

Alfred Rosenberg & The ERR
Art Confiscation as Antisemitism in Action

Sophee Engle

History 425: Nazi Germany in Historical Perspective

Dr. Jeff Rutherford

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I.

The scholarship regarding the Third Reich's occupation of German-controlled lands during World War II, deservedly, focuses on the harm and death brought to targeted peoples like Jews, Roma, and other designated 'enemies' of the Nazi State. With the Holocaust being the most utilized lens of examining the Nazi Germany, something like the Nazi fixation with art and its manipulation for their destructive goals can fade into the background. Recently, "there has been great interest among the general public and scholars in the theft of art by the Nazis", states Arthur McLaughlin Jr. in his book, *Art and Nazis 1933-1945: Looting, Propaganda, and Seizure* (McLaughlin, 18). Lynn Nicholas' *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* is one of "more than fifty non-fiction books" that have alerted the public to this vein of the Nazis' cultural warfare, according to McLaughlin.¹

The basis of scholarship on the Nazis and art has progressed past the discussion of 'why art', as artwork and other cultural assets have been targeted for plunder or destruction during warfare for centuries. As in strategies and technology, World War I also demonstrated an escalation on how people seized, stored, and sold cultural materials belonging to those conquered during the war. Germany destroyed what cultural materials they could not take with them as they left Belgium, so "the Allies demanded these valuable works be returned specifically as a form of reparation for German actions."² The losses were not only confined to the battles and aftermath of World War I. The *Glaspalast* (Glass Palace Museum) was a staple in Munich, housing a vast amount of German cultural works and artifacts. When the *Glaspalast* burned down in June 1931,

¹ Arthur McLaughlin, "Art and the Nazis 1933-1945: Looting, Propaganda, and Seizure", (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc.): 2021, p. 18.

² McLaughlin, "Art and the Nazis", p.12.

“an immortal Treasure of German art” perished with the building.³ The post-war culture was comprised of removing significant German works as reparations and the war’s overall destruction in Germany, art then serving as an example of the downfall of German pride and national identity after World War I.

The post-war conditions laid the stage for the rise of the Nazi Party by creating the national problems for a new regime to promise solving. Art was a propagandistic priority of the regime, with Hitler’s beliefs being forced “on the people of an entire nation, and he hoped eventually the world, by banning, confiscating, and trading art by decree.”⁴ Hitler’s personal identity as an artist remains involved with scholarly discussions of his past, his prejudices, and the formation of his genocidal intentions. He wrote to British Ambassador Neville Henderson, “I am an artist and not a politician. Once the Polish question is settled, I want to end my life as an artist.”⁵ Hitler authorized agencies that carried out theft and plundering across Europe, but also fueled the dealings personally, “spend[ing] the estimated equivalent of \$65,590,000 of art for his private collection” during his time in power.⁶ Hitler, like many Nazi elites, built up his personal vault with pieces “owned by Jews, beginning with Jews in Germany and then Austria and finally throughout Europe” through “internally ‘legitimate’ methods” of Nazi policy.⁷ The Nazi regime worked to remove artworks from the public that conflicted with Nazi values as they simultaneously deported and killed millions of Jewish people.

Across German-controlled areas, the Reich profited from the ERR stealing artwork from European Jews. Jonathan Petropoulos writes on the complicity of ‘regular’ Germans in a society

³ George L. Mosse, “Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Life in the Third Reich”, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Schocken Books), p.13.

⁴ McLaughlin, “Art and the Nazis”, p. 51.

⁵ McLaughlin, “Art and the Nazis”, p. 44.

⁶ McLaughlin, “Art and the Nazis”, p. 52.

⁷ McLaughlin, “Art and the Nazis”, p. 76.

that instilled their antisemitic policies on art and artists. In his book, *Goering's Man in Paris: The Story of a Nazi Art Plunderer and his World*, Petropoulos delves into the practices in Paris through the ERR and Hermann Goering that targeted and abused French Jews, starting with the removal of their culturally valuable possessions and ending with their deportation to extermination camps. The culturally valuable belongings were displayed for the Nazi elites, to be determined as 'degenerate art' or purchased for private collections.

In Germany itself, the 'Degenerate Art' movement had deemed thousands of works as immoral, improper, and backward compared to correct Germanic art, as decided by Hitler. Hitler liked "anything that he considered to be in the 'Germanic' tradition" while despising "non-representational Modern art, which he thought was influenced by Jewish or Communist ideas".⁸ The growing antisemitism and fear of Communism among the public and government policies allowed for *any* art chosen as 'Jewish' or 'Communist' to be promptly removed from the public eye without question. Collectively, art labeled as 'Jewish' was not created by Jewish origin or perspective, but negatively (therefore truthfully) portrayed World War I or the struggles of post-war German daily life and needed to be removed from institutions and private homes to unify the Nazi vision of Germany's past, present, and desired future.

Additionally, examples of proper German art were removed from improper (non-Aryan) hands. Creating a *Fuehrermuseum* was a goal of Hitler's, an accumulation of 'correct' art stolen from private owners and former state institutions that would exalt 'great' art and artists. In *Hitler's Art Thief: Hildebrand Gurlitt, the Nazis, and the Looting of Europe's Treasures*, Susan Ronald details the gutting of national galleries to fuel the Nazis' larger aims for proper German art and the collection of degenerate art for 'type-only' touring exhibits to display the horrors of

⁸ McLaughlin, "Art and the Nazis", p. 51.

bad art to German citizens. Ronald references the true ideologues, like Alfred Rosenberg – the ERR’s namesake and founder – that actively wanted to enforce antisemitic policies. Scholars, like Ronald, Jonathan Petropoulos, and Meike Hoffmann, are quick to inform audiences that numbers of ‘regular’ Germans willingly perpetuated these antisemitic policies with scholarship detailing the lives of artists, art dealers, and art directors that directly profited off the destruction of Jewish people through these policies.

