

Foreword

Otto Dov Kulka

But most of all, they say, a deportation in the near future of all Jews from Germany would be warmly welcomed.
—From the Secret SD-Reports on German Popular Opinion, 2 February 1942

There is a wide range of research in historiography on the significance of the Wannsee Conference for the unfolding of the “Final Solution.” The present volume of biographical studies by leading historians on the participants of the conference, which dealt with the planning and implementation of the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question,” is unquestionably an important achievement in the field of research on the Nazi perpetrators.

Particularly valuable is the exceptional concept of bringing together these studies in one volume. Furthermore, in addition to examining the participants’ individual roles at the conference, the chapters range across their complete biographies. In each case, the reader is led back to the origins of their political activities, generally in the wake of the First World War and during the formative stages of the Nazi movement. One can view the new volume as a continuity and extension of Ulrich Herbert’s innovative approach in his acclaimed major biography of Werner Best on *Radicalism, Ideology and Reason*,¹ as well as Hans-Christian Jasch’s on *Wilhelm Stuckart, and the Judenpolitik*.²

However, unlike the collective biography by Michael Wildt—*An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*,³ on the rather homogeneous body of the RSHA—this volume references a time-specific historical event while also considering a heterogeneous gathering of leading representatives of the Nazi regime from different ministerial offices, security agencies, plenipotentiaries for the occupied territories, and party representatives. Each of the senior representatives invited to the conference, which was convened by Reinhard Heydrich, was indispensable for planning, organizing, and implementing the annihilation of European Jewry.

Thus, the distinction of the present volume derives not only from its ability to take earlier historiographical approaches to a new level, but

also from its singular compilation of the biographies of representatives of the leading echelon of the Nazi regime. Hence its innovative value for research about key Nazi figures.

At the same time, the editors and some of the contributors have gone beyond research about the perpetrators. In their introduction, Hans-Christian Jasch and Christoph Kreutzmüller devote considerable space to the unconcealed picture displayed by the German press around the time of the conference, about the impending and indeed already ongoing extermination of European Jews, also referring to Hitler's notorious prophecy from January 1939 and January 1942.

Accordingly, it might be worth posing the question on how the German population reacted to these frank media representations and, beyond that, what their attitude was toward the regime's anti-Jewish policy—and toward the Jews themselves—at this critical stage of the persecution.

Today, we have massive, albeit not yet adequately researched, source material that can shed light on these questions.⁴ It turns out that the Nazi regime itself did not accept at face value the monolithic image of state and society that it portrayed in the mass media. The authorities established secret internal reporting systems to provide reliable information about the prevailing popular mood and about activity among the different segments of the population.

The most important as well as the most dependable of these systems was that of the SS Security Service (the SD). The directives to the compilers of the reports emphasized repeatedly that the authorities wanted a true, unembellished picture of the situation and of the population's attitude toward the policy of the regime and of course toward its *Judenpolitik* and toward the Jews themselves.⁵ Particular attention was to be paid to critical or even negative attitudes and activities. According to the directive issued by Heydrich in 1937, the purpose of the SD reports—written “for the political leadership of the Reich”—was “to fight the enemy with passion but to be cold as ice and objective in the assessment of the situation and its presentation.”⁶

The existence of these reports has been known since the mid 1960s and sporadically quoted in the research literature on various issues, including “the Jews.” For the war years, however, the dominant impression was that “the Jewish question” was all but neglected in the reports. Overall, the assessment of the historians on this issue was encapsulated in the phrase: “the silence of documents.” Hence, it was concluded, the German population, preoccupied with personal matters of subsistence during the war, was generally indifferent to the fate of the Jews. The result was the ongoing “indifference thesis” in research.

However, the documentation available today allows a re-examination of this thesis.

The comprehensive scholarly edition of the Secret Reports contains nearly 4,000 documents relating to the Jews during the period 1933–1945. Nearly 1,000 of them were written during the war years. Beginning from the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, many of them contain information about the deportations of the Jews to the East and their fate, as well as the reactions of the population in various parts of the Reich.

One such document is the SD report for 10–16 December 1941 of the District Office Bielefeld:

On Thursday, 11 December 1941, the action began here locally to transport the first Jewish families to Riga. . . . Although this action had been kept secret by the Gestapo, the fact that the Jews were being sent off was the object of discussion in all segments of the population. Accordingly, there were also a number of statements reflecting the prevailing mood. It should be noted that the action was welcomed and approved by the preponderant majority. . . .

