

It's Them or Us: Killing the Jews in Nazi Propaganda¹

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Why did the Nazis talk about killing the Jews and how did they present the idea to the German public?



“Revenge. Go where you wanted me, you evil spirit.” (1933)

Between 1919 and 1945, the core Nazi anti-Semitic argument was that Jews threatened the existence of Germany and the Germans, using nefarious and often violent means to reach their ultimate goal of world domination. Germans, on the other hand, were reacting in self-defense and resorted to violence only when driven to it by necessity. This essay considers a subset of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda: images depicting either violence by Jews against Germans or violence by Germans

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Texas A & M University Conference on Symbolic Violence, March 2012.

against Jews.² Although Nazi verbal rhetoric against Jews increased in vehemence over the years (particularly after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941), violent visual rhetoric declined both in frequency and vividness. The more murderous the Nazis became in practice, the less propaganda depicted violence by or against Jews.

I divide the essay into three sections: the period before the Nazi takeover in 1933, from 1933 to the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and from that invasion to the end of the war. I will take examples from a wide range of sources over the period, including posters, official Nazi party publications like *Der Angriff* in Berlin, the Nazi Party's weekly illustrated magazine (the *Illustrierter Beobachter*), daily newspapers, two weekly humor publications, the prestige weekly *Das Reich*, several contemporary films, and Julius Streicher's weekly anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*.³

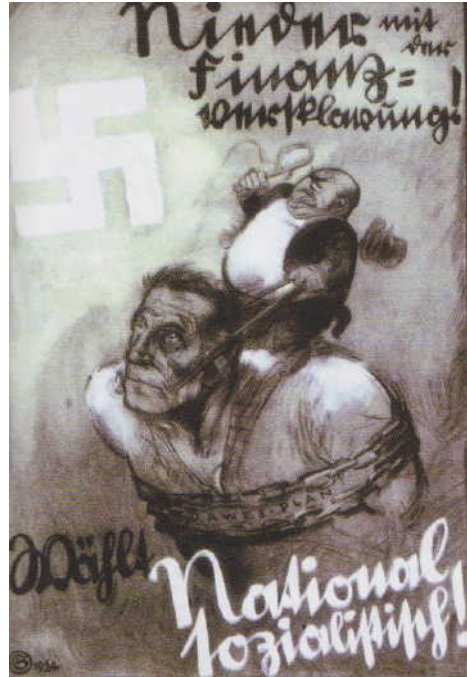
Prelude to Power: 1923-1933

Before Hitler took power in 1933, the Nazis presented everyone in Germany as victims of Jewish power. Jews committed violence against Germany as a nation, against German womanhood, and against Nazis.

² I will consider images that contain some depiction of violence, but also those that imply what Jolyon Mitchell calls the "off-stage presence" of violence, images that may not themselves be violent, but could result only through violence. See his *Media Violence and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

³ Streicher's publications are in some ways atypical. Although Nazism was anti-Semitic at its core, *Der Stürmer* was the single widely circulated periodical devoted entirely to anti-Semitism. Even many Nazis found it extreme. However, Streicher's close personal relationship with Adolf Hitler enabled him to publish his newspaper until February 1945 despite his removal as party leader early in the war, and his work clearly expressed the core Nazi anti-Semitic views. For further details, see my book *Julius Streicher*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001). Other recent publications on Streicher include two books by Franco Rualt, "*Neuschöpfer des deutschen Volkes*". *Julius Streicher im Kampf gegen "Rassenschande"* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006) and *Tödliche Maskeraden. Julius Streicher und die "Lösung der Judenfrage"* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009) and most recently, Julia Schwarz, "Visueller Antisemitismus in den Titelkarikaturen des 'Stürmer'," in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, v. 19 (Frankfurt: Campus, 2010), 197-216.

A 1924 poster, for example, depicted a midget Jew (representing all Jews) riding a German (representing all Germans) shackled by fetters labeled “The Dawes Plan,” an international agreement on German reparations payments due under the Treaty of Versailles. The German has a bit in his mouth and is driven with a whip.



“Down with Financial Enslavement! Vote National Socialist!” (1924)

The same theme was evident several years later in a cartoon from Joseph Goebbels’s Berlin weekly *Der Angriff*. German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann tells a bound and blindfolded Germany surrounded by bayonets that things are getting better and better while an oversized Jewish arm empties Germany’s pockets.



“Things are getting better and better for you” (circa 1927

Julius Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*, first published in 1923, carried a profusion of similar images. In 1930, for example, it portrayed a Jewish spider sucking the life from Germans. The spider was a particularly suitable visual metaphor from the



Sucked Dry (1930)

Nazi perspective since spiders do not physically overcome their prey, but rather trap them in an inescapable web, just as Jews were too weak and cowardly to physically overpower Germans. Streicher specialized in portraying Jews as animals or demonic, making his images even more disgusting.