The *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (Task Force led by Reich’s head Rosenberg) functioned in Germany proper as well as expanding German-controlled areas in the east and west. This ERR had units in France and, following the German army, expanded into the eastern territories. The ERR was tasked with “seiz[ing] all valuable cultural property of Jews, as well as manuscripts and books from libraries and artifacts from masonic lodges throughout all Nazi occupied countries beginning in 1940.”⁹ The founder of the ERR, Alfred Rosenberg enthusiastically sought the ‘answer’ to the Jewish Question with his position as Reich Minister in the growing German east, reporting only to the highest authorities in the Nazi regime and enacting whatever policies and action he saw fit to prepare the east for proper German civilization with lessened restrictions. The specifics of Rosenberg’s wartime actions were disclosed, leading to his hanging at Nuremberg, although that result came from his conquer and abuse of the eastern territories and their people, not simply from his work in the art world. The ERR carried out confiscation actions that resulted in the storage and sale of an unfathomable amount of artwork and archival matters. Rosenberg’s diaries provide his personal ‘investment’ and enthusiasm for the destruction of the Jews and the collection of all Jewish cultural materials. Depending on which nations ‘claimed’ German-controlled areas in the final stretch of the war

⁹ McLaughlin, “Art and the Nazis”, p. 78.

and after the war's end, the transparency of ERR records and findings fluctuated. As Patricia Kennedy Grimsted discusses, the Soviet Union withholds information that remains classified in the present. Shortly after the Yalta Conference, Stalin "issued orders to establish a Special Committee on Reparations and a Trophy Administration", for the "organized transport of extensive spoils of war, from whole factories to pianos, furniture, and wine – 450,000 railroad cars by the end of 1945."¹⁰ The Allies did the same thing, with the sensationalist, patriotic portrayal of the United States as a hero to Europe that rescued all its treasures from the Nazis. The amount of works and archival materials taken from Jews by the ERR is still up for debate and further study, with the collapse of the Soviet Union revealing hidden works and records that survived Soviet ownership. Grimsted details the railroad cars, warehouses, and castles full of ERR-hoarded materials that the Soviets took into their custody, documented, and stored until decades later.

While the public focus appeared to be on art, the ERR branches across Europe targeted all cultural property held by Jewish people in occupied locations. Art, documents, and other texts that related to Jewish culture or 'development' were seized by the ERR for "the Study of the Jewish Question [Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage]" prevent degradation and pollution of the Aryan race 'again' after the destruction of European Jewry.¹¹ Institutes and private homes of the east were robbed of hundreds of thousands of volumes in pursuit of this Nazi brand of science. In a decree by Hitler on March 1, 1942, he emphasizes the ERR's task "register[ing] all cultural goods in libraries, archives, and lodges in connection with the fight against the Jews."¹²

¹⁰ Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "The Postwar Fate of Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg Archival and Library Plunder, and the Dispersal of ERR Records", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall 2006): p. 281.

¹¹ Juergen Matthaeus & Frank Bajohr, "The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust", p. 228.

¹² Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Roads to Ratibor: Library and Archival Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (Winter 2005): p. 397.

Antisemitism was the motivation for the confiscation of Jewish artworks and other culturally important materials while it also served as the force behind the Nazi Party's radicalization and eventual genocidal actions against European Jews. The Germans wished to destroy all Jewish people to solve their nation's social, economic, and labor problems, and study the culture of Jews formed by their archival materials and art as to prevent it from recurring or harming the Aryan people. The true believers in the Nazi cause created policy to hoard materials and destroy peoples that did not fit their view of the nation's correct evolution. Germany's formation of the Nazis' desired culture was dependent on the mechanisms of society, like art and technology, becoming intertwined and blending time periods into the perfect Germany. "In fact, no other government in the interwar years was more obsessed with art and culture than the Nazi regime."¹³ The actions planned and executed throughout Nazi society in Germany were towards the perpetuation of the war and the elimination of all Jewish people – the basis and design of the genocidal regime was centered the complete removal of anything 'decidedly' Jewish from the world.

II.

German culture was primed for the supposed connections between Jewish people and Communism by the time the Nazis came to power. The vehement hatred for both groups and the 'need' to remove them from the nation fueled a cycle in positions of prominence in the Third Reich: hatred creating ideologues, like Alfred Rosenberg, who sought to eradicate peoples and dissect culture, causing more policies driven by stronger, publicly supported hatred. Rosenberg was a "Nazi Party Chief Ideologue and later Reich Minister for the eastern occupied territories".¹⁴ He was born in modern Estonia to Baltic German parents and witnessed the

¹³ Thomas Childers, "The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany", (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks), p. 292.

¹⁴ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 3.

