

HOLOCAUST, GAY

The genocide of Jews and Gypsies in Nazi-occupied Europe has overshadowed the persecution and murder of male homosexuals, which is only now beginning to be recognized and analyzed from the few surviving documents and memoirs. Regrettably, in the immediate post-war period most of those who wrote about the concentration and extermination camps, and even courts which dealt with the staffs and inmates of the camps, treated those sent there for violating the laws against homosexual offenses as common criminals deserving the punishment meted out to them by the Third Reich. The final insult to the victims of Nazi intolerance was the decision of the Bundesverfassungsgericht (Federal Constitutional Court) in Karlsruhe on May 10, 1957, which not only upheld the constitutionality of the more punitive 1935 version of **Paragraph 175** of the Penal Code because it "contained nothing specifically National Socialist" and homosexual acts "unquestionably offended the moral feelings of the German people," but even recommended *doubling* the maximum penalty—from five to ten years. If any other victims of National Socialism had been rebuffed in this manner by a West German court, there would have been outraged demonstrations around the globe; but this one went unprotected and ignored—above all by the psychiatrists who until recently never missed an opportunity to assert that "homosexuality is a serious disease"—for which ostracism and punishment were the best if not the only therapy. Until the late 1980s homosexuals, along with Gypsies, were denied compensation by the West German authorities for their suffering and losses under the Nazis.

The Background of Nazi Views.

The National Socialist attitude toward homosexuality was and had to be ambivalent. Most pro-Nazi eugenicists had in the 1920s quietly if not enthusiastically accepted Magnus Hirschfeld's arguments that homosexuality was innate and unmodifi-

able. They therefore saw no need to interfere in the private lives of those who by nature if not choice were already marked for biological death. In fact, Hans F. K. Günther (1891–1968), professor of rural sociology and racial science first at Berlin and then at Freiburg im Breisgau, the chief authority on such matters in the Third Reich, held that the genetically inferior elements of the population should be given complete freedom to gratify their sexual urges in any manner that did not lead to reproduction because they would painlessly eliminate themselves from the breeding pool. Also, Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering (and his cousin Matthias Goering) were greatly interested in promoting psychotherapy and giving it an institutional base within the Reich, even if their protégés were forbidden to mention explicitly the Jewish contribution to the subject (Freudian psychoanalysis).

However, National Socialism in Germany, like Marxism-Leninism in Russia, was a conspiracy of the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries against the eighteenth-century **Enlightenment**—against liberalism and its beneficiaries, which included homosexuals in those countries where legal reformers had stricken the medieval sodomy statutes from the books. National Socialism inclined even more than its totalitarian Soviet mirror image toward the assertion of traditional values and beliefs—of which the Judeo-Christian taboo on homosexuality and petty bourgeois antipathy toward it was emphatically one. Furthermore, Nazi leaders, preoccupied with the German birth rate, foresaw extensive German colonization of that part of Eastern Europe which they meant to annex. Some of them even cherished the belief that homosexuality was the harbinger of race suicide and wished to encourage it among inferior races.

The principal figures who determined or influenced Nazi policy in regard to homosexuals, apart from Hitler himself, were: Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), the chief of the SS; his protégé Karl August

Eckhardt (1901–1979), who after the war devoted himself to editing early Germanic legal texts; Rudolf Klare, a student at the University of Halle, who under the supervision of Erich Schwinge (1903–) wrote a dissertation, *Homosexualität und Recht* (Homosexuality and Law); and the Munich psychiatrist Oswald Bumke (1877–1950). On October 15, 1932 Bumke wrote a letter meant for Hitler's eyes, urging him to remove Ernst Röhm from his entourage because of his Chief of Staff's "corrupting influence" on German youth and assuring him that "homosexuality has in all ages been one of the most objectionable phenomena of degeneration that we encounter among the symptoms of a declining culture with great regularity."

