



Liberated Prisoners of Wöbbelin Concentration Camp, May 4, 1945 – Everett Historical

***First, they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Socialist.***

***Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Trade Unionist.***

***Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Jew.***

***Then they came for me—and there was no one
left to speak for me.***

— Martin Niemöller

Yvonne

*As a Christian I have no duty to allow myself to be cheated,
but I have the duty to be a fighter for truth and justice. . .
I offer you struggle, danger and death.*

— Adolf Hitler

I don't know how long I slept, but when I awakened, I saw Giovanni in the distance walking along the canal. When he returned, he said, "Did you have a good sleep?"

"I thought you were going to sleep too?"

"I did a little, but felt like walking along the canal. How do you feel?"

"Wonderful, just wonderful," I said, slipping my arms around his neck. "It was a beautiful little nap. Your massage did it."

"I'm going to make you feel even better." He slipped off my pants, poured fragrant oil into his hand and began massaging my legs.

"That's a different fragrance."

"It is Rosa damascena, also known as Attar of rose. It balances the hormones."

"It smells heavenly."

"Just lie back," he said, his strong fingers moving in circular motions on my calves. "Close your eyes. I'll take you on a little voyage,"

"It feels marvelous."

"Just empty your mind."

"Oh, Lord ... it's intense."

"Just close your eyes and drift."

"One reason I'm so tense, I've been concerned about Céline."

“How’s that?”

“She doesn’t have any friends besides Yasmina. I’m afraid she’s taking after me, isolating herself.”

“But you have friends.”

“I don’t see them often. I work all the time. Since Mama died, I’ve treated Céline like an equal. I sometimes wonder if I’ve made a mistake by treating her like an adult. She takes science and French classes with Yasmina, but she’s never brought anyone home except Yasmina. By schooling her at home, I’ve taken over too much of her life.”

“But you’ve said, Céline couldn’t go to a regular school because it wouldn’t be possible to fit in János Orosháza’s ballet classes.”

“I’ve done all I’ve could to give her all the classes she chooses. She’s become a scholar because of my influence. I’ve encouraged her intellect because I love bouncing ideas off her. Perhaps I’ve done it for selfish reasons, but it bothers me that I’ve isolated her. I don’t want to make her a carbon copy of me.”

“She certainly talks a lot with me.”

“Céline is comfortable with adults.”

“She’s not shown an interest in boys?”

“She’s advanced in her mind, but not socially. She’s the opposite of her friend Yasmina who has boys chasing her. But Céline has never talked about a boy, except for the time when a little Danish boy kissed her on the beach when she was eleven. If I bring up boys, she segues into another subject or says something about how immature boys are. It’s a profound mystery because my sister and I talk about everything. God knows how many hours she’s listened to me talking about my problems with Emile. She’s my therapist. But about romance — only silence.”

“You’re worrying about something that’s unavoidable. Under the circumstances of her passion for dance, you had no choice but to educate her yourself. From the wisdom I see in her, I think by the time she’s seventeen, she’s going to really come out.”

Giovanni finished with one leg and began on the other. I lay quietly while his strong fingers pressed into my calves, stroking my muscles while overhead a little wind rustled the leaves of the linden tree, its limbs swaying with the flight of squirrels.

When he finished, he lifted my foot and kissed my toes. Putting his fragrant oils back into his little leather bag, he said, “You didn’t finish telling me how the French finally defeated the Germans in the Great War.”

“Well, it’s a frightful story. They had a lot of help from the Brits and the Yanks. Things got worse before they got better. The Germans were suffering as much as the French from the torrent of blood. The British fleet had blockaded their ports. Their work force had been dying at the front for four years.

“When the February Revolution broke out in St. Petersburg in 1917, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known by his nom de guerre, Lenin, who’d been exiled to Switzerland, was burning to get back to Moscow. But due to the war, all travel was blocked through the battles lines. Knowing it was the moment to act, joined by other Russian dissidents, Lenin requested that the German Foreign Ministry help them get back to Moscow. An emissary recommended the idea to Ludendorff, saying that the way to take Russia out of the war was to send the Bolshevik Lenin to overthrow the Provisional government.



Lenin – Train to Petragrad – Drawing by Pyotr Vasilievich Vasiliev, Public Domain



Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, 1917 – Painting by Hugo Vogel, published by Verlag Gerhard von Stalling, Berlin, 1928, public domain, Wikimedia

“Ludendorff saw the opportunity and seized it — the best way to destabilize Russia. Germany arranged for a train with extraterritorial status to take 32 revolutionaries and Lenin back to Russia. While traveling on the private coach through wartime Germany, Lenin said he saw only women, teenagers, and children in the fields. All the able-bodied men had been sent to the front. Germany had no more men.”

“Astounding,” Giovanni said. “The Germans were responsible for getting the leader of the Russian Revolution, safely back to Russia? I’m surprised a communist revolutionary would trust the Imperial Germans.”

“It’s hard sometimes to know what is true. One has to suspend judgment at times. But if it were true, it was a shrewd calculation on the part of Lenin and the Germans. They even gave Lenin an escort of German officers and provided funding for the Bolshevik revolution. By destabilizing Russia with a revolution, the German high command was predicting that the Russian army would collapse, which would allow the transfer of German troops to the Western Front, giving them numerical superiority. Their prediction came true. The Bolshevik Revolution took Russia out of the war.”



Russian Imperial troops moving to the front – Author, Georges H. Mewes, *National Geographic Magazine*, public domain, Wikimedia

“How ironic, the very man that the Germans were helping to create a revolution in Russia, would establish a dictatorship that would destroy Germany on the Eastern Front in World War Two.”

“Later, Ludendorff regretted the decision to send Lenin to Russia. He even blamed the decision on Chancellor von Hindenburg. While Ludendorff’s army was successful in defeating the unprepared Russian forces on the Eastern Front, it took them a lot longer than they’d foreseen. The second front in the East meant they had fewer divisions for a quick conquest of Paris. With Russia finally knocked out. General Ludendorff began transferring his army to the West. The Germans were training new ‘storm trooper’ divisions for one last all-out offensive to punch a hole through Allied lines to Paris. Ludendorff, a born warrior with tremendous energy, was facing a do or die moment, marshalling the very last resources of Germany for one final roll of the dice. He had to defeat the French immediately. He had no more reserves.”

“Germany,” Giovanni said, “had bit off more than they could chew.”

“Germany was desperate by 1918. The demands of the war had reduced the German economy by half. With many women working in the factories, there were few hands left to tend the farms. With the fields uncultivated, there wasn’t enough food to fill the bellies of the fighting men. The demands of the war had hollowed out the economy. Anti-war sentiment was rising with hunger, anti-war marches, and men on strike.

“The collapse of German agriculture during World War One was effectively used a few years later by Hitler to promote his idea of *Lebensraum*. The idea that science would be able to discover new ways of feeding masses of people was a Jewish plot. Hitler’s solution was to seize the Ukraine, eliminate the Slavs and Jews.

“With the collapse of Germany’s ability to feed the people, Ludendorff realized that he had little time left and plunged ahead with his last gamble to seize Paris. The giant Krupp railway guns fired continuously at the capital, the Germans pressing forward until they were at Chateau-Thierry, only 50 miles from Paris. Parisians were fleeing south. Germans were celebrating in Berlin. They thought it was all over.

But, the celebration was too early. There was a fatal weakness in the German success. The troops couldn’t be easily supplied by horse-drawn wagons crossing terrain devastated by artillery without a chicken or pig in sight. The German soldier had been pushed to the limit. He was hungry. His morale was disintegrating.”

“I see the end coming,” Giovanni said, “hundreds of thousands of Germans dying just to advance a few yards.”



With the Germans only 50 miles from Paris, American Expeditionary Forces under General John “Black Jack” Pershing prepare for their first major battle at Chateau-Thierry – Author, U.S. Army Signal Corps, public domain, Wikipedia

“That pretty much says it,” I said. “The insanity of the war was captured ten years later in a novel written by Erich Maria Remarque, a German veteran of the war. No writer I’ve read has captured the life of the soldier in the trenches as well as Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. When the National Socialist Party came to power in 1933, Remarque’s novel was one of the first books burned by the Nazis in their spectacular propaganda burnings for its ‘degenerate portrayal of the German army.’”

“After they burned his books, what happened to him?”



Erich Maria Remarque, 1916, Author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, translated into 30 languages and adapted as a Universal Studios movie in 1930 – VeertienAchtien.be, public domain

“The Nazis proclaimed him a French Jew and revoked his citizenship. After Goebbels had banned his books, Remarque escaped from Switzerland to the United States where he became a citizen. Because Remarque got away, the Nazis took their vengeance by charging his sister with destroying morale with anti-German sentiment.”

“They put her in prison for destroying morale?”

“They beheaded her.”

“By the guillotine?”

“By the guillotine.”

“Remarque is fascinating. What became of him?”

“He had an eventful life. A handsome man with a riveting gaze, Remarque had affairs with actresses Hedi Lamarr and Marlene Dietrich.”

“When I was a kid, I thought Dietrich was stunning in von Sternberg’s *Shanghai Express*.”



Erich Maria Remarque and Marlene Dietrich at the NYC German restaurant The Blue Ribbon – public domain

“During the time between the wars when Remarque had a love affair with Marlene Dietrich, they visited the brothel Le Chabanais.”

“Denis told me that brothels operated throughout the war.”

“With men separated from their wives, the brothels were popular during the war, especially Le Chabanais. Glamorous Parisian bordellos had been created during the Belle Époque when aristocrats and the very wealthy bought shares in the *maisons closes* which assured them access to an erotic gentleman’s club. Marcel Proust invested in l’hôtel Marigny, a male brothel which allowed him to peer through a small concealed window to watch aristocrats sharing steam baths with soldiers, images which he used in the creation of Baron de Charlus in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust’s 2,000-page meditation on the mystery of memory.”

“Proust was a voyeur?”

“In a sense, all authors are voyeurs. Located near the National Library of France and the Palais Royal, Le Chabanais had décors of architectural fantasies costing millions of francs with rare antiques and stained-glass windows, 30 private rooms fashioned in exotic motifs, Moorish, Hindu, Pompeiian, Venetian and a Japanese room which won honors in design at the 1900 Paris World Fair.



Le Chabanais, The Hindu Room, Parisian brothel near the National Library of France – Unknown author, public domain

“Queen Victoria’s son, the Prince of Wales, in the long period before he ascended to the throne at age 59 and became King Edward VII had his private room at Le Chabanais furnished with a copper bathtub in the form of half swan and half woman in which his favorite girls would bathe in champagne. A man of great charm and bonhomie, The Prince of Wales, nicknamed Bertie, married Princess Alexandra of Denmark to the irritation of Queen Victoria who favored the side of Germany in the dispute with Denmark over the province of Schleswig and Holstein. Bertie constantly annoyed his mother because of an obsession with indulging his sexual appetites and his desire to meet Giuseppe Garibaldi.”

“That’s wild. Edward VII admired an Italian revolutionary?”

“Bertie was an unpredictable king. Despite Bertie’s erotic fascinations, when he became king, he loosened the restrictions of society. Gifted socially, he eased tensions in the nation by cultivating politicians from all parties and making friends of men with republican sentiments. Bertie’s wife Princess Alexandra had no option but to overlook her husband’s numerous assignations which included actress Sarah Bernhardt and Winston Churchill’s mother, Lady Randolph Churchill. Although it was a time of virulent anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus case, Edward socialized with Jews and on his tour of India, criticized the treatment of Indians by British officials, though it did absolutely nothing to change the prejudices of the colonial administrators. One of the originators of the Welfare State and an advocate for nuclear disarmament, J. B. Priestley, the author of *Man and Time*, said Edward VII was the most popular king Britain had known in the last four centuries. But in the debauched years before the Prince of Wales became king, Bertie made Le Chabanais famous throughout Europe.”

“Denis told me that when the Nazi officers occupied Paris, they took over Le Chabanais.”

“In Vichy France, the Nazi seized what they wanted. Abwehr, the German military intelligence agency, took over the Hotel Lutetia for their headquarters. Famous for its Hemingway Bar, The Ritz Hotel, created by César Ritz and Chef Auguste Escoffier, was taken over by the Luftwaffe. The Governor of Paris, General Dietrich von Choltitz, commanded the Hotel Meurice. The Wehrmacht Heer took over the Hotel Majestic. The Nazi forced the Vichy government to pay for the occupying German army of 300,000 men, a staggering amount of 20 million Reichsmarks every day. The Germans seized 80% of food production reducing the French to starvation, especially kids who were suffering from malnutrition. Paris was living under grim circumstances. Two million French husbands and fiancés had been sent to concentration camps or conscripted for slave labor

in the factories and mines of Germany leaving many women with no means of support. Respectable housewives, shop girls, and schoolteachers went to work in the bordellos sleeping with the enemy. It's estimated that during the war 10,000 full or part time prostitutes were working in Paris, six times as many as before the war. Following the Napoleonic tradition, German medics examined the *poules* several times a week to insure against an outbreak of venereal disease.”

“The Germans were brilliant,” Giovanni said, “at administering precise details, but failed to grasp how difficult it is to fight a war with half the world.”

“Failure comes from swallowing your political indoctrination. While all was rosy behind the doors of Le Chabanais, outside those charmed walls, the people were starving. The brothel workers lived a life of luxury, showered with gifts which the Madame insisted the Nazi officers bring to the girls, chocolates and cigarettes, lingerie and nylon stockings, foie gras and champagne. Every kind of sadomasochist fantasy was offered in the private rooms which one writer called ‘a temple of aristocratic eroticism.’ The horizontal collaborators were charmed by the Prussian manners of the Teutonic warriors who spoke French and English, especially the elite, young SS officers dressed all in black.”



Schutzstaffel SS – Siehe, warrelics.eu

“How could a Wehrmacht officer afford such extravagance?”

“That’s a good question. One visit alone could set an officer back a week’s salary. When a soldier is faced with death, money has no meaning when weighed against the nihilism of the war. In the summer of 1941, just before the Germans were to leave for the Russian front, there was a cyclone of sexual activity at Le Chabanais. The warriors had no idea if they would survive the war. Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, the creator of the Gestapo, the abbreviation for *Geheime Staatspolizei*, the Secret State Police, commander of the Luftwaffe, and morphine addict, frequently visited Le Chabanais when he came to Paris to collect the art that the Nazi agents had confiscated from Jewish collections.”

“Goering was a morphine addict?”

“A serious one. In 1923, Goering was shot in the groin during Hitler’s and Ludendorff’s Beer Hall Putsch in Munich.”

“Hitler’s putsch failed?”

“It failed. Hitler, inspired by Benito Mussolini’s success the previous year in his March on Rome, with leaders of the Kampfbund, decided to lead a massive march on the Weimar Republic government in Berlin to seize power. Germany was suffering a financial crisis. To guarantee that Germany would repay the World War One war reparations, French and Belgian troops had occupied the Ruhr, the industrial region of Germany in 1923. Although Germany’s industrial plants hadn’t been destroyed during the war, the London Ultimatum of May 1921 demanded payments in either gold or foreign currency plus a certain percentage of Germany’s exports. Unlike the French who had financed the war with their first income tax, the Kaiser and German Parliament had prosecuted the war by relying on borrowing which left Germany deeply in debt over and beyond the reparation debt. To pay the debt, Weimar printed masses of banknotes to buy foreign currency.

“What the Allies didn’t know was that since 1922, under the secret Treaty of Rapallo the new leaders of the German army had entered a secret partnership with the Bolsheviks to develop new weaponry, tanks, and airplanes, all of which was forbidden by the Allies under the Versailles Treaty. To get around the treaty prohibitions, German industrialists built factories in Russia to manufacture poison gas, explosive shells, and military aircraft. In return, the Soviets sent their officers to Germany to study the methods of the German Military Staff.”



Adolf Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch, Munich 1923 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikipedia

“Astounding, I wonder if any German or Soviet officials imagined that in a decade Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia would become virulent enemies.”

“At that moment, Germany and Russia saw an advantage in secret cooperation, that is, until it was no longer an advantage after Hitler rise to power. Such is the modus operandi of governments. The Weimar printing of banknotes eventually set off a disastrous hyperinflation in which the German Mark became worthless. During a time of political violence in the ‘30s, Hitler decided to seize the critical moment or else his supporters might turn to the Communists who were attracting workers. In order to increase the prestige of the Kampfbund, Hitler urged World War One hero, Erich Ludendorff to join the putsch against the Weimar Republic. When things began to go badly for the putsch, Ludendorff and Hitler joined by Goering and Röhm, marched 2,000 men to the Bavarian Defense Ministry. They were intercepted by the Bavarian State Police. Sixteen Nazis were killed and Goering was shot in the groin.”

“I get it. To deal with the pain, Goering became addicted.”

“It could be the morphine that inspired Goering’s bizarre military costumes. A World War One ace fighter pilot known as the ‘Blue Max’ with 22 kills, Goering was a sybaritic hedonist living in a palace in



Hermann Göring on his 52nd birthday, January 1945, shortly before the end of the war – Author, Robert Röhr, public domain, Wikimedia

Berlin and at Karinhall, a 100,000-acre estate with a hunting lodge and spacious art gallery in the forest of Schorfheide. He accumulated vast wealth through a state-owned consortium, the Hermann Goering Works, building aircraft and armaments, taking bribes for preferential contracts with German industrialists. A narcissist obsessed with art and ostentatious military uniforms, he shared many of the same personality traits as Mussolini, often changing costumes several times a day when he at Karinhall. But the vain Reichsmarschall was popular with the public, admired for his bluster and vitality which the Germans found warm and colorful. I'm sure it crossed Goering's mind to steal the murals of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec off the wall of Le Chabanais."



Au Salon de la rue des Moulins – Painting by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi, France, public domain, Wikimedia

“It’s a wonder,” Giovanni said, “that the Resistance didn’t seize the opportunity and assassinate Goering. After all, Goering was second in power only to Hitler. Eliminating Goering would have been a great victory.”

“I don’t know the answer to that. I suppose it was because Goering’s visits were carefully concealed and a contingent of SS troops ensured his safety. Goering had great powers of persuasion. On the Day of Judgment at Nuremberg, Goering even had the courtroom laughing. But they still sentenced him to death by hanging. The fate of Le Chabanais was sealed when George Patton’s Third Army and General Leclerc’s 2nd French

Armored Division approached Paris and Colonel Henri Rol-Tanguy, the communist leader of the resistance group, Francs-tireurs et partisans, called for a general uprising which succeeded in forcing General von Choltitz to surrender 13,000 troops. Enraged at the collaborators, the Parisians drug the prostitutes out of the *maisons closes*, shaved off their hair in front of jeering mobs, stripping them naked and carved swastikas on their foreheads. General de Gaulle's wife, Yvonne, who despised the brothels, supported Marthe Richard, a counselor of Paris and former prostitute, in passing the loi de Marthe Richard which closed the *maisons closes*. It was Le Chabanais' final curtain."

"Tell me more about Remarque."

"Remarque was smitten with actresses. And actresses are smitten with famous men. Last year, a German film director, Douglas Sirk made a film based on Remarque's novel *A Time to Live and A Time to Die*. Remarque recently married Paulette Godard, Charlie Chaplin's paramour and heroine of *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator*. Remarque's intensity was irresistible to women.



Erich Maria Remarque, Hotel Curhaus, Davos, Switzerland, 1929
– Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“One of the things that makes *All Quiet on the Western Front*, so moving is Remarque’s gift for describing unforgettable images of war. He described the artillery bombardment as a ‘field of surging sea with daggers of flame leaping up like fountains of fire.’ After a break in the fighting, the German troops were called up for an offensive. On the way to the front, his main character, Paul Baumer and childhood friends who’d joined up right out of school, passed a destroyed school house. Against one wall were stacked hundreds of brand new coffins of pine, waiting for those who were yet to be killed.

“You can say one thing about the Germans,” Giovanni said, “in whatever they do, they are thorough.”

“The Germans surpassed themselves in their Teutonic perfection, but as Remarque observes, there was as much failure of foresight as there was perfection. War never turns out like the generals calculate. In the third and fourth year of the war, the Germans were sending seventeen-year-old recruits with no training to the front.