Russian Revolution.¹⁵ He attempted to join the German Army using his citizenship of the occupied country, but wanted to be move and be German rather than stay “between the frontiers of several countries.”¹⁶ Rosenberg stated in his Nuremberg testimonies that “German culture was [the] intellectual home” to Baltic Germans, and his early life in Russia strengthened his “resolution to do everything within [his] power to help prevent the political movement in Germany from backsliding into Bolshevism”, according to the building “tremendous catastrophe” forming from “the precarious structure of the system of the German Reich.”¹⁷ With this experience and perspective, he reportedly offered what few men could, “firsthand experience of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and a relentless commitment to fighting Bolshevism as a Jewish attempt to rule the world”.¹⁸

Once in Germany, he fueled his “immediate artistic interests in architecture and painting”, “pursued historical and philosophical studies” and consumed the “social ideas of Charles Dickens, Carlyle, and [...] Emerson.”¹⁹ Later, he “studied the prominent European historians of the history of civilization” and “modern biology more closely” once in Munich.²⁰ He joined the precursor party to the Nazis in 1919 and was “assigned Number 625 as a member.”²¹ He wrote commentary in response “to different inquiries regarding the 25 points of the program”, stating the party’s wish to “regain their homeland and its history” from the effects of industrialization and creating vast promotional materials for the party.²² He wrote book while serving as the first editor for the party’s newspaper, *Voelkischer Beobachter* (The Ethnic

¹⁵ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 3.

¹⁶ Yale Law School Library, The Avalon Project, Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Volume 11, One Hundred and Eighth Day, Monday, 15 April, 1946, Morning Session, Testimony of Alfred Rosenberg.

¹⁷ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

¹⁸ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 3.

¹⁹ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

²⁰ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

²¹ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

²² The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

Observer).²³ Rosenberg's books, *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* (Traces of the Jew through the Ages) published in 1920, and *Der staatsfeindliche Zionismus* (Zionism as an Enemy of the State) published in 1922, "echoed racist ideas en vogue among radical German nationalists", along with his "flood of antisemitic articles in periodicals" that followed.²⁴ Rosenberg's "magnum opus", *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the Twentieth Century), "sold more than 1 million copies during the Third Reich but also solidified Rosenberg's standing within the Party" and displayed him as the leading Nazi with "such an elaborate vision of Germany's national destiny", second only to Hitler.²⁵ These works, among his other writings, were utilized as evidence of Rosenberg's war crimes during the Nuremberg Trials, prefacing Rosenberg's account of his personal history.²⁶

Like Hitler, Rosenberg also 'acted' for the cause in addition to published works and participated in the Munich Beer Hall Putsch, which failed at the time but later served as an early moment of Nazi Party 'struggle' against their perceived enemies and all involved were revered for their dedication to Germany.²⁷ As the Nazi Party's election success in 1930, Rosenberg became a member of the *Reichstag* (national parliament) and was placed "in charge of the Nazi Party's Foreign Policy Office (Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, or APA), which aspired to serve as a corrective to the traditional German Foreign Office" regarding Nazi goals after Hitler was elected chancellor.²⁸ This positioning, combined with his positions as a *Reichsleiter* and Plenipotentiary for Supervising the Nazi Party's Ideological Training, established his authority at home and abroad on topics relating to 'Judeo-Bolshevism'.²⁹ In 1934, Rosenberg was appointed

²³ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 3.

²⁴ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p.3.

²⁵ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 4-5.

²⁶ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

²⁷ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 4.

²⁸ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 5.

²⁹ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", 5-6.

as the head of the Office of the Fuehrer's Commissioner for the Supervision of the Entire Intellectual and Ideological Training and Education of the NSDAP (DBFU), which "he used to build up an extensive network of ideological and cultural activities".³⁰ Utilizing the close contact he had developed with Hitler from these official positions, Rosenberg was given his own agency, the ERR. This Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (Task Force led by Reich's head Rosenberg) was "devoted to the systematic looting of Jewish libraries, archives, art collections, and other assets in the countries overrun by the Wehrmacht".³¹ While not the only agency of its type, having built off of the DBFU, it was regarded as the most successful and had branches throughout Germany, eastern territories, and France. To be considered successful in achieving its goals by both Nazis elites and in the historiography, Rosenberg himself and the ERR collectively must have been particularly extreme or ideologically driven in its antisemitic destruction.

On July 17, 1941, Rosenberg was declared Reich Minister of the East, his territory expanding as Germany continued invading eastward. His ministry followed through on pacification and Germanization policies to subordinate the east. Once it became clearer that Germany was not going to win the war, Rosenberg attempted to fix his image by claiming he only knew of theoretical concepts, not the execution of such things in the east. However, the mountain of evidence against him regarding his demonstrative exploitation of the east kept him legally accountable for the destruction.³² While claiming that he first heard of the word *Herrenmensch* (superman) from his subordinate leaders in his administration in east, that term and *Herrenrasse* (master race) were never used in his speeches or writings in the manner which the Nazi Party was blamed for at trial.³³ He stated, in this regard, "ethnology was, after all, not an

³⁰ Grimsted, "Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg", p. 292.

³¹ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 6.

³² Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 7-9.

³³ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

invention of the National Socialist movement, but a biological discovery” built on four hundred years of European research and fueled by the cemented concepts of hereditary laws.³⁴ Rosenberg stated that the movement for Jews to migrate back to where their ethnic roots lie was present and growing, his “more radical attitude in the political sphere” was a combination of this foundation from Jewish scholars and his experiences in Russia and Germany.³⁵ However, Rosenberg’s words of defense cannot surmount the sum destruction of ideologically-based genocidal actions.

The ERR’s actions under Rosenberg’s eastern administration escalated at the same time as Germany’s mass execution actions, the spiraling of Nazi thinking radicalizing methods of persecution and destruction in the Reich’s growing empire. His diary entries prove his reputation as a devout ideologue, dedicated Nazi Party member, and the head of an agency ransacking institutions and private citizens’ collections for Jewish materials to study. Rosenberg’s administration in the east was not the only department he was involved in; his ERR stretched westward and his Office for the Cultivation of Literature catalogued and studied confiscated archival materials.³⁶ In April 1933, the Foreign Policy Office was founded with Rosenberg appointed in charge by Hitler. From this position, “many foreigners came to Germany in order to obtain information about the origin and nature of the National Socialist Party” from Rosenberg.³⁷ Rosenberg was the “information center” for this office, his office had to receive these visitors, “give them information, to refer them to the proper organizations of the Party and the State, if they were interested in the labor front, the youth problem, the winter aid work, and so forth.”³⁸ This office provided Rosenberg with the means to travel and build relationships with other

³⁴ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

³⁵ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

³⁶ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 225.

