

The Einsatzgruppen:

Mobile Death Squads of Nazi Germany

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Background

Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime brought an incomprehensible death toll to a variety of European people groups. Although the level of barbarity and loss of life is impossible to comprehend, there is a moral necessity to try. To do so we must separate the events of the Holocaust into smaller events. To that end, this paper will place emphasis on the mobile killing squads of the Holocaust, known as the Einsatzgruppen. Increased understanding of this period of history will be advantageous in two ways. First, it is the desire of this author to increase my own understanding of the Holocaust as a simple offering of remembrance and honor toward the victims. Secondly, a deeper understanding of Nazi Germany's war of aggression will provide the impetus to more seriously address the uncomfortable reality that bigotry and hate remain extant. The question must be asked, "Are there current examples of institutionalized racism?" After gaining a basic understanding of the Einsatzgruppen and their role in initiating the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" (Nazism's systematic extermination of European Jews), this paper will serve to compare the U.S. criminal justice system's treatment of those caught up in the "war on drugs" with Nazi leaders convicted of war crimes.

Sept. 11th, 2001 has been thought of as "the day the world changed" for 14 years now. While it is hard to comprehend the loss of life, it is possible. From documentaries, museums, and the annual reading of the names of the victims, one can eventually begin to grasp the numbers of victims. When it comes to the attempted extermination of European Jews at the hands of the Nazis, however, it is impossible to ever grasp the full extent of hate and horror released upon the Jewish people. One can read many books on the subject or visit any number of museums, but the sheer number of victims will never be grasped. The names cannot be read in a single morning. For perspective, if one wishes to comprehend the magnitude of the Nazi Holocaust upon

European Jewry, it would be as if 9/11 happened every day for nearly five and a half years.

While it is true that Hitler did not really invent anything and only built upon generations of anti-Semitic literature, policies, and attitudes, he and the Nazi Party nearly managed to accomplish in a mere 12 years what all other anti-Semites had not in 12 centuries.

Anti-Jewish Laws and Ghettoization

On September 1st 1939, six and a half years after Adolf Hitler rose to the position of German Chancellor, the Nazis' plans for ridding Europe of their perceived enemies took a drastic change for the worse. The far-right policies of the Nazi Party had been making life miserable for German-based Jewry for years. Examples include laws with nice-sounding names that were actually sinister. The dismissal of all Jews working in civil service positions, for example, was known as the "Law for the Restoration of Professional Civil Service Workers." Other anti-Semitic laws included the "Enabling Act" and the "Law against the Crowding of Schools" which suspended civil rights and barred Jews from the public education system, respectively. These are merely examples, a basic overview of the beginning stages of the progressively cruel treatment of European Jews.

As the response of the free-world remained virtually nonexistent, the Nazi Führer was increasingly emboldened. In a poignant example of Hitler's testing of the free world's desire to stop injustices, over 900 German Jews were sent away with the promise of immigration and freedom aboard the passenger liner "St. Louis" in May of 1939. After being rejected by multiple countries, including the U.S., with valid passports in hand, half of the passengers returned to Germany and eventually die in the Holocaust (Tomback). A mere five months later, in October, the first Jewish ghetto, Piotrków, is established ("Timeline"). The ghettoization of European Jews would continue for five more years, at thousands of locations. Overwhelmed by disease,

starvation, and shootings (termed “Liquidation” by the Nazis) thousands of ghetto residents die every month. The large number of ghettos, along with the number of people involved in the infrastructure of the ghetto system, and reporting about conditions within the ghetto walls support the idea that the German people were fully cognizant of the ghettoization of European Jews.

WWII and Mobile Death Squads

The German Army (Wehrmacht) initiates WWII in the summer of 1939 and quickly pushes east through Poland in route to the Soviet Union with unprecedented tactical skills and veracity. This created a problem in the eyes of Nazi Germany; with so much land and so many people under their expanded dominion, the death rate of ghettos becomes insufficient. Over the course of the occupation nearly 6 million Poles die, half of which are Jews. At least 90% of these casualties came by way of German and Soviet actions against unarmed civilians (Piotrowski 295). One million of these casualties come by the Einsatzgruppen, the often-overlooked link in the process between the ghettos and concentration camps. In *Masters of Death* historian Richard Rhodes notes that: “...it is impossible to understand how the holocaust unfolded without knowing this part of the story, because the Einsatzgruppen massacres preceded the invention of death camps and significantly influenced their development” (Rhodes xii).