Streicher also found unusual ways to suggest widespread Jewish violence against Germans. He promoted Medieval legends of ritual murder, claiming that Jews frequently murdered Christians to secure their blood for religious purposes. A 1926 image had three ugly Jewish men literally sucking the blood from a bound and naked woman.



Butchered Polish girl (1926)

Streicher’s material was extreme even for the Nazis, but it makes clear the ability of images to elicit disgust, a powerful emotion that readily leads to action to eliminate the cause of the disgust.

Another 1930 cartoon had Jewish physicians experimenting on a German patient, since people were objecting to animal experimentation. This theme was



“Well, if the animal protection society is against vivisection, that’s why we have the Goy...” (1930)

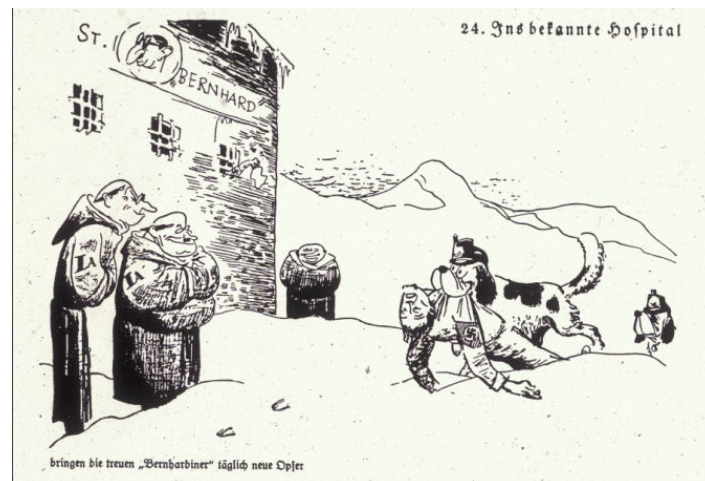
consistent with a common assertion that Jews viewed Gentiles as no better than animals (in contrast to Nazi propaganda, which saw Jews as the worst sort of animals). Streicher also had a variety of cartoons depicting Germans driven to suicide by Jewish oppression. Jews were literally killing Germans in a variety of graphic, disgusting ways, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly.

Nazis, too, were victims of Jewish violence. The clearest examples come from Goebbels’s *Der Angriff*, which conducted a running campaign aimed at Bernhard Weiß, the Jewish vice president of the Berlin police force. In one cartoon, Weiß is hanging Nazis on his Christmas tree, capped by a Star of David. A similar cartoon



“If HE were to celebrate Christmas” (circa 1927)

showed a “St. Bernard” dog bringing in a fallen Nazi, the Alpine monastery bearing a caricature of Bernhard Weiß.



“The loyal ‘Bernhardians’ bring new victims each day to the famous hospital” (circa 1927)

As political violence escalated in the final years of the Weimar Republic, Nazis claimed that their members killed or injured by the Communists or Socialists were victims of the Jews, who since they were by nature cowards used ignorant Germans to kill for them. A mid-1932 *Stürmer* cartoon was typical. A Nazi holds a fallen

comrade while his non-Jewish attackers flee. The caption claims Germans are fighting senselessly against Germans, with Jews provoking violence from behind the scenes.



“Blood against blood! Too cowardly to fight, the Yid incites others to murder.” (1932)

Given Nazi racial theory, a particular concern was sexual relations between Jews and Germans. Mixing races was always deleterious, since “bad blood” corrupted “good blood.” Since Jews according to the Nazis were ugly, they depended on reprehensible methods of sexual conquest. Non-violent means such as money were common, but also violence. Streicher specialized in stories and images alleging Jewish sexual violence. In a typical example, a girl covers under the huge claw-like hand of a Jew, his evil silhouette in the background. The caption at the bottom of the page: “German girls! Keep away from Jews!”

Der Stürmer

Nürnberg, im April 1926

HERAUSGEBER: JULIUS STREICHER

Alfred Guckenheimer und sein Kindermädchen

Wer ist Alfred Guckenheimer? - Der Reichende des Bezirks zur Befreiung der Antisemitismus - Der Reichende der amerikanischen Handelskammer - Der Jude und die Königskammer - Der Chef und der Jude - Hines den Klaffen der Kistenbeuge Judenweiss - Der Kampf mit dem Kindermädchen - Jüdische Weltanschauung

Mädchen Mädchen! Unter dem Titel steht die hier abgebildete Illustration. Sie zeigt eine jüdische Hand, die eine deutsche Mädchenhand ergreift. Die jüdische Hand ist riesig und dunkel, während die deutsche Hand klein und hell ist. Die deutsche Hand ist in einer hilflosen Geste ausgestreckt, während die jüdische Hand sie fest umschließt. Die Illustration ist in einem dunklen, schattigen Umfeld dargestellt, was die Machtlosigkeit der deutschen Hand betont.



Es entspann sich ein heisser Kampf. Das Mädchen rief um Hilfe.

Deutsche Mädchen! Hütet euch vor den Juden!