³⁷ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

³⁸ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

nations and ambassadors, Hitler urging him to focus on beneficial relations with English and Italian military and political figures.³⁹

Alfred Rosenberg's personal diaries show his career trajectory and reputation, which followed a similar path to Hitler's, but also reveal the malicious and targeted intentions in which people were persecuted, how, and for what purposes. As a well-known ideologue, Rosenberg was consulted on various state matters and allowed to instruct others on their intentions and responsibilities. On April 26, 1936, he addressed "10,000 SA leaders in Stuttgart", where he "made an effort to give the SA self-confidence again, the conviction that it has another responsibility" in ensuring they target the correct people as their "victims".⁴⁰ He later addressed "12,000 people in Posen, primarily *Volksdeutsche*" who were emigrating to the expanding German territories, having to 'adjust' how they viewed their new Polish neighbors.

In his entry from August 23, 1936, he detailed his reading of *Jew and Worker* from the *Institut zum Studium der Judenfrage* (Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question), how most of the information is "old, familiar stuff, but nonetheless some new historical data as well".⁴¹ He wrote of being "gripped by fury" when considering "what this parasitic Jewish people has done to Germany", and in decades of 'attempts', he feels "one satisfaction: to have done my part here to expose this betrayal".⁴² The continued work of the *Institut* and its publications would only further expose such 'parasites' and work towards the removal of such 'dangers' for German society. He wrote to heads of the *Hohe Schule* (High School of the NSDAP) to discuss uniformity in "a new kind of education", with textbooks "seeking to permeate the subjects of

³⁹ The Avalon Project, Testimony of Rosenberg.

⁴⁰ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 74.

⁴¹ Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 88.

⁴² Matthaeus & Bajohr, "Diary", p. 88.

study (natural sciences, German, history) with ideology”.⁴³ Beyond simply Germany, once fully installed, Rosenberg sought to “invite foreigners” to the *Institut* and expand the audience for “the largest library in the world: 350,000 volumes”.⁴⁴ These volumes were “[a]ll from France, Belgium, etc. There are probably 200,000 more coming from Holland. Anyone in the world whoever wants to do research on the Jewish Question will have to come to Frankfurt”.⁴⁵ In Frankfurt, he presented these findings at a conference he deemed a success, as it was “the first time in European history that 10 European nations have been represented at an anti-Jewish conference with a clear agenda of weeding out this race from all of Europe”.⁴⁶

On February 28, 1940, Rosenberg was visiting the ERR branch in Paris and “had a look at the Jewish cultural assets and art that had been confiscated by my *Einsatzstab* for France”.⁴⁷ Hermann Goering “had already carted away 42 of the best pieces for his collection, extremely valuable things”, collectively valued “close to 1 billion marks” by art appraisers, as Rosenberg noted the other path that confiscated works took if they were not designated for study.⁴⁸ He called the confiscated materials from France “unique” and taken from “the library of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, the library of the rabbinical academy, the archives of the Bank Rothschild (1816-1925) in 760 crates, the libraries of other Jews from Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, etc.”.⁴⁹ The works were sent to Neuschwanstein (castle), Rosenberg hoping to “present them to the Fuehrer for distribution to the museums”.⁵⁰ In September 1940, he wrote about a collection of artwork, literature, and other documents being confiscated in Paris, where a branch of the ERR

⁴³ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 200.

⁴⁴ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 228.

⁴⁵ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 228.

⁴⁶ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 230.

⁴⁷ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 223.

⁴⁸ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 223.

⁴⁹ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 230-231.

⁵⁰ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 231.

was stationed and tasked with the persecution of French Jews.⁵¹ The ERR kept impeccable records of their cultural contraband, as well as being involved in “the records of other Rosenberg agencies” like the DBFU.⁵²

Following his arrest and containment by the Allies, he was one of the “prominent government leaders” kept in American hands.⁵³ In the summer of 1945, “the Soviet Tass news agency published profiles of the major prisoners in the English-language *Soviet Monitor*. Each one ended with a call for the severest penalty: ‘so must the Hitlerite hangman Alfred Rosenberg ... be punished by death’ on that list of ill-will.”⁵⁴ The Soviet compiled list of major war criminals was over one hundred, while the Americans narrowed that list to seventy-two individuals, and the British whittled it further to only six “top-class criminals”, including Rosenberg.⁵⁵ According to interrogators, Rosenberg “accepted very little of the evidence presented to him about conditions in the wartime eastern territories under his jurisdiction”, instead “blam[ing] the harsh measures imposed on Soviet civilians as a consequence of ‘the conduct of our enemies,’” and refusing consistently “to accept any moral responsibility for German actions.”⁵⁶ In his final interrogation, he was offered “one final chance” to “‘admit and judge the crimes committed’ by the regime he served.”⁵⁷ His ideological convictions preventing genuine self-reflection, he “turned the question on its head: ‘Why did not the world listen to the sufferings and complaints of the German people for twenty years, since 1919?’”⁵⁸ Rosenberg stated that “Humanity should also have been practiced in the treatment of the German people...

⁵¹ Matthaeus & Bajohr, “Diary”, p. 211-212.

⁵² Grimsted, “Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg”, p. 292.