The Einsatzgruppen trailed closely behind the Wehrmacht. Raiding towns in search of Jews, the four squads, A, B, C, and D, use similar techniques to liquidate men, women, and children. The combination of densely populated urban areas and the speed of the German advance enabled the Einsatzgruppen to be effective in their genocidal plot. The Nazified Einsatzgruppen soldiers degraded the Jewish people by forcing them to undress and dig what would become their own grave. With their preferred technique of shooting people in the back of

the head at point-blank range, the Einsatzgruppen units murdered an average of 100,000 Jews per month between July 1941 and July 1942 (Earl 6). According to the commanding officer of Einsatzgruppen D, Otto Ohlendorf, the killing squads were instructed to “proceed ruthlessly” (Hilberg 106) by Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Hitler’s second in command.

In June of 1941, Nazi Germany dedicated 75% of its military in what would be the largest invasion in the history of warfare. In what is known as “Operation Barbarossa”, Germany swept across Soviet occupied Poland at a rapid pace, in adherence to Hitler’s desires contained in *Mein Kampf*. Eyewitness reports reveal groups of people fleeing eastward towards Minsk as low-flying Nazi warplanes were “‘playfully’ firing their machine guns into groups of terror-stricken people...mostly women holding children by the hand or in their arms” (Rhodes 38). This differs greatly from German officer Siegfried Knappe’s account of Polish civilians. He reported that Wehrmacht units were applauded and welcomed as liberators (Ibid 38). Much in the same way Adolf Hitler tested the World’s resolve with the St. Louis, Einsatzgruppen leadership “tested the waters” by exploring the extent of anti-Semitic attitudes within the local populations of newly acquired territories.

Einsatzgruppe A, led by Franz Walter Stahlecker and later by Heinz Jost, initiated what may have been the first of the mobile death squads’ *pogroms*, what Webster’s defines as “an organized massacre of helpless people.” Although the official task of the Einsatzgruppen was to follow behind the advancing German army as a type of security force, their true intentions and mission are exposed early in Barbarossa’s execution. Advancing along the front lines, not the rear, the Einsatzgruppen worked with local police; their task was to round up both Jews and recently released convicts to stage beatings (of Jews) in town squares. The Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen would hang to the back while crowds of Lithuanians (in the case of

Einsatzgruppen A) cheered the beating to death of Jews by repeated blows with crowbars. The victims of these staged events had absurd claims made against them, such as participating as snipers against the “Liberating” army. On June 25th 1,500 Jews were murdered as their homes and synagogues burned in the background. On subsequent nights another 2,300 are driven from their homes and murdered by armed civilians.

At the beginning of the staged beatings, Einsatzgruppe A reported that “it was not easy at first to set any large-scale anti-Jewish pogrom in motion” (Rhodes 42). Only days later, the report to Berlin required a monumental update: “Lithuanian partisan groups have already killed several thousand Jews” (Ibid 43). As Jewish homes and places of worship are smoldering, and Jewish men, women, and children are being gunned down in groups of forty to fifty, the message to the Nazis and Einsatzgruppen is clear. Two years after the St. Louis returned with half of its passengers, the green light for implementation of the Final Solution has been given, not merely by Hitler, but by the actions (or inaction) of the entire local populations now under Wehrmacht/Einsatzgruppen control. These early atrocities, facilitated by Einsatzgruppen A, represent a small fraction of both the horrors that accompanied Barbarossa and what was to follow. Group A was, after all, only one of four groups, each divided into smaller divisions.