15-year-old soldier, Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism fighting with the German Wehrmacht, 1941 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives

“The same tragedy occurred in World War Two when the Nazi war machine was collapsing. Recently, I saw Bernhard Wicki’s film, *Die Brücke, The Bridge*, based on Gregor Dornmeister’s World War Two novel about 16-year-old boys in military school who are given a suicide mission to defend a bridge against American tanks. All of them die. Although the war was lost, the Germans sacrificed young boys in a hopeless quest.”

“That’s the ultimate crime, sending children to war.”

“The boys in Remarque’s novel knew what a hand grenade was but little else. They were helpless in their lack of knowledge of how to survive. They had no idea how to distinguish the sound of the shells and what they might do to evade them. Paul taught them how to listen for the sound of the incoming shells, how to run from a mortar, how to decide where shells will drop, how they will burst, how to find shelter from them and how to simulate a dead man when overrun in an attack. But when the shells came in and all hell broke loose, the kids forgot everything that Paul had taught them. Unable to tell shrapnel from high-explosives, the kids died as they listened to the thundering shells falling in the rear failing to hear the shrill whistle of incoming shrapnel shells. They flocked together like sheep instead of scattering. They fell like flies. The government had sent them to their death with practically no preparation. For every experienced soldier who died, five or ten recruits met their death. In one dugout, Paul found the new recruits dead with blue heads and black lips. When the kids had seen others above taking off their gas masks, they took theirs off too, unaware that gas is heavier than air and clings to the hollows.”

“Paul mourns the young recruits who didn’t know how to stay alive, kids dying for no reason but the vanity of a nation. On a break in the fighting they bathe in a stream. Lying in the grass watching them swim, Paul wonders how many will be alive in a months’ time and whether he will be alive to see them swim. In death he sees their faces, the downy cheeks, the expressionless faces of dead children, uniforms too big, shoulders too narrow, bodies too slight for the uniforms never intended for bodies who were not yet men.”

“I can see,” Giovanni said, “why Hitler despised Remarque’s book.”

“Throughout the night, the soldiers could hear the wounded in No Man’s Land, crying out in pain. The torrent of artillery shells made it impossible to bring the dying in. The cries of the dying went on for a long time. By morning they could no longer be heard. If there was lull in the shelling, they’d go out at night for their dead. There’s a painting by Georges Paul Leroux. It’s called, *Aux Eparges, soldiers burying their dead by moonlight*.



British Dead After German Phosgene Gas Attack, 19 July 1916 – Author, Herman Rex, public domain, Wikimedia

“After the chlorine gas shells had been fired on enemy lines, the Germans hurled themselves into the French trenches to find men gassed by the shells, stiff as if stricken with apoplexy with blue faces, men with scorched lungs who’d died of hemorrhages and suffocation. Remarque tells of the sudden death of the high explosives smashing two men so that you could scrape them off the wall with a knife and bury them in a little tin box. One has his lower body torn off, a cigarette still burning in his mouth. And the horses are dying everywhere. The horses pull the carts, the caissons that furnish the war. There were millions of horses in the war, brought to the fields of death from all over the world. And millions died, wounded with broken backs, broken legs, running wild with terror in No Man’s Land, a belly ripped open, their guts slithering out, galloping in the mist, difficult to put out of their misery, appalling screams of mad horses tearing the air.”

“My God,” Giovanni said, “I never thought of how brutal the war is to animals.”



Gassed – Painting by John Singer Sargent, 1919, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



British troops blinded by poison gas, Battle of Estaires, 1918 – Author, Thomas Keith Aitken, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



French calvary crossing a river on their way to Verdun – Unknown author, *National Geographic Magazine*, public domain, Wikimedia



Horses killed by artillery fire, Ypres Sector, 1917 – National Library of New Zealand, Wikimedia. 8 million horses and mules were killed in WWI.



Wehrmacht horse carriage sunk in mud, Kursk Oblast, Russia, 1942 – Author, Dinstühler, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“The rain created pools of water in the shell holes and trenches, red spiraling steams of blood into which the dead, wounded and living sunk, the rats leaving the trenches to feed upon the bodies in No Man’s Land, men trapped in shell holes with decomposing bodies, their bellies swollen up like balloons, gases hissing and belching escaping from the putrefying bodies of the slain. When Paul’s company came to the front, they numbered 150 men. When relieved there were only 32 alive. Herodotus observed, ‘In peace, sons bury their fathers. In war, fathers bury their sons.’ A moving passage is when on leave, Paul visits his mother. When the soldiers die, they cry for their mothers.”

“How did this nightmare end?”

“The High German Command had envisioned a short war, but it had become a war of attrition. Farmers had to give up their horses for the war. With no horses to pull the plough and all the men at the front, Germany’s food production collapsed. Britain had the same labor problem but due to its command of the seas could import food while the Royal Navy’s blockade of German ports prevented Germany from importing food. The hunger of the people created a crisis in Germany. In Syria, Bulgaria, and Italy, the German bloc was collapsing — surrender and chaos everywhere. With the loss of the Balkans, Germany lost its supplies of food

and oil. Seeing the writing on the wall, supreme commander Ludendorff, transferred troops from the Eastern front, preparing one massive last-ditch offensive before the American troops could arrive in strength. He couldn't transfer as many as he wanted, because the defeat of Russia meant that he had to keep one million German troops in Western Russia to enforce the occupation. Throughout the occupied zone, Bolshevik agents were stirring up guerilla warfare against the Germans and Ludendorff feared the impact of the Bolshevik propaganda on his troops."

"At that time," Giovanni said, "communist parties all over Europe were making headway with the workers. The communists were a real threat to the established order."

"In Ludendorff's desperate offensive of 1918, he concealed his main thrust through Flanders by a diversionary attack along the Marne which became one of the first actions where the Germans engaged the just arrived American Expeditionary Forces. Shortly after the Germans launched their attack at the Second Battle of the Marne, Ferdinand Foch ordered General Black Jack Pershing's troops around Château-Thierry to attack the Germans in Belleau Woods. The Germans were within 50 miles of Paris. What the Marines didn't know was that a regiment of German infantry was dug in Belleau Wood with a network of machine gun nests and artillery trained on the surrounding wheat field which the Marines had to cross before reaching the woods."



Marines 5th and 6th Regiments arrive in France before engaging in the Battle of Belleau Wood – Unknown author, public domain, mca-marines.org

“It sounds like the makings of a blood bath.”

“As they charged across the wheat field, the German machine guns decimated the Marines. Dan Daley, a Marine gunnery sergeant, storming across the wheat field under withering fire yelled, ‘Come on ya sons-of-bitches, ya want to live forever?’ The Marines of the 4th Brigade were slaughtered. Once they were into the woods, they were fighting the Germans with bayonets, fists, and feet.

“Crossing an exposed field,” Giovanni said, “raked by machine gun fire is suicide. It reminds me of the American Civil War when General Robert E. Lee ordered Generals Pickett and Pettigrew to charge Cemetery Ridge at the Battle of Gettysburg. Even the Confederate commanders believed there was no chance of success but they obeyed Lee’s orders. The South lost over half their number, either dead or captured. Being captured in the Civil War was a sentence of death because so many died of disease in the prisons. It was one of General Lee’s greatest failures. The Confederacy never recovered psychologically from the bitter loss at Cemetery Ridge.”

“Without artillery back up,” I said, “the assault on Belleau Wood was a meat grinder. Many military historians say that the Americans should have refused the French order to attack Belleau Wood. All of the assaults against densely wooded areas on the Somme and in the Ypres Salient had been failures.”



German MG08 machine gun emplacement – Unknown author, rue des archives, public domain



La Brigade Marine Americain Au Bois de Belleau, June 1918 – Illustration by Georges Scott, public domain, Wikimedia

“Did they take Belleau Wood?”

“The Marines refused to give up. Six times they lost the woods and six times regained it. Despite their losses, they drove the Germans out of the woods. But it was a catastrophic victory. The Marine Corps suffered the greatest number of casualties in all of corps history up to that time. It was the beginning of the legend of the Marines — *Semper fidelis*. After the battle, the government renamed Belleau Wood, ‘*Bois de la Brigade de Marine*’ and awarded the *Croix de guerre* to the 4th Marine Brigade. Nine thousand Americans killed in the Second Battle of the Marne are buried in the American Military Cemetery in Aisne-Marne and Oise-Aisne.”

“Had the Americans,” Giovanni said, “ever fought in Europe before?”

“No, it was the first time.”

“Despite the carnage, it must have given the American Expeditionary Force great satisfaction to take part in a battle that not only stopped the Germans from capturing Paris, but led to the final victory.” Roll over,” he commanded. “This’ll be good for your circulation.” With the edges of his hands planted parallel on either side of my vertebrae, he firmly raked his hands down my spine several times. Rolling the skin between his



Aisne-Marne American Cemetery at the foot of Belleau Wood – American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries, public domain, Wikimedia

fingers and thumb, he lifted the skin, rolling it up my spine, repeating the rolling several times, then pinched my skin between his index and middle fingers and began lifting and twisting the tissue.

“Oh, that hurts.”

“Sorry. I see blood rising beneath your skin.”

“I believe you.”

“Sorry, I’ll be gentler. Was the American training tough? Before I left Italy, I was too young to serve.”

“Well, the army didn’t offer massage. The recruits worked from 5:30 AM to 5:30 PM, six days a week, marching, 20-mile hikes over rough terrain, advanced weaponry training, crawling through barbed wire under machine gun fire, strength of voice practice so they could shout commands over 200 yards. The boys were given nothing but a uniform, bedding, a safety razor, and a toothbrush. Many were using their toothbrush to clean their guns instead of their teeth until the dental surgeon caught them. The American military brass were surprised how quickly the training camps produced disciplined fighters.”

“I’ve heard that tanks were first used in World War One, rather weird looking tanks.”



Mark IV tank 'Hyacinth' ditched in a German trench while supporting 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment during the Battle of Cambrai, 20 November 1917 – Author, John Warwick Brooke, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia

“At first, they didn’t have enough tanks to make a significant impact. Of the early versions, more conked out from mechanical failure than were destroyed by fire. After the Brits introduced the first Mark I in 1916, a year later, they sent several hundred improved Mark V tanks into the Battle of Cambrai with good results.”

“They must have been pretty primitive.”

“It was horrid inside — deafening noises, poor ventilation, temperatures of 122 degrees, oil and fuel vapors from the engine, cordite fumes from the guns, carbon monoxide, no wireless, only communication by pigeons.”

“Are you kidding . . . pigeons?”

“There were little doors for them fly out with their messages. Sometimes entire crews passed out while operating the tank, leaving the tank stranded on the battlefield with unconscious men inside.”

“I don’t know how they could induce men to operate them.”



Homing pigeon with miniature German camera for aerial surveillance – Author, Hans Adler, German Federal Archives, Wikipedia



Forest of Argonne, France destroyed by October 1915 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



U.S. Army operating Renault FT tanks, commanded by General George Patton, move to the front in the Forest of Argonne, France, 1918 – Unknown author, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

“When something is necessary in war, it gets done, but the World War One tanks were death traps. Their speed was only as fast as a walking man. German machine guns could penetrate them with armor-piercing bullets. But the worst fear was a direct hit by a mortar shell, igniting the fuel tanks, incinerating the crews in a wall of flames.”

“Jesus Christ.”

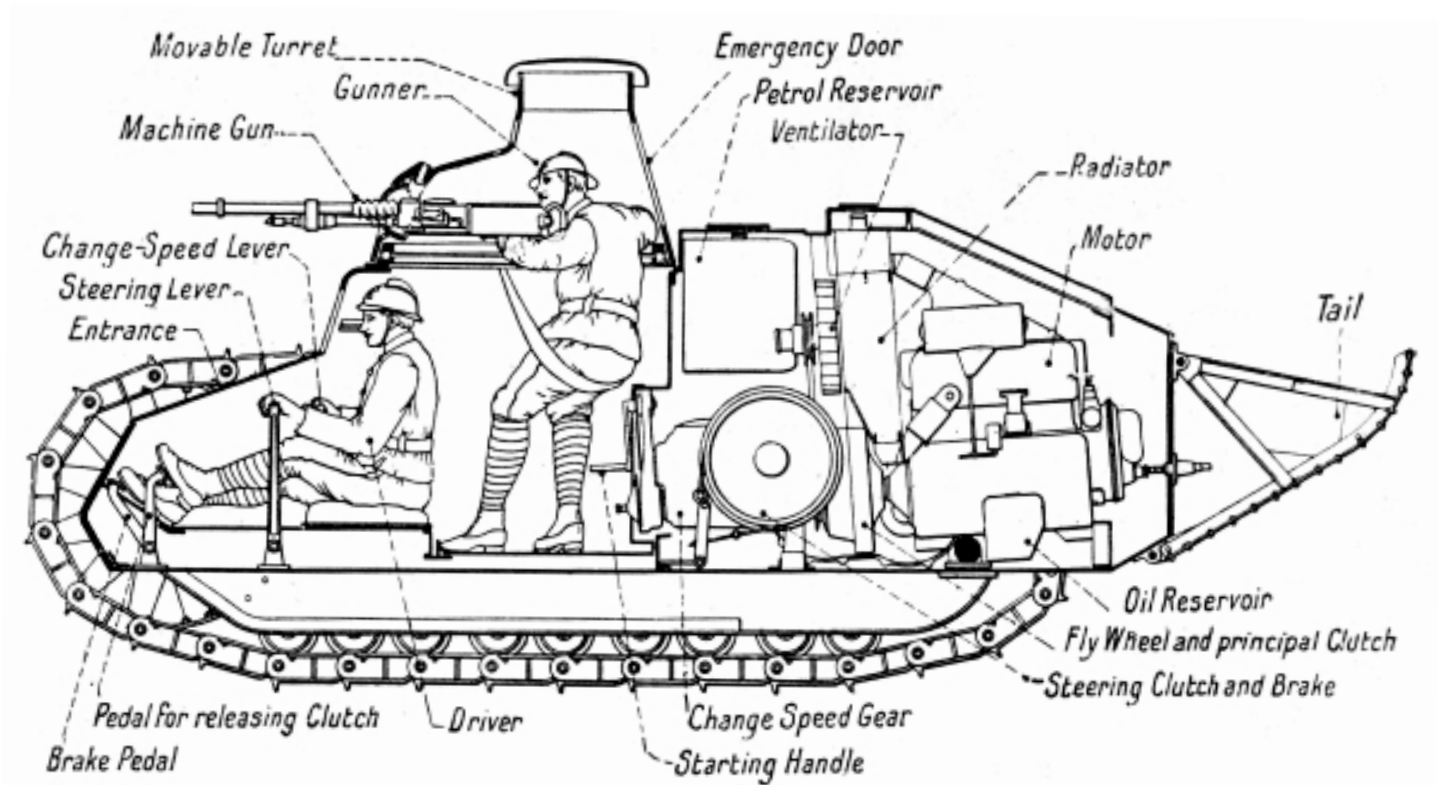
“They had specially trained crews to remove men who’d been burned alive. New inventions gave hope for victory. The Americans wanted a tank like the Brits, so they designed a light tank and another one, a monster weighing 35 tons, spending \$200 million dollars to manufacture 4,000 tanks overnight. But only 15 made it to France, arriving after the armistice. The organizer and commander of the first U.S. Light Tank Brigade was George Patton.”

“I thought the Americans didn’t have any tanks.”

“George Patton used Renault FT tanks.”

“The French had a tank?”

“With its revolutionary design, the Renault FT was the first tank to have its gun mounted on a fully rotating turret, the same design that became standard in World World II. Before the end of the war, the French churned out 3,000 Renault FT tanks.”

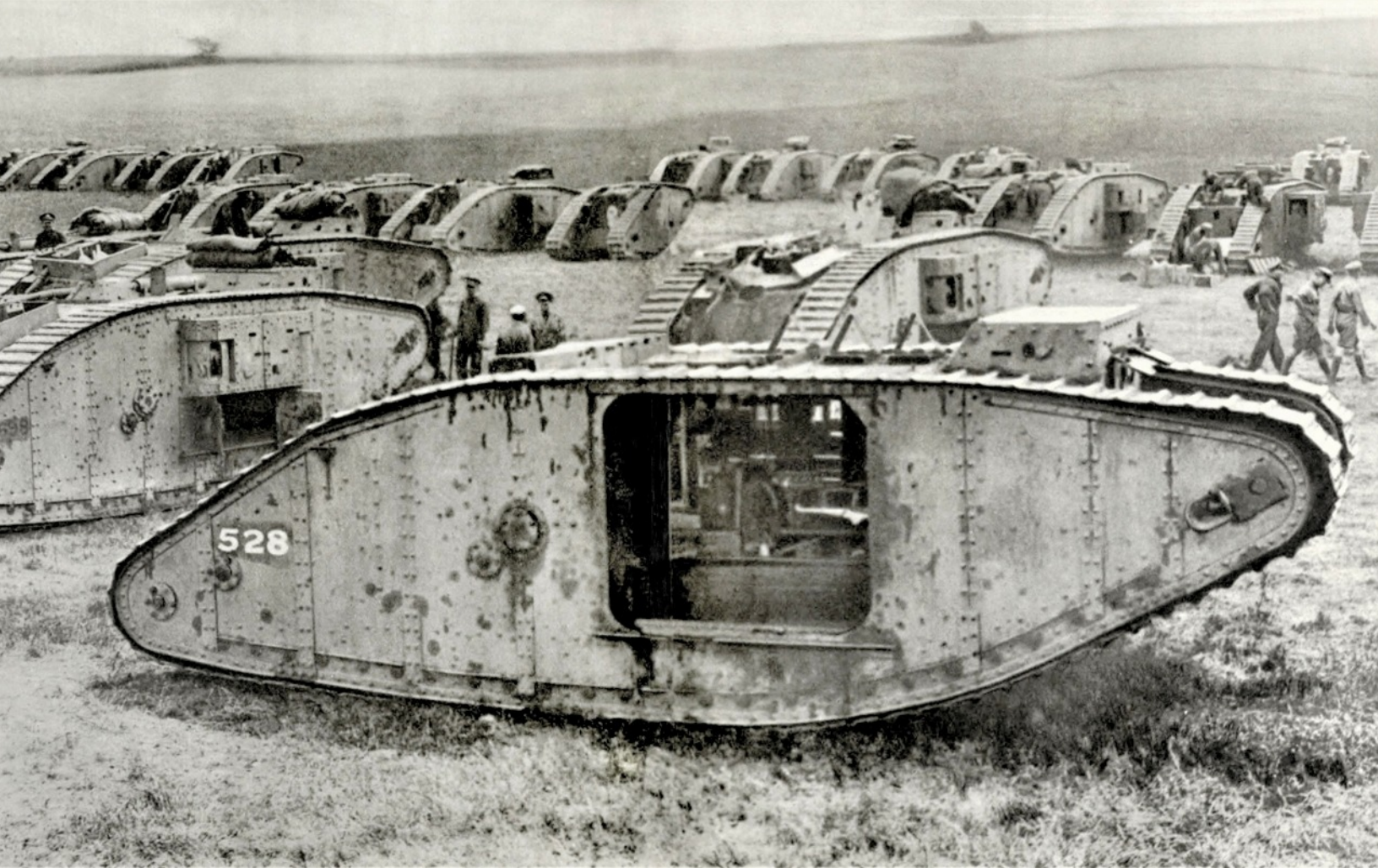


DIAGRAMMATIC SECTION OF A FRENCH LIGHT (OR “MOSQUITO”) TANK.

Renault FT-17 Tank - *The Times History of the World*, public domain, Wikimedia. The FT-17 was the first tank to have its armament in a rotating turret. Based on the Holt caterpillar tractor with the crew placed in front, the engine in back, and innovation of the revolving turret, the Renault was the archetype of the modern tank. 3,000 Renault 17s were manufactured in 1918 with 1,000 deployed in the Battle of Amiens where British, Canadian, and Australian divisions with 75,000 troops, 500 tanks, and 1,900 aircraft broke through German rear positions creating panic. 50,000 German troops and 500 guns were captured, crushing German morale. During the 100 Days Offensive, one hundred thousand German soldiers were captured in the Second Battle of the Somme, pushing the Germans back to the original Hindenburg Line, their forces weakened beyond continued resistance.

“Lord,” Giovanni said, “what a waste of money for the Americans to make tanks that never saw combat. \$200 million bucks must be \$400 million today.”

