

# Book review on ordinary men history essay



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## Introduction

It is famous quote on apathy and empathy of human condition that death of one man is considered as a tragedy and death of million people is known as statistic. This quote gives us an idea that how it became possible for ordinary men to be eager or genocidal killers in the holocaust. It involves human ability to emotionally detach or attach with the view of death in very personal way. Reactions for death are confusing and conditional and it can be described in a single sentence. Researchers have investigated some views, motivations, reactions and intentions with a view of murder of thousands of Jews by ordinary men in the holocaust. This book is the scholarly work of Christopher Browning along with some primary researches. We will discuss in this work that who are ordinary people, what they did, how they acted out on it, what factors motivated them to act upon that shameful task. Researchers have worked on this report to find out that what were the circumstances or situation that led them or allow them to exceed their moral limit and act in that way. An executor who was a human being transformed ordinary men into genocidal killers. These transformations involve the process of conditioning within the variety of constraints. Researchers will explore their various ideas on Nazism, motivation, anti-Semitism though this essay to understand all these aspects.

This study will focus on the ordinary people in Germany and what they did, why they did and the factors which were responsible for it. Some ideology has been described in this study that involves motivating factors that adheres them to authority and it became the cause when eager killers targeted hundred of Jews. We cannot generalize this topic for each and every

ordinary man in Germany at that time. This study will explore the responses to the books, work on this subject, and criticism with this book. Some ideas on combat motivation and Nazism will also be discussed. It will involve the work of Goldhagen and Christopher Browning on their publications. This book "ordinary men: reserve police battalion 101" has been written by the author to give a strong reply to other previous researches. The issues that will be discussed in this essay are not new; they have already been researched before in other published books.

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## **Discussion**

Christopher Browning is the author of this book named as ordinary men: reserve police battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland. He is working at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the department of history. He has given expert ideas in the claim of Nazi perpetrators at the British war crimes branch, Australian public prosecution commonwealth offices and Canadian Department of justice. He is the author of seven books on Holocaust and Nazi Germany. Among his publications, he received National Jewish book award in Holocaust category.

He is a former controller of United States holocaust memorial museum. It is a centre for advanced holocaust studies and Maurice Shapiro visiting fellowship. He is currently working in the academic committee as a member in United States Holocaust memorial council. The book is about the horrible event which was done by ordinary people. They acted out on the killing process of thousands of Jews in Germany thus they killed the entire village named as Jozefow village in the Poland city. This study was carried out to <https://assignbuster.com/book-review-on-ordinary-men-history-essay/>

find that how it became very easy for ordinary middle-aged men for presenting the activity of mass murder of men, women, children, infants and old men.

Browning has worked more on providing treatment to those people who were committing Hitler's crime. His work more relies on the same resources of Goldhagen on the investigation material that was assembled by Prosecutor of Hemberg but he gave his own interpretations. He proved that how reserve police battalion 101 with the German society was submerged in the cascade of racist as well as anti-Semitic propaganda. He has also described that how police men provided coaching to the each unity with the purpose of giving basic training and ongoing practices. Many of the members were not ready for shooting the Jews. As the result some police men did not shoot them. This ostracism, isolation and isolation under psychological effects have been assigned to the foreign land with the aggressive population[1]. The oppositions have been imposed by some demands of ethics and the regulations and norms of the battalion on both hands. Ordinary men give a graphical description of the involvement of police battalion 101 in the Holocaust.

This book had been written to give reply to other book named as Hitler's willing executioners by Daniel Goldhagen. That book had collected so many positive responses and it became very important book in Germany (D. J. Goldhagen, 1998). Goldhagen views were very simple because he thought that Violent anti-Semitic beliefs became the major cause for the participation of ordinary German people in the holocaust. He suggested a view that neither social and psychological pressure nor psychological activities but the <https://assignbuster.com/book-review-on-ordinary-men-history-essay/>

views and ideas about Jews induced ordinary men to kill thousands of women, men, children and old people. He stated a phrase that no German, no holocaust but there was number of arguments had been taken place. He was obvious for the treatment of anti-Semitism as he knew that it was not much common in Germany.