The Einsatzgruppen were comprised mainly of German SS and Police personnel. With approximately 3,000 men in total, they represented the terrifying combination of intellect, experience, and complete adherence to Nazism’s end goal: the destruction of the Jewish people. The Einsatzgruppen were frequently supplemented by German soldiers and, as mentioned, local collaborators. With 990 members, Einsatzgruppen A was the largest of the four squads. They operated in and around Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia and were attached to Army Group North. Einsatzgruppen B was initially led by Arthur Nebe and later by Erich Naumann. Being assigned

to Army Group Center, they operated in and around Minsk. Group C was led by Otto Rasch, attached to Army Group South, and operated in the Ukraine. Lastly, there was Einsatzgruppen D, led by Otto Ohlendorf. Group D was the smallest of the four with 400-500 personnel and was attached to the 11th Army, which operated in Crimea (Hilberg 106). Ohlendorf, an unrepentant Nazi until the end, would go on to be instrumental in the world's understanding of Nazi war crimes.

Ohlendorf was the poster child of anti-Semitic Nazi culture, considered an intellectual; he had a doctoral degree in Jurisprudence and genuinely believed that the killing of Jews was the right thing to do. The Einsatzgruppen was replete with professionals and intellectuals. Large numbers were lawyers and other examples include a physician, a minister, and an opera singer. Most Einsatzgruppen members were in their thirties and the organization had a much higher percentage of officers than the regular German Army. This combination of attributes made for efficient killing sprees. The Einsatzgruppen were subdivided into smaller, company-sized units known as Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkommandos. Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppen C was responsible for some of the most egregious crimes of the Holocaust.

Sonderkommando 4a was led by SS Standartenführer (Colonel) Paul Blobel. An architect by trade (Friedlander 216), Blobel is cited in the construction of a ghetto in Zhytomyr and "Aktion 1005", the latter of which included the invention of bone-crushing machines and incineration techniques designed to hide Nazi atrocities in Einsatzgruppen C jurisdiction. Targeted exterminations of the local Jewish population under his watch included the Belaya Zerkow and Babi Yar Massacres (Ibid 215). Atrocities in Belaya Zerkow included the killing of 90 children under the age of five. The children were left alive after 800-900 adults and older children were killed in previous actions. Starving to death, these young ones were found covered

in excrement and either comatose or hanging on to life by eating the mortar in the building they were abandoned in. Over the objection of a priest and a minister, Sonderkommando 4a hauled the children in trucks to be liquidated at a local ravine. The second of Blobel's massacres is the most infamous of all; unfortunately, his attempts to cover up the carnage were mostly successful, and leave the official death count somewhat speculative.

Blobel reported to Berlin that the Jews in Kiev had been instructed via notices posted throughout the town to report on the morning of September 28th, 1941. The instructions told the "Yids" to bring warm clothes, money and all valuables. The Germans spread misinformation throughout the town that Jews in Kiev were to be resettled. The public notices included a warning that those who do not comply would be shot (Rhodes 174). This, in combination with the fact that word of atrocities to the west and in Poland had not reached most of the victims, resulted in a massive turnout; men, women, and children, from infant to senior citizen, would soon fall prey to one of the largest and most systematic Einsatzgruppen massacres.

In addition to planning major killings on Jewish holidays, the Nazis also had a keen eye for locations; Babi Yar was deep and wide enough for their plan. The geography also made it easier for the Germans to carry out their mechanical and inhuman plot. After a two-mile walk, the Jewish community in Kiev would reach the massive ravine known as Babi Yar. The headquarters of Einsatzgruppen C had set up office desks to collect, and later destroy, the Jewish people's passports and documents. As it turned out, resettlement had only been a ploy. Both Germans and a few survivors describe how the murders were carried out, how Babi Yar became the Nazis single largest mass grave.

Soon after being tricked into leaving their homes under the guise of "resettlement", the Jews of Kiev were led like animals to be slaughtered by Einsatzgruppen soldiers, supplemented

by Ukrainian police. Upon reaching the mile-long ravine, people were forced to strip naked through a corridor of uniformed Nazi henchmen that rained blows upon them with clubs and brass knuckles. Dogs were also used against the Babi Yar victims, who were then forced to lie in the ravine atop the previous group and gunned down. Einsatzgruppen members would then walk atop of the bodies, shooting at any signs of life. After being covered with a thin layer of earth, the next group of 30-40 people would lie down. This continued for 48 hours. According to the Einsatzgruppen's own reporting, 33,771 Jews lay dead in Babi Yar. The ravine continued to be used every Tuesday and Thursday for the next year (Ibid 176-178). An estimated 100,000 dead eventually lined the ravine; murdered by Einsatzgruppen C, Sonderkommando 4a, and armed local anti-Semites.

