

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## I

## Germany Reverts to the Dark Ages

*Nazi Clarity and Grassroots American Protest,  
1933–1934*

As soon as Hitler came to power on January 30, 1933, the American Jewish press compared him to Haman, and the plight of Germany's Jews to those of ancient Persia, whom Haman had threatened with extermination. Boston's *Jewish Advocate* declared on March 7 that Germany's entire Jewish population of 600,000 "is under the shadow of a campaign of murder which may be initiated soon." It drew its readers' attention to an article published a few days before in the London *Daily Herald* that predicted that the Nazis would initiate a pogrom "on a scale as terrible as any instance of Jewish persecution in 2,000 years."<sup>1</sup> At Purim in mid-March 1933, the festival celebrating the Jews' deliverance from Haman, many rabbis devoted their sermons to condemning the rise of Nazi anti-semitism in Germany. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan indicated that Hitler was even more threatening than Haman in that he was attempting to make the whole world unsafe for Jews. Kaplan predicted that Nazi Germany could ultimately destroy modern civilization and thrust all of humanity "back to the days of ancient barbarism."<sup>2</sup>

On March 20, 1933, shortly after the Nazis assumed power in Germany, the *New York Times* declared that testimony from Americans returning home from visits to Germany left no doubt that to be Jewish there "now constitutes a crime." It reported the declaration of Prussian high commissioner Hermann Goering and minister of propaganda Josef Goebbels that the "Jewish vampire" was responsible for "all the troubles from which the Reich is suffering." The Nazi leaders proclaimed that it was "the duty of all Germans to persecute and harass" the Jews.<sup>3</sup> No Jew was exempt from such treatment. The Nazis physically attacked

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Jews; forcibly shut down Jewish businesses; drove Jewish professors from their lecture halls; barred Jews from practicing law, medicine, and other professions; and embarked on a campaign to prevent them from finding gainful employment in nearly any field. The Manchester *Guardian* noted that by shutting down Jewish-owned stores and savagely beating Jews in the streets, the Nazis had graphically demonstrated that they were immediately putting into effect a sweeping antisemitic doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

That same month German Jewish refugee Lion Feuchtwanger, whose home had been ransacked by Nazis while he was abroad and his manuscripts destroyed, told the *New York Times* that the Nazis had initiated “pogroms such as Germany has not seen since the Jewish persecutions of the fourteenth century,” which were precipitated by the ludicrous accusation that Jews had caused the Black Death that destroyed one-third of Europe’s population. Feuchtwanger had spoken with Jewish refugees in Paris, who told him of acts of antisemitic violence they had experienced or witnessed in Germany compared to which “the atrocities during the war paled.” These refugees had insisted to Feuchtwanger that “[e]very Jew in Germany must expect to be assaulted in the street or to be dragged out of bed and arrested, to have his goods and property destroyed.” Jews were dragged from automobiles and beaten, just because they were Jews. “Day after day,” the corpses of Jews slain in antisemitic attacks were found “mutilated beyond identification.”<sup>5</sup>

An American just returned from Berlin told the *New York Times* that he had cut short his trip there after witnessing a platoon of Nazi storm troopers brutally beat Jewish businessmen at a restaurant who had refused to purchase Goebbels’s newspaper *Der Angriff*. Seizing the Jews, the storm troopers formed a double line and forced them to pass through a gauntlet to exit the restaurant. As each of the Jews attempted to make his way to the door, every storm trooper, “first on one side and then on the other, smashed him in the face,” with brass knuckles and “kicked him with heavy boots,” turning his face into “beef steak.”<sup>6</sup>

A British visitor to the German capital described a similar anti-Jewish atrocity to the London *Daily Herald* not long afterward. As he sat in a café, five Nazis entered and without any provocation repeatedly beat the Jewish proprietor with rubber truncheons. They left the premises shouting, “Get out, you cursed Jew!” As the proprietor lay unconscious on the floor in a pool of blood, his wife rushed to his side and cradled his battered head in her lap. When the British visitor asked her to call for an ambulance, she replied, “What good is that? There are only Nazi doctors . . . and they will not attend to anyone attacked by the Nazis.”<sup>7</sup>

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Germany Reverts to the Dark Ages*

3

The American and British press provided extensive coverage of such incidents of antisemitic violence, which occurred with great frequency during the early months of Nazi rule. On March 25, 1933, the Manchester *Guardian* emphasized that the Nazi terror “did not consist of sporadic excesses [and] was not a series of disorders” but was “systematic and integral” to the Nazi system of government.<sup>8</sup>