“There followed a hard fight. The girl screamed for help.” (1926)

These images were particularly striking and consistent with the larger theme. Although Jews were too cowardly to engage in manly combat and too disgusting to be physically attractive to German women, they were eager to overpower and rape German women, thereby corrupting the Aryan racial stock and speeding the day when Jews would dominate a world no longer possessing the racial purity to enable it to resist.

These and other images suggested a fundamentally strong Germany being destroyed by Jews. A 1926 *Stürmer* cartoon made the point clearly. A powerful German locomotive is switched to the track of death. Germany and the Germans



Life or Death (1926)

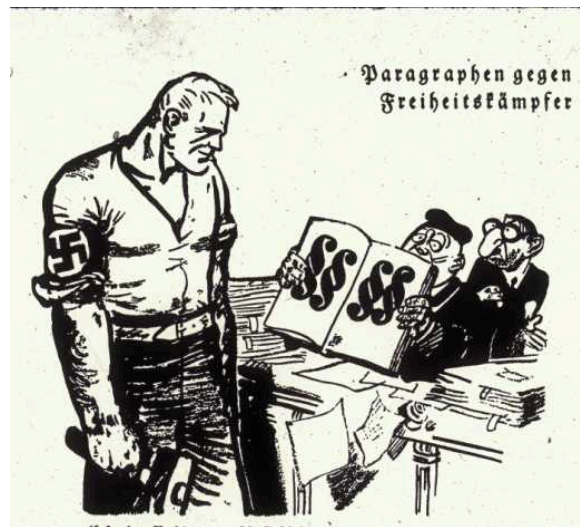
were portrayed stronger than the Jews. Only treachery enabled Jews to overcome the physically and morally superior host people.

In contrast to Jewish violence that was always directed to an evil end, German violence was in self-defense. Given the image of a massive threat, images sometimes showed a helpless rage from non-Nazis. A 1929 *Stürmer* cartoon had a father holding an injured or dead child in one arm while raising the other at Jews driving away in a fancy car. The injured child added intensity to the image of impotent rage — with the caption promising that violent retribution would one day come.



“The day of revenge is coming” (1929)

The Nazis, however, were not cowed by Jewish force. Just as Jews often towered over Germany in Nazi caricatures, Nazis towered over Jews. In a typical cartoon, a huge Nazi holding a hammer looks down on two midgets, at least one of whom is Jewish, who are trying to defend themselves by legal technicalities. The confident Nazi is not discouraged. His rolled-up sleeves and hammer will clearly



Laws vs. freedom fighters (circa 1927)

make short work of the opposition. A 1931 cartoon in the party's weekly the *Illustrierter Beobachter* had a Nazi lowering a pile driver on a Jew, a communist, and a capitalist.

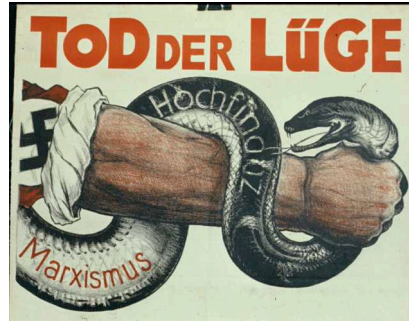


“In the beginning was strength...” (1931)

The large “1” represented the Nazi position on the ballot.⁴

In posters, the Nazis presented themselves as victors over the Jews in ways that suggested not only the defeat, but also the death of Jews. In the early 1930s, a vivid poster had a powerful Nazi arm gripping a serpent labeled “Marxism” and “High Finance.” Although there is no explicit Jewish reference, within the world of Nazi propaganda both terms were linked to the Jews and the serpent a common visual metaphor for the Jews.

⁴ The more votes in the previous election, the higher a party stood on the ballot for the next one. Since there were as many as thirty parties in some elections, ballot position was important.



Death to Lies (early 1930s)

Another poster from the same period has a ghostly figure slaying a dragon marked with Stars of David and the initials of Marxist parties that the Nazis considered part of the Jewish plot.



Before 1933

A 1932 cover of the Nazi satirical weekly *Die Brennessel* showed a Nazi lopping off the heads of tiny political opponents, Jews among them. Such caricatures had an obvious violent tone (lopping off heads is generally fatal), but the images



“Battling the Weeds” (1932)

could be interpreted in a symbolic rather than literal sense.

More ominous (but rare) caricatures suggested what would become known as the Final Solution. *Der Stürmer* carried a cover cartoon in 1927 depicting Jewish rats being killed by poison gas. The cartoon claimed that German art, commerce, science, and industry would thrive only when the Jewish vermin infesting them were exterminated. Although no one in 1927 could foresee the Holocaust,



When the vermin are dead, the German oak will flourish once more (1927)

the visual presentation of Jews as rats and the use of poison gas at least suggested what the Nazis were capable of.

In these and other images, a viewer could assume either the exaggeration of caricature or that the Nazis were in deadly earnest. This was advantageous, since the Nazis were appealing to a broad audience. To suggest too great a violent intent would alienate less radical Germans. Fervent anti-Semites, on the other hand, could take the images more literally.