Groups A's "spontaneous" beatings to the north and Group C's actions in Ukraine are only a small sample of the Einsatzgruppen's wanton behavior. In addition to open-air shootings with their collaborators, and serving as a preview of the final stage of extermination, the Einsatzgruppen would also kill Jews in mobile gas vans. These vans would be equipped with hoses to channel the van's carbon monoxide into the rear compartment, asphyxiating the victims. As the frontline in the "Final Solution", the mobile death units were responsible for the beating, shooting and gassing to death of as many as 1.5 Million Jewish, Roma, Gypsy, Gay, or invalid victims; anyone who did not conform to the twisted ideology of a supreme Aryan race. The Einsatzgruppen represented the most fanatical of the Nazis. The Germans in general were meticulous record keepers and the Einsatzgruppen leadership was no different. Detailed records of their actions were sent to Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of Reich Security, in Berlin. These have come to be known as the Einsatzgruppen Reports. The following are a few examples of Einsatzgruppen Operational Situation Reports (OSR). The U.S. Army discovered a cache of

Nazi records in Berlin. These OSR's would go on to be the key pieces of evidence in the Einsatzgruppen trial at Nuremburg, trial number nine.

From Jewishvirtuallibrary.org:

OSR Number 117
18 October 1941

Einsatzgruppe D

“The districts occupied by the Kommandos were cleansed of Jews. 4,091 Jews and 46 Communists were executed during the time span covered by the report, bringing the total to 40,699 [for the period of 1-15 October 1941 by Einsatzgruppen D].”

OSR Number 173
25 February 1941

Einsatzgruppe A

In the course of a routine Security Police screening of an additional part of the civilian population around Leningrad, 140 more people had to be shot. The reasons for this were as follows:

- a) Active participation in the Communist Party before the arrival of the German troops;
 - b) Seditious and provocative activity since the arrival of the German Army;
 - c) Partisan activity;
 - d) Espionage;
 - e) Belonging to the Jewish race.**
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OSR 21
13 July 1941

Einsatzgruppe B

“Only 96 Jews were executed in Grodno and Lida during the first days. I gave orders to intensify these activities.”

“The activity of all the Kommandos has progressed satisfactorily. The liquidations, in particular, are in full swing and usually take place daily. The carrying out of the necessary liquidations is assured in every instance under any circumstances.”



American army staffers organize stacks of German documents that were collected by war crimes investigators as evidence for the International Military Tribunal trial of war criminals at Nuremberg.
USHMM Photo Archive # 03549

Trial Number 9

In her book *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial 1945-1958*, historian Hilary Earl elucidates the way in which Nuremberg case number 9, originally intended for the SS in general, evolved into the Einsatzgruppen trial. It is difficult to discuss the Nuremberg Military Tribunals, NMT, without the testimony of Otto Ohlendorf. The Einsatzgruppen D leader was an unrepentant Nazi and frequently shocked interrogators and spectators with his cold, detailed accounts of Einsatzgruppen actions. Ohlendorf's testimony "horrificed" the court and depressed

fellow defendants as he exposed “the inescapable reality and shame of mass murder...by the unquestionable reliability of a German official” (Earl 72). Ohlendorf, when put in a position where others typically do and say whatever they can to spare their lives, exposes Einsatzgruppen actions and Nazi ideology in a way few others can, as one who is convinced that killing Jews is the right thing to do. This is one of the two factors that gave NMT case 9 prosecutors such a solid case.

