

Holocaust Denial and the Mentality of Deniers

I. The Revisionists

Some of the most atrocious events in human history would today be labelled genocide under the definition set forth in article II of the 1948 *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

As repugnant as the act itself inherently is, there often arises a situation after a genocidal event where members of a society deny in part or in whole the occurrence of or the role that countrymen, governments, and individuals played in the tragedy. A particularly widespread form of this denial focuses on the Nazi Holocaust of Jewish people in Europe. The ideology behind Holocaust denial relies on many of the same bigoted ideas that for centuries caused pogroms targeted at Jewish communities, and ultimately led to the organized extermination of millions of human beings that they themselves deny. Furthermore, the individuals who actively deny the

Holocaust are themselves victims of predation by organized propaganda that feeds on their internalized insecurities, and causes them to lash out at the Jewish community infecting social discourse.

To most members of society the idea of Holocaust denial would likely seem as ludicrous as it is, but many people really doubt what Hitler's Reich did to the Semitic peoples of Europe. There are several different tactics used by the deniers, and the one that is most fundamental to initially ensnaring people into denial is a façade of legitimacy. These people present themselves as not Nazis, but as legitimate "revisionists" who seek to rectify the historical record. (Lipstadt) There are thousands of documents: first hand records, testimonies by Nazis, photographs, and contemporaneous bystander accounts that all unequivocally paint a picture of systematic and organized eradication of roughly six million Jews in the 1940's.

All of this in mind, the "revisionists" claim that there is no evidence that such things happened, and further, claim that photographs are either falsified or taken of people who died of natural or other war related causes. (The Holocaust) Moreover these erroneous claims seek to discredit survivors, demonize Jews en masse, alleviate Nazi guilt, and promote xenophobic thought in those who are exposed to their propaganda. The reality is quite the opposite as Deborah Lipstadt, an expert on Holocaust denial, pointed out, "The Holocaust which has the dubious distinction of being the best-documented genocide in the world? Who could believe it didn't happen?" Clearly some do fall into this trap, the question is why and what tactics are used to ensnare them?

The stated intentions of this denial movement are to fix falsehoods in the records of World War II era eradication programs, but the real motive that drives them is a belief in a Jewish over class that controls media and society in order to siphon off wealth from European

states and provide legitimacy to Israel (Lipstadt; Natman). These talking points are very similar to the kinds of rhetoric that served to dehumanize Jewry during and before the Holocaust, and it follows the same path when in a blog entry on a white supremacist website the author claims that the Jews are parasites. He goes on to support the expulsion of Jews from nations as seen throughout history, and says that they are destroying western society by promoting civil rights movements, "race mixing," and white genocide (Natman)... These ideas don't just echo the rhetoric of anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda, but in some cases are the same arguments of subversion, degradation of racial purity, and oppression of a perceived superior group by Jews (Nazi Propaganda). In short, the revisionists are not so objective, nor far removed from the Nazi ideology as they would like to project.

White supremacist websites often present such an obtuse view that at first it might seem as though it is all a joke in very poor taste, but they are all too serious in their dedication to the distortion of reality for political gain. One such site directly claims that the allied forces are responsible for Jewish deaths, and that the Germans never used crematoria, Zyklon-B gas, nor any tactics to starve their Semitic slaves (The Holocaust). In direct refutation of that claim is the Nazi era Bischoff letter describing the optimal daily cremation capacity in Auschwitz-Birkenau as being 4,756 human beings, there and in many other cases the original Nazis refute modern anti-Semitic claims (Auschwitz-Birkenau Crematoria). This is one of the more explicit documents, but there were many others that relied on euphemisms rather than explicit language and figures (Kaye). Euphemistic phrasing in documents made it easier for Allied officials to disbelieve what the Nazis were doing at the time, which combined with prevalent anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiments in the States led to fewer refugees being admitted than could have been (United). Additionally, it was never a wartime priority to rescue Jewish people from

murder, in fact the United States made immigration policy more restrictive during the war.

(United)

The Holocaust was in essence designed to be denied, beyond just in documentation, as the decision was made to return to mass graves in 1942 and exhume the remains of massacred people in order to destroy the evidence of mass murders. (Kaye) However, as previously mentioned there are Nazi documents that explicitly detail the number of killings in given time spans and the estimated capacity of crematoria. (Auschwitz-Birkenau Crematoria) It should also be noted that in no cases have Nazi war criminals on trial claimed that the Holocaust was a fabrication in any way. (Lipstadt) Furthermore, Nazi death camp population totals and conditions were transmitted daily or monthly via encrypted radio to SS police forces that were intercepted by Allied code bakers. Unfortunately these tallies only accounted for slave labor populations and did not include those sent directly to be executed, which adds to the theories of inflated death reports (Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Death). There is no ambiguity in many of these documents as to what was happening, and anyone who does not accept this is ignoring facts in order to mislead people. The human loss experienced in this genocide is completely incomprehensible in scope, but then again the Nazis did not view the people they murdered as humans. Entire villages were completely exterminated, and no exception was given to children; in actuality, children were specifically targeted in order to ensure the total eradication of Jews from the face of the Earth (Kaye). To give some perspective: A German transmission estimated that in four camps involved in Operation Reinhard the total number of persons killed in 1942 alone was 1,274,166, in other words, just over four times the total 2010 population of the UP (Hanyok 78-79; UP).