Preface to Genocide: 1933-1941

After Hitler took power in 1933, Nazi anti-Semitism took a turn. Jews inside Germany were still a threat, but one whose total defeat was nearing. The Nazis began immediately restricting the rights of Jews, presenting their actions as peaceful

and justified means to eliminate harmful Jewish influence in Germany.⁵ Jews, according to propaganda, used underhanded means to establish their control whereas Nazis followed the peaceful method of laws and regulations to keep Jews from exploiting Germans. While making life ever more difficult for the Jews, the Nazis actually downplayed anti-Semitic propaganda (although Streicher's *Der Stürmer* maintained an almost entirely anti-Semitic focus). Since Nazis now had the power to carry out their policies, a goal was to minimize sympathy for Jews within Germany as well as unpleasant international publicity.

The basic propaganda line was that Jews were exploiting Germany's remarkable patience. A 1936 *Stürmer* cartoon has a Jew sitting down on a park bench next to a polite German, only to shove him aside. Life for German Jews in



“May I sit next to you...” (1936)

Jew in 1936 was already difficult, but the caricature suggests prosperous Jews continuing to exploit gullible Germans.

⁵ An excellent account of the period is Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York, HarperCollins, 1997).

Jews were still a deadly threat, however. Since they could no longer depend on their former political and economic power within Germany, they turned to individual acts of violence. Julius Streicher was the most prolific source of such images during the period, but they sometimes appeared in other popular periodicals as well. Streicher printed a large number of vivid caricatures and stories of alleged Jewish sexual violence, and a significant number of stories on Jewish ritual murder. There were several special editions on the latter theme which had enormous print runs. Since they resemble the images already discussed, there is no need to provide more here.⁶

There was also some emphasis on the alleged cruelty of Jewish kosher slaughter. A 1938 *Stürmer* edition carried grisly photographs of Jewish cruelty.



“How the Jew slaughters: Devilish cruelty to animals” (1938)

⁶ For examples, see <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/sturmer.htm>.

Since Nazi propaganda maintained that Jews viewed Gentiles as animals rather than fellow human beings, such photographs suggested corresponding violence toward Gentiles.

At the same time, caricatures showed varieties of Nazi violence against Jews. Some examples were abstract. Two months after the Nazi takeover, a *Stürmer* cartoon had the arm of the Ministry of Education hauling a Jewish teacher out of the classroom.



“Free the schools from the corruption of the Jewish spirit” (1933)

Such cartoons did not necessarily imply physical violence against Jews — but neither did they suggest gentle methods.

Five months after Hitler’s takeover, *Der Stürmer* carried the most ominous caricature I have found during the early years of the Third Reich. With a rising swastika sun in the background, a personification of Germany pushes a Jew (representing all Jews) off a cliff (see page 1). The consequences would, of course be fatal, but Germany is acting only in self-defense, doing to the Jews what the Jews were attempting to do to Germany.

Other caricatures addressed the theme. A 1933 *Stürmer* cover has a host of grim Nazis victims of Jewish violence before Hitler’s takeover. A battered Jew holds up an arm to defend himself. The caption states that past Jewish deeds have not been forgotten.



Do not think that we will forget, Yid! German blood did not flow in vain (1933)
A 1935 *Stürmer* cartoon had a firm hand grasping a Jewish serpent.



Don't let go! (1935)

The doggerel verse beneath was direct:

Do not become weary, do not weaken the grip.
 The fist may not release this poisonous worm.
 Better that one strangles it to death
 Than that our misery begin anew.

Despite images of violence against Jews, the Nazi press suggested that the few examples of real violence against Jews inside Germany were trivial in comparison to goings on in neighboring countries. One *Brennessel* cartoon had the world's press attending to a Jew being pestered by boys with a slingshot within Germany, while in the background the Soviets are hanging multitudes and the Poles and the Czechs are beating up others, presumably Germans — all ignored by the Jewish-dominated press



“Nothing is hidden from the spotlight of the world press” (1934)

I have found no images of violence against Jews during and after the November 1938 *Kristallnacht*. Although it was the most violent anti-Semitic episode prior to the war, Nazi press coverage emphasized the alleged cause (popular outrage at the killing of a German diplomatic in Paris by a Jew) and suggested that German violence was a justified and moderate response by the German public. Print coverage stated that the Jews were responsible for their fate. A *Stürmer* cover soon after depicted the pistol-wielding assassin about his work. Although the accompanying article stated: “It was unavoidable that a few windows



**“An infamous Jewish crime soils the land
That received the murdering Jew as a guest.
One only gives the murderous people free rein
If one treats the criminal too humanely!” (1938)**

were broken and that a fancy Jewish house or two suffered some damage,” it claimed that “no reasonable person” took international press reports of atrocities against Jews seriously.⁷

This response made strategic sense. Internal German reports on public opinion found that even many not sympathetic to the Jews were distressed by the burned synagogues and looted shops and homes they could see in their neighborhoods. To carry photographs or caricatures suggesting the full extent of the violence would have caused even more public alarm, and would have been appropriated by foreign news sources that already had sufficient material to convince their publics that German anti-Semitism was deadly.