Rationale. The confused and illogical thinking of these homophobic policy-makers had certain common themes. In 1937 Eckhardt published an article in *Das Schwarze Korps*, the newspaper of the SS, which mentioned that documents seized by the Nazis after they came to power revealed that two million men had been involved in the homosexual organizations that flourished under the Weimar Republic, but that a mere 2 percent of these—40,000—represented a "hard core" that was responsible for infecting the others. To identify and extirpate this source of contagion would be the task of the NSDAP. Such an approach contradicted the rationale of the Wannsee conference of January 20, 1942, where, with Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942) presiding, Nazi leaders determined upon the physical extermination of the eleven million European Jews. For them a "racial Jew" (*Rassenjude*) was defined by ancestry—a meaningless criterion when applied to homosexuals. Their ideological motive for wishing to liquidate Jews and Gypsies was that these nomadic peoples were trespassing on the *Lebensraum* of other nations—another conception that had no relevance to homosexuals, inasmuch as the latter had never constituted an ethnic group distinct from the one from which they

individually descended. So while the extermination of the Jews was Hitler's pet project from 1942 onward, there is no evidence that the Nazi leadership ever contemplated or undertook a mass screening of the German male population in order to identify even "hard core" homosexuals for imprisonment or execution.

Hence Nazi policy in regard to homosexuals consisted in making the penal laws more punitive, as was effected by a legal novella of June 28, 1935, altering Paragraph 175 by eliminating the definition that restricted the offense to "beischlafähnliche Handlungen" (acts similar to coitus). The new wording opened the door to prosecution for the most trivial acts, but at the same time the novella amended the code of criminal procedure to allow the Staatsanwalt (equivalent to the district attorney) not to prosecute an individual whose sexual activity had subjected him to blackmail. This amounted to a recognition of Magnus Hirschfeld's tireless assertion that Paragraph 175 was a major source of blackmail and extortion. The motives for the new law were never consistently set forth; the most common justification was the lapinist argument that homosexuality diminished the German birth rate with which the leaders of the Third Reich were obsessed. Nazi indifference to lesbian activity—and the official commentaries specified that Paragraph 175 could not be extended by analogy to women—was motivated by the assertion that female homosexuality did not interfere with marriage and procreation or with the conduct of public life.

The fullest treatment of the subject was Klare's dissertation of 1937, which found that of ancient peoples the Jews alone had proscribed homosexual activity. After rejecting the "liberalistic" arguments for legal toleration, he concluded that the solution to the "homosexual problem" was the complete exclusion of homosexuals from society. Even so, the constitutional biologists in Nazi Germany, far from abandoning the position which Hirschfeld

had argued for thirty years, voiced it openly on the pages of criminological journals. Paradoxically, Jewish figures such as Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) and Kurt Hiller (1885–1972) prominent in the homosexual emancipation movement had linked this aspect of sexual reform with the hated “Semitic influence” that the Nazis determined to eradicate from German life. During World War II German military courts often dealt less severely with homosexual offenders than did the less sophisticated American counterparts. On the other hand, instead of giving homosexuals dishonorable discharges, as was the American practice, some German authorities preferred to send them to the eastern front—to die in battle.

Actions Against Homosexuals. Under the legal novella of 1935 the number of prosecutions for homosexuality grew enormously—but many of those convicted were not strictly speaking homosexual at all. Some were political opponents—leaders of youth organizations or Catholic clergy—against whom the Nazis knew how to bring perjured testimony; others were simply street hustlers whom the police had rounded up in Hamburg, Munich, and Berlin, particularly to clean up the capital before the 1936 Olympic Games. Eventually even the Chief of Staff General von Fritsch was charged to break the power of the Junkers. The memoirs of Rudolf Hoess (1900–1947), the commandant of the death camp at Auschwitz/Oświęcim, shows the wretchedness of homosexuals in the camps. Himself incarcerated under the Weimar Republic, Hoess had become familiar with the realities of homosexuality inside prison and took vigorous measures to prevent homosexual activity among his charges. He later calmly wrote that he imposed a regime upon wearers of the pink triangle so severe that few survived.

