

Who was Responsible for the Holocaust?

1. Sourcework

Task 1

Read the sources and answer these questions.

1. Does Buller (Source 1) think that the German people were 'Hitler's willing executioners'?
2. Is it fair to describe Stangl (Source 2) as a heartless animal?
3. Do you think that Gnewuch (Source 3) should be excused for his actions because he was just a soldier with a duty to follow his orders?
4. What lessons does Niemoller's poem (Source 4) teach us?
5. Overall, do these sources suggest that the German people were evil, cowards, neither or both?

Source 1: Extract from an interview with E.A. Buller, a German civilian, 1945:

"Our great mistake lay in our failure to see right at the beginning when the Party decided to persecute the Jews, that once persecution became part of its gospel, no one could say where it would stop. We were not quick enough to organize against the movement while it was still possible ... And while we were so slow, and I will add so tired after the last war and all the bad years that ... followed, the Nazis gained such control over our lives that we woke up to find ourselves in chains."

Source 2: Extract from an interview with Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka, 1971:

Q. "Did you think the Jews were human beings?"

A. "Cargo. They were cargo."

Q. "When did you begin to think of them as cargo?"

A. "I think it started the day I saw the death camp ... I remember standing there, next to the pits full of blue-black corpses. It had nothing to do with humanity – it couldn't have ... Wirth said, 'What shall we do with this garbage?' I think that started me thinking of them as cargo."

Source 3: An interview with Erich Gnewuch, a soldier in Nazi-occupied USSR, 1993

"On orders from my department, I too drove a gas-van from Berlin to Minsk. These vans had been constructed with a lockable cargo compartment, like a moving van...There were about a thousand Jews in each convoy...Some of the Jews were shot. I myself never shot a single Jew; I only gassed them...I gassed about 150 to 180 people".

Source 4: A poem by Martin Niemoller (1892-1954), a German Pastor

"First they came for the Communists but I was not a Communist so I did not speak out;

Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists but I was not one of them, so I did not speak out;

Then they came for the Jews but I was not Jewish so I did not speak out.

And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me."

