

What was the
involvement of
ordianry germans in
the holocaust essay
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With specific references to at least three testimonies, assess the role of ordinary Germans in the Holocaust.

The ordinary Germans had an ambiguous and heavily debated role in the Holocaust during WW2. Much research has been undertaken by historians such as Daniel Goldhagen and Robert Galletely into the role the majority of ordinary Germans played in the Holocaust. The extent to which the majority understood and freely supported the Nazis in their persecution of the Jews is controversial. This majority, however, did not have such a significant impact in the holocaust as the minority groups, which either supported and helped the National Socialists and as such were true supporters of their cause, or were prepared to assist the Jews in evading persecution, such as members of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. There were also ordinary Germans who were employed to assist the Nazis in their conquest as part of their every day job, such as Hefer, a German truck driver.

Historians do not agree entirely on the involvement of the majority of ordinary Germans during the Holocaust. Daniel Goldhagen argues in his book "Hitler's Willing Executioners", that the majority of the German population had full knowledge of the Nazis plot against the Jewish people and were willing to participate. However, others such as Gellately disagree that the German public were purely Anti-Semitic, instead it is believed they were subjected to a clever propaganda machine. However, the question remains as to why they didn't stand up en mass to the Nazi Regime. Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbles used his best efforts to try and 'Sugar Coat' the Holocaust and cleverly justify the treatment Jews were being subject to, nevertheless, Germans soon found out what was being done to <https://assignbuster.com/what-was-the-involvement-of-ordianry-germans-in-the-holocaust-essay-sample/>

the Jews. Hefer, a German Truck Driver, witnessed the Jews being lined up and shot by Ukrainian supporters of the Nazis, he states ' As soon as a Jew lay down, a Schutzpolizist came along with a submachine gun and shot him in the back of the head. The Jews who descended into the ravine were so frightened by this terrible scene that they completely lost their will'.

Events such as these no doubt, slowly began circulating through the German public. It would appear there are two main reasons why the majority of the German public did not actively oppose the Holocaust, they were either afraid of the Nazis or they supported the ideology in principle. Fear of the Nazis was strong throughout the ordinary German public; many believing that there were Nazi spies in every aspect of their society. Furthermore, once Hitler came to power in 1933 he created the Nazi Storm Troopers, called the SA, these men were used to patrol the streets and to deal with anybody that opposed the Nazi Regime. These men instilled fear into the populace and forced them into silence when it came to dubious aspects of the Nazi rule. These storm troopers carried on their work well into the time of the Holocaust, thus preventing many Germans from standing up to the Nazis, for fear of their lives and the lives of their families. Gellately argues that the atmosphere of terror and fear was enhanced by ' denunciations' from ordinary Germans, in which they would report any suspicious ' anti-Nazi' activity to the local Nazi authority. On the other hand, Daniel Goldhagen argues that many ordinary Germans supported the anti-Semitic views of the Nazis and would have happily become involved in the holocaust if asked to, thus they were actively in support of what Hitler was doing.

The Holocaust did, however, have many political and military rivals. Some also came from the German population. These people were a minority, and they did not have the full support of their friends and neighbours behind them. They did not believe in the purification of the German race and did not share the Anti-Semitic views of the Nazis. The few that opposed the Nazis included members of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, certain individuals and other loosely organised groups, an example these people is Hans and Sophie Scholl. This brother and sister combination was part of a non-violent resistance group called the White Rose, which aimed at spreading awareness of Nazi violence and trying to stop it. Eventually they were found by the Nazis, trialled and executed in 1943, highlighting the extreme danger of this kind of resistance. As shown in the transcripts and testimonies, penalties for defiance were severe. It reads ' That the accused have in time of war by means of leaflets called for the sabotage of the war effort and armaments and for the overthrow of the National Socialist way of life of our people'. Propaganda was also very effective here, ' to the end that the German people would be deprived of the National Socialist way of life and thus also of their government.'. These ordinary Germans played a role in trying to stop the Holocaust and paid the ultimate price.

Along side the minority of ordinary Germans who actively opposed the Holocaust, were the Germans who supported what the Nazis stood for and the actions that they were taking against the Jews. These ordinary Germans were people who had previously voted for Hitler in the 1933 or 1938 elections that occurred before the holocaust, or people who were swayed by the Nazis propaganda scheme that they had leading up to, and during WW2.

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Daniel Goldhagen argues in his book 'Hitler's Willing Executioners' that ordinary Germans, if given a chance to kill a Jew, would have done it. This statement is heavily debated and many Historians agree that only a minority of Germans would have agreed to kill the Jews and of these the most would not have dared carried out their promise. This minority did, however, help the Nazis in many ways, mainly boycotting Jewish business and driving them out of German towns and from their homes. An example of this was the Kristallnacht, the destruction of Jewish synagogues by the Nazis and its supporters. A German school boy recalls the events of the Kirstallnacht, 'Walking past the synagogue when a group of men led by Paul Wolff, a local carpenter... broke into a run and stormed the entrance of the building... pieces of furniture came flying through doors and windows'. This account demonstrates how willing some Germans were, to assist the Nazis in achieving their goals.

Ordinary Germans played a diverse and complicated role in the Holocaust. There is no doubt their behaviour can be largely categorised by obedience to Nazi directions once the war was in full swing, however, small but determined resistance was active on many levels albeit largely disorganised due to intense scrutiny and fear. We can distinguish three main groups; the first of these groups being the majority of Germans who didn't become actively involved in the holocaust even with the knowledge of the events that were taking place, passive submission and compliance. The second were the ordinary Germans who assisted the Jews in spite of Nazis threats. The last group were the Germans who openly and actively supported the Nazi ideology and were prepared to aid them in their persecution of the

Jewish people. It can be argued that the ordinary Germans of WW2 were a population with mixed views and perspectives largely shaped by propaganda and fear, this ultimately shaped their involvement in the Holocaust.

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