Jews outside Germany were now the greatest danger as they attempted to stop the spread of anti-Semitism by destroying National Socialist Germany. The first

⁷ *Der Stürmer*, #48/1938. In fact, nearly one hundred Jews were killed, about 30,000 arrested, 1000 synagogues were burned, and thousands of Jewish homes and shops were looted or destroyed.

major, relatively unpopular, measure was the anti-Jewish boycott of 1 April 1933 allegedly to oppose international “atrocities propaganda” against Germany. Julius Streicher was the titular head. Uniformed Nazis stood outside Jewish shops throughout Germany, making citizens understandably reluctant to enter. The pretext was alleged Jewish atrocities propaganda throughout the world aimed at Germany. The images in world newspapers created an impression of barbarism that the Nazis did not wish to encourage. Seeing that the boycott was doing more harm than good, the Nazis declared victory after one day and ended the measure.

The propaganda campaign to suggest the international Jewish assault on Germany was ongoing throughout the 1930s. A typical *Stürmer* cartoon from 1936



“To enslave only one people is not the Jew’s goal. He wants to devour the entire world.” (1936)

presented an image of a huge Jew devouring the world’s peoples. The hammer and sickle on one side and the symbol of Freemasonry on the other suggested that they were allies of the Jewish attempt to subdue the world.

During the 1930s (and during the war), the Nazis also used photographs to depict international Jewish violence. Except for the two years of the German-Soviet

nonaggression treaty, there were frequent accounts of Bolshevik violence (to use the preferred Nazi term), which was synonymous with "International Jewry."



“Hell in Soviet Russia: How Bolshevism murders” (1936)

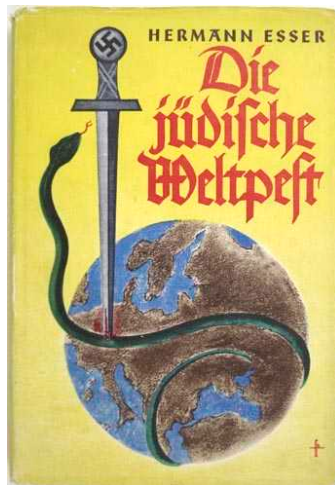
Many similar images appeared during the Spanish Civil War. The usual suggestion was that Jewish-Bolshevism intended to bring the same fate to Germany, and that it might already have succeeded had it not been for National Socialism’s determined resistance. The same theme was evident in the exhibition guide to a major anti-Semitic exhibition held in major German cities in 1937. An Eastern European Jew



The Eternal Jew (1937)

holds a Communist Germany under one arm along with a whip. The other hand holds coins, the “non-violent” Jewish method of overcoming opposition.

Before the war, the Nazis were reluctant to express the suggestion that Jews throughout the world should be annihilated. There were occasional images suggesting the death of “world Jewry,” for example the cover to the 1939 edition of Hermann Esser’s *The Jewish World Plague*. A Nazi sword pierces the Jewish serpent that has wrapped itself around the world. Once again, the image suggested but did



Dust jacket for *The Jewish World Plague* (1939)

not compel, thoughts of the end of the Jews. Even when Hitler stated on 30 January 1939 that were the Jews to succeed in launching another world war the result would not be the victory of the Jews, but rather “the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe,” he claimed that the defeat of the Jews would come in the rest of the world as it had in Germany — through propaganda rather than violence.⁸

During the first two years of World War II violent images involving Jews (as perpetrators or recipients of violence) declined significantly. There were several reasons. Jews had become more abstract, more distant, from Germans. About half the German Jewish population had been able to leave the country before the war began. The remaining Jews had been concentrated in larger cities, so most Germans had limited or no contact with them. After the defeat of France, England was the

⁸ Max Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945*, trans. Mary Fran Gilbert, 4 vols. (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1990-2004), vol. III, 1449.

enemy, and although Nazism claimed that the Jews were the driving force behind England's war against Germany it made more persuasive sense to attack the real English enemy rather than the alleged Jewish one.

There were occasional images suggesting Jewish responsibility for the war. Just before the fall of France in 1940, for example, the weekly humor magazine *Lustige Blätter* carried a cartoon depicting Jews in a less than threatening way.



“Plutocratic Dove Hunters” (1940)

A variety of Jews on a biplane with the French and British flags are attempting to kill the dove of peace, since wherever it landed it brought trouble for Jews. Even Streicher's *Stürmer* greatly decreased its anti-Semitic caricatures (but not its articles), focusing more on the evils of England and the glories of German military power. There were occasional caricatures depicting German violence against Jews,



“Under this symbol the Good must conquer,
 The offspring of Hell must succumb.
 And the world, free of Jewish oppression,
 Enters a new age.” (1940)

but in a general sense. The above caricature was titled “Satan’s End,” but did not necessarily imply physical death. Later in the same year, a *Stürmer* caricature had tiny Jews being swept away by an enormous broom, indicative of Nazi confidence at the end of 1940 that the “Jewish Question” in Europe was near its solution even if



“The New Order in Europe” (1940)

it was not clear what would happen to the Jews being swept away.