The Nazis delighted not only in beating defenseless Jews, including the elderly and women, but in publicly degrading them. On April 4, 1933, the Manchester *Guardian* published a photograph, taken at Chemnitz in Saxony, that a Social Democratic refugee had smuggled out of Germany, showing grinning Nazis parading a Jew through the streets in a refuse cart. At Worms in late March 1933, the Nazis arrested three Jews, took them to a *Sturmabteilung* (SA) headquarters, and subjected them to a terrible beating. The storm troopers then entertained themselves by forcing the Jews to strike each other with cudgels.<sup>9</sup> Several days later in the same city, the Nazis confined arrested Jews in a pigsty.<sup>10</sup>

On April 1, 1933, the Hitler government staged a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses and professional establishments, signaling the Nazi intention of making it impossible for Jews to earn a living. Fully half a million Nazi storm troopers enforced the boycott, forming squads in front of Jewish stores and offices that warned customers not to enter them. H. R. Knickerbocker, Pulitzer-prize winning Berlin correspondent of the New York *Evening Post*, reported that storm troopers had forcibly prevented his *Evening Post* colleague Albion Ross from entering a Jewish-owned department store in the Rosenthalerstrasse, and beat him after they ejected him from the doorway, shouting, “Damn dog!” while a policeman looked on indifferently.<sup>11</sup>

After reading Knickerbocker’s dispatches from Berlin in the *Evening Post*, John Haynes Holmes, minister of New York City’s Community Church, wrote to him that Germany had reverted to the Dark Ages.<sup>12</sup> Particularly frightening was the symbol that the storm troopers pasted over the entrance to every Jewish-owned store and physician’s and lawyer’s office as a “badge of shame”: a yellow circle on a black background. This was the mark Christians had required Jewish businessmen, lawyers, and physicians to use during the Middle Ages to identify themselves, and it indicated a reversion to the vicious antisemitism of that era.<sup>13</sup>

James G. McDonald, League of Nations high commissioner for refugees from 1933 to 1935, stated that the boycott, which he observed in Berlin, was effective because it demonstrated “that Jewish trade could be completely stifled.” McDonald noted that although the Nazis had

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

scheduled the boycott to last only a day, “an equally destructive discrimination against all Jews in law, medicine, school, civil service, shops, and industry . . . continue[d] unabated.”<sup>14</sup>

The day after the boycott, the National Socialist Women’s Federation in Berlin called on German women to never again patronize a Jewish store, physician, or attorney, and to ensure that their families did not “until Jewry has been destroyed.” It reminded German women that they were “fighting a holy war.”<sup>15</sup>

On April 7, 1933, the Hitler government enacted a law discharging Jews from the civil service. Professors were included because universities in Germany were administered by the state. Jews were defined as persons with at least one Jewish grandparent, and non-Jews married to Jews were included in the decree. Only those who were war veterans or had been appointed to their posts prior to 1914 were exempted, because of pressure from President Paul von Hindenburg. As a result, many of Germany’s leading academics and intellectuals were forced into exile.<sup>16</sup>

As succeeding chapters will show, Germany’s institutions of higher learning quickly deteriorated to the point that they could not properly be called universities. Martha Dodd, daughter of William E. Dodd, U.S. ambassador to Germany from 1933 to 1938, who had served as president of the American Historical Association, stated that when she lived with her father in the Third Reich, Germany’s universities were just “elevated institutions of Nazi propaganda.” She recalled that Ambassador Dodd, a longtime professor who had studied in Germany at the University of Leipzig around the turn of the century, “was so shocked and sickened” by the damage the Nazis inflicted on higher education that “he dreaded even passing through a university town.” He refused to accept any honorary degree from a German university.<sup>17</sup>

On April 24, 1933, Frederick T. Birchall, *New York Times* correspondent in Berlin, wrote that the Jews in Germany were facing an impending catastrophe. The Nazis had relegated them to a position even lower than second-class citizens – they were “to be like toads under the harrow.”<sup>18</sup> Thousands of them had been deprived of homes and driven from employment but lacked the funds necessary to leave. American reporter Dorothy Thompson wrote in Berlin in May 1933 that Germany’s Jews were “truly in a hopeless state,” because they were no longer permitted to earn a living.<sup>19</sup> Those Jews with the means to escape Germany were required by the Hitler government to leave behind nearly everything they had. The *New York Times* reported in early May that Jewish refugees were arriving

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Germany Reverts to the Dark Ages*

5

in Paris at a rate of 200 a day, and that nearly all were “reduced to a state of poverty.”<sup>20</sup>

During the spring and summer of 1933, American and British journalists continued to publish alarming reports about Nazi persecution, drawn from their own observations and investigations, and from refugees able to flee to France, the Saar, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain. By April 1933, the Nazis had confined an estimated 45,000 political opponents and Jews in newly established concentration camps and in SA headquarters, known as Brown Houses, that the Manchester *Guardian* called “nothing less than torture chambers.”<sup>21</sup> (SA members were known as Brown Shirts, and brown was the Nazi color.)