“They were impressive in the victory parades back home,” I laughed. “My love, can you work a bit more on that muscle? No, just a little higher, yes, right there. Oh, . . . you make me feel so good. It was a good idea to make those tanks even if they didn’t arrive in time for combat. If the Germans hadn’t faced a revolution at home, they might have gone onto the bitter end. If the 4,000 tanks had arrived they would’ve



British tankdrome, 1917 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock. The British Mark I was the first tank in combat. It's name derived from a secret code name during its development, a project begun in 1915 to break the stalemate of trench warfare. It's bulldozer style tracks, 57mm cannon, Hotchkiss machine gun, and thick metal plate allowed infantry to be more protected from machine gun fire while the tank crushed barbed wire defenses, its rhomboidal shaped tracks capable of crossing eight foot wide trenches to attack artillery positions in the rear. It met with failure at first due to the small number of tanks initially deployed, but when deployed in the hundreds a year later, they broke through the trenches and eventually broke the stalemate, turning the Western Front into a mobile war.

saved lives by ending the war sooner. A mass of tanks advancing through a smoke screen offers protection during an infantry advance. The invention of the tank changed the war. When in sufficient numbers, tanks could breach the trench defenses. The tank made the difference, for it ended the static trench warfare by making the front fluid again.

“The medical care was primitive, not much better than in the time of Napoleon. Poor medical care killed as many men as the bullets. There were no plasma or blood banks in World War One, no immunization shots for malaria, cholera, dysentery, fevers and venereal disease which devoured millions of lives. Military historians say that 90% of the men who died from their wounds during World War One could have been saved if the medicine treatment of the Second World War had existed.



When the first tanks first appeared emerging from the fog, they had a devastating effect on the German troops which fled their trenches, leaving their machine guns behind – Unknown author, public domain

But the Americans did have a big success with their pigeons.”

“Like the pigeons in the tanks?”



Carrier pigeon being released from a British tank, 1918 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Royal Engineers Signals Service former London double-decker bus refitted as mobile carrier pigeon loft, 1918 – Imperial War Museums, Wikimedia. During WWI, carrier pigeons would land in the coop, sounding a bell for the Signal Corps soldier who'd remove the message from the canister and send it by telegraph, field phone, or messenger. It was dangerous work for enemy soldiers would shoot pigeons down knowing they carried important information. Mobile lofts gave the pigeons a nesting place and protected them from predators and bad weather.

“Pigeons were chief carriers of messages throughout the war. They were far more reliable messengers than the wire that had to be strung and restrung every time there was an advance. The Americans sent thousands of trainers of carrier pigeons to France. Military historians say that of all the messages sent by American pigeons during combat, 95% made it through. Secure communication wins battles.

“With 1.2 million soldiers of the American Expeditionary forces in combat, the Second Battle of the Marne and Argonne Forest, was the largest battle in United States military history, continuing for 47 days until the Armistice of Compiègne on 11 November 1918. A key planner of the Meuse-Argonne offensive was General Pershing’s aid, Colonel George Marshall. After the victory at Saint-Mihiel where 7,000 doughboys died, Marshall succeeded in moving the troops by stealth without alerting the Germans over poor roads at night to mount a surprise attack which unleashed the Meuse-Argonne offensive.”

“Colonel Marshall, was he the one responsible for the Marshall Plan?”

“The same Marshall,” I said, “who became the Army Chief of Staff and U.S. Secretary of Defense during World War Two and U.S. Secretary of State and most important of all, the man who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953 for the aid program which engineered the economic recovery of Western Europe.”

“What was the outcome of the Second Battle of the Marne?”

“Despite the slaughter of Belleau Wood, the Allies were getting smarter. They finally had learned to not warn the Germans by laying down an artillery barrage in advance of the attack. Instead, the French and British troops, backed by 300 tanks including the Renault FT tanks, and joined by 200,000 Americans, climbed out of the trenches and charged a few hundred feet behind a synchronized rolling barrage which caught the enemy by surprise.”

“I get it, the Germans were accustomed to being bombarded for a day or two before an attack was launched. They were overwhelmed when a wave of men suddenly appeared out of a haze of exploding shells. It must have been hard to precisely control a rolling barrage with soldiers running a short distance behind.”

“You’re right — there were many deaths from ‘friendly fire.’ In the Second Battle of the Marne, the Germans lost a couple of hundred thousand men including many Storm Troopers, which was the beginning of a non-stop Allied advance during the final Hundred Days Offensive.”

“After four bloody years, the tide turned.”

“The surge of American troops made a big difference. In the Battle of Amiens, great secrecy was used by the Allies in the preparation for the offensive, moving British, Canadian, Australian, and American troops by night while destroying German lines of communication. With fresh troops and 1,000 tanks, the Allies overwhelmed the Germans resulting in the capture of 50,000 Germans and 500 guns. The Renault tanks broke through to attack German rear positions, creating disarray and panic.



American Expeditionary Force victims of Influenza, U.S. Army Camp Hospital No. 45, Aix-les-Bains, France, 1918 – U.S. Army photographer, public domain, Wikimedia

“After the Battle of Amiens, German morale collapsed. Field Marshal Ludendorff called it ‘*Schwarzer Tag des deutschen Heeres*’, the Black Day of the German Army. One hundred thousand German soldiers were captured in the Second Battle of the Somme, pushing them back to the original Hindenburg Line. The German soldiers in the trenches knew the war was lost. They knew by the lack of food and ammunition and by the arrival of untrained boys being sent to replace the dead.”

“They were back where they started from. Nothing had been gained after millions of dead.”

“While millions died in the war,” I said, “many more millions died from the influenza pandemic which lasted nearly two years from January 1918 to December 1920. The contagion was spread by means of hundreds of thousands of soldiers being transported by ship and rail, crowded together in humid trenches, their immune systems weakened by stress and exposure to chemical gas. Wartime censors suppressed the first reports of the epidemic in order to maintain morale. Due to King Alfonso XIII of Spain being gravely ill with the flu, early press reports of the epidemic came from Spain. Consequently, it was called the ‘Spanish flu,’ even though it didn’t originate in Spain.



Emergency hospital during 1918 influenza pandemic, Camp Funston, Kansas – Author, National Museum of Health and Medicine, Wikimedia

“500 million, a fifth of the world’s population was infected. Some say that there were 40 to 50 million deaths, other estimates were greater, 50 to 100 million deaths, more than all the deaths from combat. In October 1918 alone, 200,000 died. India was especially devastated, with 17 million dying.”

“War and pestilence,” Giovanni said, “is it God’s punishment of mankind?”

“People in the Middle Ages believed that the Black Death was a punishment from God. The Spanish Flu pandemic was as devastating as all of the bubonic plagues put together. It’s estimated that nearly 700,000 Americans died within 3 years, so many that the average life span in the U.S. was depressed by 10 years. People would suddenly fall ill on the street and die within hours. You could be feeling healthy one day and be dead the next. Bodies multiplied so fast that health workers and medical supplies were overwhelmed.



American Red Cross nurses care for influenza patients in emergency wards set up in the Oakland Municipal auditorium, 1918 – Author, Edward A. Rogers, Public domain, Oakland Public Library, Wikimedia



Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D.C., Influenza Pandemic of 1918 – 1919 – Author, Harris & Ewing, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Seattle policemen wearing masks made by the Red Cross, 1918-1919 Influenza pandemic – Unknown author, U.S. National Archives, Wikimedia

“The morticians and graveyard diggers ran out of coffins. Physicians noted that what appeared to be at first just ordinary influenza quickly developed into the most lethal pneumonia ever known. Patients hemorrhaged from mucous membranes, victims struggling for air and dying from suffocation, frothy blood gushing from their nose and mouth.”

“Couldn’t modern medicine do anything?”

“As I mentioned before, Giovanni, there were no vaccines. Little was known about virology. The symptoms were so bizarre that it was misdiagnosed as cholera or typhoid. There was no quarantine. Many physicians had been sent to the front. Military leaders tried to keep it a military secret from the enemy which was absurd because the flu went everywhere like a virulent specter. One theory was that the pandemic had emigrated from China. Nearly 100,000 Chinese laborers had been brought in to work on the Western Front building earthworks, concrete redoubts, and underground ammunition dumps. Two hundred thousand African-Americans laboring behind the lines were vulnerable through mass exposure. Some observers thought that the outbreak in the troops at Fort Riley Kansas, had been the origin of the pandemic, caused by the mutation of viruses in poultry and swine raised to feed the troops. It was suspected later that in France, a bird virus had mutated to the pigs kept in the rear to feed the troops, then mutated to humans.”

“The flu pandemic spread over the entire globe?”

“No place on earth was safe. People died from Greenland to Tahiti and Samoa. American Indians had an especially high mortality rate with entire villages wiped out in Alaska. In the second wave, influenza mutated into an even more sinister form especially lethal for young adults. Many mistakes were made. Severely ill soldiers were sent on crowded trains to field hospitals, a perfect way of infecting thousands of others. Influenza hit Germany and Austria even before it hit the Allies. The higher mortality rates for the Axis Powers, combined with the surge of American troops, shifted the balance of power in the killing fields of the Western Front.”

“Didn’t Germany think about negotiating a strategic surrender?”

“Up until the Battle of Amiens, Ludendorff and the high command were under the illusion that they could win. It was only a matter of determination. German had convinced itself before the war that its superior military strength and moral discipline would conquer France quickly. Generals are human, susceptible to believing their myths of invincibility.”

“The time for the Germans to have negotiated a surrender was *before* the Battle of Amiens, not afterward.”

“Right, it was too late to negotiate. Facing a surge of American troops and the Allies’ superiority in planes and tanks, the Germans couldn’t stop the Hundred Days Offensive.”

“The Germans failed to take into consideration America’s ability to create a trained army quickly.”

“You hit the nail on the head. The Germans failed to execute their plan of winning the war before America could ship troops to Europe. Once German morale collapsed after the Battle of Amiens and thousands of German troops surrendered, everything within Germany began to come unglued. The people were rebelling. Hungry citizens were marching in anti-war demonstrations. With the loss of oil from the Balkan countries, sickness in the trenches and a mutiny of sailors, the German army was out of gas. The German ports were blockaded by the British fleet and their industrial output cut in half. Confronted by the magnitude of the German defeat at Amiens, Commander Erich Ludendorff suffered what the French call, *une crise de nerfs*. Fearing a breakthrough, Ludendorff informed the Supreme Command that the situation was hopeless and that he might not be able to hold the front for another 2 hours. He demanded the Entente to ask the Allies for an immediate cease fire under the conditions set by Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points and recommended that the Kaiser transfer power to the majority parties in the Reichstag, the Social Democrats, Center Party and Progress Party, with the strategy of shifting the blame for defeat to the politicians rather than the military.”

“At long last,” Giovanni said, “Ludendorff realized that they couldn’t win.”

“There was no longer a way to deny the reality. Weakened by evaporating morale in the troops and loss of civilian support for the war, Ludendorff understood that Germany would be devastated by an Allied invasion. Another hitch to Ludendorff’s request for a cease fire was that the British and French didn’t accept the conditions of Woodrow Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’ that emphasized self-determination.”

“Why did they oppose Wilson’s ideas?”

“Self-determination would undermine France and Great Britain’s colonial empires. Even a couple of months before Ludendorff called for a cease fire, naval crews had revolted on the dreadnought battleship SMS *Prinzregent Luitpold* anchored in the port of Wilhelmshaven. They were arrested, and the leaders executed, but the repression led to the sailors forming secret revolutionary groups. In late October, the Imperial Naval Command in Kiel, ordered the fleet to prepare for a last stand against the Royal Navy in the English Channel.”

“With Ludendorff telling the Supreme Command that the situation was hopeless why would the navy start a battle they were certain to lose?”

“A good question. It was a supreme act of denial by naval commanders who ignored Ludendorff’s plea for a cease fire. However, the sailors refused to be sacrificed in a war that was lost. The sailors believed that by beginning a useless battle, it would damage the new democratic government’s negotiations for peace. Sailors and workers in Kiel demonstrated in early November by the thousands, demanding the release of the imprisoned leaders chanting, *Frieden und Brot*, ‘Peace and Bread.’

The soldiers fired on the demonstrators, killing a number of them, which ignited the revolt against the Emperor. By the end of the day, Kiel was under the control of 40,000 sailors, soldiers, and workers who formed Worker’s Councils modeled on the Bolshevik Revolution and took power in many cities.

“Although it wasn’t their original objective, the sailor’s revolt in Kiel was the spark that instigated the revolution. A newspaper said, ‘The revolution is on the march — what happened in Kiel will spread throughout Germany.’ The workers and the soldiers didn’t want anarchy, but rather a new social republic with the Worker Councils formed by socialists — democracy, not a dictatorship. By November 7, the revolution had swept like wild fire across the county from the coastal cities to Frankfurt and Munich, forcing the last King of Bavaria Ludwig III to flee from Munich. The Revolutionary stewards, the Majority Social Democratic Party, MSPD, and the Independent Social Democratic Party, USPD, workers unions, and the Spartacists called for a general



Sailors mutiny at Kiel, 3 November 1918, setting off the German Revolution and the creation of the Weimar Republic – Unknown author, German Federal Archives



Kiel Mutiny, German sailors demonstrating at Wilhelmshaven, 4 November 1918 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



The German Republic was proclaimed by MSPD leader Philipp Scheidemann from the Reichstag balcony, 9 November 1918 – Author Erich Greifer, public domain, Wikimedia

strike and masses of strikers marched on the Reichstag leading to Chancellor Prince Maximilian von Baden announcing the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the renunciation of the hereditary rights to the throne of Crown Prince Wilhelm. On November 9, 1918, from the balcony of the Reichstag, Philipp Scheidemann, a pragmatic leader of the Majority Social Democratic Party, proclaimed a new republic and Max von Baden handed the chancellorship over to Friedrich Ebert, leader of the Social Democrats.”



Reichstag, Berlin, 9 November 1918, a new republic is proclaimed – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“With the dissolution of Imperial Germany, what was the position of the military? Did they refuse to accept the transfer of power?”

“The German military chief of staff promised Chancellor Ebert the support of the military on the condition that the government quickly suppressed Bolshevism, terminate the soldiers’ and workers’ councils, form a new national assembly, and establish law and order. Under Ebert’s leadership, the Council of People’s Deputies introduced reforms — the eight-hour workday, universal suffrage for those over 20, increased workers’ old age and unemployment benefits, restricted the possession of firearms, and established the Reich Office for Economic Demobilization to make the transition of the German economy to peace conditions, forming a government which later became known as the Weimar Republic.”

“My God, after millions of deaths, the war was finally over.”

“The war was over, but stability was extremely precarious. Due to the enormous challenges of recovering from a lost war, the devastating loss of loved ones, millions of men vanished. Coping with the sorrow imposed a heavy psychological burden on the German nation.”

“I can imagine,” Giovanni said, “everyone had lost either a father, a brother, a son.”

“The Weimar government was confronting the challenge of reintegrating millions of unemployed men, restoring an infrastructure bankrupted by military depletion, finding enough food to feed the people, rebuilding a once powerful industrial nation that was on the brink of collapse and starvation at the same time it was struggling to establish a parliamentary form of government that Germany had never achieved before. And above all, struggling to keep a disillusioned nation from falling into bloody civil war.”

“I can see the picture,” Giovanni said, “left and right dictatorships, revolutions forming in the air.”

“Under enormous social pressure, Chancellor Ebert and the MSPD were allied with the old powers of the Empire, the nationalistic elements, the military, the industrialists, and the police , all the elements that were diametrically opposed to the reforms that many Social Democrats, socialists, and communists wanted to achieve. On the same day that Scheidemann of the MSPD, proclaimed the Republic from a balcony of the Reichstag, the Spartacist leader of the USPD, Karl Liebknecht, speaking from the Berliner Stadtschloss, the Imperial Palace of the Emperors of Germany, declared the *Freie Sozialistische Republik*, ‘Free Socialist Republic.’”

“How did they resolve the conflict between two declared governments?”

“In the following month, an attempted alliance in the provisional government between the two Social Democrat parties collapsed, and the Spartacist League Revolt erupted in January 1919.”



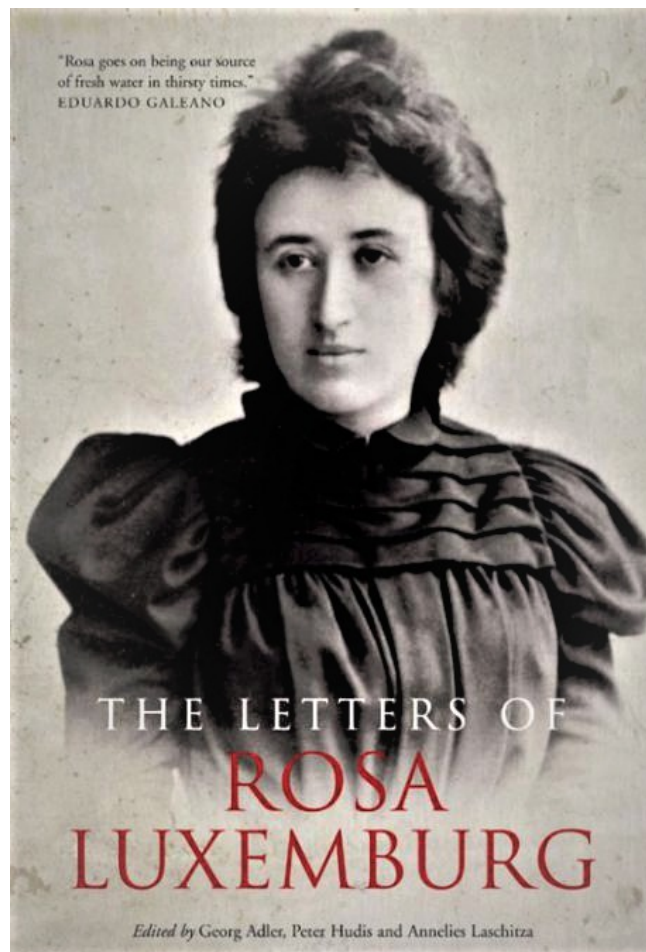
Spartacist Uprising, 1919 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Who were the Spartacists?”

“Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and several revolutionaries created the *Spartakusbund*, Spartacist League in 1915 to oppose the war. Named in honor of the Thracian gladiator who’d led the great slave rebellion in the Roman Republic, the Spartacist League opposed the parliamentary platform of the MSPD and called for a revolutionary Marxist movement dedicated to creating a dictatorship of the workers.”

“Denis admires Rosa Luxemburg. He told me of her tragic death.”

“Rosa Luxemburg was a powerful woman with a brilliant intellect from a lower middle-class Jewish family in the Russian controlled part of Poland. A philosopher, economist, anti-war activist, and revolutionary socialist, Rosa helped establish the Polish Social Democratic Party which later evolved into the Polish Communist Party. To avoid prison because of her radical politics, she attended the University of Zürich receiving her doctorate in law and political economy in 1889.”



The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg, published March 2011, co-leader of the Spartacist Uprising, Berlin, 1919 – Author, Rosa Luxemburg, edited by Annelies Laschitza, Georg Adler, Peter Hudis, translator, George Shriver, fair use, Penguin Random House, Amazon

“Switzerland, “Giovanni laughed, “a haven for revolutionaries.”

“Luxemburg began writing articles on communism, one published in 1904, *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* critiqued Lenin’s approach to party organization and his centralism. She warned of the dangers of central control, arguing against the concentration of power in a central committee. Rosa envisioned a humanitarian, no-authoritarian communism.”

“I bet that went over big with Lenin.”

“Indeed, Rosa was severely criticized by Moscow, but Rosa was a free thinker, and no man was going to tell her how to think. Originally she’d thought that Germany would be the country where a Marxist revolution would take place but when the Russian Revolution of 1905 broke out, it became the turning point of her life. Elated by the possibility of achieving the revolution, Rosa went to Warsaw to participate in the movement, was arrested and imprisoned, which resulted in her writing a book on her humanitarian theory of Marxism stressing mass revolutionary action, *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften, The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. The mass strike, Rosa declared, was the tool that would radicalize the workers and drive the revolution to final victory.



Spartacist revolutionaries holding a street in Berlin, 1919 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Rosa Luxemburg addressing a crowd, 1907 – Unknown author, fair use, Wikimedia

“When she was released from prison in Warsaw, she returned to Berlin to teach at the Social Democratic Party school and in 1913, published *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals*, *The Accumulation of Capital*, an analysis of capitalism’s exploitation of underdeveloped areas of the world — the systemic justification for imperialism.”