There was also a sudden burst of anti-Semitic films in the fall of 1940. In general, the Nazis avoided making films with too heavy a propaganda message. After early attempts, they realized that the public was unwilling to pay for propaganda when seeking entertainment. With strong pressure from Hitler, Joseph Goebbels ordered the production of three major films that were released in the last half of 1940 — *Die Rothschilds*, *Jud Süß*, and *Der ewige Jude*.⁹ The latter two particularly emphasized visual violence.

Jud Süß, based very loosely on historical events in the eighteenth century, was a box office success. It had the top German movie stars and the best available production facilities. As the film begins the new Duke of Württemberg needs money. Where else to get it than from the Jews — but the villain of the film, Süß Oppenheimer, will provide the cash only if the duke allows the previously-banned

⁹ See Rolf Giesen’s discussion of the films in *Nazi Propaganda Films: A History and Filmography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003), 118-142.

Jews to enter Stuttgart and appoints him finance minister. The Jews immediately begin to exploit their positions.

Crushing new taxes lead a desperate blacksmith to attack the coach in which Oppenheimer is riding. He persuades the duke to hang the blacksmith. Even worse, he rapes the film's heroine. She first attempts to resist, throwing the Jew to the



Jud Süß (1940)

floor. He is unable even to defeat a woman. However, prepared for resistance he resorts to a perfidious method. He has the woman's new husband tortured in an adjacent building. The bride recognizes that the agonized cries come from her husband. The only way to save her husband is to be raped by the Jew.



Jud Süß (1940)

She commits suicide immediately after.

There is now a popular uprising, and as the people's leaders demand that the duke renounce his finance minister, he reacts with anger and dies of a heart attack. Süß Oppenheimer is immediately arrested and put on trial. At first there is difficulty finding grounds for conviction, since Oppenheimer defends himself by asserting that everything he did was at the order of their duke. The chair of the proceedings, the father of the dead girl, refuses to convict without legal support — but finds an old book of Germanic law that prohibits sexual relations between Jews and Germans. With that legal principle Oppenheimer is taken to the gallows, where he begs for his



***Jud Süß* (1940)**

life as he is lifted into the air in the hangman's cage. The trap opens. The film ends with the solemn admonition to hold to the ancient law for all time to come.

Der ewige Jude, a pseudo-documentary, presented Jews as a bastard race of criminals intent on world domination. Much of it was filmed in Poland after the Nazi invasion. In an extended series of scenes it compared Jews to rats, carriers of a plague deadly to humanity. Two vivid images appear near the end of the film. In the first, the film presented the most disgusting images in all of Nazi cinema, a portrayal of Jewish ritual slaughter intended to make the practice as offensive as possible to the viewing public. Viewers were warned not to watch if they were of a sensitive nature, which only increased the power of the images. A rabbi holding a long knife



The Eternal Jew (1940)

approaches the cow about to be slaughtered. He slices the animal's throat and blood spurts out. The dying animal thrashes about in its death agonies.



The Eternal Jew (1940)

Soon after, the film ends with a clip from Hitler's 30 January 1939 speech on the "destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." Within the context of the film that destruction was justified. As a variety of writers observe, the film was intended to justify the most radical measures against the Jews. Unlike *Jud Süß*, however, *Der ewige Jude* was a box office flop.

Both films presented both despicable Jewish violence and justified German violence in response. Images and articles about them were widespread in the press throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. They were intended to intensify popular anger against Jews and they succeeded.¹⁰ These films were, however, unusual. There was nothing like them before or after 1940. They were inconsistent with the general propaganda line at the time. Perhaps they were intended to remind Germans that, although anti-Semitism was temporarily being downplayed, it remained at the core of Nazi ideology and that violence, even deadly violence, against Jews was justified.

In general, however, Jews played a less central role in most Nazi propaganda from the outbreak of the war until the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Nazis issued a weekly propaganda poster including both text and images, the *Parole der Woche*. It was posted in public places throughout the country. Only three of the issues between September 1939 and June 1941 focused primarily on the Jews. Several others made passing anti-Semitic references. Consistent with Hitler's principle of focusing propaganda on a single enemy, propaganda, whether verbal or visual, centered on England.