II. The Ideology of Deniers

Most claims of the deniers follow a similar pattern of plainly refusing facts and lying in order to either make Nazis seem less despicable or attack Jews. It is really pointless to refute people who will not accept thousands of documents, videos, photographs, and testimonies. There is a well sourced rebuttal for anything that the “revisionists” claim for free online or in one of many books on the subject. What is intriguing, however, is the people behind the hate. The individuals who harbor and spread not just Holocaust denial but any number of xenophobic or bigoted beliefs. The denial of the Holocaust cannot stand alone as a conspiracy theory, because there is no reason to try and refute the Holocaust if not motivated by a preexisting ideology of prejudice. That does not mean that everyone who doubts the Holocaust is an ardent Neo-Nazi, but the people who publish articles and produce propaganda for the cause could not reach the conclusions they do if they did as much as a cursory evaluation of the evidence that is readily available. When this kind of rhetoric is disseminated throughout society, it only serves to break down the social cohesion of civilized life. The deniers act like antibodies attacking one’s own system, rather than the virus that is quietly propagating itself, yet there is a way to inoculate and even cure people infected with the xenophobic virus.

An invaluable window into the mind of racists and extremists comes from those who have been deracialized and exited their respective movements. One such person is Christian Picciolini a former leader of America’s first racist skinhead group and co-founder of Life After Hate, a nonprofit designed to disengage extremists and provide a safety net for them afterward. In an interview with NPR he touches on the tactics used by his former racist group to target insecure youths and provide them with a family of sorts. Then they add the ideology in slowly so that the kids are taught with a racist point of view, and the threat of losing their community is greater than any doubt they might have about hate. Not all people who get sucked into extremism

end up with swastikas tattooed on their arms or even attending events like the 2017 rally in Charlottesville, Va. More end up keeping these thoughts unspoken or contained to their online life, such as the Florida teacher who in March 2018 was found to run a white supremacist internet radio show and Twitter account (Willingham).

It's all well and good to look at how people are targeted by xenophobic ideology, but where does the primer come from? There must be a gap that needs to be filled as Hilary Jacobs Hendel, a psychotherapist in New York, says, "Racism is more about our personal stories than hatred of others. Racism is the cover story. The real story is this: 'I'd rather hate a group of people than my father, my mother, and myself.'" Many will tell stories of bad home lives or personal dilemma in which the individual develops their hate filled persona as a coping mechanism, because they have such low self-worth they need to empower themselves with a feeling of superiority (Hendel). It's not unlike a powerful narcotic that makes reality disappear for a short time, but you always need more to get the same high. Picciolini talks about his own pattern of escalation from hitting a bully at school all the way to assaulting a random black teenager who he, "proceeded to beat... very, very badly." Once the person internalizes the idea that they are superior: No matter how bad things get in their life, they're always better than someone else whether it be women, homosexuals, Muslims, or Jews.

Once a network of beliefs is established, it becomes relatively easy to build on top of them conspiracy theories like an international Jewish plot to fake the Holocaust. The only reason to espouse such a belief is to disenfranchise and discredit those who experienced horrors that no living being should be forced to suffer. The minimization of the atrocities of the Third Reich have no place in civil discourse, nor any in scholarly debate. Evidence in this regard is insurmountable, no legitimate researcher wants to revise the historical record based on

manipulated evidence and outright falsehoods. The majority of people who doubt the holocaust aren't "scholars," however they are taken in by the wrongheaded ideas that create an atmosphere of fear and distrust that effects political action and society as a whole.

Xenophobic ideologies are very deeply held beliefs, yet still, many move away from them because the human spirit is naturally inclined to be loving. When exposed to the vicious other that has been the subject of scorn, sometimes the synapses might fire in just the right way to breed empathy. Undoubtedly, holding a grossly inaccurate caricature as the template for a whole group becomes difficult when people are humanized not demonized. When a neo-Nazi can look in the eyes of a Jewish child and see his own child looking back at him, there can be no hate. The only way to create empathy like that is to show empathy. No good comes from returning their hate in kind, but comes from a willingness to accept them as someone who is deeply hurt and suffering. This doesn't in any way excuse violence, but as hard as it sometimes is to love your neighbor, it's the best medicine for hate. As Martin Buber said, "The true meaning of love one's neighbor is not that it is a command from God which we are to fulfill, but that through it and in it we meet God."

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