“You said that the Spartacist League opposed the war?”

“Rosa declared war would be an absolute disaster for the working class.”

“Rosa,” Giovanni said, “was doing the same thing as Jean Jaurès was doing in France. I remember you saying that Jaurès predicted the war would result in the ‘loss of a generation of the youngest and brightest.’”

“Jean Jaurès and Rosa Luxemburg were counterparts, eloquent in both voice and pen. She urged the workers to organize a general strike against the war. ‘If they think,’ she said, “we are going to lift the weapons of murder against our French and other brethren, then we shall shout, ‘we will not do it!’” When she was in prison for opposing the war, writing under the pseudonym Junius, inspired by Lucius Junius Brutus, founder of the Roman Republic, she established the theoretical foundation of the Spartacist League in the pamphlet *Die Krise de Sozialdemokratie*, *The Crisis of the German Social Democracy*, which sympathizers smuggled out of prison and published in 1916 in the underground press. ‘The public life.’ Rosa wrote, ‘of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress.’ Upon Germany’s capitulation, Rosa Luxemburg was freed from prison in Breslau on November 8, 1918. Very shortly after Karl Liebknecht was released from prison, he proclaimed the “Free Socialist Republic.”



Spartacist Uprising Militia, Berlin, 1919 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Karl didn’t waste a minute.”

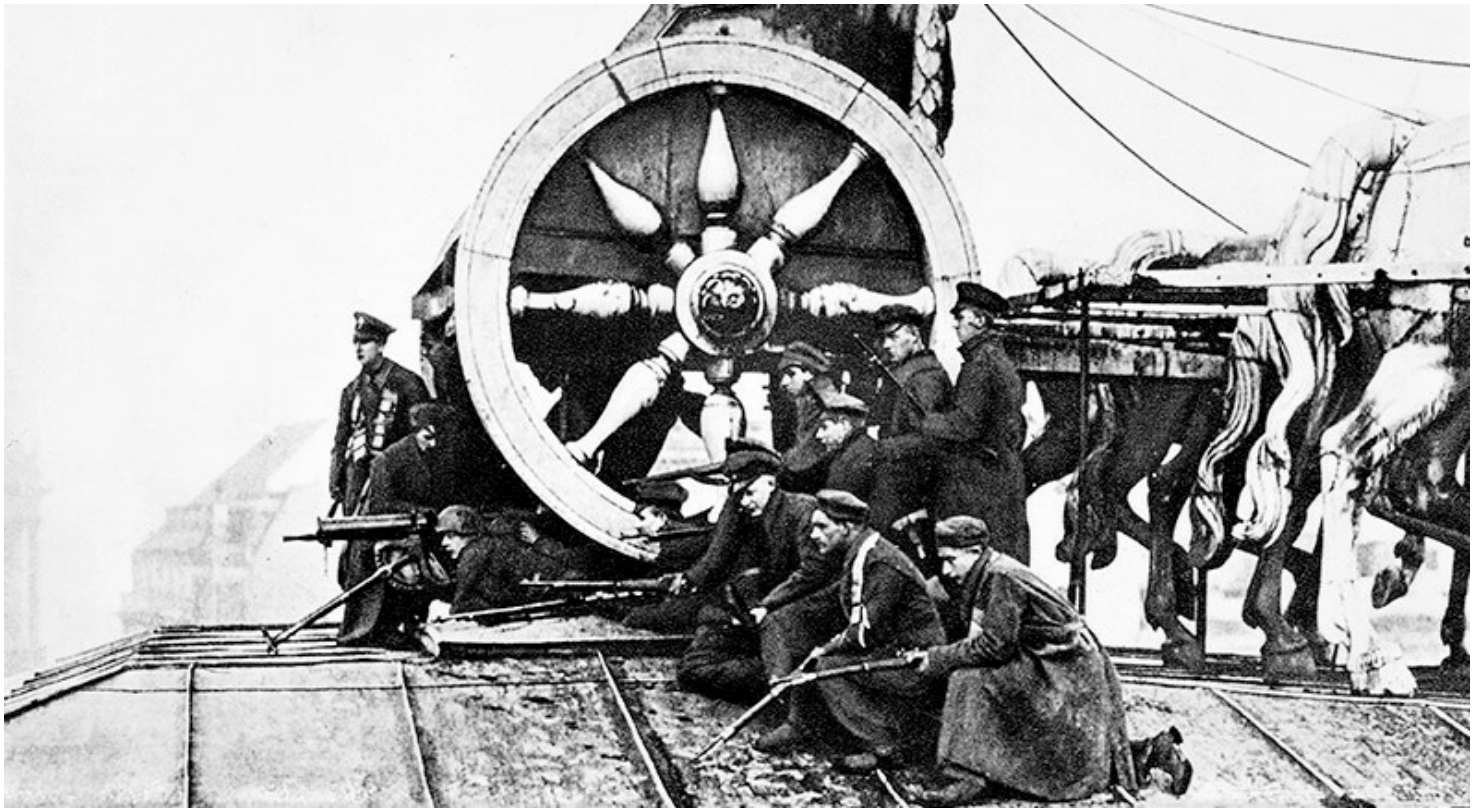
“Liebknecht knew that the loss of the war, the confusion, and instability of the moment, provided the right chemistry for revolution. Envisioning the very real possibility of the Russian Revolution spreading to Germany, Karl and Rosa reformed the Spartacist League, founded *Die Rote Fahne*, *The Red Flag*, newspaper demanding the abolishment of capital punishment, the release of all political prisoners and the establishment of a socialist republic, and renamed itself the Communist Party of Germany. The KPD manifesto proclaimed that the party was dedicated to using all means of power to achieve socialism by expropriating the capitalist class and establishing a socialist society ‘in accordance with the will of the revolutionary majority of the proletariat.’ *The Red Flag* launched an uprising by calling for massive street demonstrations to bring down the Social Democratic Party government of Friedrich Ebert. With order breaking down, Chancellor Ebert accused the communists of staging a Bolshevik revolution against the state and ordered the Freikorps militia to destroy the insurrection.



Freikorps right-wing militia suppresses the Spartacist Revolution, Berlin 1919 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikipedia



Freikorps, suppressors of the Spartacists Uprising, 1919 – Author, Major D.F.W. Deiß, Weller Verlag/Berlin, public domain, Wikimedia



Machine-gun mounted on the quadriga of the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, 7 January 1919 – Author, New York Tribune, public domain, Wikimedia



Street barricade during the Spartacist uprising, 1919 – Author, Alfred Grohs, Wikimedia

“The Cavalry Guards of the Friekorps captured Luxemburg and Liebknecht and tortured them before shooting them. After the Friekorps troopers threw Rosa’s body in Berlin’s Landwehr Canal, news spread quickly of the government’s extra-judicial killing of their beloved leader, igniting a wave of violence across Germany. In response, Ebert’s forces killed thousands of communists and civilians, and brutally extinguished the flame of revolution.”

“Denis,” Giovanni said sadly, “laments Rosa Luxemburg’s death. Her decentralized view of communism, he said, was more humane than the one they’d get in the next ten years. Rosa opposed German militarism and imperialism — the very forces that brought Hitler to power. Denis told me that her book, *The Accumulation of Capital*, helped to influence young people on maintaining an internationalist, rather than a nationalist point of view, and that legacy has made her a socialist icon many years after her brutal death.”

“The severe unrest in Germany after the war,” I said, “was driven by the harsh Allied demands for the complete demilitarization of Germany, immediate removal all German troops from France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Alsace-Lorraine, occupation of the Rhine by Allied troops, removal of all German troops from Turkey, Austro-Hungary, and Romania, immediate release of all prisoners of war, and surrender of all German submarines, locomotives, railcars, and arms. They were given only 72 hours to accept. There was no question of negotiation.”

“How could the Germans accept those terms?”

“Despite the harshness of terms, with Germany coming apart at the seams, the delegation was in no position to refuse to sign. Informed with the shocking news that the Kaiser had abdicated, the delegation was ordered to sign by the new Chancellor Friedrich Ebert and the Chief of the German General Staff Paul von Hindenburg. On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, November 1918, the Armistice of Compiègne was signed by Marshal Ferdinand Foch in a railroad car in the Forest of Compiègne, a lovely woodland of oaks and beech trees in Picardy where Napoleon III once staged grand hunting parties. The elections for the Weimar National Assembly were held in January 1919 and six months later, a Constitution was adopted. The Weimar Republic was declared, and a new Germany was born.”

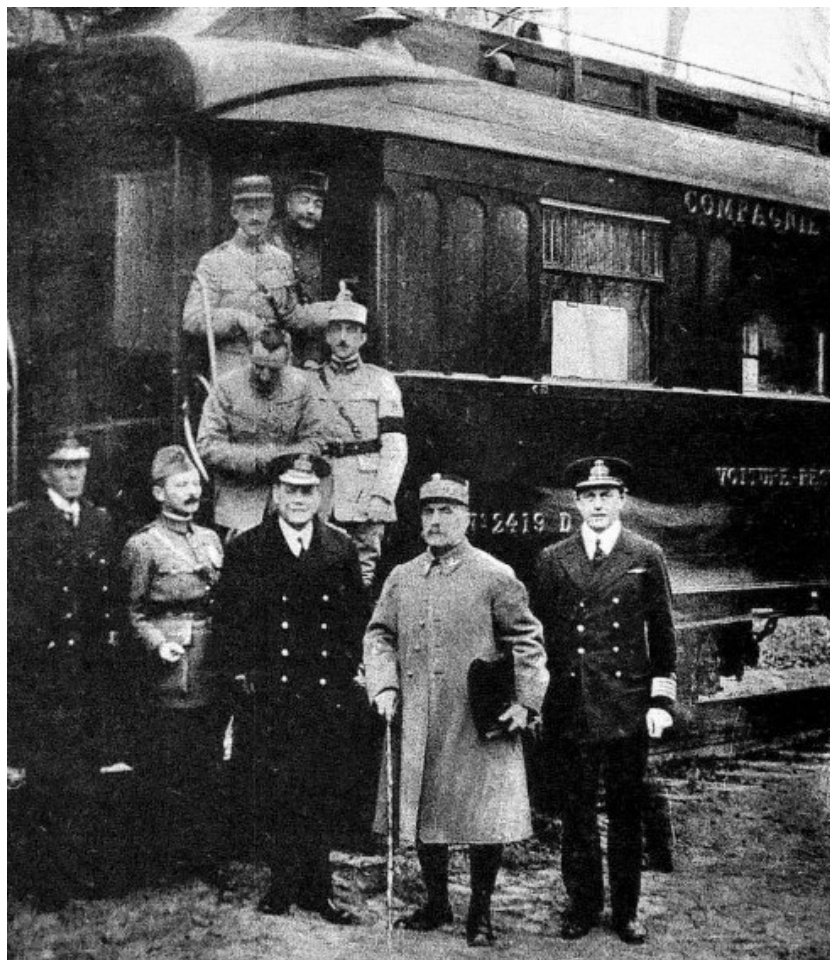
“How did the Versailles Treaty,” Giovanni asked, “figure in ending the war.”

“President Raymond Poincaré, Prime Minister Georges Clémenceau, and Commander-in-Chief, Ferdinand Foch didn’t want to sign a peace treaty. That was why Foch’s conditions were so harsh. He was

hoping that the Germans would refuse to sign and France could invade Germany to make certain that the German war machine was destroyed forever. But weary of the carnage, the Brits and the Yanks wanted peace. Marshal Foch told Wilson that the United States and Britain are ‘separated from Germany by a sea; France is just across the river.’

“The Versailles Treaty was negotiated by Georges Clémenceau of France, Lloyd George of Britain, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States. The defeated nations, Germany, Austria, and Hungary weren’t even included in the negotiations. The Versailles Treaty blamed the war on Germany’s aggression. The War Guilt Provision of the treaty held Germany responsible for the horrific loss of life. The memories of the burning of Louvain, Belgium and the destruction of French farms, villages, and towns, made France determined to require Germany to pay compensation for the damage done to the civilian population.”

“Why is it important for your students to know the history of the First World War? The war ended forty years ago.”



Armistice of Compiègne signed in Marshall Ferdinand Foch’s railroad car, 11 November 1918 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Marshall Foch is second from right, flanked by British signers Sir Rosslyn Wemyss and Admiral George Hope

“I show my students how one war contains the seeds of the next war. *L'histoire est une chaîne d'événements* — history is a chain of events. The linkage goes back not only for scores of years but hundreds of years. If my students don't understand the currents of history, they'll not have the capability to avoid a future war. Portuguese-Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza said, 'If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past.'

“I tell my students that the value of studying history is critical because it helps us to understand the origin, success, and failure of the forces active in forming a civilization. History is more than politics and military adventures. To understand the shifting currents in society, history must integrate economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, religion, and philosophy in a holistic way. History must delve into the popular culture, the forgotten people, those who have been left out of the history books. There is a Nigerian proverb, 'Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.'”

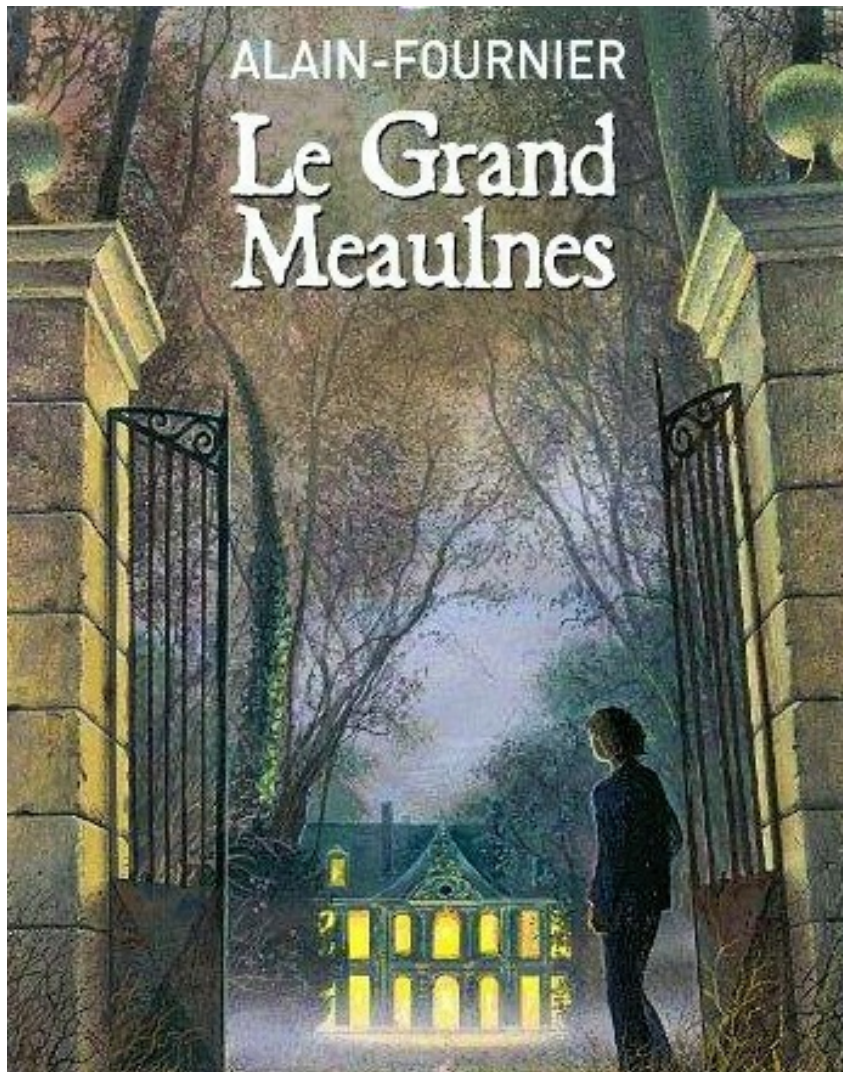
“American students are taught little about the First World War because the United States was not as deeply affected by the war as were the French. They didn't lose their homes and farms. Their friends weren't murdered. In Northern France, hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed, roads and bridges wiped out, train tracks destroyed, farms devastated, livestock slaughtered, forests blown to pieces by shells, fields useless for planting, laced with mines and unexploded shells which are still being discovered buried in the earth fifteen years later.”



Land Destroyed by Artillery Shells, Flanders, 1919 – Author, F. J. Lamphere, Everett Historical

“Not to mention,” Giovanni said, “the men who came home with brain damage, missing arms and legs, unable to work, abandoned to sell pencils and flowers on the street.”

“Everyone in France,” I said, “had lost a beloved husband, brother, or friend. Maurice Ravel composed *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, an homage to French Baroque composer, Couperin, dedicating each one of the movements to a friend who’d been killed in the war. The artists of France were decimated. The poet, Charles Péguy was killed while leading his platoon in the opening moments of the First Battle of the Marne. The young novelist, Alain-Fournier who wrote the classic of French literature, *Le Grand Meaulnes*, was killed at Vaux-lès-Palameix a year after his first and only novel was published. He was 28.”



Le Grand Meaulnes by Alan-Fournier, 1913 – Augustin
Meaulnes’ Search for his Lost Love – Hachette-Abe Books

“The brightest lights of France,” Giovanni said, “an entire generation was extinguished in a war that should’ve never been fought.”

“Understanding the history of a country,” I said, “allows us to comprehend their motivations, hatreds and primal fears. One cannot understand the conflict between Bosnian Muslims and Serbian Christians without considering the 14th century Serbian Empire of the Christian Nemanjic dynasty. Two centuries later, the Serbian Empire was conquered by the Turkish Ottomans, setting up a struggle between Muslims and Christians that lives on in the Balkans today. One might say that nations possess biologically inherited histories. To understand why wars happen we must study the causes of previous wars.”

Giovanni sat up, looked at the clouds moving swiftly over the trees, a breeze catching his hair and making it dance. “You were going to tell me how the Versailles Treaty eventually led to the Second World War.”

“Before I answer your question about the Versailles Treaty,” I said, I want to talk first about the rise of anti-Semitism in France at the turn of the century.”

“How would anti-Semitism be connected to the Versailles Treaty?”

“If you can be patient a little longer, I’ll connect the dots and there are many. The key event was the Dreyfus Affair. In 1898, as the editor of the newspaper *L’Aurore*, Clémenceau published on the front page, Émile Zola's *J'accuse*, a public letter to President Félix Faure.”



L'Aurore, 13 January 1898. Letter to the President of the Republic! by Émile Zola on the Dreyfus affair – Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, public domain, Wikimedia

“Didn’t Zola write *Germinal*, about the coal miner’s strike?”

“*Germinal* was Zola’s masterpiece.”

“It’s Denis’ favorite novel. Denis said Zola never flinched from the truth, no matter how wretched or obscene.”

“Zola,” I said, “was the most loved and hated French writer of his time. He penetrated the sordid depths of every class in society, from the slums to the millionaires. He wrote about the bourgeoisie, doctors, officers, churchmen, politicians, miners, peasants, alcoholics, and prostitutes. The French Academy never welcomed him. The military establishment had long hated him for his criticism of the Franco-Prussian War. After the publication of *Germinal*, he was marked as a champion of labor and an enemy of the established order. It was an accurate description. Zola was a fighter and he went out on a limb for Dreyfus. For daring to challenge the military, the establishment came crashing down on him. He was burnt in effigy, called a foreigner, and packages of excrement were mailed to him. Hatred and insults spewed from the press.”



Germinal by Emile Zola. Riot of the Miners Against the Mine Owners – Marzolino, Shutterstock

“What was this *J'accuse*?”

“Zola accused the Minister of War Auguste Mercier and the General Staff of falsely charging Captain Alfred Dreyfus who'd been imprisoned for treason. Zola denounced the military and government for railroading an innocent man. While Clémenceau's *L'Aurore* normally sold 30,000 copies a day, on that day, Zola's *J'accuse* sold 300,000 newspapers.



Le Procès de Rennes : Dreyfus Devant le Conseil de Guerre – Le Petit Journal, 1899, public domain, Wikimedia

“I’ve heard Dreyfus’ name linked to anti-Semitism.”