⁵³ Thomas Overy, “Interrogations: The Nazi Elite in Allied Hands, 1945”, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Overy, “Interrogations”, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Overy, “Interrogations”, p. 164.

⁵⁶ Overy, “Interrogations”, p. 164.

⁵⁷ Overy, “Interrogations”, p. 164.

⁵⁸ Overy, “Interrogations”, p. 164.

The fact that Germany's complaints were ignored led to the passionate attitude of the German people."⁵⁹ He continued, "if crimes were committed punishment must be meted out, not only to the Germans, but to all who were responsible for them", maintaining his positions on his actions and his nation's actions against humanity.⁶⁰

Rosenberg's rigidity was "typical" compared to the other NSDAP prisoners.⁶¹ He admitted "that he had always advocated a comprehensive anti-semitic policy", hearing back his wartime speeches involving the removal of every last Jew from the Great-German area and that the entire continent must be rid of "Jewish parasitism", confirming those words and maintaining his agreement on the stance.⁶² Within the same sitting, Rosenberg also "refused not only to accept that he had anything to do with a policy what was 'in the hands of the police', but denied almost any knowledge to what the police were doing."⁶³ He had, however, heard "rumours that Jews were persecuted by the native Soviet population and 'that certain Germans had shot some Jews'".⁶⁴ He further denied "all knowledge of the system of camps; he claimed to learn about the extermination of the Jews only from listening to foreign radio broadcasts."⁶⁵ These words cannot reflect Rosenberg's factual knowledge, as he was in a powerful position in the eastern territories, where the majority of the camp system was constructed and where the most severe deaths and terrorization of Jews had taken place. Rosenberg was one of the twelve out of twenty-two defendants that were condemned to death, due to the combination of his actions (directly or otherwise) and his lack of remorse or emotional impact in response to German actions.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 164.

⁶⁰ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 164.

⁶¹ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 178.

⁶² Overy, "Interrogations", p. 179.

⁶³ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 179.

⁶⁴ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 179.

⁶⁵ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 179.

⁶⁶ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 205.

In Hermann Goering's testimony at Nuremberg, he confirmed that he and Rosenberg took art for their personal possessions after "Rosenberg['s] commission" had "collected and registered all their art objects", which were "destined to either go to the Fuehrer's gallery in Linz, that was to be built, or to the Hohe Schule that Rosenberg was going to build at the Chiemsee."⁶⁷ During the Nuremberg Trials, Rosenberg was among a group of true believing Nazi Party members that "took an identical stand on the key issues of racism and terror on which they stood accused", many following the wartime belief that they need not have any consciences, as Hitler was the ultimate conscience they all were to defer to.⁶⁸ The ideological basis to which multiple Nazis leaders, including Rosenberg, stuck with until execution had planned to spread and encourage the same racist, antisemitic fervor among the rest of the proper Germans if the war did not end as it had.

III.

In the advancement of Nazi training and education, the pursuit of Jewish literature and artwork was not to destroy the materials, despite the Final Solution for the Jewish people. Instead, it was a means to collect, analyze, and write on facets of Jewish culture that the Aryans didn't want to return after the solution to the Jewish Question. Warehouses, train cars, and castles held the seized materials intended for the "Central Library (Zentralbibliothek) of the Hohe Schule (ZBHS), Rosenberg's planned university for the Nazi elite" or for Hitler's planned library in Linz.⁶⁹ The most significant book collections seized by the ERR for the Hohe Schule amount to 552,000 volumes of materials from private Jewish homes, universities, libraries, and other

⁶⁷ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 289.

⁶⁸ Overy, "Interrogations", p. 500.

⁶⁹ Grimsted, "Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg", p. 280.

institutions within German-controlled territories.⁷⁰ The ERR itself was “a sizable multinational organization, with branches in Belgium and the Netherlands and even more ambitious operations in the east (with a key office in Riga).⁷¹ These materials seized by the Allies and the Soviets following German defeat held “stamps of major Jewish libraries in Paris” or other regional markings, as well as being written in Russian, Polish, French, and other foreign languages.⁷² Despite ‘disagreements’ with Rosenberg, Hermann Goering supported the creation and mission of the ERR to “seek out and seize all manner of research materials and cultural goods belonging to [Jews, Freemasons, their allies, and spiritual agencies] and to transport them to Germany” as to study “the books of the ‘enemies of the regime.’”⁷³ Rosenberg’s post as “supervisor of the intellectual and spiritual guidance of the German people” allowed his administration to expand past “collecting the archives and libraries of these declared enemies in France and other German-occupied countries” into including “artworks in the summer and fall of 1940.”⁷⁴ With these expansion, “the *Reichsleiter* detailed a team of professional art historians to divide the works into categories, photograph them, catalogue them, and, in many instances, appraise them.”⁷⁵

On the western front, the ERR was “closely linked with the Moebel-Aktion (Furniture Action, or simply M-Aktion), an organization for stripping the contents of Jewish homes”, that was under the control of Rosenberg’s western office.⁷⁶ Where “no records were available of the addresses of Jews who had departed or fled”, Rosenberg’s staff and infantry “drew up inventories of these homes and subsequently sealed them”, where “the goods [were] dispatched first, to large

⁷⁰ Yale Law School Library, The Avalon Project, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Volume 1, Chapter XIV – The Plunder of Art Treasures, Section 1, Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg.

⁷¹ Jonathan Petropoulos, “Goering’s Man in Paris: The Story of a Nazi Art Plunderer and His World”, p. 13.

⁷² Grimsted, “Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg”, p. 283 & 286.

⁷³ Grimsted, “Roads to Ratibor”, p. 395.