It was stated that the Jews were all being deported to Russia. The transport was to be in railway carriages to Warsaw, and then in cattle cars from there on to Russia. In Russia, people were saying, the Jews were being deployed for labor in former Soviet factories, while the elderly and frail Jews were to be shot. It was, some said, inconceivable that the Jews could be treated so brutally. Whether a Jew or an Aryan, we're all the children of God.⁷

Such information obviously came from local personnel, who accompanied the transports to the East. Many more detailed reports on mass executions of Jews in the East were circulated by soldiers on leave. One such report, dated as early as 21 July 1941 is an actual eyewitness testimony:

According to a report from Major Frantz, 2,600 Jews were recently shot in Bialystok. He drove through a street that had been closed off by the police, and asked a German police officer: "Are Jews being deported here?" "No," he replied, "but they're being shot." The day before, they shot 2,600 Jews, the next day 6,000 were to follow. Supposedly all Jews between the ages of 15 and 60 are being shot. According to the police officer, the operation is being carried out daily, each day by a different unit of men on duty. Several police officers who are no longer able to take part in such operations because of nervous breakdown have reported ill to a German physician on duty there. An execution of Jews in Baranawitschy has as yet not taken place.⁸

The systematic reporting, on all levels, continued until nearly the end of the war. The following section of an SD report of 6 November 1944, from Stuttgart, refers also to the views among the German population regarding the fate of the Jews:

Didn't we slaughter the Jews by the thousands? Don't soldiers repeatedly tell stories that the Jews in Poland were forced to dig their own graves? And what did we do with the Jews who were in Alsatia in concentration camps? After all, Jews are only human too. In doing this, we gave the enemies an example of what they are allowed to do with us in the event of their victory. (numerous voices from all circles of the population).⁹

One of the most comprehensive, detailed documents compiled close to the time of the Wannsee Conference, and covering the period from September to December 1941, is the nation wide SD report dated 2 February 1942. It summarizes on a national level the reports from all parts of the Reich. The main issue was the population's reactions to the edict of marking the Jews with a yellow patch, though at the end it also relates to people's expectations of further measures regarding the solution of the "Jewish question."

The summarizing section opens as follows:

According to reports now available from all parts of the Reich . . . the issuance of the ordinance on the marking of the Jews has in general had a favorable impact in the population. It is emphasized everywhere that this ordinance is in keeping with a wish long present among broad circles of the population, especially in localities where there are still a relatively large number of Jews. . . . It is significant that many regard the ordinance on marking not as a final measure of some sort, but rather only as the prelude to further more drastic ordinances, with the goal of a final resolution of the Jewish Question. . . .

And it concludes:

The population wishes to mark in an appropriate manner also the apartments of the Jews. But most of all, they say, a deportation in the near future of all Jews from Germany would be warmly welcomed.¹⁰

Like all special reports, this one, about the popular reception of the marking of the Jews, was preceded by a general overview (*Allgemeines*) of the mood of the population in the Reich. This included the first reactions to Hitler's notorious speech of 30 January 1942, in which he reiterated his prophecy of 30 January 1939¹¹ on the interdependence between a new world war and the extermination of the Jews in Europe, "which is now being realized:"

We are fully aware that this war can end either in the extermination of the Aryan people or in the disappearance of Jewry from Europe. . . . I wish to avoid making hasty prophesies, but this war will not end as the Jews imagine, namely, in the extermination of the European-Aryan people; instead, the result of this war will be the annihilation of Jewry. For the first time, the old, truly Jewish rule of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” will obtain.¹²

The report opens with a description of the tense, impatient expectations of the people for Hitler’s speech, owing to the continuing lack of adequate information about the situation on the Eastern Front. In regard to Hitler’s prophecy, the report notes:

The renewed denunciation of the Jews and the emphasis on the phrase from the Old Testament “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” were interpreted to mean that the Führer’s struggle against Jewry will continue on with relentless consistency until it is completed and soon the last Jew will be expelled from European soil.¹³

As we have seen, information about the fate of the Jews deported from Germany was already widespread among the German population. Thus, the question is no longer what the German population knew, but rather which political course for the solution of the “Jewish question” the majority of Germans favored at this stage.

In his historiographical survey of the developments, focusing on the perpetrators, Mark Roseman hints at “the most recent trend of blurring the boundaries between direct perpetration and a wider societal participation.”¹⁴ The prolonged, frustrating debate between the so-called Intentionalists and Structuralists, or “Functionalists,” gradually changed its focus following Ulrich Herbert’s groundbreaking biography of Werner Best and turned its attention more to the early biographies in the Third Reich. As mentioned above, the conceptual framework of the present volume is based on this fruitful approach.