“Anti-Semitism was at a fever pitch in the late 19th century. Captain Dreyfus, a young artillery officer of Alsatian Jewish descent, had been sentenced to life imprisonment for giving a top-secret artillery manual to the Germans. The family of Dreyfus was so assimilated into bourgeois French culture that when the Germans took Alsace from the French, they moved to Paris. With France and Germany in an arms race at the turn of the century, artillery had the equivalent destructive power of a B-52 Stratofortress bomber today. When arrested, Dreyfus protested his innocence. Although there was no proof against him, the military laid a pistol before him offering him the choice of going to prison or to kill himself.”

“He was judged,” Giovanni said, “by a military kangaroo court.”

“Dreyfus refused to kill himself. He told his inquisitors he wanted to live to prove his innocence. Upon sentencing, the military staged a ceremony with rolling drums while four artillery officers led Dreyfus before the ranking officer to receive his judgment — imprisonment for life. An officer tore off his medals, his ensigns and stripes. Maintaining a perfect dignity while the officer broke his sword on his knee, Dreyfus raised his arms and cried, ‘*Innocent, Innocent! Vive la France!*’ Outside of the parade ground where Dreyfus was dishonored, the crowd howled, ‘*A mort! A mort les juifs!*’ To death. To death with the Jews!’



Le traître : Dégradation d'Alfred Dreyfus dans la Cour Morland de l'École militaire à Paris, 13 January 1895 – Bibliothèque national de France, public domain, Wikimedia

“Dreyfus was branded as a traitor to France. He had no defenders except for Jewish officers who fought duels in his name, some of whom died for standing up for their faith. At that time, unaware of the truth, even socialist leader Jean Jaurès and Clémenceau thought Dreyfus deserved the death penalty. Two years after Dreyfus was imprisoned on Devil’s Island, Lieutenant Colonel Georges Picquart, the new head of military intelligence discovered a document in the army’s file on Dreyfus, a telegram which had been clandestinely intercepted at the German Embassy, written but never sent by Max von Schwarzkoppen, the German military attaché in Paris, addressed to Major Walsin- Esterházy in Paris. Colonel Picquart also discovered a recent letter addressed to von Schwarzkoppen from Major Esterhazy. To the surprise of Picquart, the handwriting matched that of the original document which was used to incriminate Dreyfus. Handwriting experts verified that the handwriting was identical.”



Alfred Dreyfus, 1894 – Painting by Aaron Gerschel - Public Domain, Wikimedia



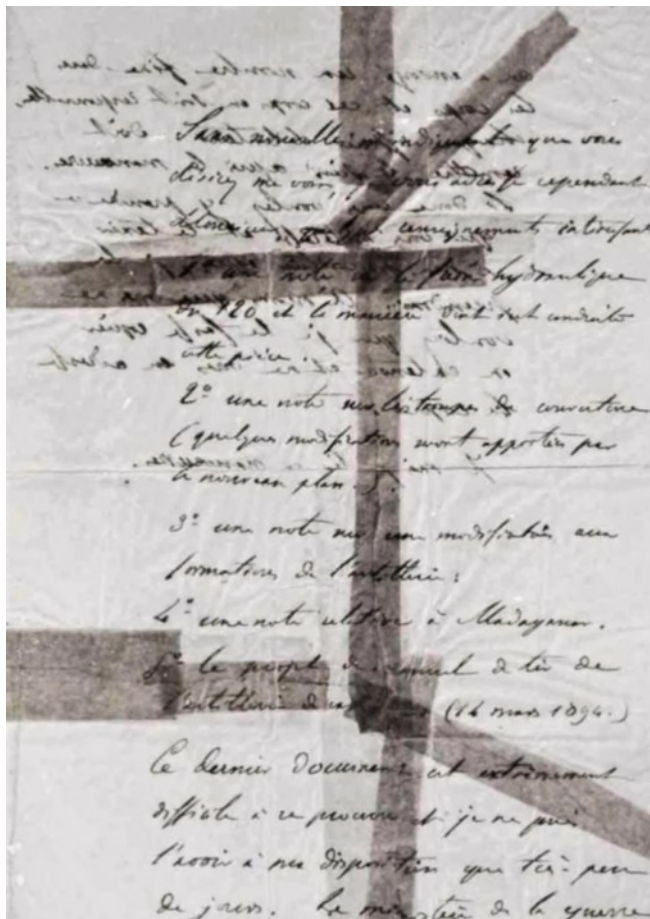
Major Walsin Esterhazy, author of the bordereau used to convict Dreyfus – Wikimedia

“Dreyfus was in prison on Devil’s Island,” Giovanni said, “He couldn’t have written the note. The military had used forged evidence to convict an innocent man.”

“Picquart discovered what the military was determined to hide. While Picquart was convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Dreyfus had been convicted on trumped on charges, he also understood that the military establishment was not going to admit the truth. General Auguste Mercier, the Minister of War who’d originally ordered Dreyfus’ arrest, had become the idol of the nationalists and anti-Semite cabal. Incredibly, Mercier had succeeded in withholding from the defense the ‘secret file’ which he said proved Dreyfus guilt.



General Auguste Mercier, Minister of War, 1894 – Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale – public domain, Wikimedia



Bordereau offering a top-secret artillery manual to the Germans – French National Archives, Wikimedia

“Despite evidence of falsified documents and perjury, Mercier and the high military command had concealed the truth for two years until the moment when Picquart opened the ‘secret Dreyfus file’ and discovered that it was empty of any credible evidence. Pursuing an investigation not officially authorized, Picquart determined that Esterházy had knowledge of the artillery manual and had been in contact with the German Embassy. He discovered that Esterházy was a former counter-espionage agent who crippled by gambling debts had a compelling reason to sell secrets to the Germans. Picquart brought his findings before the General Staff. But Minister of War Mercier’s fierce opposition to any revelations concerning the Dreyfus case stopped Picquart in his tracks. One general claimed that he’d seen Dreyfus’ own letters to the German Emperor. When Picquart spoke to others outside the War Ministry, the Staff began persecuting him.”

“I can see,” Giovanni said, “why the military feared Picquart’s attempt to reopen the case. If it came to light that all the evidence against Dreyfus was false, then the Minister of War and the high command would be guilty of a miscarriage of justice. The army would be dishonored.”

“The military was determined not to let that happen. Each time that Dreyfus’ defenders brought forth new evidence to demand a new trial, the army invented new fabrications that were fanatically supported by most of the popular press. The anti-Semite, Édouard Drumont seized on the Dreyfus Affair and wouldn’t let go. Drumont began a campaign in his nationalist newspaper, *La Libre Parole*, to drive Jewish officers out of the army.

“Determined to conceal Picquart’s information, the army transferred Picquart to Tunisia. But the army’s case came unglued when Dreyfus’ brother Mathieu located a reproduction of the original document upon which the conviction was based, perhaps from Picquart. Fernand de Rodays, the editor of *Le Figaro*, published the document and a banker verified the handwriting as that of Major Esterházy who was in debt to him for money loaned to pay gambling debts. The enraged nationalist journal *Le Libre Parole* mounted a campaign to cancel subscriptions to *Le Figaro*. The management caved into the right-wing attacks and de Rodays lost his job.”

“An issue,” Giovanni said, “that tore France apart and fanned the hatred of the people against the Jews, was set in motion because of a traitor’s gambling debts. The ‘democratic press’ had degenerated into a rabid pack of animals.”

“The turn of the century,” I said, “was the heyday of yellow journalism. There were at least 25 or 30 newspapers in France all vying to scream the loudest in a competition for which paper could be the most

virulent. The journalists inflamed anti-Semitism in the people, who in turn drove the invectiveness of the press, a vicious cycle fueling a firestorm.

“Amidst the battle, Zola came riding to the rescue of Dreyfus, charging the army with pandering to the public’s anti-Semitism to divert attention from their own failures. Zola said the army was committing treason against humanity. Along with Anatole France, Marcel Proust, Claude Monet, Georges Sorel, Émile Durkheim, and many other intellectuals, Zola signed a petition demanding a new trial for Dreyfus. Instead of a new trial for Dreyfus, the government put Zola on trial for defamation.”

“Are you kidding, Zola defends an innocent man and the government puts him on trial?”

“That’s right. The nationalists were out to get Zola. He was enemy number one. When the Minister of War Auguste Mercier testified at Zola’s trial, he spoke with a disdainful infallibility, declaring that without a shadow of a doubt, Dreyfus was a traitor. Mercier refused to reveal the ‘secret’ documents upon which Dreyfus had been convicted. Zola was convicted and removed from the Legion of Honor. Upon leaving the court, Zola was confronted by a taunting mob so violent that he had to have police protection. Given a sentence of one year in prison and a fine of 3,000 francs, Zola escaped to Britain before he could be imprisoned.



Emile Zola faces the Mob – Oil on canvas by Henry de Groux, 1897, public domain, Wikimedia

LA LIBRE PAROLE

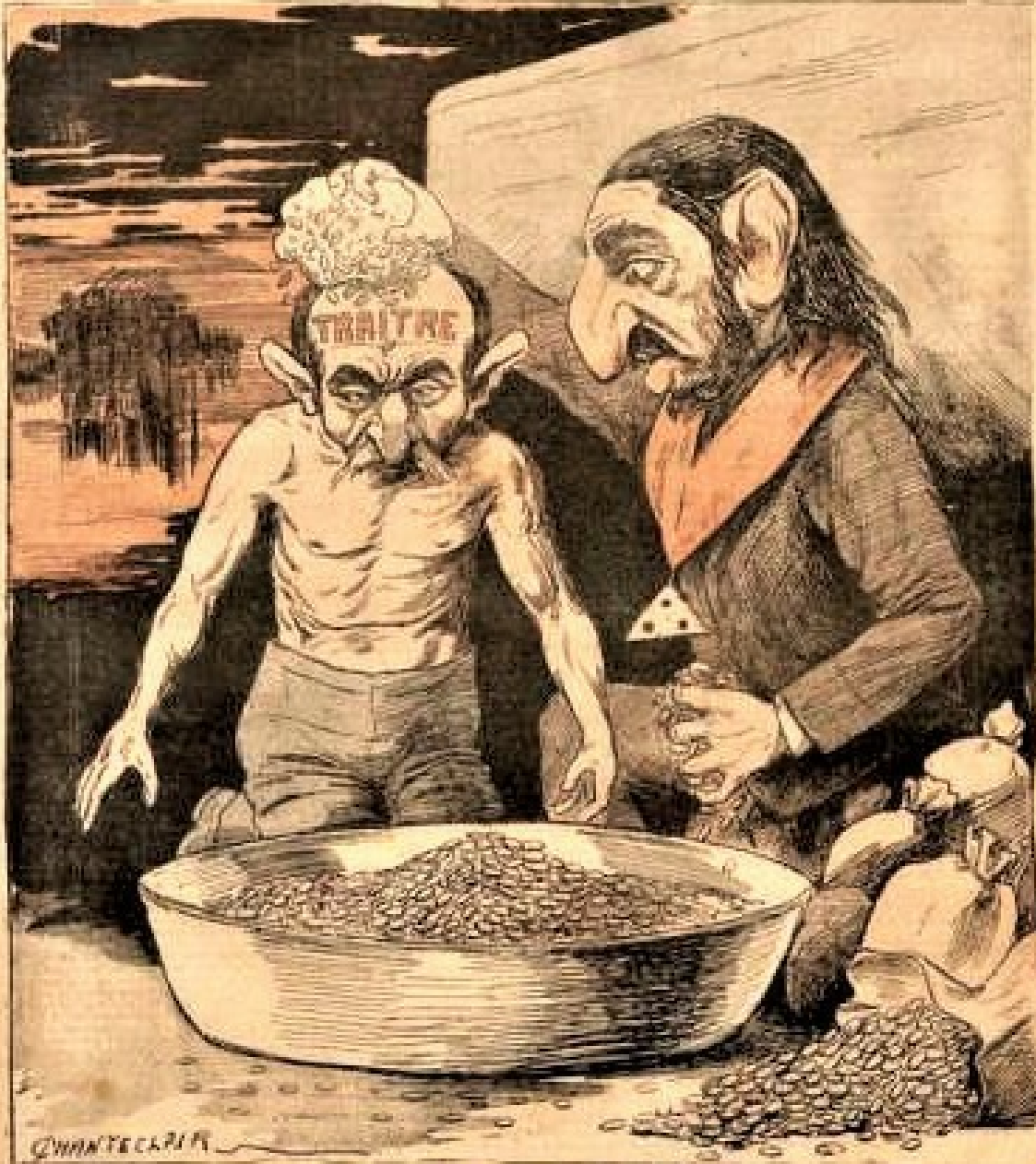
ILLUSTRÉE

La France aux Français

REDACTION
14, Boulevard Malesherbes

Directeur : ÉDOUARD DRUMONT

ADMINISTRATION
14, Boulevard Malesherbes



Savonnage infructueux

— Fuite, chez nous, en France, le sang, seul, lave une tache comme celle-là !!!

Drawing of Dreyfus in the anti-Semitic newspaper of Édouard Drumont, *La Libre Parole*, "Only blood can clean a stain like this." – Public domain

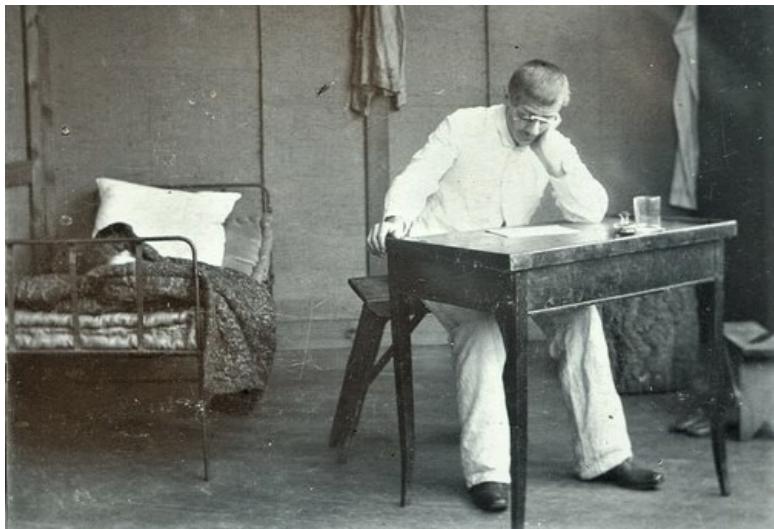


L'AGITATION ANTISÉMITTE A PARIS
Montmartre, Mathieu Dreyfus est brûlé en effigie par des jeunes gens.

L'Agitation antisémite à Paris, anti-Semitic riot in Paris, effigy of Alfred Dreyfus being burned – Unknown author, Le Petit Parisien, public domain, Wikimedia



Alfred Dreyfus during his second trial – Public domain



Alfred Dreyfus imprisoned on Devil's Island, 1898, French Guiana
– Stereograph author, F. Hamel, public domain, Wikimedia

“During this time, Clémenceau published hundreds of articles in his newspaper defending Alfred Dreyfus. Édouard Drumont accused Clémenceau and Zola of insulting the army and Clémenceau fought a duel by pistols with Drumont at the Parc des Princes, both missing the other, a grave misfortune for no man in France deserved to die more than the hate peddler Drumont.”

“Clémenceau,” Giovanni said, “was born to be a fighter.”

“Clémenceau fought several duels and survived.”

“Did they succeed in freeing Dreyfus from Devil’s Island?”

“Due to the outcry for justice by Clémenceau and many artists and intellectuals, the Supreme Court finally took over the case and ruled that Esterhazy used the very same paper in the recent note as in the original incriminating note. Secondly, the court declared that the secret file on Dreyfus contained zero evidence. To placate the military command, a strange compromise was worked out straight out of Louis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* — if Dreyfus made a statement of guilt, then he would be set free.”

“That’s perverse,” Giovanni said, throwing his arms up in the air. “It goes to show that a country that produced Voltaire, Montaigne, Rousseau, and Montesquieu, could also produce Auguste Mercier and Édouard Drumont. If Picquart, Zola, and Clémenceau hadn’t come to the defense of Dreyfus, he would’ve spent the rest of his life in a prison on Devil’s Island.”

Giovanni stopped massaging my back. “If you want me to continue doing lovely things to your body, you have to tell me about unintended consequences of the Versailles Treaty.”

“Please don’t stop doing these wonderful things. You must be patient. There’s more I want to say about the outburst of anti-Semitism before the war. I’m trying to weave a tapestry showing how leading up to the First World War, public opinion created an anti-Semitic zeitgeist which would grow even more malignant before the Second World War. The Dreyfus Affair occurred in the context of extreme bitterness of the French against the annexation of Alsace and Moselle by Germany after their victory in the War of 1870. France was looking for vengeance for that loss. They wanted Alsace and Moselle back. Extreme nationalists fanned the hatred of the Jews and pushed for a war with Germany. Édouard Drumont published a book in 1896, *Jewish France*, demonizing the Jews. It was wildly popular, selling 150,000 copies. From that moment on, virulent anti-Semitism flourished like an evil flower in France.

“The zeitgeist of anti-Semitism, imprinted on the minds of people throughout Europe, created a shroud of complicity while many citizens of France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Ukraine, not only looked the other way but aided the Nazis in deporting Jews to death camps.”

“It was the same in Italy. After Mussolini was overthrown in 1943, German troops occupied Italy and deported thousands of Jews to death camps.”

“There was another affair,” I said, “that contributed to anti-Semitism. During the French attempt to build the Panama Canal, a scandal erupted in 1893 when it was discovered that government officials were taking bribes to withhold information from the public about the bankrupt finances of the builders of the canal. It was a major financial disaster for the French because over a half-million ordinary French had purchased stocks and bonds of the Panama Canal Company. Many French lost their entire savings because of builder Ferdinand de Lesseps’ delusion that he could repeat his success of digging the Suez Canal across low-lying desert terrain of Egypt. De Lesseps’ incompetent engineering studies had failed to grasp the enormity of the task of building a canal through the inhospitable, yellow fever infested mountainous terrain of Panama.



Culebra Cut, 1896, Doomed French attempt to build the Panama Canal through mountainous terrain – public domain, Wikimedia



Panama Canal, Culebra Cut – Shutterstock, 244393495

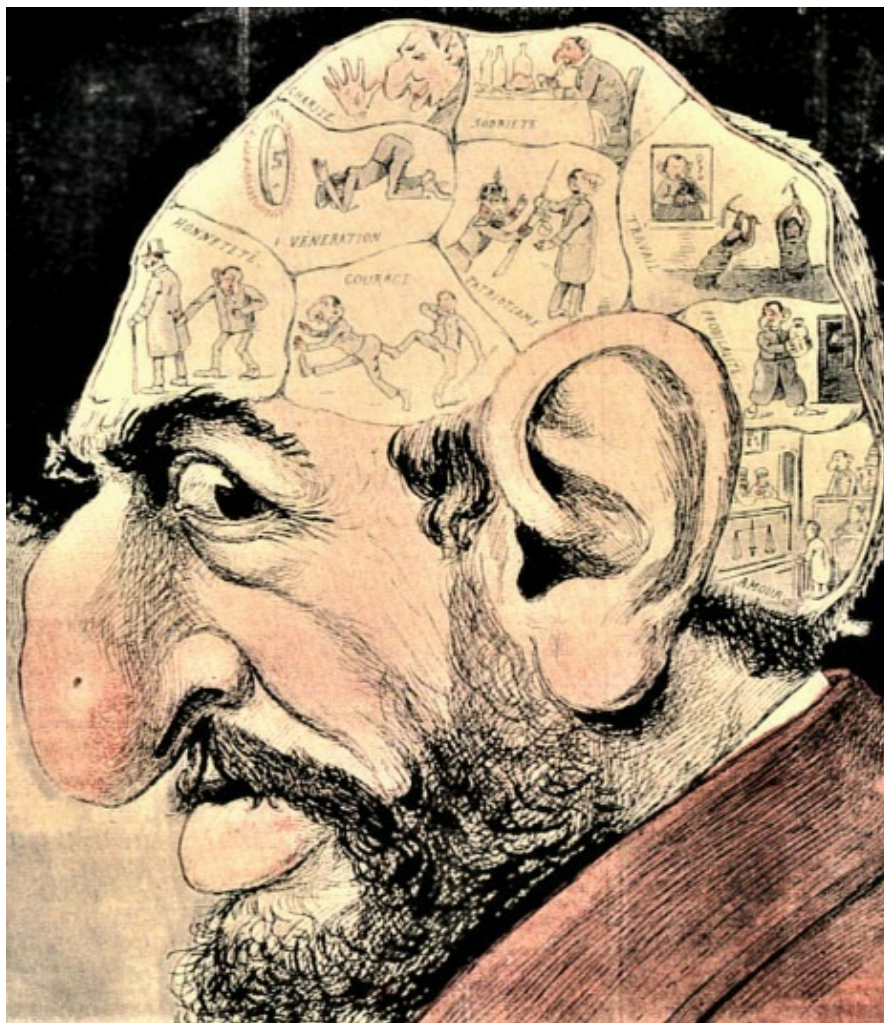


Share of the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique de Panama*, 1880. Ferdinand de Lesseps' effort to build the Panama Canal ended in bankruptcy resulting in a half-million French losing their savings.