The Destruction of the Jewish Race in Europe: June 1941-1945

The invasion of the Soviet Union changed Nazi propaganda dramatically. The treaty with the Soviet Union, lasting 22 months, had been awkward. How could the Nazis make a pact with Bolshevism, which propaganda had long argued was central to the Jewish conspiracy to take over the world? The solution had largely been to ignore the Soviet Union, with occasional articles and images demonstrating the treaty's economic value to Germany. German propaganda now could return to one of its core themes: Jewish Bolshevism. England (and soon the United States) remained targets, but once the attack on the Soviet Union began Jews returned to

¹⁰ For a summary of audience responses, see Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939-1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 100-102. One person leaving *Jud Süß* was heard to say: "The Jew is shown here as he really is. I would have loved to wring his neck."

their old role as the central villains in Nazi propaganda. A Viennese newspaper carried this cartoon five days after the invasion began:



The Real Puppeteer (1941)

A Jew pulls the strings directing England and the Soviet Union, both bearing deadly weapons.¹¹ The point again was that Jews were too “clever” to risk their own lives, but rather directed others in their violent acts. Two weeks later the same newspaper brought in the United States as a Jewish ally. The Jews drive a war



The War Chariot! (1941)

¹¹ *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 27 June 1941, 2.

chariot pulled by the English Lion, the Russian bear, and Franklin Roosevelt.¹² The chariot's wheels are decorated with dollar signs, indicating that the Jews earn profits while others carry out the unpleasant and dangerous business of doing the fighting.

Two months after the invasion, a cartoon in *Lustige Blätter* had a statue of Stalin being pulled apart, revealing a Jew inside, a variant of the common theme of ripping off the Jewish mask.



"At the center" (1941)

An unusually violent image of alleged Jewish violence appeared in an early 1942 issue of *Der Schulungsbrief*, a party publication for political education with a large circulation. Party leaders at the local level encouraged every household to subscribe.

¹² *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten*, 7 July 1941, 2.



Der Schulungsbrief (early 1942)

A huge Jewish arm stabs Germany in the back during World War I. The image was unusual in that it showed a Jew as larger than Germany — however, since it referred to the previous war, it perhaps suggested the alleged power of Jews in the past rather than the present.

With the broadening of the war, Nazi verbal rhetoric increasingly called for the destruction, annihilation, or extermination of the Jews. Hitler regularly recited his 1939 “prophesy” about the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe. Joseph Goebbels called for the annihilation of the Jews. Nazi speakers received guidelines on how to speak about the destruction of the Jews. After Stalingrad, two major anti-Semitic campaigns in 1943 spread vehement anti-Semitic words across newspapers and magazines.¹³

¹³ For more extensive discussions of Nazi verbal anti-Semitic propaganda during World War II, see my “The Argument for Genocide in Nazi Propaganda,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91 (2005), 37-62, and Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi*

There were a fair number of images showing Jewish violence along the familiar lines. There were images depicting Jews as the power behind Germany's enemies, a power that if it succeeded in destroying Germany would then destroy its temporary allies. A 1943 cartoon in *Lustige Blätter*, for example, had a Jewish monster with its tentacles strangling China, Russia, England, and the United States.



1943

A *Stürmer* image the same year had the world's people in chains while a Jew leered at the enslaved planet. These images, however, remained less vivid than verbal anti-Semitism, which incessantly claimed that the Jews intended the complete extirpation of Germany.



“The Devil’s Plan” (1943)

Later in the war as Germans increasingly realized that the war could be lost, images of Jewish violence increased in vividness. The core Nazi propaganda line was that the war was a matter of life or death in a literal sense. If Germany lost it and its people would be extirpated by the Jewish-led coalition. An August 1944 cover from *Lustige Blätter* depicted an enormous ape bearing the symbols of the Soviet Union, England, and the United States, with a Star of David on its forehead. With barred teeth, a huge club, and a bomb labeled “murder,” the beast strides



His way to “liberate” Europe!” (1944)

forward to subjugate Europe. Jews were again grim figures threatening Germany’s existence.

Violent images of violence against Jews, however, remained almost as uncommon as they were before the invasion of the Soviet Union. Several posters like the one below from the first half of 1943 still depicted a towering German soldier and a worker driving midget enemies before them, a Jew included.



“The slogan for 1943: Forward until final victory!” (1943)

The overall Nazi message focused on the general destruction of the Jews, not that of individuals. In verbal propaganda as well, there was little to lower the level of abstraction, to indicate that specific Jews were being killed.

Aside from combat pictures that often showed the destruction caused by German military forces, the Nazis were entirely willing to use images of specific human beings being killed — but usually by their enemies.¹⁴ During one of the 1943 anti-Semitic campaigns, a pamphlet was issued with graphic photographs of alleged Jewish-Bolshevist violence in Spain and the Baltic states.¹⁵ Other cartoons claimed that the Allies were murderous. American concern about the Jews was hypocritical, for example, given what they did to American Blacks. A 1944 cartoon in *Lustige Blätter* commented on an American proposal to erect a monument to its Black

¹⁴ Minimizing images of death in warfare was common in wars before governments lost control of the image with the spread of technology. The American government, for example, banned all images of dead American soldiers during World War I and for the first twenty-one months of World War II to avoid adverse public reactions. When the U.S. began to release images of Americans killed later in World War II, one reason was to “nullify any voices that might be raised here if we should undertake bombing of Japanese cities.” See George H. Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁵ *Bolschewisierung: was heißt das in Wirklichkeit?* (Berlin: Nibelungen Verlag, 1943). A translation is at: <http://www.calvin.edu/cas/gpa/bolshevism1943.htm>.

citizens. The magazine suggested an appropriate monument would depict the lynching of an American Black. The Nazis, aware of widespread rumors within Germany of the massacre of Jews, had no wish to make clear the details of what they were doing. Such images could at least ease the consciences of Germans, telling



Our Proposal (1944)

them that the Allies were as murderous as the rumors they heard suggested that Germany was.