The other component utilized by the prosecution, organized by American lawyer Telford Taylor, was an unexpected goldmine of Nazi documents. Being short staffed, Taylor was lucky to have experienced war crimes investigator Benjamin Ferencz join his team. In mid-1946 Taylor assigned him to a team of analysts to sort through documentation in Berlin. Ferencz would soon uncover “between 8 and 9 million documents” in the Berlin Gestapo headquarters. This was part of a two-ton collection seized on September 3rd, 1945 (Ibid 77). This discovery emboldened the prosecution. Associates would bring to Ferencz binders full Einsatzgruppen OSR’s, written by the perpetrators themselves. In one such report, Paul Blobel bragged about the killing of Jews at Babi Yar: “As a result of a very clever piece of organization [the Jews] still believed they were going to be resettled right up until the time they were executed” (Rhodes 178). Case number 9, originally slated to be a catch-all for the SS, would now focus its full attention on Einsatzgruppen leaders.

During the Einsatzgruppen’s two years of operation there were 84 different leaders, when accounting for Sonderkommando and Einsatzkommando units. Only 24 of these leaders were indicted, despite their tireless contribution to the final solution. Of these, 22 stood trial. The Commander of Einsatzgruppen C, “Dr. Dr. Rasch”, so called due to his two doctoral degrees, was found too ill to stand trial and died in November of 1948. Emil Haussmann, a former school

teacher and SS-Sturmbannführer (Major) in Einsatzkommando 12 of Einsatzgruppe D, committed suicide before the trial. So solid was the prosecution's case that they relied heavily on the Einsatzgruppen reports and called minimal witness to the stand. The case was overseen by the outspoken and theatrical Judge Michael Musmanno. Musmanno would frequently take over the questioning, if he felt the prosecution was doing an inadequate job. He often trapped the Einsatzgruppen defendants in a corner with their contradictory arguments. This may seem unfair, but Musmanno also allowed defendants, who had found themselves intellectually cornered, ample time to arrive at an answer. This was the case of SS-Brigadier General Franz Six, who presented himself as a professor who had committed no crime. Musmanno tested him by asking, hypothetically, if he would have murdered Jews if given the order by Hitler. Three days later, Six announced that he would not have carried out the order. This dismayed the defense, who had been relying heavily on the "superior orders" argument (Earl 251-252). One by one, the defendant's arguments were revealed as contradictory and unbelievable. If they relied on the concept of following orders, the prosecution, or more often Musmanno, would ask if they would murder their siblings or parents if given an order. This put the Einsatzgruppen leaders into an impossible situation; they could answer in the negative and undercut the "superior orders" rationale for the defense as a whole, or they could answer in the affirmative and appear like a monster in front of the courtroom.

Despite Musmanno's actions in the courtroom, liberties that one would not be allowed today, the typically-critical German press had a fair opinion of him. Musmanno permitted the defense "every possibility to refute the serious charges against their clients" (Ibid 222). This is exemplified in a rare gift given to Musmanno by the defense team, an 18-inch bronze statue of a penguin. In what would later be called the *Penguin Rule*, Musmanno permitted the defense to

“enter into evidence any and all material that might prove the innocence of their clients, including the social life of the Antarctic Penguin, if it would help” (Ibid 222). The Judge’s taking over the prosecutor’s line of questioning should not be viewed as unfair. For the defense he gave every opportunity to make a case, even interrupting the proceedings if the defense team was making an ill-timed objection or following a line of questioning that would end up hurting their case. In the end, the evidence against the Einsatzgruppen leaders was insurmountable.

Of the three charges levied against the 22 defendants, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and membership in organizations declared criminal by the International Military Tribunal (IMT), 20 were found guilty on all three counts and 2 were found guilty of charge three alone. The sentences were read on April 10th 1948. 14 Einsatzgruppen leaders were sentenced to death by hanging, 2 received life terms, and Matthias Graf, an officer in Einsatzkommando 6 of Einsatzgruppe D, had a judgement of time served. Only four of the death sentences were carried out and the remaining convicts were all released by 1958 ("Subsequent Nur. Proceedings"). As a Criminal Justice Major it is impossible not to notice differences in the courtroom proceedings and sentencing outcomes between the NMT and current trends. Insofar as the stated goal of History 44, Nazi Holocaust, is to have more concern for other people (Tombback), one may like to begin by addressing the puzzling discrepancies between non-violent offenders in today’s courtrooms with that of convicted war criminals.

