that defined the relationship between state and society in the Third Reich and helps to explain the Germans' abiding support for Hitler and their complicity in the regime's crimes. Stories of everyday life in Nazi Germany paint the clearest picture yet of just how differently the Gestapo handled certain groups and actions, and the routine investigation, interrogation, and enforcement practices behind this system. *Enemies of the People* offers penetrating insights into just how reasonable selective enforcement appeared to Germans, and draws unavoidable parallels with the contemporary threat of authoritarianism.

J. Ryan Stackhouse is a historian of modern Europe and Nazism. As a Walbolt Fellow, his Ph.D. from Florida State University was honoured with Distinction. Ryan hosts The Third Reich History Podcast, and interviews experts about the many faces of authoritarianism on the New Books Network.

# Enemies of the People

*Hitler's Critics and the Gestapo*

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J. Ryan Stackhouse



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
 978-1-108-95967-4 — Enemies of the People  
 J. Ryan Stackhouse  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108959674](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108959674)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108961677

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First published 2021  
 First paperback edition 2023

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data*

Names: Stackhouse, J. Ryan, 1985- author.

Title: *Enemies of the people : Hitler's critics and the Gestapo* / J. Ryan Stackhouse.

Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020049624 (print) | LCCN 2020049625 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108832601 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108959674 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108961677 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Germany. Geheime Staatspolizei–History. | Secret service–Germany–History–20th century. | Nazis–Germany. | Government, Resistance to–Germany–History–20th century. | Dissenters–Germany–Social conditions–20th century. | Political culture–Germany–History–20th century. | Authoritarianism–Germany–History–20th century. | Germany–Politics and government–1933–1945.

Classification: LCC HV8207 .S723 2021 (print) | LCC HV8207 (ebook) | DDC 363.28/3094309043–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020049624>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020049625>

ISBN 978-1-108-83260-1 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-95967-4 Paperback

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For Mom and Dad. We stand on the shoulders of giants.

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## Preface

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When I started researching this book, it never occurred to me that the past would confront me in the headlines. I was a child of the nineties. My first political memory is of investigating the noise downstairs to find dad standing in front of the television as images flashed of revelers dancing atop the Berlin Wall. He excitedly waved me to his side and began to explain the significance of what we were witnessing as he gesticulated wildly toward the screen. I don't remember what he said. But I knew it must have been important for him to be home during the afternoon. The people on the screen were happy though. How the times have changed.

I started researching the Third Reich because I wanted to know why people supported Nazism. The draw of Hitler's spectacular charisma and economic recovery after the Great Depression had always made sense to me. So too did the scapegoating of minorities and fear of communist revolution. But I could never square the circle with terror. Why would people support a regime that threatened their lives?

The headlines remind us that authoritarian populists draw a line between us and them. We are good. They are evil. A threat to our very way of life. We only belong to us if we remain loyal to the tribe. But it is hard to imagine being shut out of that community. Especially when we are constantly reminded that they are different. All we must do is behave to be rewarded. The terror protects us from them.

This is a book about how popular authoritarian regimes remain legitimate. It is a book about how systems enact ideas. It is a book about how genocide and political persecution become possible. It has become a book about dynamics at work in the world today.

## Acknowledgements

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The most satisfying part of any project is celebrating its completion with everyone who helped along the way. A book some ten years in the making involves so many people over such a long time that I can only beg forgiveness from anyone I forget.

Some provided inspiration that planted a seed. Mary Anne Cressman fostered a love of reading, while Chris Kirkness continues to nourish what grew into an insatiable appetite for books that bring history to life. Great teachers cultivated those interests. Vic MacFarlane saw to it that we bore witness to the Holocaust. Bruce Fisher showed us the connections to the present day. Chris Brown shared both his considerable library and wit on the hunt for understanding. Beth MacMichael pushed me one step further with a first taste of teaching. She now tweets stoic philosophy. Leo MacKay built an oasis where we could play with words and find our voices. After Truro, there was Acadia, where Arndt Kruger, Christian Thomas, Thomas Voss, and Uwe Wilhelm cultivated a new-found appreciation of German culture. And from Acadia to Guelph, where Peter Goddard's methodology course remains one of the turning points in my life.

