

Paper 32-2015 Holocaust Interpretation Essay

The historian utilizes an approach that focuses mostly on the German culture, specifically, the German anti-Semitism that had been prevalent in Germany for centuries prior to the Holocaust. The historian puts forth that German anti-Semitism was a “sufficient cause” for the Holocaust, explaining that the German people’s participation was a direct result of their similar mindset to the Nazis, and that their participation in actions against Jews was only guaranteed by this shared anti-Semitism. The historian’s interpretation of the Holocaust is distant from the two main schools of thinking, Functionalism and Intentionalism. Rather, they put blame for the Holocaust on German culture and anti-Semitism, taking some away from Hitler and the Nazis by doing so. Throughout the extract, the historian sticks to his thesis that eliminationist anti-Semitism was the main cause of the Holocaust, and further develops this idea by alleging that Germany’s anti-Semitism was unique, in that it placed Germany on a straight path to the Holocaust.

In the opening paragraph, the historian, in regards to German anti-Semitism, states, “it was also a necessary cause for such broad German participation in the persecution and mass slaughter of Jews...” Here the historian sets German culture as the basis for all actions of the Holocaust perpetrated by the Germans, both ordinary and the higher ups. The historian includes this statement in order to emphasize that the actions taken by Germans were because of their beliefs and ways of thinking, not because they were pressured to do such things by a higher up power such as Hitler. This is true of the many Germans who joined different groups such as the Hitler Youth or SA not necessarily because they were forced to, but because they agreed with aspects of Nazi ideology since it had similarities to their own, German culture. The historian claims that the Nazis would have had a hard time in proceeding with the extermination of the Jews without a German people that dislike Jews. This is true because the Nazis would not have been able to gain power in 1933 without the votes needed to gain a majority in the Reichstag. Throughout the paragraph, the author approaches the Holocaust in a way that stresses German culture. They intentionally disregard the actions of Hitler and the Nazis in order to further emphasize this point.

In the second paragraph, the historian develops the idea that the Holocaust was a result of the “enabling conditions” of German anti-Semitism, which the Nazis and Hitler took advantage of for their own eliminationist ideology. The historian states that anti-Semitism was “mobilized by a criminal regime beholden to an eliminationist, genocidal ideology, and which was given shape and energized by a leader, Hitler... who was known to be committed wholeheartedly to the unfolding, brutal eliminationist program.” Here, the historian references Hitler’s desire to exterminate the Jews, as evidenced by his writings in *Mein Kampf*, and his annihilation speech given to the Reichstag in January 1939. However, the historian does fail to include how Hitler was not always committed to the eliminationist program. Hitler had not decided on completely exterminating Jews until 1942, up until which he was strongly appeased by the idea of deporting Jews to Madagascar or Eastern Europe. By including information about Hitler and the Nazis, the historian is alluding to the idea that although anti-Semitism was a major

factor, it needed to be driven and directed by leaders to be put to use. The historian provides this information through a synthesis approach.

Towards the end of the extract, the historian delves deeper into his approach by focusing on how German anti-Semitism was unique compared to other countries and how it enabled Germany to be the sole location for the Holocaust to occur. The historian supports this by saying, "it was only in Germany that an openly and rabidly anti-Semitic came to power-indeed was elected to power." This is true to an extent, as the Nazis did gain the majority of seats in the Reichstag in 1933, but only after removing their rivals, the Social Democratic Party and German Communist party from government by force. The historian's reason to include this information is to show that the German people shared a common anti-Semitism with the Nazis and that they supported the actions the Nazis were going to take. A bottom-up argument can be seen here, as the historian is pointing out that the German anti-Semitism was satisfied by putting into power a government led by people who shared similar views, or even possibly, more radical ones. The historian also states, "Germany developed along a singular path, setting it apart from other western countries." Here, the author is differentiating Germany from other western countries, such as France or Britain, where anti-Semitism was common, but not as violent or racist as in Germany. This is significant as it explains why the Germans were the ones that led the actions against the Jews and were the main perpetrators of the Holocaust. The Germans were the only people to think of Jews as a threat to their culture and livelihoods, and thus turned to extermination. The use of the word "unique" shows that the historian is attempting to set Germany aside as a special case, a country where similar, eliminationist ideologies and a culture based on anti-Semitism, led to the path that Germans took in carrying out the Holocaust.

Looking at the extract as a whole, the historian bases their approach on the German eliminationist anti-Semitism as the main cause of the Holocaust. They emphasize that Germany was unique, as its anti-Semitism was very different compared to that of other countries that participated in the Holocaust. Neither intentionalist nor functionalist viewpoint is taken in the extract, with the author choosing to place blame on the German people and eliminationist mindset rather than entirely on Hitler or the Nazi government.