⁷⁴ Petropoulos, “Goering’s Man in Paris”, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Petropoulos, “Goering’s Man in Paris”, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Grimsted, “Roads to Ratibor”, p. 396.

collecting camps from where they [were] turned over, sorted out and loaded for Germany.”⁷⁷ A report by Von Behr, the Chief of the Office West, from August 1944, summarized the statistics of the entire furniture action, stating 71,619 Jewish homes were liquidated, resulting in 26,984 railroad cars required for transportation to Germany.⁷⁸ While cultural materials was the priority of the ERR, the confiscation within homes involved any items that could be applied to the German war effort. The same report’s “miscellaneous items seized” included “china (199 boxes), curtains (72 boxes), coat hangers (120 boxes), toys (99 boxes), bottles (730 boxes), etc.” and concludes with “an itemized statement of the number of wagons dispatched to various cities throughout Germany, to German camps, to SS Divisions, the German State Railways, the Postal Service, and the Police.”⁷⁹ In January 1941, Rosenberg stated that the properties seized in France alone were worth “close to a billion Reichsmarks”.⁸⁰ Baron Kurt von Behr, “the manager of the ERR operations in the west and later the chief of the notorious *M-Aktion*”, explained to art directors “that they were securing ‘ownerless’ Jewish property in accordance with the German-French armistice signed at Compiegne in June 1940.”⁸¹ While many did not know the details, “the linkage between plundering – especially taking a people’s cultural property – and genocide was evident.”⁸² The art directors or officers on the ground denied their roles in these actions, blaming the ERR or Rosenberg specifically, but this “intimated that [they] understood the implications of the theft: the processing of victims’ property after they had been deported to the murderous east.”⁸³ Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel later described these “epitomized” objectives in

⁷⁷ The Avalon Project, *Aggression*, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁷⁸ The Avalon Project, *Aggression*, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁷⁹ The Avalon Project, *Aggression*, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁸⁰ The Avalon Project, *Aggression*, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁸¹ Petropoulos, “Goering’s Man in Paris”, p. 33.

⁸² Petropoulos, “Goering’s Man in Paris”, p. 14.

⁸³ Petropoulos, “Goering’s Man in Paris”, p. 14.

the Nazis' 'Final Solution' as "a combination of both perverse, hate-filled idealism and convenient, cheap robbery."⁸⁴

In eastern territories, the ERR evacuated items from institutions, cities, and towns as the German army came through and assumed control. Robert Scholz reported "several hundred most valuable Russian ikons, several hundred Russian paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries, individual articles of furniture and furniture from castles were saved in cooperation with the individual Army Groups, and brought to a shelter in the Reich" over the ERR's eastern branch.⁸⁵ In August 1943, "just prior to the loss of Charcow by the Germans, 300 paintings of West European masters and Ukrainian painters, and 25 valuable Ukrainian carpets, mostly from the Charcow museum, were packed and shipped by the Einsatzstab."⁸⁶ 131 cases of 10,186 books, including "art folios, samples of magazines, Bolshevik pictures, and Bolshevik films", as well as "an essential part of the prehistoric museum" were taken from the Ukrainian Museum in Kiev.⁸⁷ These "works of famous masters of the German, Dutch, and Italian schools of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the works of the best Russian artists of the 18th and 19th centuries", "the most valuable works of the known Ukrainian art possession" worth "many millions after a cursory appraisal" were shipped westward for German collection, sale, or use to further the German war effort.⁸⁸

Within the General Government, the first order "to undertake the immediate securing of all Polish art treasures" came as a verbal order from Hermann Goering in October 1939.⁸⁹ Han Frank, the Governor-General for the Occupied Polish Territories, issued decrees ordering "all art

⁸⁴ Petropoulos, "Goering's Man in Paris", p. 14.

⁸⁵ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁸⁶ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁸⁷ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁸⁸ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 1.

⁸⁹ Yale Law School Library, The Avalon Project, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Volume 1, Chapter XIV – The Plunder of Art Treasures, Section 2, General-Gouvernement.

objects in public possession in the General Government will be confiscated for the fulfillment of public tasks”, “private art collections which have been taken under protection by the special commissioner” and “all ecclesiastical art property with the exception of those objects required for the daily performance of liturgic actions” will be seized for “the safekeeping of the art and cultural treasures.”⁹⁰ Additionally, to determine “whether art objects are public property in the sense of this regulation, every private and ecclesiastical art possession has to be registered with exact data on the kind, nature, and number of pieces”, with everyone who has ever possessed art “obliged to register the same”.⁹¹

This Seizure Program applied “to all articles located in the territories annexed by the Fuehrer’s and Reich Chancellor’s decree” for “the benefit of the German Reich and are at the disposal of the Reich Commissioner for the strengthening of Germanism.”⁹² The purpose of the art seizures was “the promulgation of German Culture throughout the Occupied East”, materials designated as “those of primary importance (“Reich-important”), and those of secondary importance” were seized not simply for protective measures, but for the financial and material benefit of Nazi leaders.⁹³ Items from the General Government like “paintings, tapestries, etc., plates, dishes, cups and saucers, vases, cream pitchers, glasses, a bread basket, a service tray, and other items of table service” were seized through the Art Seizure Program, but turned over to Architect Koettgen “for the purpose of furnishing the Castle at Cracow and Schloss Kressendorf for the Governor”, while others were taken from Poland to Berlin.⁹⁴ The Reich-important pieces were catalogued as ‘First Choice’, which a copy of the list went to Hitler, “who reserved to

⁹⁰ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 2.

⁹¹ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 2.

⁹² The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 2.

⁹³ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 2.

⁹⁴ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 2.

himself the first decision as to location and use of the art objects of the ‘First Choice’.”⁹⁵ The Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg enforced these decrees through the confiscation and transportation actions, the acting arm of the ideological elites at the top of the Nazi Regime.