Others opened their homes and hearts in pursuit of knowledge. John Burke introduced me to the men whose stories convinced me to become an historian. Philipp Spalek gave the gift of language and an understanding of the two Germanies that changed everything. His perspective opened the world to me through new eyes. Christian Gropp and his magnificent beard introduced me to the Rhineland over winding conversations about archival science and the state of the world. A foreign land can be a lonely place, but thanks to their friendship, Germany will always be a home away from home. The Gentlemen of Salmon Lake continue to be a source of intellectual inspiration and moral clarity in an ever-changing world. Guelph's Eighth Floor stands as testament to what can happen when institutions remember that they exist to bring people together and set aside space to share ideas. In all my travels, I have yet to find a finer community of scholars. Dan Zylberkan, Jonathan Deverse,

Matt Burkhalter, and Witt Callaway were right there through thick and thin in Florida. Nothing quite drives a project forward like living with friends sharing the same struggles and asking the same kinds of questions from very different perspectives. Aaron Ducker and Weston Nunn were always game to bounce around ideas. Robert Watkins and Claire Cotton quite literally peeled me off the street and helped me get back to work after being run down by a pickup truck. David Thompson has continued to encourage the endeavour with his shared enthusiasm for a good war story and an even better yarn. Colleagues became friends, and friends became colleagues along the way.

Time and treasure have also been dedicated such as I can never hope to repay. The Walbolt Fellowship made this study possible. Without their generosity, the second sample charting the range of enforcement measures would have been impossible. Time to focus on making sense of the data and craft a narrative was equally vital. Bastian Gilner and Sabina Eibels ran countless searches for names through archival metadata on my behalf. As in all things, Christian went above and beyond here as well. But for him, I would never have looked into the denazification files while I was already drowning in a sea of paper. The missing links are down to their good graces.

Assistance with the manuscript through its myriad iterations owes much to many. Alan McDougal first took me on in 2008 and has pushed me to consider the bigger picture ever since. The core of policy documents in this book could only be mined thanks to the opportunities he afforded while ransacking the Prussian Cultural Holdings for his own project. Velma Smith and the Strozier interlibrary loan team chased down the rest from collections across the globe. They and the other unsung heroes at Hauptstaatsarchiv Duisburg, Bundesarchiv Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Stadtarchiv Mönchengladbach, Imperial War Museum Duxford, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum have pulled hundreds of metres of documents for me over the years. Expedited requests and courtesy scans kept the ball rolling as the paper trail ran ever onward.

Chris Osmar helped me find my voice again. He has been the consummate friend and colleague, and half the reason that Anton and everyone else in this book became people in the final telling rather than remaining a heap of data points. Anthony Hampton, Jan Jones, and Jeff Waugh also encouraged me to take risks telling the stories that need to be told. Their attention to the craft and help striking the balance in pursuit of ever-elusive tone has been integral to the process. Elizabeth Friend-Smith at Cambridge University Press not only tolerated this experiment and ensured that narration walked the straight and narrow, she snared

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excellent peer reviewers who understood the project and helped take the project to the next level. Everyone's thoughtful comments have steered me clear of several pitfalls, rounded out the story where it was needed, and sharpened the argument in other places. Hopefully, they all see their efforts as worthwhile.

Florida State University proved fertile ground for the study of authoritarian institutions. George Williamson always had the right question to send me back to the drawing board as I struggled with political philosophy. Nazism would have remained enigmatic but for his introduction to the craft of intellectual and cultural history. It makes the knowing deeper. Michael Creswell built conversations with his reading lists that allowed me to trace the same questions of statecraft in very different contexts. His gentle reminders to think of the audience have also proven invaluable. Nathan Stoltzfus was an adept guide to the grand sweep of modern Germany. Our conversations about the nature of Nazism and bridging past to present remain a wellspring of inspiration. And, of course, Robert Gellately taught me the true value of a question. The standard and example he set improved the work immeasurably. *Enemies of the People* took shape amid echoes of his advice to write with all the actors reading over your shoulder. Remaining shortcomings are entirely my own.

Finally, there is family. The aunts and uncles and cousins have encouraged and listened on countless drives to the airport. Jamie, my brother, has been what only a brother can be. His keen eye and honesty have saved the day more than once. John and Sheila, my parents, have done more than I can say. Over the years, they have laid hands on each passage and footnote. Their involvement – be it as captive audience, sounding board, human thesaurus, or moral support – has shaped the project at every step along the way from that first conversation at the kitchen table in October 2009. Much has happened since that day. A decade of work has gone into this book. Yet it was forged in the warm glow of their love and wisdom.