Courtrooms Today

Even a cursory look at the drug laws enacted in the U.S., and the way in which they are enforced, sheds light on the vast disparity in Black vs. White incarceration rates. The Criminal Justice System is comprised of three main structures; Police, Courts, and Corrections. Racial

disparity, for Blacks, is felt in all stages of this system, including racial profiling by the Police and racialized prosecutorial discretion. These are exacerbated by mandatory minimum sentencing laws, which remove a Judge's ability to use discretion. The combination of racial profiling by the police and disparate sentencing outcomes for minorities are major causes in America's epidemic of over-crowded prisons. These facilities are now filled beyond capacity with non-violent drug offenders. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports 581,300 Black men in jails or prisons (Carson & Sabol). Despite studies showing similar amounts of drug use across various demographics (National Institutes of Health 1995), Blacks are currently incarcerated at a rate nearly 7 times that of their White counterparts (Carson & Sabol).

The disproportionality of African American incarceration is nothing new, since the 1920's Blacks have been incarcerated at an average ratio of 8-1 as compared to Whites. While it goes much further back in time, we can see rapid increase as a result of the "get tough on crime" and mandatory sentencing laws of the 1980's. In short, while African Americans make up only 12% of the U.S. population, they simultaneously make up roughly half of State and Federal inmates (Carson & Sabol). A prime example of racially-coded laws includes sentencing affiliated with cocaine. Despite being pharmaceutically identical, the inner-city version of cocaine, crack, has carried penal sanctions at a rate of 100-1 when compared to its more-expensive, powder counterpart.

In NMT case 9, Einsatzgruppen leadership were convicted as war criminals and the front-line in Hitler's genocidal plot. In the face of overwhelming evidence, the majority (18 of 22) were given an extremely-lenient sentence. During the course of the case they were given exceptional legal representation and advice. The proceedings were overseen by Judges (Musmanno was 1 of 3) that afforded great liberty in how proceedings should be carried out. With the invention of

mandatory minimum sentences these liberties have been removed from judges. No longer able to assess each individual case or defendant, the judge's hands are now tied. In an extreme example, Leandro Andrade was handed a life sentence in a California court after stealing VHS tapes from K-Mart stores (Jaffe). The average person swept up in the war on drugs will now sit in jail and wait up to two years for a trial. Unlike the Einsatzgruppen, who were given every legal advantage, most of these (non-violent) individuals will be unable to produce bail and, in turn, unable to mount much of a defense. When the court date finally arrives, one may not meet their public defender until minutes before the trial. Overworked, overstressed, and underpaid attorneys will oftentimes then suggest a plea bargain. With the threat of a long prison sentence, many will agree and take a lesser sentence and/or some time on probation or parole. Beyond discrepancies in the courts and sentencing outcomes, there are policing procedures that conjure images of the Third Reich's "Law against the Crowding of Schools."

The school-to-prison- pipeline is the term used for the racialized, over-the-top policing practices inside some of America's poorest schools. Marked by zero-tolerance policies and an exponential increase in out-of-school suspensions, the school-to-prison pipeline is ushering more and more children into the criminal justice system for infractions that would never lead to an arrest for an adult. Judith Browne, Senior Attorney and Co-Director for the Advancement Project says, "We are treating them like criminals, we are putting it in their minds that they are criminals, and that may be what we wind up with" ("Zero-tolerance policies"). Examples of charges include: a student charged with using an egg as a deadly weapon, terrorism charges for students playing cops and robbers, and the arrest of a 10-year-old girl for messing up papers and throwing flour on a class trip. These examples may sound comical if they were isolated events, however, in Florida as many as 7 children are moved from the school room to courtroom every single day (Ibid). New York City is not exempt, in 2005 there were 4,625 school safety agents

and upwards of 200 armed police officers in the cities' schools. This would make the NYPD's *school safety division* the fifth largest police force in the country ("Toolkit").

The enforcement of these policies is clearly conducted with racial bias. While only 1 in 20 white students are likely to face a suspension, the figure jumps to 1 in 6 for Blacks, and 1 in 4 for a Black student with a disability. As for arrests, 70% of students referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or African American ("Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track"). The end result of these harsh policies is overcrowded prisons with young people being labeled as "criminals" and growing up with a mistrust of adults, no high school degree, and diminished life chances. The war on drugs, mandatory minimum sentence laws, and school-to-prison pipeline policies help to explain how America is far and away the global leader in per-capita incarceration rates. The discrepancy between America's treatment of Blacks and War Criminals is bad enough, it is the treatment *inside* of our prisons, however, that begin to mimic Nazi behavior.