In July 13, 1942, the men in reserve police battalion men 101 which was the unit of German order police, entered in to the Jozefow village. They arrived in Poland city not less than three weeks before. They drafted old men in family for combat services. The combat services include artisans, salesman, workers and clerks. They rounded up approximately 1800 Jews in Jozefow and selected people for working as work Jews along with 1500 old people, children and women. Most of the old age and rear-echelon reserve policemen were become mature in the port city of Germany and did not commit Nazis and racial fanatics. The men from Jozefow village were told by their officers to do the same task and also they gained the chance for not participating in it. But most of them were participated in the shooting the member of the Jewish community in that village. It was dreadful event but it was continued to show that how much battalion had learned from that day. Then they had to shoot to large number of Jews. On sixteen months from Jozefow mass murder (J waller, 2002) to the harvest festival slaughter in November 1943, these men participated in direst shooting deaths of about 38000 Jews. They participated for the transportation of Treblinka gas chambers of about 45000. That count reached upto 83000 for a unit of 500 men. This is the explanation of this book that average middle aged German became cold blooded murderers of thousands of Jews. It also shows that how they were

transformed into the active participants in this type of horrible crime in the human history.

This book focuses on the reconstruction of men who participated in that monstrous event. Those men were just an ordinary people. Those people were the middle aged and working class people of German. They were not the members of Nazi party and members of S. S. most of them were from Hamburg which was the least occupied Nazi area in Germany and they were not much exposed to the Nazi regime. Those people were not specially selected for being the part of order police due to some sadistic personalities. They were selected from normal lives and positioned into the police force. Then they had been given the task of killing Jews because they were not ready for the task. Those ordinary men became totally capable in killing thousands of people and their capacity to murder them was too great. Thus they exceeded the expectations of Nazi leaders. The reserve police Battalion members were conditioned in a way with the sense of racial kinship and superiority. The only cause of Jewish inferiority, sense of duty and the peer pressure turned these police battalion into the murderers.

Postwar interviews of approximately 210 former members of that battalion have drawn. Christopher Browning makes easy for them to speak about their work that what they did, how they worked on the rationalization of the behavior and what they thought. The concept was that one man would shoot only children as well as infants for the purpose of releasing them from their unhappiness. The Germans were acting out for the esteem of their authority. They acted out for the fear of punishment than from such motives like careerism and peer pressure and these are some common phenomenon.

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With the constant reforming of the battalion's murder records and the attention towards the social backgrounds and actions of ordinary men, has given some powerful evidences for the ordinary man capacity for extraordinary inhumanity.

Here is a question in everyone's mind: were they ordinary Germans or ordinary men? As per the book, I suggest that anybody can say these people as ordinary Germans and ordinary Europeans but when the topic is Ordinary men then I would consider everybody as an ordinary man. Its main focus was on the human nature of people and that is universal. Some people were Luxembourgers and they were not from German background but they behaved as German comrades. The title of the book was more focusing on the features of group behavior which was making very human being helpless to act on that monstrous task of mass murder. People who belonged to Nazi regime were ideologically conscious[2]and came there to accept ideological importance of the regime. There were some true believers who required an opportunity for killing the people. I suggest that as the people behave, they adapt their idea to this behavior. That killing process increased the momentum because people acted as what they did. The true believers are said to be enthusiastic killers and eager killers, it increased over the time. Here is a question that whether German people participated in that event. Human beings have a devotion to the authority so that they participated in the holocaust (R. Smelser, 2002). Some situational experiments and explanations along with Milgram's experiment on demonstration of the willingness of individuals to follow some institutional orders, Zimbardo's

Stanford Prison experiment are described by Browning to related these topics to the groupings that came out in the battalions.

The author himself studied more on the Nazism, anti-Semitism in his previous published books. That concept is not totally new because some other authors had already researched a lot on it. This book had been written for changing some views and giving reply to this world about some concepts.

I suggest that German people were from Nazi party. It controlled the German regime and it was the driving force behind this task. That all German people were not of the mind of Hitler was an individual personality. Those people were not psychologically different and they were not disturbed individual. Also they were not ideologically and politically committed people before that event. They were very tough soldiers as well as tough policeman. They were having some motives such as they were afraid to deal with authority and they were afraid to look weak etc. It is a question that why individuals commit these crimes? It was due to the Nazism. It is a party of members of the national socialist German workers and it was founded in Germany in 1919 but it came in existence under the ruling of Adolf Hitler. Nazism is described as an anti-communist movement which is borrowed from so many adversary forms as well as methods. As it was an anti-communist act so it instrumentalize anti-communism in the same way. That method was significant. Most of the people in Germany became Nazis due to the fear of communism. Nazism was set as the guideline of hate and the rejection of idea of humanity. Humanism is not the part of Nazism (Les Fièvres, 1997).