“There was not yet medical technology to cope with yellow fever. Corruption on the project was legion with contractors stealing right and left, leaving the work years behind schedule. French workers had no immunity to yellow fever which killed not only the workers but many of the supervising staff. Workers coming from all over the world, India and Pakistan, Egypt and Greece, Spain and Italy, French and British West Indies, died by the thousands, a toll estimated over time to be 40,000. While the workers from the Antilles were immune to yellow fever, they were not immune to malaria. It’s been estimated that 500 hundred workers died for each 1,000-feet of canal. Jungle, tons of earth, and disease doomed the French effort to build the canal.”

“How does this connect to anti-Semitism?”

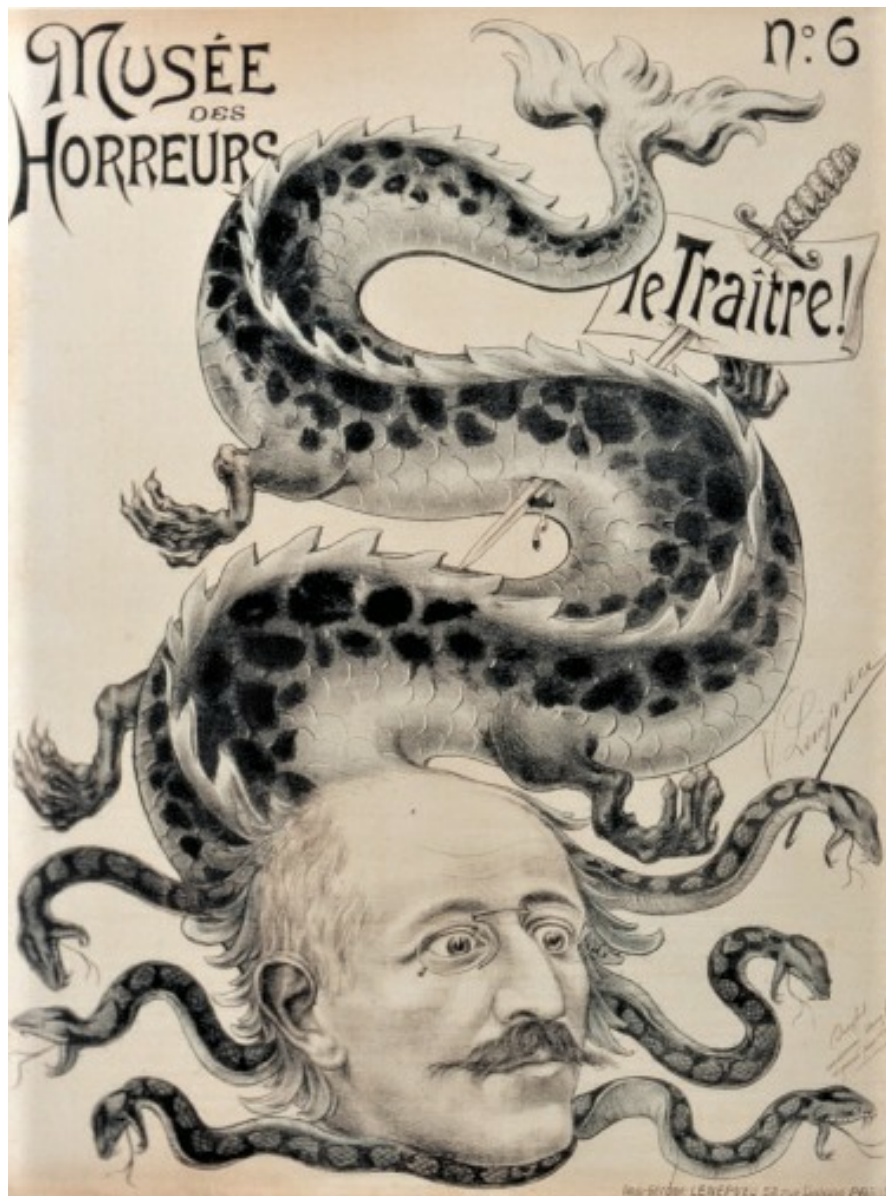
“I’m coming to it. There are many pieces to the puzzle. The German-American writer, Hannah Arendt concluded that the Panama Scandal was employed by the nationalists and monarchists to enflame anti-Semitism in France. Édouard Drumont’s *La Libre Parole* focused on two Jews of German origin.



Édouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole* - thejewishmuseum.org, public domain

“Although they were not among the bribed Parliament members, they were accused of being the agents in charge of distributing bribe money to corrupt legislators and ministers. Because of his association with the agent Cornelius Herz, Clémenceau was defeated in the 1893 election. Drumont’s newspaper day by day insinuated into the public psyche that the agents were exclusively Jews. Historians believe that Cornelius Herz was a scapegoat, vilified by anti-Semites in the Parisian Press who accused Herz of being a traitor, an English spy, and murderer. Herz had his Legion of Honor taken away, held under arrest on trumped charges for three years, and had most of his wealth confiscated only to be completely exonerated eight years after his death after the French government admitted it has been a mistake.

“It appears that the French press was virulently anti-Semitic.”



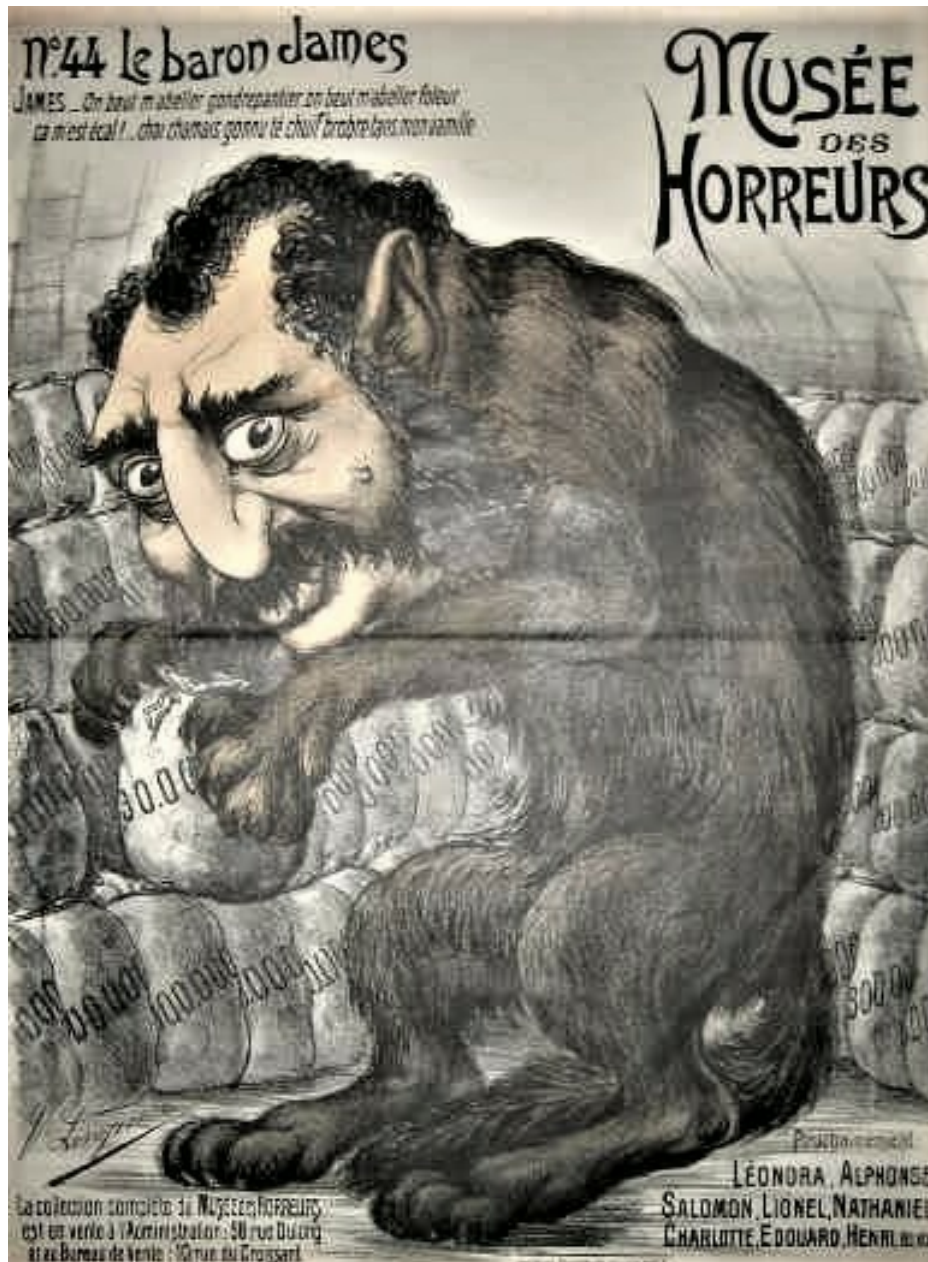
“Dreyfus is a Traitor” – Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme, public domain



Édouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, 1893, public domain

“Drumont had a great influence on popular opinion and the scandal was a dress rehearsal for the persecution of Dreyfus. Hannah Arendt believes that Drumont’s propaganda on the scandal of the Panama Canal prepared the way for the violent anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair.

“During the Affair, Drumont organized dozens of riots against the Jews while the police did little to interfere. Dreyfus was excoriated, a man despised while the one who was truly guilty, Esterhazy, was transformed by the Nationalist press into a hero. When Dreyfus was first charged with treason, few knew the truth of his innocence.



Banker Baron James de Rothschild caricature – Musée d’art et d’histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

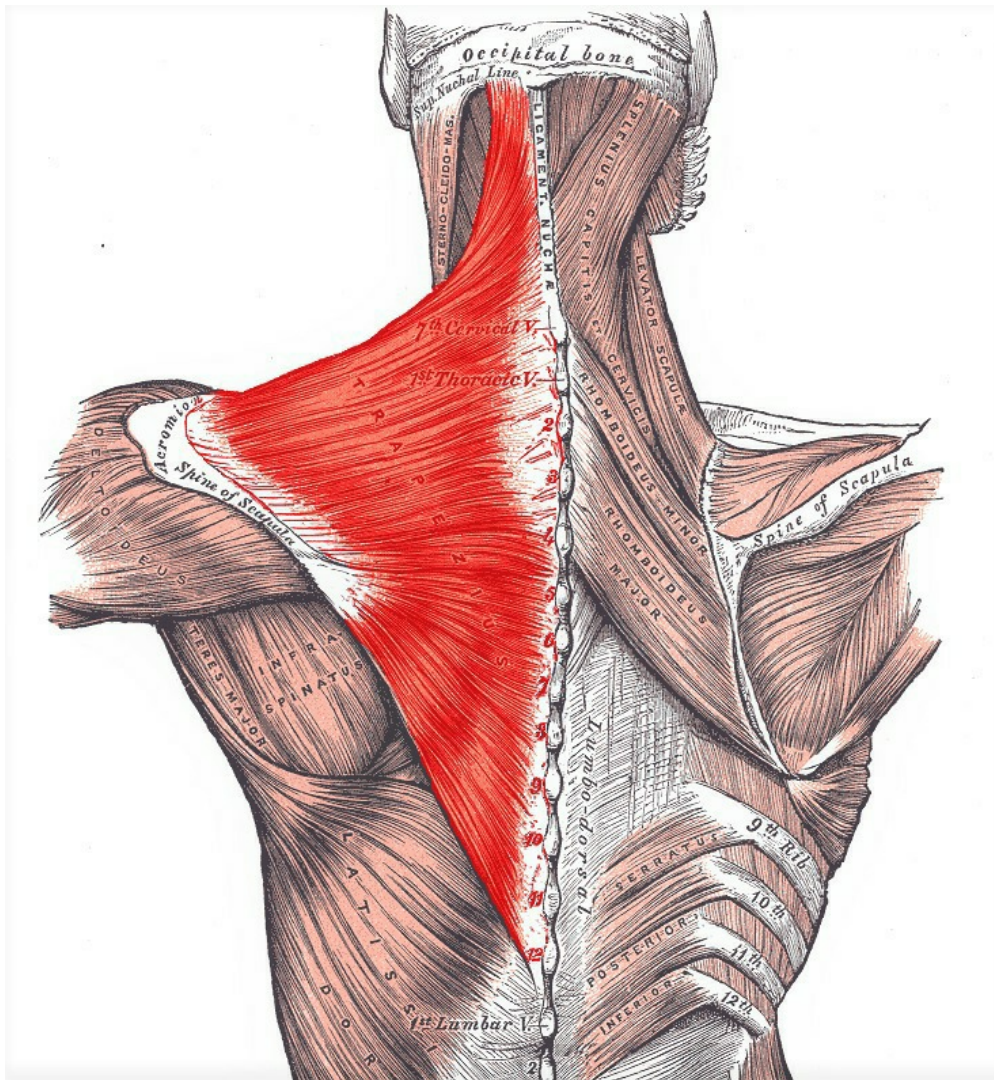
“It reinforces the importance of John Stuart Mill’s warning about the tyranny of the majority. Edmund Burke said, ‘In a democracy, the majority is capable of exercising cruel oppressions upon the minority.’ The monarchists and nationalists were successful in creating a wave of hysteria against the Jews. When I researched old newspapers that reported on the trial, I discovered drawings which depicted the mob chanting death threats against the Jews. Public opinion is a dangerous and fluid beast.”

“Political cartoons are effective propaganda,” Giovanni said, “for they capture an essence that prose cannot — a cocktail of sentiment mixed with hate.

“The Union Générale was a Catholic bank set up with the blessing of the Pope to hold the assets of Catholics. Unable to compete with the greater resources of the Rothschild Bank, the Union Générale went bankrupt, and a number of the aristocracy and Catholics of modest means lost their life’s savings. The Jews were blamed. The clerical and royalist papers said Jews weren’t Frenchmen. They were aliens conspiring against France.”

“Sweetheart,” I asked, “would you work a little more on my neck?”

“If you sit up, I’ll work on your neck. You sit at your typewriter holding your back, neck, and shoulders in a rigid position for hours at a time. That’s bad. Your head is cantilevered forward producing a severe strain making your muscles stiffen up. It restricts the flow of oxygen and blood throughout your body. You must start taking frequent breaks. I’ll give you some relaxing exercises for the trapezius that will increase your circulation and release the toxins built up in your muscles.”



Trapezius muscle – Gray’s Anatomy of the Human Body, 1918 – Public domain, Wikipedia

“Show me.”

“OK, stand up and we’ll do a shoulder blade squeeze. Leave your arms at your side and squeeze your shoulder blades together slowly. That’s it, now hold it for a count of three then slowly release your blades back to a relaxed position. Go ahead, do it 20 times.”

“Good. Here’s another one, the shoulder shrug. Raise your shoulders as high as possible towards your ears and hold for a count of two, then release. Repeat it 20 times. That’s perfect. Keep it up.”

“I already feel more relaxed. What does the trapezius do?”

“The trapezius muscle is named for its trapezoid shape, like that of a stingray, linking the vertebrae of the spine, scapulas, clavicles, and ribs. The trapezius, attached to your head at the occipital bone, serves to tilt and turn the head and neck, balance and move the shoulders and twist the arm.”

“I’m going to start taking breaks at the library and do the trapezius exercises. Are there other exercises I should try?”

“Go down into the push up position. That’s it. Now, lower yourself to the ground keeping your back straight and your stomach taut. Keep your head up. Don’t let it drop down, keeping your neck in line with your spine. Touch the ground, inhaling as you go down, then push back up exhaling as you come up. That’s very good. Now do it ten times. Once you’re used to it, you can do it as many times as you like. Not only are you working the trapezius but your arms and stomach too.”

“What would I do without you, Giovanni?”

“What can I say my love, I’m indispensable. Tell me, what was the final outcome of the Dreyfus affair?”

“It changed the lives of Jews everywhere. It was a watershed moment in the lives of Jews in Western and Central Europe. Theodore Herzl, a young Austro-Hungarian journalist with the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna, was sent to Paris to cover the Dreyfus affair. Reporting on the issue woke Herzl up to the depth of the hostility of the Christian majority in France. Karl Leuger, the Mayor of Vienna and founder of the Christian Social Party at the end of the 19th century, had gained great popularity by raising the ‘Jewish Question.’ Although Leuger was considered by the Catholics a progressive leader who accomplished much to turn Vienna into a garden city, he was an admirer of Édouard Drumont.



Karl Leuger, Mayor of Vienna – Author, Ludwig Gillich, public domain, Wikipedia

“Here in our Austrian fatherland the situation is such that the Jews have seized a degree of influence which exceeds their number and importance. In Vienna, the poor craftsman has to go begging on Saturday afternoon, to turn the labour of his hands to account, he has to beg at the Jewish furniture dealer’s. The influence on the masses, in our country, is in the hands of the Jews, the greater part of the press is in their hands, by far the largest part of all capital and, in particular, high finance, is in Jewish hands, and in this respect the Jews operate a terrorism of a kind that could hardly be worse. For us, in Austria, it is a matter of liberating Christian people from the hegemony of Jewry.” – Karl Leuger, Mayor of Vienna

“A zealous Catholic, Leuger advocated racist policies against non-German minorities in Austria-Hungary and the restriction of the immigration of Russian and Romanian Jews. Believing that Hungary was infiltrated by Jews, Leuder called Budapest, ‘Judapest.’ Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* credits Leuder as an inspiration for the final solution of the ‘Jewish Question.’”

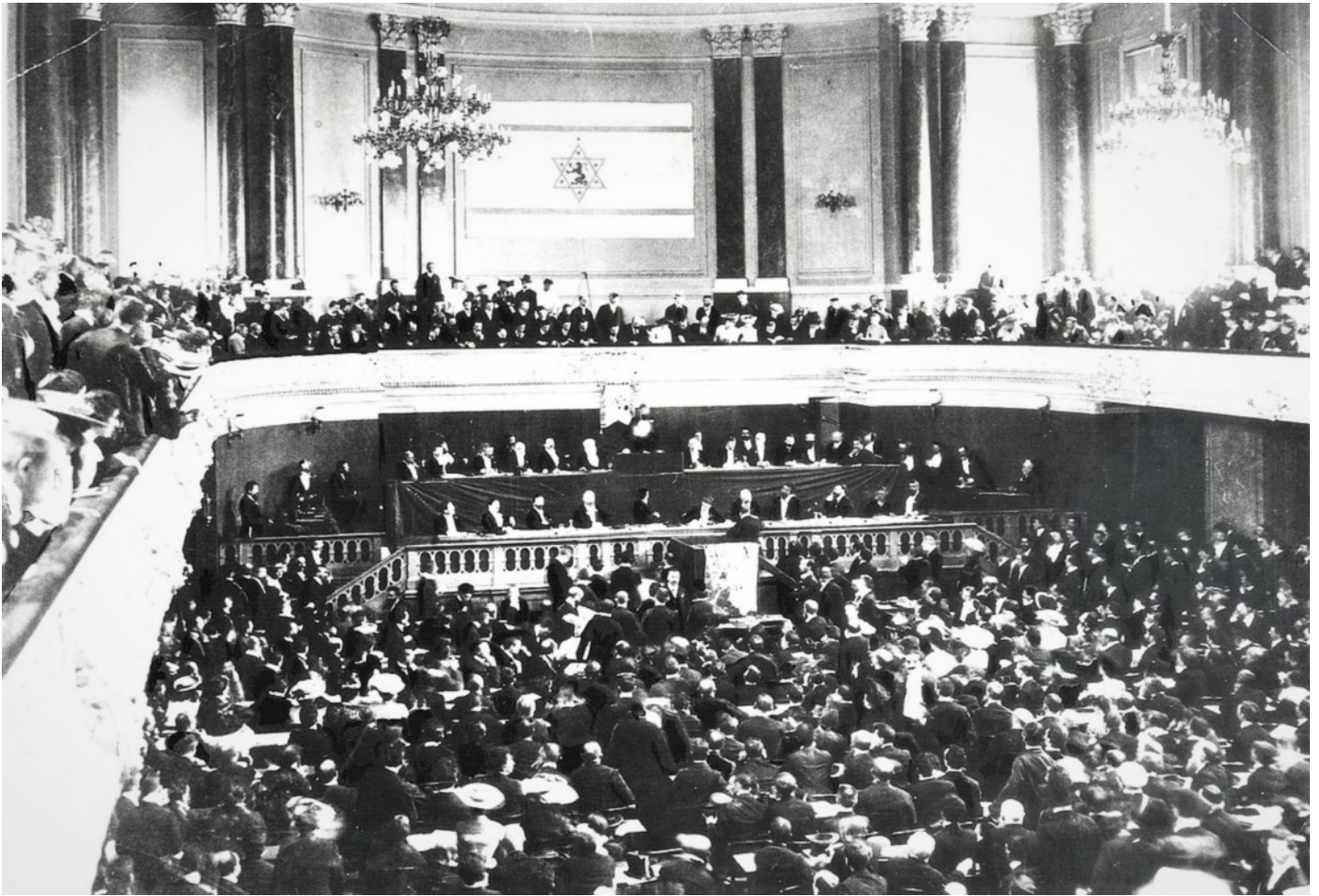
“I see,” Giovanni said, “Hitler’s racial ideas had been around for a long time.”

