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Katherine Ludwig

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The Scapegoat

Throughout history, Jews have been discriminated against, viewed as inferior to other races, and blamed for hardships no matter how little evidence there may have been to support these ideas. Whether it be blame for plagues, disappearances of children, financial hardships, or violence, Germans and other Europeans had no qualms about turning against their Jewish neighbors. For example, after the destruction of Jewish homes and a synagogue in Leutershausen, Germany, the NSDAP chapter of the neighboring town of Windsbach published a flyer which claimed that “in the past few weeks the Jew has been determined to bait some of the peoples of the world into engaging in an awful war. The German nation was to be wrestled to its knees and destroyed. Millions of people were to be slaughtered and murdered” (*Probing the Depths of German Anti-Semitism* 196). However unfounded these statements may have been, they and similar accusations were common claims among Germans who refused to take responsibility for their own problems, and who adamantly denied their anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism has caused Jews to be used as scapegoats throughout history. A scapegoat is a person or group who is “blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others, especially for reasons of expediency” (*Oxford Dictionaries*) despite having nothing to do with whatever the problem may be. Ironically, the term itself originated from ancient Jewish religious practices: Jewish religious leaders would ceremoniously place their sins upon the animal and then banish it into the wilderness as a way of purging themselves from their own wrongdoing. Jews themselves have been used as scapegoats by other groups of people so often and to such an extent that even the statements quoted above are unsurprising.

However common such accusations against Jews are, the statement made in the NSDAP's flyer in particular makes ridiculous and completely unjustifiable accusations. The author of the flyer blames the Jews for an attack on their own people, claiming that it was somehow a Jewish attack on the German people instead. The attack in question was committed in 1938, when Germans in Leutershausen broke the windows of a Jewish home and those of a nearby synagogue, and then piled cow dung just outside of the temple. Two days later, German anti-Semites broke into the synagogue again and destroyed all of its contents as well as those of multiple other Jewish residences. Especially after such an incident, no part of the accusations made by Windsbach's reactionary flyer had any supporting evidence: the idea that the Jews were planning an uprising had no factual basis, and the claim that Jews had committed the attacks in Leutershausen was simply an act of turning the blame on the victims.

The mere concept that Jews in Leutershausen could have been plotting an uprising is simply impractical: only about twenty Jews lived in the whole town (*Probing the Depths of Anti-Semitism* 196). Such a number of people could not possibly have hoped to have any success in a fight against German Christians, who made up the vast majority of the population, which had reached 2000 in 1920 (Ingall 190). However, this sort of logic had no effect on how other Germans responded to the Leutershausen attacks or on how Jews were viewed in Germany and throughout the world. No amount of evidence or lack thereof seemed sufficient enough to convince the Anti-Semites of their cruelty and misplaced blame.

Ironically, the claims made by Windsbach's flyer that Jews were planning to slaughter millions of Germans were the opposite of what atrocities came to pass in the 30's and 40's in Fascist Germany. While the author was correct in saying that "millions of people were to be slaughtered and murdered" (*Probing the Depths of German Anti-Semitism* 196), the victims of

the mass murder implied by the flyer were not Christian Germans; rather, they were mainly Jews (the other groups being homosexuals, the disabled, the Romani people, and Hitler's political enemies). The Holocaust and other atrocities committed against the Jews were often based upon the belief that Jews would commit mass murder and attempt to destroy Christianity if Christians did not wipe them out first; at least, that was the justification.

True fear of an uprising like that described in the Windsbach flyer cannot have been what motivated the systematic killings of the Jews in the end: the practices of the "Final Solution" carried on for years with the Jews having absolutely no control over what was happening. Had it been only fear, the horrors of the Holocaust would not have continued on for so long and would not have been so well-organized. In the end, hatred was what motivated the killings: Jews, homosexuals, the Romani people, and the disabled posed no threat to Germany or Hitler's rule, and the inclusion of Hitler's political enemies as concentration camp prisoners was merely an extreme political tactic, as was his overall placement of blame on the Jews for Germany's various hardships in the wake of World War I.

One of Hitler's more famous quotes from *Mein Kampf* may be used to explain why so many Germans were drawn into anti-Semitic beliefs: "the broad masses of a nation... more readily fall victim to the big lie than the small lie" ("Excerpts from Mein Kampf"). He was referring to how Jews had supposedly manipulated Germans into allowing them to dominate the country, but it more accurately describes the result of the Nazis' practice of propagating Jewish repulsiveness, inferiority, and guilt for German suffering. Hitler's belief in the power of the "big lie" undoubtedly influenced the way he engineered his propaganda.

Even if Adolf Hitler actually believed in the inferiority of Jews, the horrific actions taken against them and the way in which he used the hatred to manipulate the feelings of the German

public made clear his true intentions. Hitler knew that providing a scapegoat, especially one so commonly used as the Jews, would help further his political goals and give his subjects a concrete enemy. The consequential suffering for the Jews gave him no pause in his decision to use his strategy. In his thirst for power, Hitler viewed the Jews with utter apathy, using them only as a target for blame.

Such brutal treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust was a result of long-standing hatred, which can be exemplified by events such as the comparatively minor punishment during and in wake of the Leutershausen attacks. The blame which Germans placed on the Jews in the instance of the 1938 Leutershausen attacks was unfounded, untrue, and based only upon anti-Semitism. The same has been true about allegations made against Jews for thousands of years. The irony of Windsbach's accusations against the Jews cannot be overstated, and yet such statements were tolerated and even encouraged in Germany. Anti-Semitism in Europe has never had a factual basis, and Jews have therefore only ever been used as scapegoats.

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