Motivation theories struggle with the psychological characteristics. It varies from people to people, from mood to mood and from day to day. Nazi party members abused Jews and it was anti-Semitic task. It is a question that either anti-Semitism or financial frustration motivated the attack. It comes under combat motivation. Combat motivation supports the soldiers or battalion men who are fighting for each other. Many military thinkers along with commanders have reflected the motivational factor during combat. The effects of victory cannot be explained without motivation (Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Krieg*, 1963). Combat motivation is explained as an impulse that makes soldiers fully complete to fight with their enemy or it is the determination of the soldiers that prepares soldier's mind to fight (Reuvan Gal, 1999). Combat motivation refers to the physiological status of mind or in other words it is an attitude of an individual or group of people at the time of performing task. Individual combat motivation is a diverse and broader concept. It makes unclear creation of ideas. The combat motivation includes some powerful factors which are very conceptual in nature. Here are some primary combat motivators are present such as strong leadership, rewards, recognition, disciplines and values (Anthony Kellet, 1987). Some other motivating factors such as individual integration, training etc but these factors inspires people at the time of combat and also at other time. Sense of duty is very essential part of combat motivation and it appears frequently at the time of fight. So battalion men were highly motivated while shooting the Jewish community members.

Anti-Semitism was working as a motivational factor. Hitler was considered as an obsessed anti-Semite. He worked within some German and European

centuries of traditional anti-Semitism. It was working as a broad part in the politics in every country of Europe. Christian Anti-Semitism and right wings of anti-Semitic politics were imposed the anti-Semitism in the Nazi regime and it was considered as fanatical and obsessive anti-Semitism. This book starts with the story of entire battalion and it acts as one of the motifs that play a part in it or not? It is an issue and I suggest that there are some anti-Semitism factors that tell about the situation of war. This fact is very crucial. But nothing helped Nazis for killing Jews and also for framing their work in war. This thing made them to attach others to their anti-Semitism activities. A wide range of anti-Semitism of less fanatical objects was the part of it. So Nazi supported the anti-Semitism as a traditional or racial method during the third Reich and it acted as an expansion for the killing of Jews. It may not be of the priority to regime as of Nazis but their sensitivity towards Jews and other human beings has become dull. So both aspects such as force behind the policy making by regimes and lowering the frequency of human obligation, has become easier for their people.

There are so many types of anti-Semitism. Daniel Goldhagen talks about eliminationist anti-Semitism, Shaul Friedlander talks about redemptive anti-Semitism, Gavin Langmuir talks about chimeric anti-Semitism and other kinds such as deeply obsessive anti-Semitism, fantastic and Hallucinatory anti-Semitism are also present. German anti-Semitism is separated from these issues that a fully committed anti-Semitic regime is very essential and it takes power. I suggest that the German people were redemptive anti-Semites, chimeric anti-Semites or eliminationist anti-Semites.

## **Conclusion**

This book review concludes that there were some motivational factors along with other factors available that lead them to take part in that dreadful activity. They were ordinary German or ordinary people who participated in the holocaust. Germany has the wide history of Nazism/ Nazi party ideology and the concept of anti-Semitism and it was fitted in that trend. Goldhagen went so far from this concept when Browning presented his own views on these issues. The researchers have found that that turned into anti-Semitism and became the cause for participating in that event of killing Jewish members. It has been found by researches that there are some changes happened and that changes turned genocide into practical aspect. We can think that some people were drawn from the holocaust and people who had participated in the reserve police battalion of 101 men, had number of things at the time of war. This research does not end at one point of anti-Semitism; there are so many points that are to be done. Not all Germans became enthusiastic anti-Semites but some of them were. There is an exact relationship between anti-Semitism and human participation. Holocaust is a unique concept and if we look at the regime then it was able to connect every aspect of German life. The administrative, bureaucratic and technological efficiencies are the unique features of this concept. This topic comes under Nazism and combat motivation. Combat motivation provides a pathway to the people to at the time of war and it was there. Nazism also turned most of the people's mind to become Nazis. The reason to find why ordinary men participated in the shooting cannot be generalized in a single linear explanation. It should be identified in various experiments and findings and that all should be interconnected with each other. It plays an important

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role for shaping alternative solutions. It has been proved that some psychological repercussions were experienced by the eager killers and they justified their actions through self self-defence and charge of Jewish Criminalization.