IV.

The confiscation of art was executed by ideologues and subagencies of the Nazi elites to steal intentionally from Jewish people and other ‘enemies’ of the Reich, as these same people were removed from society and killed en masse. Starting with the designation of art as degenerate and ending with the seizure of any possible cultural materials across German-occupied territories, the Nazi Party sought to contain and determine the root of these ‘undesired’ cultures after they were removed from German society and the body of the Volk.

The formation of a culture of degeneration and purity necessitated the formation of agencies for the purpose of regulating and controlling cultural materials. German society had to accept these concepts and allow agency actions to happen against former Jewish friends, neighbors, etc. for people like Alfred Rosenberg to maintain and expand their power in the Reich. The policies of art confiscation were put forward and passed into law by Nazi ideologues, but less die-hard Nazis and regular Germans were complicit in allowing the targeted abuse through the relative normalization of degeneration and persecution, if it did not harm regular Germans.

Physician Max Nordau first diagnosed degeneration “as a mental illness and targets modern artists as diseased, decadent corrupters” who were to be separated from the healthy “body of the people”.⁹⁶ Conforming with their Social Darwinist tendencies, the Nazis borrowed

⁹⁵ The Avalon Project, Aggression, Vol. 1, Ch. XIV, sect. 2.

⁹⁶ Olaf Peters, “Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937”, dissertation by Shannon Connelly, CAA.Reviews (December 17, 2014): p. 1.

from the established ‘science’ and utilized the term for the mental illness that could be present in those depicting realistic or horrific renditions of World War I in their art. The Nazis then applied the term to art movements and artists they wished to remove from society, leading to “the eventual segregation of Jews and other persecuted groups” from the healthy, proper German people.⁹⁷

Following the designation of degenerate, art was confiscated from their home institutions to be stored, out of sight (and therefore minds) of the public, or collected for traveling exhibitions of *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art). These special exhibitions, titled “Chamber of Art Horrors,” “Images of Cultural Bolshevism,” “Art in the Service of Decay,” “Exhibitions of Shame,” etc., presented the ‘degenerate’ works to the public without leaving room for alternate interpretation.⁹⁸ The largest one, titled *Entartete Kunst*, “open[ed] in Munich in July 1937. Six hundred fifty paintings and sculptures, all forbidden since 1933, were hauled from the storage vaults of German museums and collected for the show”.⁹⁹ These exhibitions traveled throughout Germany in the 1930s, displaying the “perversion of art as cultural bolshevism” that “museums from all over Germany had purchased with taxpayers’ hard-earned money and displayed as art”.¹⁰⁰ Supposedly, “more than two million visitors” attended the *Entartete Kunst* in Munich, according to the Nazi-dominated press. International publications became involved as well, *The New York Times* reporting that “the show had drawn three times as many visitors as the officially approved German art exhibit down the street”.¹⁰¹ If the Nazis exaggerated the numbers of visitors at the Degenerate Art exhibit, they were further celebrating the perverse and horrific

⁹⁷ Peters, “Degenerate Art”, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Childers, “The Third Reich”, p. 294.

⁹⁹ Childers, “The Third Reich”, p. 295.

¹⁰⁰ Childers, “The Third Reich”, p. 295.

¹⁰¹ Childers, “The Third Reich”, p. 296.

artworks. After the exhibit's closing, many works "slipped into the private collections of prominent Nazis; more than nine hundred were sold abroad, the proceeds going to the Reich government; and more than four thousand were burned".¹⁰² For a "Hitler-approved" operation, "their confiscation of artworks was a blatant effrontery to the law", artworks were taken with "no promise of return, no insurance for the 'loan', and no word about their ultimate fate."¹⁰³

In sharp, intentional contrast to the 'degenerate art' exhibits, artwork deemed as exemplary of desired German values, settings, and people were also confiscated to display in 'wholly correct' exhibits in Nazi-founded art museums. The Degenerate Art exhibit opened around the same time and in proximity to its counterpart, the *Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibit), that celebrated correct and proper German art in Hitler's new *Haus der Kunst* in Munich in 1937.¹⁰⁴ In May 1933, Joseph Goebbels had already explained the Nazi vision of art and culture going forward, stating that "[i]ndividualism will be conquered and in place of the individual and its deification, the Volk will emerge" as the regime sought to "conquer the soul of the nation".¹⁰⁵ On November 27, 1936, Joseph Goebbels released a statement "forbid[ding] once and for all the continuance of art criticism in its past form", removing the "complete perversion of the concept of 'criticism'" that stemmed from "the Jewish domination of art".¹⁰⁶ With critique and interpretation gone, the Reich could freely confiscate whatever they wanted for whatever purposes benefitted the regime, with sale to private individuals and institutional study being two of the dominant uses.

¹⁰² Childers, "The Third Reich", p. 297.

¹⁰³ Susan Ronald, "Hitler's Art Thief: Hildebrand Gurlitt, the Nazis, and the Looting of Europe's Treasures", p. 178.

¹⁰⁴ Peters, "Degenerate Art", p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Childers, "The Third Reich", p. 297.

¹⁰⁶ Mosse, "Nazi Culture", p. 162.