A Manchester *Guardian* correspondent, reporting from Germany, declared that “[t]he inquirers by digging only an inch below the surface, will in city after city, village after village, discover such an abundance of barbarism committed by the Brown Shirts that modern analogies fail.” He considered the storm troopers far more dangerous and sadistic than American gangsters, professional killers whom they somewhat resembled. The American gangster at least led a life of danger, confronting far more powerful armed government forces. By contrast, the German government’s armed police and military forces were allied with the storm troopers. The Brown Shirts, carrying revolvers and pistols, and in some places armed with carbines and steel helmets, confronted as adversaries “helpless Jewish shopkeepers” and “defeated and unarmed Republicans.”<sup>22</sup>

American newspaper reporters posted in Berlin emphasized to James G. McDonald on his visit there in the spring of 1933 the horror of Nazi brutality and antisemitism. Charles Elliot of the New York *Herald Tribune* told McDonald that “the degree of violence and intolerance was unprecedented in Western Europe.” McDonald found Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Edgar Ansel Mowrer, Berlin correspondent for the Chicago *Daily News*, “highly overwrought” when he met with him on March 30, 1933. Mowrer “could talk of little but terror and atrocities” and described the Nazi leaders as “brutes [and] sadists,” McDonald noted in his diary.<sup>23</sup>

McDonald also found very ominous Adolf Hitler’s remarks to him about what he planned to do to Germany’s Jews in a personal conference with the Fuehrer in Berlin on April 8, 1933. When McDonald returned to the United States later in the month, he reported that Hitler had told him: “I will do the thing that the rest of the world would like to do. It doesn’t know how to get rid of the Jews. I will show them.” McDonald

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

told James Warburg, son of prominent Jewish banker Paul Warburg, that Hitler had said at their meeting, “I’ve got my heel on the necks of the Jews and will soon have them so they can’t move.” In his conversation with Warburg, McDonald “predicted that German Jews would retrogress to medieval ghetto status.”<sup>24</sup>

Because no country allowed any significant number of Jewish refugees to enter, Germany became, as Lord Melchett stated in May 1933, “an absolute death trap” for its 600,000 Jews. Lord Melchett emphasized that “there was no escape of any kind” for them.<sup>25</sup> *New York Times* correspondent Otto Tolischus wrote from Berlin in September 1933 that, if other countries including the United States lowered their immigration barriers, there was no doubt that “the vast majority” of Jews would leave Germany immediately. But unfortunately, “few of those seeking to emigrate entertain any hope of finding room in the other western countries.”<sup>26</sup>

Tolischus stated that the majority of Jews in Germany were doomed. Because under the Hitler regime “Jews are in practice barred from all higher schooling and all the ‘academic’ professions,” they had no prospects other than manual laborer. He noted that German Jews already referred to the older members of their community as “the lost generation,” fated to struggle for a short time living on handouts “and then die out.”<sup>27</sup>

Michael Williams, editor of the Catholic magazine *The Commonweal*, returning in June 1933 from a trip to Germany to investigate Nazi persecution, also considered the plight of Jews in Germany so desperate that they could not survive there. Williams stated that the Nazis’ intention was to “absolutely eliminate the Jewish portion of the German nation.” Williams asserted in the *New York Times* that the Nazi oppression of Jews “probably surpasses any recorded instance of persecution in Jewish history.” He called the situation of Jews in Germany “deplorable beyond words.” Williams appealed to the League of Nations to “come quickly and strongly to the rescue!” to prevent “the worst crime of our age” from proceeding: “the deliberate extinction of nearly 1,000,000 men, women, and children.”<sup>28</sup>

That same month, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) published the 112-page *White Book*, designed to provide the American public with as complete an account as possible of the Hitler government’s antisemitic laws and regulations, and of Nazi brutality and threats against Jews, from 1923 until May 1933. The AJC *White Book*, whose publication was announced in the *New York Times*, presented translations of the complete text from the official German law gazette, of “the numerous decrees

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Germany Reverts to the Dark Ages*

7

promulgated under Chancellor Hitler prohibiting the employment of Jews in the professions, State services, [and] the schools.” This was followed by eyewitnesses’ reports of “the acts [of] oppression and violence” against Germany’s Jews.<sup>29</sup>