However, the historiographical debate could be resolved by yet another approach. I refer to Ian Kershaw’s innovative thesis based on the metaphor of “working towards the Führer” (*dem Führer entgegenarbeiten*). In his article titled with the same phrase, “Working towards the Führer,”¹⁵ Kershaw developed the theoretical implications of this thesis, based on his earlier empirical research, that he later applied in his monumental biography of Hitler, which is virtually also a social and political history of Nazi Germany:

The notion of “working towards the Führer” could be interpreted, too, in a more indirect sense where ideological motivation was secondary, or perhaps even absent altogether, but where the objective function of

the actions was nevertheless to further the potential for implementation of the goals which Hitler embodied. . . . The result was the unstoppable radicalisation of the “system” and the gradual emergence of policy objectives closely related to the ideological imperatives represented by Hitler. . . .¹⁶

Would it be too daring to propose that Kershaw’s thesis on the perpetrators is also applicable to the research on the German population as well? That this is indeed the case suggested by the reports about the population’s awareness of the radicalization in the regime’s “Jewish policy” and its favorable anticipation of even more radical steps against the Jews, such as the already ongoing deportations (*Abschiebung*).

We have to take into consideration that the reports quoted above on the moods and attitudes of the population reflect the period when Germany under Hitler’s uncontested leadership seemed to be at the peak of its political and military achievements, and anti-Jewish sentiments and policies became widespread not only in Germany but across the continent.

In his above-mentioned chapter, Mark Roseman is well aware of the recently developing trend in the historiography on Nazi Germany, as he takes note of some of the newer studies that “[make] the whole population complicit in genocide.”¹⁷ A severe verdict indeed, but one that can be regarded as justified. The present book, as well as my foreword to it, seeks to explore prevailing approaches in historiography that might enable us to understand how this complicity became possible.

Otto Dov Kulka was born 1933 in the Czech Republic, and has lived in Israel since 1949. He is Rosenbloom Professor Emeritus of Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a historian and a writer. His publications include: *The Jews in the Secret Nazi-Reports* (Yale University Press, 2010) (together with Eberhard Jäckel); and *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

Notes

Epigraph: “Am meisten würde jedoch eine baldige Abschiebung aller Juden aus Deutschland begrüßt werden.”

- 1 Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989* (Bonn, 1996).