Administrators used two pink triangles sewed onto their uniforms to identify inmates as homosexual, part of a system to isolate groups that potential leaders and troublemakers might incite. A

Communist, who normally wore red triangles, might instead be given a black triangle for asocial (habitual) criminals so that placed in the midst of such types he would be an outsider, unable to organize them for political struggle. Camp memoirs mention that although homosexual activity was rife among all groups, other inmates most ostracized prisoners with the pink triangle. In the 1970s gay activists discovered and adopted the pink triangle as a symbol of their movement.

The Question of Numbers. Just how many homosexuals died in the camps, much less elsewhere during the Holocaust, can never be ascertained. Not all those convicted under the penal codes of Axis and collaborationist governments such as Vichy France, which in 1942 raised the age of consent to 21, Italy, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovakia were homosexual. Like National Socialism, fascism also deployed the charge of homosexuality against political opponents. A small percent of those exterminated by the Nazis on racial or political grounds must also have been homosexual or bisexual. Compared with the ferocity that the Nazis exhibited against Jews and Gypsies, their treatment of homosexuals was for a while what could have been expected of certain authoritarian regimes. It was not much worse than what the Soviets actually inflicted on them after their law of March 7, 1934—symbolically on the first anniversary of the National Socialist seizure of power in Germany—which like the Nazi law of 1935, under which convictions mounted from 800 or 900 in 1933–34 to nearly 9000 in 1937, prescribed a maximum penalty of five years for male homosexuality but ignored lesbianism. However, homosexuals were among the first executed, as early as 1933, by Nazi doctors practicing euthanasia on inmates of asylums, and the killing accelerated before the war in camps that tried to “reform” homosexuals through hard labor. Many died there of abuse and others who failed to perform when provided with female prostitutes

were executed as incorrigible. Once the war began, German males became so valuable that fewer were incarcerated or exterminated for homosexuality, from 8000 a year before 1940 to 3000 after it. Another figure that will never be precisely known is that of homosexuals who took their own lives to end the fear and misery into which the totalitarian state had plunged them. Among all modern states for which figures can be compiled, Nazi Germany offers the horrible example of suicides increasing rather than decreasing in wartime.

Richard Plant, following earlier documentation by Professor Rüdiger Lautmann of the University of Bremen, estimated that between five and fifteen thousand homosexuals were exterminated in Hitler's camps in the Reich because of their sexual orientation. He makes no attempt to count the pink triangles exterminated in the death camps, none of which was within the boundaries of Germany proper: they were all in Poland, in the General Government established in 1939. On the basis of the figures for those convicted under Paragraph 175, many estimate 50,000 killed, but many of those were actually released or "reformed." The Protestant Church in Austria had earlier arrived at the figure of 225,000 homosexual victims of the Third Reich. On the basis of Himmler's statements that there were 1,500,000 German homosexuals in 1938 and half a million in 1944, Jean Boisson believed that the Nazis killed one million, presumably all citizens of the Reich. This is a wide discrepancy, and both extremes are misleading. The regime's rhetoric encouraged violence against homosexuals inside and outside the Reich, in occupied territories as well as in German satellites. No one has yet estimated the numbers murdered in random acts of violence which collaborationist governments also encouraged. Of these measures Vichy's laws are the best documented and fully discussed by Boisson, who shows that Marshal Pétain, at the instigation of Admiral Darlan, in 1942 raised the age of

consent to twenty-one for the first time, thus creating an invidious distinction between homosexual and heterosexual acts. Giovanni Dall'Orto has shown that in 1938, because of his alliance with Hitler, Mussolini began to persecute not only Jews but homosexuals, of whom several thousand were exiled to island prisons or remote Calabrian villages, while Jews were merely deprived of their professional posts. Ironically, in 1930 Mussolini had intervened in a parliamentary debate to prevent the passage of a law criminalizing homosexual conduct on the grounds that it was rare among Italians and practiced only by decadent foreigners who even if homosexual should not be driven out of the country because they increased Italy's supply of foreign exchange.

