

**Jürgen Matthäus, Konrad Kwiet, Jürgen Förster.** *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord?: "Weltanschauliche Erziehung" von SS, Polizei und Waffen-SS im Rahmen der "Endlösung"*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2003. 219 S. EUR 12.90 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-596-15016-8.



**Reviewed by** Thomas Kühne (Strassler Family Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University)

**Published on** H-German (January, 2006)

## Indoctrination and Holocaust

The role of ideology as an essential factor in the mass murder of Jews by Germans has been debated more intensely over the last ten years than before. Whatever scholars might have thought about Goldhagen's one-sided thesis on the Holocaust and eliminatory antisemitism among ordinary Germans, it is a given that there is a relation between the Holocaust and antisemitism requiring a more sophisticated analysis. What scholarly debate there has been so far has not been Nazi ideology, propaganda, or indoctrination itself, but rather the problem of how to explore the impact all this had on the behavior and the actions of ordinary and not-so-ordinary people: How did indoctrination and propaganda stipulate or stimulate mass murder?

Readers looking for an answer to this or related questions in this book dealing with the impact of the ideological indoctrination of the SS, police, and Waffen-SS men will be dissatisfied. Sixty pages into the book, we find sixteen unpublished primary sources, mainly excerpts of materials used by the SS and the Gestapo or the SD for indoctrination of its members, with instructions of Himmler and other SS leading agencies on how to organize such

indoctrination efficiently. None of the documents, however, deals with the impact of all these efforts. Neither do the four essays, all written by well-known Holocaust scholars, presented early in the book, demonstrate an awareness of the significance of agency (pp. 83 ff., for instance). Instead, they focus rather traditionally on the organization, intentions, and content of the racist indoctrination.

The first short chapter by Richard Breitman does not live up to the promise of its title, "Anti-Semitic Indoctrination in Himmler's Ideology," but focuses on the development of the schools and training centers used to indoctrinate the SS and police members. Jürgen Matthäus contributes the longest chapter in the book, dealing specifically with the "Jewish question" as the content of all indoctrination. He points out that it was not Himmler's intention to for the SS to murder Jews sadistically, but rather in a controlled, sober, and functional way: Himmler's men were not to murder out of blood lust but rather out of their dedication to the Aryan people's community which, it was believed, had to be cleansed of the Jews.

Although this was the idea and ideology, the practice was different. To ensure some form of mental health for the perpetrators, the gregarious and convivial parts of Himmler's indoctrination programs became increasingly important, which in practice meant drowning scruples in alcohol. Jürgen Förster shows how racist indoctrination served to homogenize an increasingly heterogeneous troop, the Waffen-SS, which expanded from 23,000 to about one million members during the war. Differences among the Waffen-SS tended to decrease, even in terms of political indoctrination and professional military training. The aim was an idealized "political soldier." Konrad Kwiet finally deals with the camouflage of racist motivations in the lawsuit against Holocaust perpetra-

tors after 1945. They were well advised not to base their defense on their former antisemitism, as doing so would have been seen as proof of their base motives. In the absence of better arguments, they referred to having been incited as the reason for their actions.

This collection is part of the prestigious and extensive series, "Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus," popularly called the "black" series at Fischer, which includes a number of major contributions to National Socialism and Holocaust research. This book is one of the series's weaker contributions. It does, however, provide its readers with reliable information about a still important topic, that is, antisemitic indoctrination, and the documents might be useful in German language classes.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

**Citation:** Thomas Kühne. Review of Matthäus, Jürgen; Kwiet, Konrad; Förster, Jürgen, *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord?: "Weltanschauliche Erziehung" von SS, Polizei und Waffen-SS im Rahmen der "Endlösung"*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11370>

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).