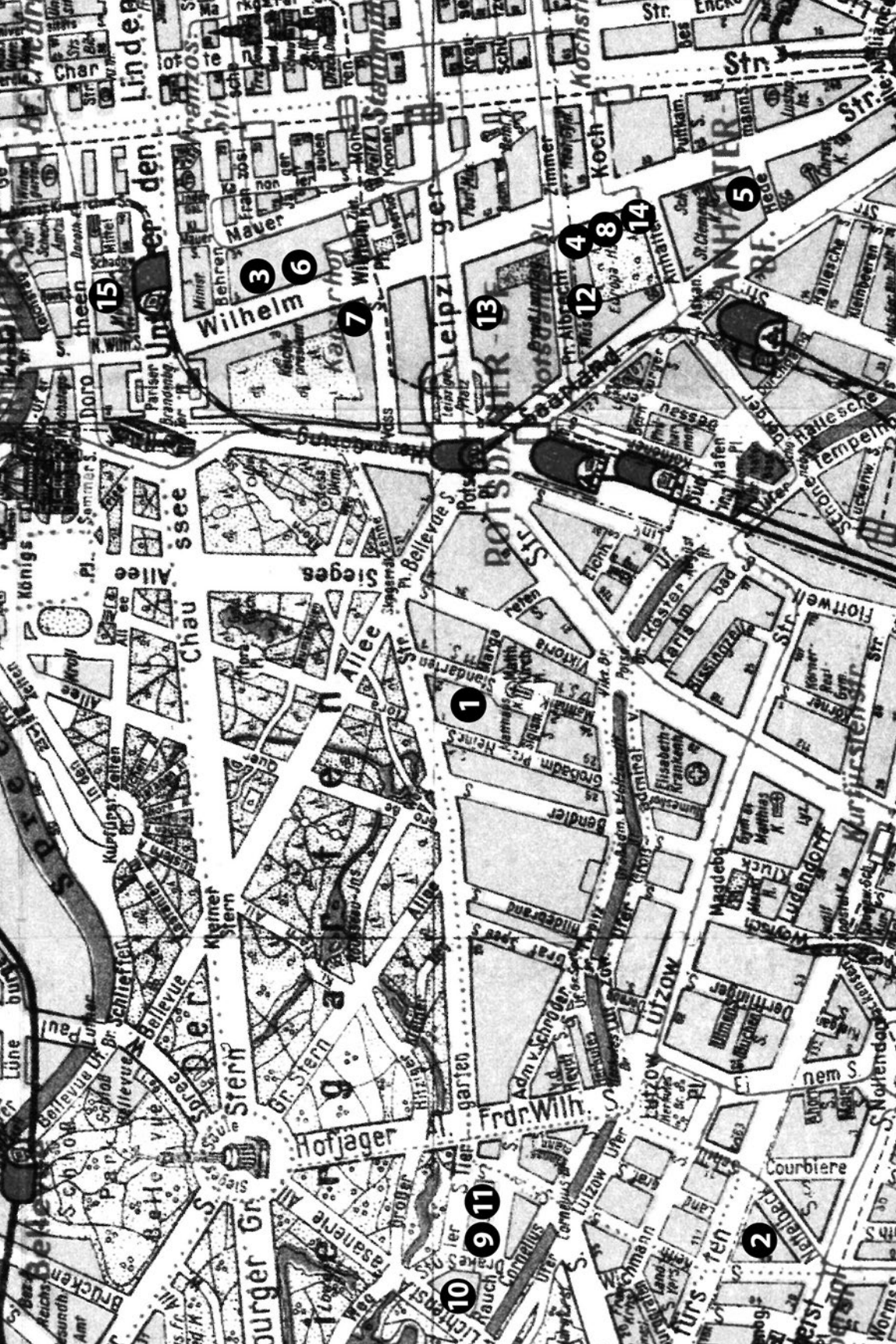
- 2 Hans-Christian Jasch, *Staatssekretär Wilhelm Stuckart und die Judenpolitik: Der Mythos von der sauberen Verwaltung* (Munich, 2012).
- 3 Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, 2009).
- 4 O.D. Kulka and E. Jäckel, ed., *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports on Popular Opinion in Germany, 1933–1945* (New Haven, CT and London, 2010). See in particular the Introduction. The book itself presents 752 selected documents of the whole corpus of 3,744 reports that appear in the comprehensive digital edition of the original German documents attached to the book on CD. See also A. E. Steinweis, "An Essential Source Collection on German Popular Opinion and the Jews," *Yad Vashem Studies* 40, no. 2 (2012). The original German edition with the attached CD appeared in 2004. See also the review by Bernward Dörner in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 26 February 2005. Retrieved 12 February 2017 from <http://www.hsozkult.de/searching/id/rezbuecher-5053?title=o-kulka-u-a-hgg-juden-in-ns-stimmungsberichten&q=doerner&page=5&sort=&fq=&total=125&recno=87&subType=reb>
- 5 Dörner, review, see in particular the Introduction. This review appeared in the same periodical online as the item in the previous note.
- 6 Dörner, review, xxviii. See above, note 5.
- 7 Kulka and Jäckel, *Secret Nazi Reports*, Doc. 605.
- 8 Kulka and Jäckel, *Secret Nazi Reports*, Doc. 557.
- 9 Kulka and Jäckel, *Secret Nazi Reports*, Doc. 749.
- 10 Kulka and Jäckel, *Secret Nazi Reports*, Doc. 618.
- 11 Hitler invariably dated it wrongly to 1 September 1939, the day of German invasion of Poland.
- 12 Max Domarus, *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*. vol. 4 (Wiesbaden, 1983), 1828–29. English translation retrieved 12 February 2017 https://archive.org/stream/TheEssentialHitlerSpeechesAndCommentary/TheEssentialHitler-SpeechesAndCommentary_djvu.txt. See also Ian Kershaw, "Hitler's Prophecy and the 'Final Solution,'" in *On Germans and Jews: Essays by Three Generations of Historians: A Festschrift in Honor of Otto Dov Kulka*, ed. M. Zimmermann (Jerusalem, 2006), 49–66.
- 13 Kulka and Jäckel, *Secret Nazi Reports*, Doc. 618.
- 14 Mark Roseman, "Biographical Approaches and the Wannsee Conference" in this volume.
- 15 Ian Kershaw, "'Working towards the Führer': Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," in *Hitler, The Germans and the Final Solution*, ed. I. Kershaw (New Haven, CT and London, 2008), 29–49. The equation "metaphor" for the thesis that appeared in the title of his article was chosen by Kershaw himself.
- 16 Kershaw, "Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler," 42–43.
- 17 As in footnote 14 above. It's worth mentioning the works of, for example: Bernward Dörner, *Die Deutschen und der Holocaust: Was niemand wissen wollte, aber jeder wissen konnte* (Berlin, 2007); Peter Longerich, *"Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!" Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945* (Munich, 2006); Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung: Gewalt gegen Juden in der deutschen Provinz 1919 bis 1939* (Hamburg, 2007);