American Jewish leaders observing developments in Germany during the summer and fall of 1933 concluded that Jews had no future there. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, honorary president of the AJCongress, who spent time in Europe that summer speaking with refugees from Germany, wrote that “the Jews of Germany are finished.” Judge Julian Mack stated that the Jews in Nazi Germany faced a fate worse than they had in Inquisitorial Spain.<sup>30</sup> Alexander Brin, editor of Boston’s *Jewish Advocate*, one of America’s leading English-language Jewish weeklies, on his return to the United States in October 1933 after a trip to Germany, called the Hitler government “the most barbaric and savage movement since the Dark Ages.”<sup>31</sup>

In September 1933, Germany’s most eminent novelist, Thomas Mann, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, expressed the deepest pessimism about the impact of Hitler’s rule. Mann had chosen to go into exile in France because of his anti-Nazi convictions. Emphasizing that Nazi rule was not an ephemeral phenomenon but would have long-term impact, he declared that Nazi policies would transform Germany into a place “intellectually so barren” that it would take “centuries before she can regain something of her former intellectual and cultural prestige.”<sup>32</sup>

Albert Einstein, the most renowned exile from Nazi Germany, publicly condemned the Hitler regime from the beginning. Outside the country when the Nazis assumed power, Einstein declared that he would never return to Germany, and stated: “I do not desire to live in a country or belong to a country where the rights of all citizens are not respected and where freedom of speech among teachers is not accorded.”<sup>33</sup> He appealed for world protest against Nazism. Shortly after the Nazis came to power they ransacked Einstein’s weekend home at Caputh, outside Berlin, and confiscated his belongings. They also seized his bank account and securities.<sup>34</sup> In March 1933, Einstein resigned from the Prussian Academy of Sciences, to which he had belonged since 1913, in protest against Nazi policies. He expressed disgust with German scientists who had “failed in their duty to defend intellectual values.”<sup>35</sup> Einstein sailed permanently for the United States in October 1933 and never went back to Germany. He became a faculty member at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, a center for research and postgraduate training organized by Jewish educator Abraham Flexner on an endowment by Jewish



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

department store magnate Louis Bamberger and his sister, Caroline Bamberger Fuld.<sup>36</sup>

Because of Einstein's stature as one of the most eminent scientists of modern times, the American press gave particular attention to his denunciations of Nazi persecution of Jews and political opponents. The Hitler government's abusive and insulting treatment of such a highly respected man of learning was further confirmation to many in the West that Germany had lapsed into barbarism.

When the Hitler government arrested British journalist Noel Panter of the London *Daily Telegraph* in late October 1933 on charges of transmitting "atrocities reports" abroad and espionage, the American press speculated that the Nazis were attempting to extend to the foreign press the censorship it enforced on German newspapers. Panter was charged with espionage because, in reporting on a speech Hitler made in Kelheim, Bavaria, he had noted the military character of the massive storm troopers' demonstration that accompanied it. Panter described 20,000 uniformed storm troopers goose-stepping past SA chief of staff Ernst Roehm, "with rifles at the slope and with steel bayonets," and noted participation by the Reichswehr (German army) in the demonstration. Germany had recently withdrawn from a League of Nations disarmament conference, and the SA's display of military equipment raised fears in the West that the Hitler government was preparing for a significant military buildup.<sup>37</sup>

The American press, like the British, voiced grave concern about Panter's arrest and the Nazis' refusal to allow him counsel or any contact with British consular officials, although academia remained silent. The *New York Times* reported that British public opinion was "thoroughly aroused" over Panter's imprisonment. The Nazis held Panter incommunicado for three days, denying him even a toothbrush or razor, while the British cabinet met to discuss its options and the British press expressed "the strongest editorial indignation." Panter faced at least two years in prison under the charges. British emissaries managed to gain access to Panter after three days, and six days later the Hitler government expelled the British journalist from Germany. Arriving in Britain, Panter declared in a radio address that liberty had completely vanished from Germany.<sup>38</sup>

Summing up eleven months of Nazi rule in late December 1933, the *New York Times* concluded that the calendar year was ending with Germany's Jews in a dismal situation. They had been degraded to "pariahs." The Hitler regime had shut down a large proportion of Jewish-owned businesses and forced a great many others to "replace Jewish directors,



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Germany Reverts to the Dark Ages*

9

managers, and other important employees with Nazis.” The minister of finance had decreed that tax and customs officials refuse contact with “non-Aryan” representatives of businesses, even if they were war veterans. The *New York Times* noted that many marketplaces and fairs prohibited Jews from engaging in any business, and that some of Germany’s towns now forbade Jews from entering them.<sup>39</sup> Jews were virtually barred from the professions and from higher education.