One might also consider the prestige weekly Goebbels established in 1940: *Das Reich*. Intended to reach an educated audience both in Germany and the rest of Europe, each issue carried a lead article by Joseph Goebbels. Most issues also carried an editorial cartoon. Goebbels made at least four calls to annihilate the Jews in his lead articles. I found only two editorial cartoons between 1940 and 1945 that had clear violent anti-Semitic content. One in the summer of 1941 addressed a standard theme in Nazi propaganda — the Jewish plan to wipe out the German people. It referred to American Jew Theodore Kaufman's self-published book *Germany Must Perish!*, in which Kaufman called for the sterilization of all Germans as

a “civilized” way of eliminating the German menace to civilization.¹⁶ The cartoon had one man telling another that with a surgical knife and anesthesia he could exterminate the German people. The response: “Sure — but will they let me do it?”¹⁷ Written at the height of Nazi confidence, it presented the threat as ludicrous. Two weeks later, a cartoon had Roosevelt and Churchill discussing the Atlantic Charter. In the background a Jew representing international finance sits atop a “world police” helmet, which in turn rests on a bleeding planet.¹⁸ Goebbels, too, preferred words to images when talking about the annihilation of the Jews.

Verbal and Symbolic Violence

Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda shifted for tactical reasons over the years. Before 1933 Jews were presented as a powerful threat within Germany. After 1933, they became a decreasing threat within Germany, but an increasing one abroad. Verbal and visual anti-Semitism also changed over the years.

Symbolic images were particularly well designed to elicit disgust toward Jews. Throughout the Nazi period, Jews were presented as disgusting both in appearance and action. Nazi violence against them was carried out by attractive figures in “non-disgusting” ways. Carl Plantinga, writing on film, discusses the relationship between physical and sociomoral disgust. He argues that “[s]ince disgust is by nature an emotion that moves toward rejection, it is hardly surprising to find that physical disgust is used to create—whether explicitly or implicitly—moral or ideological antipathy....” Evil movie characters often have disgusting appearances that “become a metaphor for their malevolence.” Within the context of a film, disgust justifies violent action: “In vengeance narratives, physical disgust is often used to make dispatch of the criminal an act that functions to ritually purify

¹⁶ For details on the matter, see my “The Argument for Genocide in Nazi Propaganda,” 42-46.

¹⁷ *Das Reich*, #32/1941, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Das Reich*, #34/1941, p. 3.

society of an unwanted contaminant.”¹⁹ In Nazi anti-Semitic images, disgusting Jews committed disgusting acts of violence, and were in turn the recipients of “redemptive violence” intended to remove a corruption from the German community.

Caricature was particularly suited to Nazi purposes. Caricatures can express ideas photographs cannot — including things that do not exist. It is hard to present an alleged Jewish plot to rule the world in a photograph. It is easy to draw a Jewish serpent wrapped around the world. Scenes of rape or ritual murder could also be expressed in graphic images unlikely to be photographable.

Furthermore, images of violence against specific identifiable Jews would have made concrete things that the Nazis wanted to remain abstract. It was one thing to call for the “annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe” in words. The phrase could be understood in differing ways. It would have been quite different to show piles of murdered Jews. The Nazis knew well that such images would backfire. Their claim, after all, was that they represented European Civilization in the battle against Jewish-Bolshevism. Mass murder was what the Jewish enemy allegedly did. With grim cynicism, Goebbels wrote in November 1941 (when the Holocaust already in its early stages) that the Nazi measure requiring Jews to wear the Yellow Star was “a remarkably humane measure on our part, a hygienic and prophylactic measure to be sure that the Jew cannot infiltrate our ranks unseen to sow discord.”²⁰ When Goebbels publicly suggested anti-Semitic violence, as he did in a May 1943 article in *Das Reich*, he kept to words: “The Jews laughed in Germany, too, when they first saw us. They are not laughing any longer. They chose to wage war against us. But that war is turning against them. When they planned a war to totally destroy the German nation, they signed their own death warrant.”²¹

¹⁹ See his discussion of disgust in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 203-217.

²⁰ “Die Juden sind schuld!” *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943), 85-91. A translation is at: <http://www.calvin.edu/cas/gpa/goeb1.htm>.

²¹ “Der Krieg und die Juden,” *Der steile Aufstieg* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1944), 263-270. A translation is at: <http://www.calvin.edu/cas/gpa/goeb37.htm>.

The more the Nazis killed, the less they wanted to make it known that they intended their rhetoric literally. To that end words were better suited than images.