F. Bajohr, "The 'Folk Community' and the Persecution of the Jews: German Society under the National Socialist Dictatorship, 1933–1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 183–206; Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis: Die Deutschen: Die NS-Führung und die Alliierten* (Munich, 2006); S. Schrafstetter and A.E. Steinweis, ed., *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford and New York, 2016).

Bibliography

- Bajohr, F. "The 'Folk Community' and the Persecution of the Jews: German Society under the National Socialist Dictatorship, 1933–1945." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 183–206.
- Bajohr, Frank and Dieter Pohl. *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis: Die Deutschen. Die NS-Führung und die Alliierten*. Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006.
- Domarus, Max. *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*. Wiesbaden: R. Löwit, 1983.
- Dörner, Bernward. *Die Deutschen und der Holocaust: Was niemand wissen wollte, aber jeder wissen konnte*. Berlin: Propyläen, 2007.
- Herbert, Ulrich. *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989*. Bonn: Dietz, 1996.
- Jasch, Hans-Christian. *Staatssekretär Wilhelm Stuckart und die Judenpolitik: Der Mythos von der sauberen Verwaltung*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012.
- Kershaw, Ian. "Hitler's Prophecy and the 'Final Solution.'" In *On Germans and Jews: Essays by Three Generations of Historians: A Festschrift in Honor of Otto Dov Kulka*, edited by M. Zimmermann, 49–66. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2006.
- . "'Working towards the Führer': Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship." In *Hitler, The Germans and the Final Solution*, edited by I. Kershaw, 29–49. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Kulka, O.D. and E. Jäckel, ed. *Die Juden in den geheimen NS-Stimmungsberichten 1933–1945*. Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004. [English: *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports on Popular Opinion in Germany, 1933–1945*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2010.]
- Longerich, Peter. *"Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!" Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945*. Munich: Pantheon, 2006.
- Schrafstetter, S. and A.E. Steinweis, ed. *The Germans and the Holocaust: Popular Responses to the Persecution and Murder of the Jews*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2016.
- Steinweis, A.E. "An Essential Source Collection on German Popular Opinion and the Jews." *Yad Vashem Studies* 40, no. 2 (2012).
- Wildt, Michael. *Die Generation des Unbedingten: Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002. [English: *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.]

———. *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung: Gewalt gegen Juden in der deutschen Provinz 1919 bis 1939*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2007. [English: *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence Against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2012.]



15

3

6

7

13

4

8

12

14

5

1

10

9

11

2

Berlin Offices of the Participants

- | | | |
|----|------------|---|
| 1 | Bühler | Administration of the General Government,
Standartenstraße 14 |
| 2 | Eichmann | Reich Main Security Office, Kurfürstenstraße 116 |
| 3 | Freisler | Reich Ministry of Justice, Wilhelmstraße 65 |
| 4 | Heydrich | Reich Main Security Office, Wilhelmstraße 101 |
| 5 | Hofmann | SS Race and Settlement Main Office, Hedemannstraße 24 |
| 6 | Klopfer | Nazi Party Chancellery, Wilhelmstraße 64 |
| 7 | Kritzinger | Reich Chancellery, Wilhelmstraße 77 |
| 8 | Lange | Reich Main Security Office, Wilhelmstraße 101 |
| 9 | Leibbrandt | Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories,
Rauchstraße 17/18 |
| 10 | Luther | Foreign Office, Rauchstraße 11 |
| 11 | Meyer | Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories,
Rauchstraße 17/18 |
| 12 | Müller | Reich Main Security Office, Prinz-Albrecht-Straße 8 |
| 13 | Neumann | Plenipotentiary for the Four Year Plan, Leipziger Straße 3 |
| 14 | Schöngarth | Reich Main Security Office, Wilhelmstraße 101 |
| 15 | Stuckart | Reich Ministry of the Interior, Unter den Linden 72 |