The *New York Times* also reported that the Nazis had made life miserable for Jewish children in the common and intermediate schools. They were ostracized and harassed by their fellow pupils and teachers. The *Times* cited the account of the twelve-year-old daughter of an American diplomat in Germany, who described how the teacher on a class excursion had separated the Jewish pupils from the rest of the class and ordered them to keep their distance from the “Aryans” on their walk. School curricula gave significant emphasis to the propagation of Nazi antisemitic doctrines.<sup>40</sup> Alexander Brin wrote in October 1933 that Germany’s public schools had promulgated so much antisemitism in the classrooms that were the Hitler regime to be “overthrown tomorrow,” it would probably take generations to repair “the damage that has been done by the poison instilled into the minds of the children.”<sup>41</sup>

During late 1933 and early 1934, some of the journalists in the West best informed about German affairs, who had visited Nazi Germany for extended periods during the early phases of Hitler’s rule, astutely warned about the very real possibility of a large-scale genocide of Germany’s Jews. Writing in November 1933 in the Jewish magazine *Opinion*, edited by Stephen S. Wise, Belgian journalist Pierre van Paassen, drawing on interviews with Jews that he had recently conducted in three widely separated cities in Germany, stated that “the position of the German Jews is getting worse every day” and called for international action to save the German Jewish community “from physical extinction.” He endorsed Rabbi Wise’s call for the settling of 150,000 German Jews in Palestine. But van Paassen warned that unless such a plan were carried out at once, “there will be no 150,000 German Jews left to be settled in Palestine.”<sup>42</sup>

Dorothy Thompson wrote in *Opinion* in March 1934 that the Nazis’ aim was “to *eliminate* the Jews.” Thompson, wife of novelist Sinclair Lewis and a non-Jew, had served as Berlin correspondent for the *New York Evening Post* and had published a series of articles in May 1933 on Nazi atrocities against Jews in the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* and for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. In her *Opinion* article, entitled “Germany Is a Prison,” Thompson stated that because the Nazis were unable “to

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76243-4 - The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses

Stephen H. Norwood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

assassinate half a million Jews in cold blood,” they had launched a “cold pogrom,” forcing the Jews to leave Germany “by closing down one by one opportunities to earn a living or educate their children beyond the elementary grades, and by social ostracism.” This “campaign of persecution” had caused a large number of Jews in one year of Nazi rule to leave Germany, despite the enormous difficulties of stiff immigration barriers everywhere in the world. Those Jews remaining in Germany, driven by the Nazis from their businesses, jobs, and schools, faced economic catastrophe.<sup>43</sup>

By the spring of 1934, the American reading public had access to books in which prominent journalists, politicians, and Jewish leaders described Nazi Germany as barbaric and detailed Nazi atrocities. In March a symposium entitled *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization* was published that included passionate denunciations of the Hitler regime by former New York governor and presidential candidate Al Smith, Unitarian minister John Haynes Holmes, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and writer Ludwig Lewisohn. AFL president William Green and reformer Alice Hamilton analyzed and forcefully condemned Nazi labor and women’s policies, respectively. Dorothy Thompson described the “wanton cruelties” inflicted by the Nazis. In the concluding article, Governor Smith wrote that if Nazism prevailed, those who had fought “for spiritual and political freedom have fought in vain.”<sup>44</sup> *Germany Unmasked* by Robert Dell, veteran Manchester *Guardian* correspondent, appeared at the same time. It opened with a statement by a diplomat stationed in Berlin: “The conditions here are not those of a normal civilized country and the German Government is not a normal civilized Government and cannot be dealt with as if it were one.”<sup>45</sup>

That spring, the American and British press reported yet another ominous development in Germany: the Nazis’ revival of the medieval blood libel accusation, which they aggressively disseminated throughout the Reich using official party newspapers. The blood libel, which had no basis in fact, charged the Jews with kidnapping Christian children, torturing and murdering them to mock Jesus, and draining their blood to mix with matzoh at Passover (*Pesach*) and with Purim pastries. On May 1, 1934, Julius Streicher, Nazi *gauleiter* of Franconia and political commissar of the Bavarian state government, published a special May Day edition of the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* of 130,000 copies, devoted to documenting 131 alleged Jewish ritual murders from 169 B.C.E. to 1929 C.E. The May Day ritual murder issue contained two heavily underscored red banner headlines declaring “Jewish murder plot against non-Jewish