The Einsatzgruppen murderers were released from prison after relatively light sentences. In present-day America, prison stays are becoming increasingly dangerous. "The rate of confirmed AIDS cases in state and federal prisons is 2.5 times the rate in the total U.S. population" (Clear et al. 228). With 72 AIDS-related inmate deaths reported in 2010, AIDS is the second-leading cause of death in state prisons (Ibid 229). The leading cause of inmate death may be Correctional officers. Recent reporting in the Miami Herald and the Orlando Sentinel reveal that record numbers of deaths are happening in Florida. The Department of Justice is conducting hundreds of investigations in regard to 320 inmate deaths. This is in a state where the total number of inmates has remained relatively unchanged.

Examples of allegations against correctional staff include the death of Darren Rainey, a 50-year-old mentally-ill inmate at Dade Correctional Institution. Reports say that Darren was

confined to a 180-degree shower for two hours. He would eventually die after crying in agony as flesh fell from his body. Bernadette Gregory was happy to be getting out of prison in just 8 months and was also planning her wedding. Prison authorities at Lowell Correctional Institution say the 42-year-old was found hanged in her cell, that she had committed suicide. In light of Bernadette's reliance on a wheelchair and the fact that she was handcuffed, this is one of many instances where the official reporting of "natural" causes does not stand up to scrutiny. Dozens of families have stepped forward during the investigations with letters sent to them during the last days of their incarcerated loved one's life. In example after example, the inmate warned that if they die suspiciously it will be at the hands of prison workers who regularly beat and threaten them.

In an example that would make Ohlendorf and Blobel proud, a Florida inmate was gassed to death in his chamber. Randall Jordan-Aparo's death at Franklin Correctional Institution was one of those determined to be the result of "natural" causes. Inspectors found covered-up evidence that Randall's cell had been repeatedly gassed with chemical agent. His lifeless body was found with his mouth at the crack of the door, presumably gasping for air. The Herald has also reported on correctional officers found to be in the KKK. They would allegedly plot murders on what was termed "pick a n---r Friday." In short, any prison sentence has the potential to become a death sentence when accounting for the prevalence of HIV in correctional settings and violence at the hands of racist correctional officers.

Conclusion

In many jurisdictions, judges' hands are tied in the hearing of drug cases and poor people of color, who have been convicted of non-violent crimes, are sent away for longer prison sentences than convicted, genocidal war criminals. Meanwhile, children in poor neighborhoods

are ushered into the criminal justice system for horseplay. Institutionalized racism is alive and well in America today. Comparing even the worst criminals to the perpetrators of the final solution is a sensitive subject. One would hope that the pogroms of that time period would never happen again. It should be stated, however, that we have the benefit of hindsight. Blobel enjoyed tricking the Jewish residents of Babi Yar; they did not know they were going to die until the last moment. Likewise, victims of the holocaust could not envision that anti-Jewish laws would escalate to the ghettoization process, mobile death squads, or large-scale death camps. If there is any truth to the adage that history repeats itself, then we do both ourselves and the victims of the Nazi Holocaust a disservice when we let institutionalized racism stand.

The War on Blacks has been nicely disguised as the “War on Drugs,” and our overcrowded, disease-filled correctional facilities, where officers will kill you for being the *wrong* race, is a result of our “Tough on Crime” policies. The Nazis could frequently be found organizing money and gold teeth after a “liquidation” of non-Aryans. Likewise, the lucrative private-prison industry has bought off lawmakers to create these nice-sounding laws to keep their businesses booming. In recent years, the wide availability of camera technology has exposed police brutality towards blacks. The technique of shooting unarmed people in the back still proves a viable tactic in the minds of those who have no empathy towards or understanding of the “other.” We should learn from the anti-Jewish laws of Nazi Germany and the sending away of the St. Louis. There is a true evil in this world. All it needs to succeed is the silence of good people.

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