“The hatred was rising throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prussia. In the early 1880’s, the Prussian ministry of the interior supported anti-Semitic student associations which the liberal university was trying to suppress. Prussia began to constrict its policy on naturalizing foreign Jews which led to the expulsion of 30,000 Poles and Jews in 1885. Anti-Semitic agitation led the government in the 1890’s to forbid Jewish citizens from adopting Christian family names because it made it hard to detect who was Jewish and who was not.

“When Herzl was studying law in Vienna and literary editor of *Neue Freie Presse*, he saw the prejudice expanding. But when he came to France to cover the trial, Herzl was shocked by the extreme virulence of the anti-Semitism in a country which he had expected to reflect the ideas of the 18th century scientists and philosophers in the Age of Reason — revolutionary thinkers like Rene Descartes, John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, Voltaire, David Hume, Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant, and Sir Isaac Newton. Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* had said, ‘If there is something you know, communicate it. If there is something you don’t know, search for it.’ While writing about the Dreyfus Trial, Herzl realized that the French Enlightenment had been buried by ignorance and passion. The popular press cheering on hatred of Jews was the final straw. It revolutionized Herzl. He became convinced that Jewish emancipation had been a failure. Abandoning his earlier ideas on Jewish assimilation, Herzl decided to dedicate the rest of his life to a better solution — Jews must remove themselves from Europe and create their own state.



Theodor Herzl, founder of Zionism, 1897 – Author, Carl Pietzner, public domain, Wikimedia



Theodor Herzl speaking at the First Zionist Congress, 1 January 1897 – Unknown author, National Photo Collection of Israel, public domain, Wikimedia. The First Zionist Congress, held in the concert hall of the Stadtcasino, Basel Switzerland, was convened and chaired by Theodor Herzl. The delegates from 17 countries established the Zionist Organization, adopting the Hatikvah as its anthem, which would later become the national anthem of the State of Israel.

“Herzl published in 1896 *Der Judenstaat*, the Jewish State. Herzl wrote, ‘I do not wish to take up the cudgels for the Jews in this pamphlet. It would be useless. Everything rational and everything sentimental that can possibly be said in their defense has been said already.’ Rather than trying to overcome anti-Semitism, Herzl said that the Jews must create a Jewish state which would have equal rights for Jews and non-Jews.”

“In 1896,” Giovanni said, “the idea of a democratic Israel was born.”

“That was the beginning. Herzl was forward in his thinking because he’d been influenced by the Utopian socialist thinkers in France. Herzl foresaw an economic system which would be a third way between capitalism and socialism. He saw no reason for conflict between Arab and Jew. The Jewish state would have an advanced welfare program, public ownership of essential natural resources. Jews and non-Jews would have equal rights and women would have equal voting rights.”

DER
JUDENSTAAT.

—
VERSUCH

EINER

MODERNEN LÖSUNG DER JUDENFRAGE

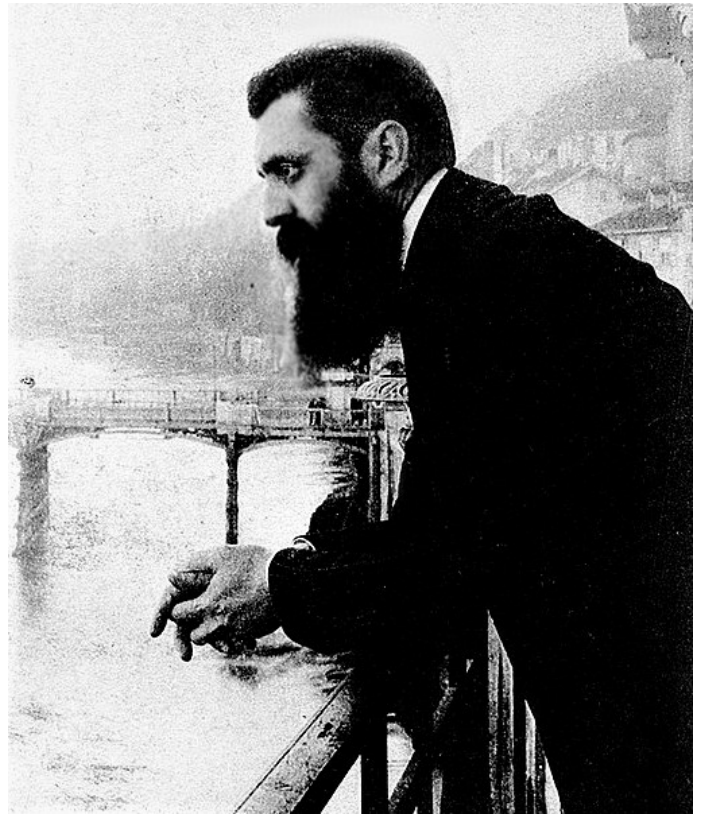
VON

THEODOR HERZL

DOCTOR DER RECHTE.



LEIPZIG und WIEN 1896.
M. BREITENSTEIN'S VERLAGS-BUCHHANDLUNG
WIEN, IX., WÄHRINGERSTRASSE 5.



At left: Title page of *Der Judenstaat*, 1896 – Author, Theodor Herzl, public domain. At right: Theodor Herzl at the Hotel Les Trois Rois, Basel, Switzerland, 1897 – Author, E.M. Lilien, public domain, Wikimedia

“These are radical ideas for the turn of the century,” Giovanni said. “Jews had been in Europe for centuries. They’d taken on influential roles in business, the arts and sciences. The roots of the Jews had permeated the soil. Jews *were* Europe.”

“Herzl was aware,” I said, “of that history of assimilation. But after the explosion of anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair, he said, ‘We are called aliens even though we have lived for centuries in our native lands. If France, an upholder of emancipation, progress, and socialism, can get caught up in a hurricane of anti-Semitism with Parisians chanting ‘Kill the Jews!’ then where can Jews be safe — if not in their own country?’”

“At that time newspapers formed public opinion, just as radio and motion pictures forms opinions today and television will do in the future. Yellow journalism flourished in France just as in the United States with newspapers advocating repressive acts against Indians and African-Americans. Newspaper owners in France sold papers by trumpeting scandal. The press was the howling wind feeding the fires of the Dreyfus Affair. Emile Zola said the Nationalist press was the scourge of France — ‘a shameful disease which nobody has the courage to cure.’

“While the fascist and communist dictators have their state-controlled mouthpieces, the capitalist democracies have a press that fuels controversy, fans hatreds, and promotes jerk leg responses that shape the nation’s beliefs, which in turn inspires the press to write more drivel. Emile sent me a quote on the press from a former editor of *TIME* magazine who said, ‘The main business of the press supposedly is news . . . News is what the press produces. Most of the world’s ‘news’ is manufactured by the press itself.’”

“I see now what you’re talking about. The newspapers made money by sensationalizing the treason of Colonel Dreyfus.”

“Herzl was convinced that anti-Semitism could never be rooted out of European culture. It was impossible to eradicate a deep and pervasive hatred. It was fixed, immutable. Herzl said that when Jews immigrated during the Diaspora to avoid persecution into another land with less discrimination, their different culture and appearance again gave rise to persecution. No matter where the Jew lives anti-Semitism follows.

“Religious prejudice against Jews has existed since the time of Christ and the birth of Christianity. The Protestant revolutionary Martin Luther was eager to convert Jews to an acceptance of the Messiah as their savior. However, the Jews weren’t interested in becoming Christians. They were quite happy with Judaism. Luther didn’t take the rejection well. After thinking about it, Luther published, *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Luther said the synagogues were dens of devils consumed by vanity, conceit, lies, and blasphemy. All that the Jews own, they’ve stolen by way of usury. The Jews are a terrifying example of God's wrath. Luther said to ban their rabbis from teaching, destroy their houses, set fire to their synagogues and schools.”

“Luther didn’t mince words.”

“Luther had a habit of hyperbolic speech.” I said. “He was a revolutionary who wanted to convert people to his way of thinking. One of the most widely read authors of his time, people saw Luther as a prophet. The Reformation of Martin Luther eventually set off the Thirty Years War which was essentially a war between Catholics and Protestants, leading to chaos and anarchy while dozens of armies looted and killed without end year after year, taking the greatest number of lives of any war until the slaughter of World War One. During those long years, Germany lost over half its population. It took over a century for some regions to regain their prosperity. Bavaria lost eighty thousand families and nine hundred villages. Virulence against the Jews spiraled into violence, with Protestant pastors urging their parishioners to murder Jews.



On the Jews and Their Lies by Martin Luther, Wittenberg, 1543 – Public domain, Wikimedia



Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521 – Anton von Werner painting – Public Domain, Wikimedia

Luther, the igniter of the Protestant Revolution was excommunicated by Pope Leo X for his fiery condemnation of the practice of the Church of selling indulgences that forgave sin. Like Augustine in the 4th Century, Luther believed that mankind could not reach salvation by their own acts. The Bible, not the Church is the central source of religious authority and salvation could only be bestowed by God's divine grace. In a direct challenge to the authority of the pope, Luther maintained that all doctrines of the Church not supported by scripture should be abandoned. After Luther's excommunication in 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V called Luther to Worms, Germany to appear before the Holy Roman Assembly to answer charges of heresy. Under a letter of safe conduct from Prince Frederick III of Saxony, Luther appeared before the Imperial Diet at Worms where he refused to recant his criticism of the Church. The Diet proclaimed him a heretic and the Holy Roman Emperor issued the Edict of Worms declaring Luther a notorious heretic, decreeing that Luther's writings were to be burned and offered a reward for his capture. Fearing for Luther's safety, Prince Frederick of Saxony abducted Luther, taking him to safety to Wartburg Castle where Luther began his translation of the Bible into the German language, making it accessible to the common man.

“The Jews of Western Europe preferred to live in the areas under Roman Catholic control, for in the Protestant areas, the Jews were ravaged by the terror of the mob and suffered terribly throughout the Thirty Years War. Through Luther's influence, the anti-Semitism of the Roman Catholic entered the Protestant Church. Many historians believe that due to his reputation, Luther became the chief conduit conveying the demonic views of Jews into the mindset of German culture — indeed into the mindset of all the Western European cultures. In Nazi Germany, many of the anti-Semitic articles in the leading Nazi journal, Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer* often quoted Luther's demonizing of the Jews.”

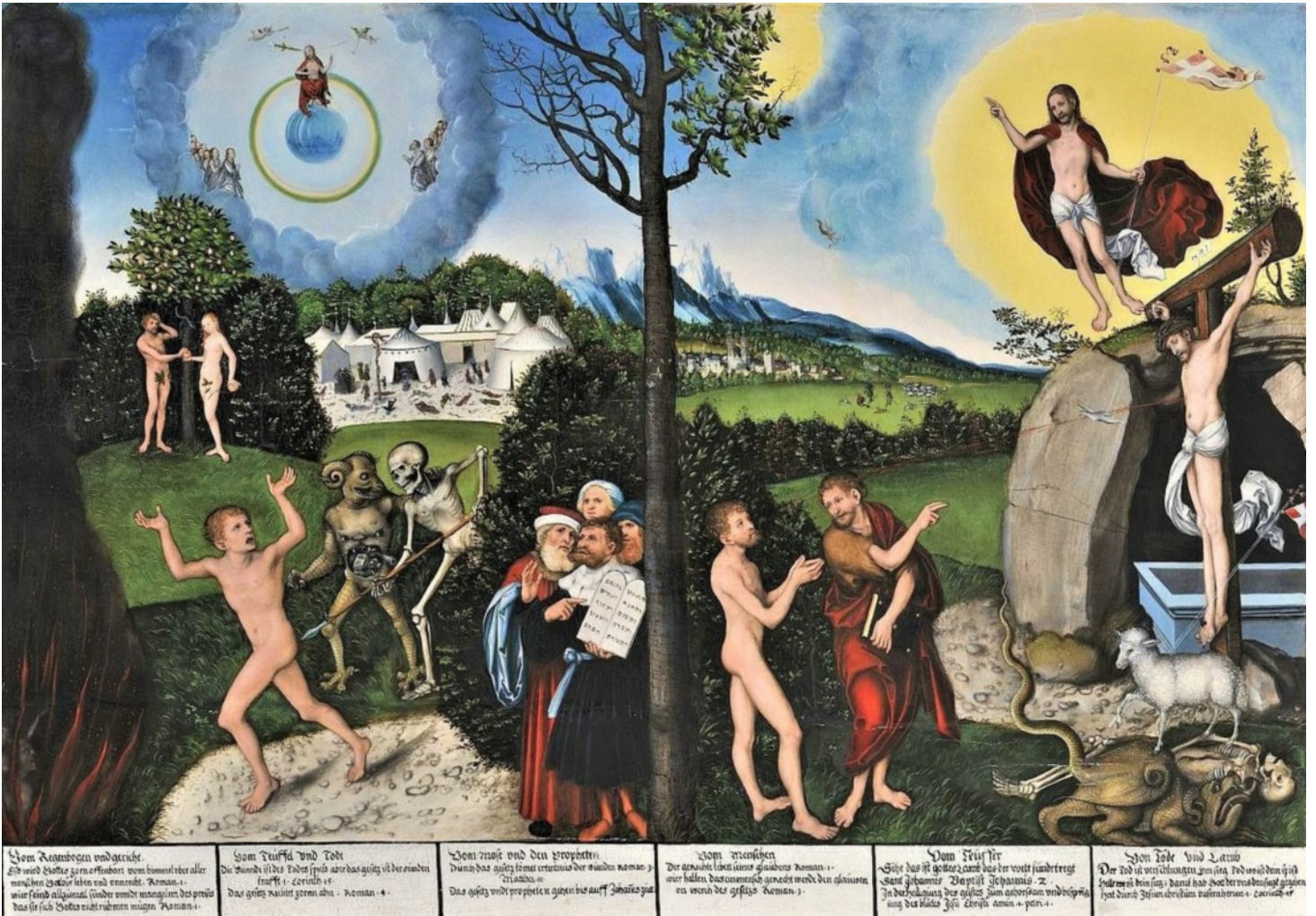
“Wasn't Martin Luther the first to translate the Latin Bible into vernacular German?”

“Luther's translation of the Bible into German fueled a revolution. The fact that the common people couldn't read the Bible up until that time had given the Church absolute control of interpreting the scriptures.

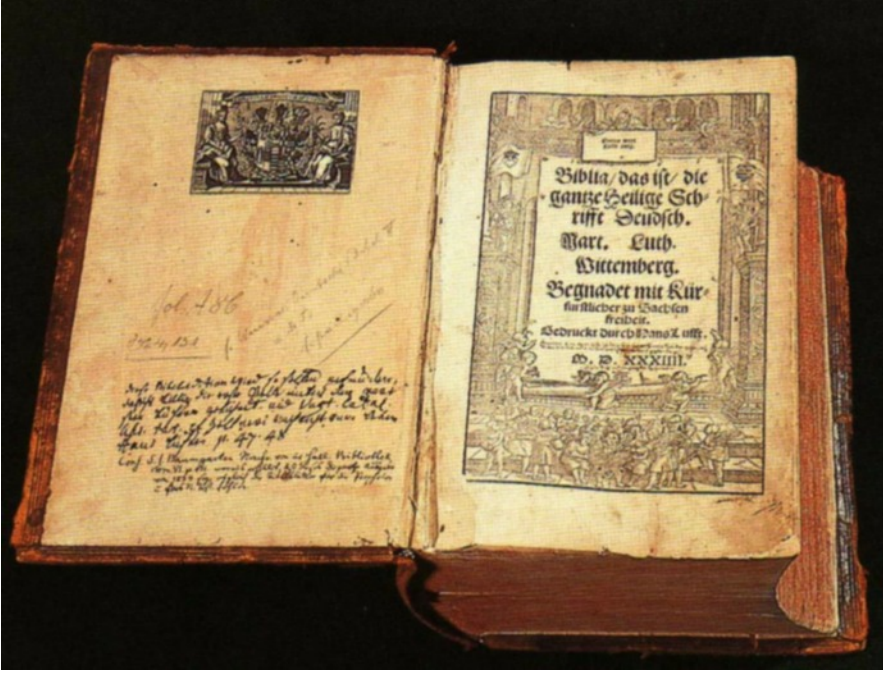


Saint Augustine – Painting by Philippe de Champaigne, circa 1645-1650, Los Angeles Museum of Art, public domain, Wikimedia

“Augustine of Hippo believed to attain authentic love, one must deny selfish pleasure by suppressing sexual desire for the love of God. One can avoid evil caused by sexual intercourse by abstaining from marriage. Augustine was responsible for the Catholic canon prohibiting women from being priests. His views on sexuality were responsible for determining the role of women in the Church.



Law and Grace, impression of Martin Luther's theology – Painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, Herzogliches Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Martin Luther's Bible, 1534 – Author, Torsten Schleese, public domain, Wikipedia



The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans Under the Command of Titus, AD 70 – Painting by David Roberts, 1850, public domain, Wikimedia

“Luther’s translation of the Bible into the common tongue served to weaken the power of the Church and ignite the Protestant’s schism with the Catholics.”

“Didn’t the Romans persecute the Jews long before Luther?”

“The Romans besieged Jerusalem in 70 AD, destroyed most of the Temple of Jerusalem and took away the Menorah. After Emperor Constantine established Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, Jews were declared ‘Christ killers.’ The Christian theologian St. Augustine compared Jews to Cain who committed the first crime in history. There was a logical Christian syllogism: Judas Iscariot sold the Lord for silver. Judas was a Jew. Therefore, Hebrews must bear guilt for the death of Jesus until the end of time. Many Romans saw the Sack of Rome by the Visigoths as a punishment for abandoning the old Roman gods for Christianity. Augustine wrote *The City of God* to defend Christianity.”

“St. Augustine,” Giovanni said, “wrote on the doctrine of original sin and free will. He believed that sin existed because man who is the spirit failed to exercise control over woman who is the flesh.”



Taking of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, 15th July 1099 – Author Emile Signol, 1847, Palace of Versailles, public domain, Wikimedia



Jews being burned at the stake, 1349, miniature from a 14th century manuscript *Antiquitates Flandriae* – Author, Pierart dou Tiel, public domain, Wikimedia



Les Grandes Misères de la guerre, Les Pendus, The great Miseries of War, the Hanging by Jacques Callot, 1632 – Wikimedia

“The history of Christian Rome set the tone for Judaic-Christian relations throughout the centuries. In the 6th century, Emperor Justinian passed the Justinian Code prohibiting Jews from building synagogues, reading the Bible in Hebrew, assembling in public, and testifying against Christians in court. In the 7th century, Emperor Heraclius forced Jews to convert to Christianity. In the 11th century, Pope Urban II gave a sermon at Clermont-Ferrand, calling for a Christian army to take back the Holy Land from the Muslims. The Holy Sepulcher church in Jerusalem was believed to contain the tomb of Christ. Any man who took up arms to take back the land of Christ, Pope Urban II promised absolution from sin and eternal glory. For unemployed warriors and younger sons who had no inheritance, a Holy War promised a life of valor, conquest, and glory.