Less information exists on repression in Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Finland, but Pilsudski's decriminalization of 1932 may have become a dead letter in the General Government (Nazi-occupied Poland). The Plant school argues that because the Nazis were not interested in purifying other races and rather wished to limit their reproduction, no persecution occurred among them. However, even within the death camps other inmates ostracized the "pink triangles," as Boisson poignantly relates, so that as Lautmann proved by comparing them with the control group of Jehovah's Witnesses and political prisoners, they suffered the shortest life expectancies and highest death rate, belonging as they did to a "scapegoat group" unable to form a strong support network. Even in the occupied zones where no collaborationist government existed, one cannot imagine that homosexuals suffered less during than before the war.

Because the Nazis aimed to "cure" Germans they thought curable, many who could perform with women, such as hustlers who had merely been selling their bodies, were released from concentration camps and ordinary prisons. Probably the chief cause of death of German homosexu-

als was from being shipped to the eastern front, where acute suffering if not certain death awaited them, not only to the *Strafbataillonen* (penal units) but to regular ones that had to have replacements. The army continued to avoid arresting soldiers as it had in the pre-Hitler era, in spite of Himmler's orders to avoid amnesty and prosecute homosexual offenders (only a handful of executions in the military is known). Many officers, some inadvertently owing to their natural homophobia, disproportionately selected homosexuals from the misfits under their command for the ever more frequent replacements demanded from other units for service at the front. So to the figures in Plant, which play into the hands of homophobic apologists who would belittle the size and extent of the persecution of homosexuals, must be added not only those exterminated in the death camps outside of German soil but also: (1) those killed by random homophobic violence both inside Germany and outside it; (2) those sent to the eastern front; (3) those persecuted and killed by collaborationist governments; (4) those who ended their own lives by suicide. The overall figures, especially if one counts those who fell into two categories such as homosexual Jews or homosexual members of other persecuted groups, would be not five thousand but many times that, and would include all nationalities, not merely subjects of the Reich.

Scandalously, a world which protested the persecution of the Jews in the Third Reich and was horrified by its other crimes against humanity remained indifferent to the treatment of homosexuals by Hitler, denied compensation to survivors, and refused to allow the pink triangle to be inscribed on monuments to victims of inhumanity. Many of these historians and commentators, silent about the persecution of homosexuals, lose no opportunity to insult and defame the German people for their unwillingness to resist Hitler's policies, even though they were living in a country where everyone

was at the mercy of the Gestapo and the rest of the Nazi terror apparatus. Such contrasts are a measure of the continuing dishonesty and hypocrisy of the Judeo-Christian world and of the liberals within Western society on the subject of homosexuality—actions that effectively give the lie to apologists who would claim that the Church and Synagogue were no more than “innocent bystanders,” powerless to prevent the injustice which they saw and deplored. Indeed, if Hitler had only killed homosexuals, these exemplars of self-righteousness might still be applauding him for having done just that.

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HOMER

Greek epic poet. Most Greeks believed that Homer was a blind bard from Chios or Smyrna (which the predominance of the Ionic dialect supports) who, at a date which they variously placed from the Trojan War (ca. 1200 B.C.) to the beginning of literacy (700 B.C.), composed both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Although dramatically dated to Mycenaean times, the late second millennium B.C., the epics sometimes refer to things that cannot predate 650 or even 570, because interpolations existed in one form or another when seventh-century poets cited the epics.

Although the poems may have evolved over centuries orally, the final version suggests a unifying hand, even if the view of some Alexandrian critics that each poem was composed by a separate bard—the *Odyssey* forty years after the *Iliad*—has not been abandoned by all. The