

Lesson 14: Handout 4

Selected Quotations from “No Time to Think” (pp. 189–92)

Milton Mayer, an American college professor, wanted to find out how ordinary people reacted to Hitler’s policies and philosophy. Seven years after the war, he interviewed a German college professor. This is what he told Mayer about how he responded to the Nazis:

“Nazism . . . kept us so busy with continuous changes and “crises” . . . that we had no time to think about these dreadful things that were growing, little by little, all around us.

“Each act, each occasion, is worse than the last, but only a little worse. . . . If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes millions, would have been sufficiently shocked. . . . But of course this isn’t the way it happens. In between come all the hundreds of little steps . . . each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next. Step C is not so much worse than Step B, and, if you did not make a stand at Step B, why should you at Step C? And so on to Step D.

“You don’t want to act, or even talk alone; you don’t want to ‘go out of your way to make trouble.’ Why not? —Well, you are not in the habit of doing it. And it is not just fear, fear of standing alone, that restrains you; it is also genuine uncertainty.

“Outside, in the streets, in the general community, ‘everyone’ is happy. One hears no protest, and certainly sees none. . . . It is clearer all the time that, if you are going to do anything, you must make an occasion to do it, and then you are obviously a troublemaker. So you wait, and you wait.

“You have accepted things you would not have accepted five years ago, a year ago. . . . Suddenly it all comes down, all at once. You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven’t done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing).”³⁴

Notes

- ¹ Winston Churchill, *Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill Speeches* (New York: Hyperion, 2003), 300.
- ² Paul Bookbinder, "A Historical Inquiry into the Background Causes of the Holocaust," (presentation, July 25, 1991, Facing History and Ourselves, Chicago, Illinois).
- ³ "The Crime of Genocide Defined in International Law," *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide*, Prevent Genocide International website, <http://www.preventgenocide.org/genocide/officialtext.htm>, (accessed January 21, 2009).
- ⁴ "The Wannsee Conference," The History Place website, <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/h-wannsee.htm> (accessed January 21, 2009).
- ⁵ Bernt Engelmann, *In Hitler's Germany: Daily Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 127.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ⁷ Edward Herman, *Triumph of the Market* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), 97.
- ⁸ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).
- ⁹ Milton Mayer, *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans 1933–45* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 172.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.
- ¹¹ Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 175.
- ¹² Christopher Browning, "Ordinary Men," as quoted in *Holocaust Theoretical Readings*, ed. Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 141.
- ¹³ Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Abacus, 1997), 47.
- ¹⁴ G.M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 259–60.
- ¹⁵ Elie Wiesel, "The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration," as quoted in *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), 7.
- ¹⁶ Leon Bass as quoted in *Facing History and Ourselves, Elements of Time* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 1989), 84.
- ¹⁷ Lawrence Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," as quoted in John Roth and Michael Berenbaum, *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1989), 224.
- ¹⁸ *Elements of Time*, 49.
- ¹⁹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 153–54.
- ²⁰ Elie Wiesel, *The New Leader* 46, (August 5, 1963): 21
- ²¹ Eva Fleischner, *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav Publishing Co., 1974), 228.
- ²² Sonia Schreiber Weitz, *I Promised I Would Tell* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 1993), x.
- ²³ Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Holocaust*, 3rd Edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).
- ²⁴ *Elements of Time*, 49.
- ²⁵ *Elements of Time*, 84.
- ²⁶ Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, 174–75.
- ²⁷ Browning, "Ordinary Men," 141.
- ²⁸ Weitz, *I Promised I Would Tell*, 48.
- ²⁹ Primo Levi and Philip Roth, *Survival in Auschwitz*, (New York: Touchstone, 1986), 27.
- ³⁰ Rita Kesselman as quoted in Margot Stern Strom, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 1994), 346.
- ³¹ Rudolf Höss, *Commandment of Auschwitz* (London: World Publishing Company, 1960), 222.
- ³² *Elements of Time*, 38–39.
- ³³ *Challenge of Memory*, DVD (New Haven: Fortunoff Archives, 1989).
- ³⁴ Mayer, *They Thought They Were Free*, 177–88.
- ³⁵ Weitz, *I Promised I Would Tell*, 28–29.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.