“As thousands of knights passed through France, the Rhineland, and Bohemia on the way to the Holy Land, Jews who refused to be converted to Christianity were massacred. Anyone who didn’t profess to believe in Christ was exterminated. Jews and Muslims were equally enemies of Christ. In resisting conversion, Jews committed mass suicides, especially young Jewish virgins. The destruction of Jewish communities was so vast that some historians call it the first Holocaust.

“Nobles of Europe set up Crusader kingdoms in Armenia, Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. During the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, the surviving defenders surrendered the citadel in exchange for safe passage, but despite the promise of safety, the Muslims were slaughtered in a paroxysm of religious passion, including those who’d taken refuge in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. When the Crusaders set the synagogue on fire, the Jews who’d taken refuge were pushed back into the flames to burn alive. Elimination of the infidel is the goal of all Holy Wars.”



Richard Cœur de Lion Having the Saracens Beheaded – Author, Alphonse de Neuville, François Guizot, public domain, Wikimedia

“You’re saying that Hitler wasn’t the inventor of the Holocaust. The policy of extermination has existed since the Roman Emperors.”

“There were many contributors to the Holocaust.” One precursor to Hitler was Heinrich von Treitschke, a German historian and philosopher in the mid-19th century. A professor in Berlin and Freiburg, and later a member of the Reichstag in the Hohenzollern Empire, Treitschke said every virile people had established colonial possessions in the territories of barbarians. Every great nation had done it and Germany must do the same or become a second-rate power. A powerful opinion maker, Treitschke detested the British Empire and was successful in creating in Germany a fervid resentment of the British. The intense Anglophobia that Treitschke instilled in Germans would become a strong motivating force for the First World War fifty years later.



History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century by Heinrich von Treitschke, German historian and philosopher – Publisher, Ernst Keil's Nachfolger, public domain, Wikipedia

“Influenced by a pseudo-scientific Social Darwinian theory, Treitschke advocated a policy of racial superiority. Africans were inferior, so were the Poles and Lithuanians. In fact, all Slavic people were inferior. Germany must annex new territories at the expense of inferior peoples. ‘Brave peoples expand,’ Treitschke thundered, ‘cowardly peoples perish.’

“Treitschke’s philosophy posited that a war of total annihilation was ultimately more humane than keeping the vanquished peoples alive as beasts of burden, a philosophy which was ruthlessly followed eighty years later by the Third Reich. Treitschke was an attack dog challenging any person or any political party who didn’t support the rising power of noble blooded Germany. His book, *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century* was hugely influential within the Hohenzollern Empire. Treitschke said that at one time Jews had a role in the history of Germany because of their financial acumen. But since the Aryan race had now mastered finance, the Jews were no longer necessary. The Jews were disloyal to Germany. They were loyal only unto themselves. Treitschke said time and time again, Jews were of no further use to the world. Many years later, Julius Streicher’s Nazi journal, *Der Stürmer*, adopted von Treitschke’s words from the 19th century, ‘*Die Juden sind unser Unglück — The Jews are our misfortune.*’”



Jews suckling a pig, Wittenberger Judensau – Author, Wolfgang Meissner, 1596, public domain, Wikimedia

“Treitschke was a powerful advocate for evil,” Giovanni said, rolling over and sitting up. “Hitler was carried on the wind that Treitschke stirred up in Germany. In time that wind became a hurricane from hell.”

“You’ve understood perfectly. That’s why, Stalin said, ‘Ideas are more powerful than guns.’”

“Demagogues,” Giovanni said, “have a demonic talent for selling their ideas. Mussolini’s rhetoric struck a cord with the disillusioned Italian. He had a genius for stirring the fears and hopes of the masses. If you’re good at hypnotic rhetoric, the patriots will follow you over the cliff. It’s sort of like a mass suicide.

“The philosophic ideas motivating Nazi Germany, I said, “were bearing poisonous fruit over several centuries. One critic said, “Hitler wouldn’t have been possible without Martin Luther.’ There were many German philosophers other than Luther who prepared the fertile ground for the efflorescence of anti-Semitism during the Third Reich, including Fichte and von Treitschke’s disciple, Friedrich von Bernhardi. In both the First and Second World War, German Protestant leaders used the writings of Luther to praise German nationalism. In 1941, Protestant Evangelical Church leaders from Saxony to Schleswig-Holstein to Lübeck issued a proclamation which declared the Jews incapable of being saved by baptism. They claimed that the Jews’ racial characteristics were responsible for the war.”

“That’s nuts. How could racial characteristics be responsible for causing a war?”

“When one desires to hate something, one invents the facts. Even though Aristotle figured out that the earth was spherical, the established powers of Church and State refused to believe — it contradicted the established dogma. When prophets are determined to create an image of evil, the human mind can conjure up whatever proofs are necessary. Many Protestant leaders agreed that severe measures had to be taken against the Jews for they were natural enemies of Germany. The Jews must be banished.

“Even pastors who opposed Hitler, like Martin Niemöller, had thought before the war that the Jews had harmed Germany. Pastor Heinrich Grübber, a friend of Niemöller who had preached against the sterilization laws and anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime, had said that the Jews had ruled Germany financially, economically, politically, and culturally since World War One, and now it would best for them to immigrate. When Grübber spoke out against Hitler’s anti-Semitic policies in sermons to his congregation, Nazi churchgoers reported him to the Gestapo. He was arrested and sent to Dachau.”

“Papa told me that under Mussolini, it was useless to resist openly. Criticizing the government was a certain death sentence. Papa said in a police state, you have no choice but to go underground. You resist through guerilla warfare — through violence.”



Nazi philosopher Alfred Rosenberg, author of *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, was one of the principle advocates of the National Socialist suppression of “degenerate” modern art, persecution of the Jews, *Lebensraum*, and the theory of the master race. Rosenberg planned the extermination of foreign Christian faiths in Germany. The Bible and Cross were to be replaced with *Mein Kampf* and the swastika – Author, Friedrich Franz Baurer, German Federal archives, Wikimedia

“As Voltaire remarked,” I said. “‘It is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong.’ Your papa fought with the partisans?”

“On Monte Pennino in the Appennino Mountains east of Assisi and around Monti Sibillini, north of Castelluccio. Papa didn’t like to talk about what he did. But he talked a lot about Mussolini. I got an earful about fascism.”

“Fascism had a conflicted view of Christianity,” I said. “Most of the Nazis elite were either Catholic or Protestant. The German Evangelical Church was one of the pillars of German culture and loyal to the state. But in the Lutheran Church there was a struggle between those who wanted to Nazify the church, and those who opposed any link with the Nazi State.

“German philosopher Dr. Ernst Bergmann was the theologian who worked Nazism into the Protestant faith. Or perhaps I should say, Bergmann worked Protestantism into the Nazi faith. Bergmann’s book, *25 Points of the German Religion*, declared that the Old Testament and even parts of the New Testament were false and should be rejected by German Christians. Bergmann said, ‘Jesus was not a Jew. Jesus was of Aryan descent.’ Bergmann believed Adolf Hitler was the Messiah.”

“What a bizarre story. What about the Catholics?”

“Since the Catholics were influenced by decisions in Rome, they were less inclined to support intervention from the Nazi State. In 1933, some bishops even forbid their dioceses from joining the Nazi Party. As Hitler tightened his grip on power, under grave pressure, the Vatican signed a concordance with the Nazi Party. Some Protestants broke from the Lutheran Church and formed a racist ‘German Christianity,’ fusing their Protestant theology with the racial theories of Nazism as Dr. Bergmann had done. Theologian Karl Barth accused German Lutherans of interpreting Martin Luther’s thought to justify Nazi ideology.



Karl Barth and Martin Luther King, 1962 – AP Photo by Bill Ingraham, Karl Barth Archiv Basel, fair use. Regarded by many as the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth co-authored the Darmstadt Statement in 1947, a declaration of German guilt and responsibility for the Third Reich and Second World War. Featured on the cover of *Time*, April 1962, his influence spread beyond academia to mainstream culture. Barth said that the Church’s fear of socialism led to it being indoctrinated by Nazi ideology.



Initially a supporter of Hitler, Swiss theologian Martin Niemöller became one of the founders of the Confessing Church that opposed the Nazification of German Protestant churches. For Niemöller’s resistance, he was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen and Dachau camps for seven years, narrowly escaping execution. One of the originators of the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, Niemöller expressed deep regret for not having done more to help the victims of the Nazi State – Author, J.D. Noske/Anefo, Dutch National Archives, Wikipedia

“After the war, Martin Niemöller, a theologian who spent seven years in concentration camps for opposing Hitler, said that both Catholics and Protestants were as guilty as the SS and the Gestapo for the Holocaust. Christians had failed to recognize Jesus Christ in their brothers who were slain for being a Jew.

“Niemöller said that the Christians did nothing to stop the Germans who were bathing their hands in blood — not only the blood of the Jews but the blood of the communists, Romani, Poles, and Slavs.

Niemöller asked, ‘As Christians, aren’t we equally to blame for the Holocaust?’”

“Weren’t there some Catholics and Lutherans who resisted Hitler?”

“Throughout the Nazi epoch,” I said, “the Church leaders felt they couldn’t speak out against Hitler, but there were a number of Germans who opposed Hitler. The one Christian diplomat who made the greatest contribution, was Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish envoy to Hungary who sheltered Jews by getting the Hungarian government to designate buildings in Budapest as Swedish territory. Raoul Wallenberg was one smooth talker. It’s believed that he’s saved 100,000 Hungarian Jews.”

“Lord, it sounds impossible. How could he manage that?”

“It wasn’t easy. With the help of Valdemar Langlet of the Hungarian Red Cross, the Swedish legation was renting buildings for ‘the Red Cross’ and equipping them with signs like, ‘The Swedish Library,’ or ‘The Swedish Research Institute,’ hanging huge Swedish flags over the entry to make the point that the buildings were territory of Sweden, protected by diplomatic immunity. A Swedish diplomat Per Anger issued protective passports which said the bearer was a Swedish subject awaiting repatriation. At one point, there were 10,000 people under Swedish protection. Wallenberg, a master negotiator, even got the Hungarian government to agree that they didn’t have to wear the Nazi yellow badge required to be worn by Jews.”



Raoul Wallenberg, Swedish envoy to Hungary, sheltered thousands of Hungarian Jews from Nazi extermination. Accused of espionage after the Siege of Budapest by the Red Army, it is presumed Wallenberg was executed by the Soviet KGB. Israel has designated Wallenberg one of the Righteous Among Nations – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

Gio sat up again, turning to me incredulously. “You mean the Nazi puppet government agreed to it?”

“Sometimes there are miracles. Miracles are created by women and men with lots of guts. A Doctor of Theology, Hermann Maas helped many Jews flee from Germany by arranging exit visas. When the Nazis discovered Maas’ work, they put pressure on the Church and forced Maas out of office, finally sending him to a forced labor camp in France. One of the most heroic attempts to oppose Hitler was the White Rose.”

“The White Rose?”

“The White Rose was an underground group of students in their early twenties guided by Kurt Huber, a philosophy professor. Some had served as medics on the Eastern Front where they’d heard of executions of Jews, deportations of Poles and Jews and the atrocities in the Warsaw Ghetto. After hearing about Bishop August von Galen's sermon condemning the Nazi program of euthanasia and the Wehrmacht’s catastrophic loss at Stalingrad, the students decided they had to act.”

“A euthanasia program?”

“In 1939, the National Socialists began a secret Aktion T4 program to systematically kill disabled children in special pediatric clinics.”



Hartheim Euthanasia Center where 18,000 patients deemed “incurably sick” were killed – Dralon photo, Wikimedia

“My God.”

“They soon extended the T4 program to the execution of mentally handicapped people in hospitals and asylums by sending them to ‘disinfecting showers’ where they were gassed by carbon monoxide. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said, ‘He who is bodily and mentally not sound and deserving, may not perpetuate this misfortune in the bodies of his children.’ By the end of the war, 5,000 children and infants had been murdered by the Nazis.”

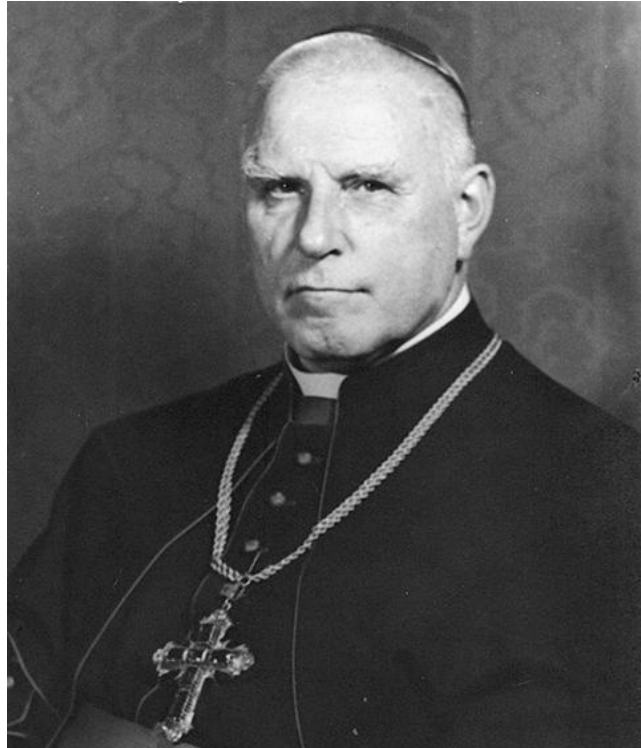
“How did the Bishop find out about it?”

“He’d heard whispered reports of people in his parish who’d received notice of a sudden death of handicapped relatives. Through his inquiries, Bishop von Galen discovered the truth of the government’s secret program of killing physical and mentally handicapped people in hospitals and asylums, including wounded soldiers and the gravely ill. Outraged, von Galen gave a sermon condemning the killing of the ones ‘unworthy to live.’ The Bishop thundered, do you or I have only a right to live as long as we are productive and after that, killed? Does the government rule that people have lost the right to live? Woe to mankind—woe to our German people if the Divine Commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ is violated and left unpunished.’



Jewish twins kept alive to be used in SS-Hauptsturmführer Josef Mengeles’ medical experiments. They were liberated from Auschwitz by the Red Army in January 1945. – Belarusian State Archive of Documentary Film and Photography, Wikimedia

“Von Galen’s sermon created a sensation in Germany. For the first time, he’d cast a shining light on the secret death programs of the Nazis. People copied his sermon and passed it clandestinely throughout the country. Von Galen’s speech awakened many Germans to the insanity of the Nazi regime.”



Cardinal Graf von Galen Bishop of Münster condemned the Nazi worship of race, denounced the arrest of Jesuits, and the state-sanctioned killing of invalids. Domkapitular Gustav Albers photo, Wikimedia

“But it was 1944, and Allied bombers destroyed Munster’s Cathedral leaving the bishop homeless, but after the war, von Galen spoke out about the terrible plight of the Germans who’d been expelled from Poland by the Soviets, the thousands of young girls that had been raped, the starvation and disease suffered by homeless refugees returning to a destroyed Germany. For von Galen’s support for the fallen nation, Pope Pius XII made him a cardinal. Just after the people of Munster had finished their celebration of von Galen’s creation as a cardinal, he died weakened by the stress of the war. The people of the town buried their cardinal in the broken ruins of the Munster Cathedral.”

Giovanni finished working on my neck and put a little kiss on the tip of my shoulder.

“Thank you,” I said, kissing him on his curvy lips.

It was rare,” Giovanni said, “for anyone to stand up to the Nazis and live. That was a miracle. It heartens me to hear of men who have courage like that. Von Galen was a man of God. What happened to the kids of the White Rose?”

“Two students at the University of Munich, a brother and sister, Sophie, 21, and Hans Scholl, 24, reprinted von Galen’s sermon. Quoting Goethe and Schiller, on the grounds of philosophy and reason, Sophie and Hans, urged the German people to act against the criminal Nazi regime. They advocated sabotage of the armaments industry, asking the people to make as many copies of the leaflet as they could and distribute them everywhere. The White Rose gang of kids left the fliers inside telephone books in phone booths, passed them on to students in many cities especially in Bavaria and Austria where the people might oppose militarism. The pamphlets declared, ‘A victory of fascist Germany in this war will have immeasurable, frightful consequences. We will not be silent. We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace!’ Graffiti began appearing on buildings all over Munich with symbols like crossed out swastikas and ‘Down with Hitler!’ ‘Hitler the Mass Murderer!’ ‘*Freihiet! Freiheit!*’ ‘Freedom, Freedom!’

“Were the kids, atheists, communists, Jews? What were their faiths?”

“Some were staunch Catholics and others were Lutherans. One was a Buddhist.”

“Surely they got caught.”

“For a time, they confounded the Gestapo. Intelligence officers knew the kids needed a mimeograph machine and a lot of paper, but they couldn’t track them down. Finally, the Gestapo got lucky, a custodian at the university, Jakob Schmidt, a member of the Nazi Party, spotted Sophie passing out pamphlets and immediately turned her over to the Gestapo. They were arrested and searched, the police finding a handwritten draft of a leaflet that they matched to a letter in their apartment signed by another medical student, their friend Christoph Probst.”

“Did they catch all of the White Rose resisters?”

“Most of them were caught including Willi Graf and their philosophy professor Kurt Huber. Berlin considered the case so incendiary that they sent a chief justice of the Greater German Reich to Munich for the trial of Sophie, Hans, and Probst. But it wasn’t a trial. It was a kangaroo court. Begun only four days after their arrest, the judge used the opportunity to castigate the three defendants for their dastardly deed. Chief Justice Roland Freisler asked the rhetorical question: ‘How could German youths who’d attended German schools and even as adolescents had been members of the Hitler Youth, how could they betray Germany? What could have twisted and warped their minds?’



The People's Court, Berlin, where Sophie and Hans Scholl and Christoph Probst were sentenced to death, February 22, 1943 – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

The People's Court was the Nazi tribunal for trying cases of espionage, demoralization, and treason. Among the many that the court sentenced to death were the conspirators who attempted the assassination of Adolf Hitler in 1944. Of the court's former officials, over 500 in number, only one served time in prison. Convicted by the Nuremberg tribunal, he was sentenced to 10 years, but served only three years. All the other justices and prosecutors of the People's Court were never brought to trial.

“Sophie said to the judge, ‘Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others... ‘You know the war is lost. Why don't you have the courage to face it?’ The judge found them guilty of treason and sentenced them to death by the guillotine.

“Before Sophie's execution, she made a final statement, ‘Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter if through us thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?’ The prison guards were so impressed with the bravery of the prisoners in the face of death that they violated Nazi regulations and allowed brother and sister to meet one last time.

“It's been said that when the guard brought Sophie in to say goodbye to her parents, her mother said, ‘Sophie, Sophie... to think you'll never be coming through the door again.’



Hans Scholl, 24, Sophie Scholl, 21, and Christoph Probst, 22, leaders of The White Rose were tried before the People's Court in Berlin, February 22, 1943, tortured, convicted of treason and condemned to death – Holocausthistoricalsociety.org.uk, Wikimedia

“Sophie smiled, ‘We took everything upon ourselves. What we’ve done will cause waves.’

“‘Remember Jesus,’ her mother said.

“‘And you too,’ Sophie said.

“‘Sophie Scholl's smile was gentle. ‘Ah, Mother, those few little years...’

“Afterward, a Gestapo official saw her crying in her cell. She apologized for her tears, saying ‘You understand, I’ve just said good-bye to my parents.’ Sophie was then led to the guillotine in Stadelheim Prison. Christoph Probst was next. Hans Scholl was last.”



***We will not be silent. We are your bad conscience.
The White Rose will not leave you in peace!***

***It is impossible to engage in intellectual discourse with National Socialist
Philosophy . . . At it's very inception this movement depended on the
deception and betrayal of one's fellow man; even at that time it was
inwardly corrupt and could support itself only by constant lies.***

– The White Rose