With the cultural acceptance of ‘correct’ and ‘degenerative’ art in German society, then specific groups of people, ‘the enemies of the State’, were targeted for confiscation of art and other possessions within Germany. Art confiscation from “wealthy Jews had long been labeled as *redemption* of Jewish assets”, with the taking of valuables as “*redeeming* process for the perpetrator, akin to an act of religious salvation.”¹⁰⁷ Once Jews were “no longer citizens of the Reich according to the Nuremberg Laws, they were illegally in possession of assets that formed part of the *Volksvermogen*, or ‘the People’s Property’.”¹⁰⁸ All possessions of the Jewish population were “considered plundered or exploitative assets to be returned to the German people,” through means like *Fluchtgut* (exit/emigration taxes) that had to be paid as Jewish people fled the country.¹⁰⁹ These compulsory payments were intended to be equal to the person’s entire wealth, stripping them of all resources as they moved to another location, and these *Fluchtgueter* “were converted into cash” and “transferred to a special account at the *Reichsvereinigung* (Reich Federation).”¹¹⁰ Black market art dealers were “officially prohibited from selling direct to Germans”, but continued selling underground and amassing profits from works taken from Jewish homes.¹¹¹

International auctions soon became the best outlet for art dealers and those seeking easy financial aid for the war effort. Dealers worked privately for the Nazi elites, as “the advantages were clear; why sell a dozen paintings through complicated blocked-and-unblocked-currency-hedging methods when an international auction every month or so would bring in much more foreign exchange?”¹¹² With this route of exchange, especially with foreign currency (worth far

¹⁰⁷ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 187.

¹⁰⁸ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 187.

¹⁰⁹ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 187.

¹¹⁰ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 187.

¹¹¹ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 187-188.

¹¹² Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 195.

more than any number of Reichsmarks), “flooded the market” in combination with “confiscations from fleeing refugees and expropriation from museums and Jews.”¹¹³ While some German institutions connected the ‘better market’ with the persecution of Jews and “a decided reluctance” to purchase from these dealers grew, the international markets were large enough and had the proper liquid finances to keep the markets confiscating and selling at home and abroad.¹¹⁴ The Fischer Auction, in June 1939, had “museum directors around the world” “torn between attending or boycotting” the sale of confiscated artwork with the proceeds rumored to “fund Nazi expansionism and rearmament.”¹¹⁵ When the auction was over, “twenty-eight lots remained unsold” and the proceeds were “converted to, of all things, pounds sterling, and deposited in German-controlled accounts in London. The museums, as all had suspected, did not receive a penny.”¹¹⁶ Many of the works undersold and the unsold works were held by the State or individual art dealers, their donors not having any legal right to the works anymore.¹¹⁷ Despite these occurrences happening prior to the war, German officials and art dealers were deeply involved in international dealings to personally profit and fuel the Nazi attempts to rid Europe of Jewish people.

Hitler’s desire for “a complete break with the defeatism and leftist ideas of the Weimar years” led to the systematic attitude towards and treatment of artwork.¹¹⁸ Museums were “closed for ‘reorganization’” of the exhibits and workforces.¹¹⁹ The thorough “fiendishness of the Nazi rules for artists who did not please the Chamber of Culture is still hard to believe” among

¹¹³ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 196.

¹¹⁴ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 196.

¹¹⁵ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 196-197.

¹¹⁶ Lynn H. Nicholas, “The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe’s Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War”, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Ronald, “Hitler’s Art Thief”, p. 199.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas, “The Rape of Europa”, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Nicholas, “The Rape of Europa”, p. 11.

modern scholars, “even after all we know of the National Socialist madness.”¹²⁰ It was not “enough to destroy and ridicule their work and forbid its sale and exhibition. They were not allowed to work at all.”¹²¹ ‘Degenerate’ painters “were even forbidden to buy art supplies”, with “Gestapo agents ma[king] unexpected visits to their houses and studios.”¹²² Representatives of local chapters of the Nazi Party, having formed in the early 1920s, “joined the fight” against people of Jewish bloodlines promoting the “degradation of the traditions and cultures of the nation” through their work, with was supposedly linked with the proliferation of modernist art.¹²³ Even with the *Deutscher Museumsbund* (Association of German Museums, DMB), that “represented all German museums of art and cultural history and promoted museums’ work in the spirit of the reform movement”, supporting individuals, like Hildebrand Gurlitt, soon the political and cultural spheres followed the Nazis’ desires and abandoned directors, dealers, and artists to remain in existence in the Third Reich.¹²⁴ With governing bodies and institutions perpetuating Nazi racial policy, the segregation of Jewish people and other ‘state enemies’ allowed for the distance and acceptance of later genocidal, extinction actions against them.

V.

Alfred Rosenberg is one example of Nazi ideology’s individual impact, spawning those who formed proper political connections and rose in the governmental power structure to ‘help’ the Regime achieve its goals. His rampant antisemitism and anticommunism were released into society through his publications. His extremist views on ‘solutions’ for Jewish and Communist problems in Germany became cemented in the minds of regular Germans. With the proliferation

¹²⁰ Nicholas, “The Rape of Europa”, p. 13.

¹²¹ Nicholas, “The Rape of Europa”, p. 13.

¹²² Nicholas, “The Rape of Europa”, p. 13.

¹²³ Meike Hoffmann, *New German Critique* 130, Vol. 44, No. 1., “Hildebrand Gurlitt and His Dealings with German Museums during the ‘Third Reich,’” p. 42.

¹²⁴ Hoffmann, “Hildebrand Gurlitt,” p. 42.

of his ideas, agencies and policies reflected the growing desire for segregation, persecution, and the complete removal of European Jewry in their daily practices. The *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* elaborated upon prior agencies and political actors and expanded geographically to siphon all profits and resources from regions as they were torn apart. With the new style of government, Germans depended on the Nazi Regime to determine their worth or define themselves within culture and society, feeding into the behaviors and prejudices that the Nazis encouraged.

The German public permitting and feeding into these new systems of confiscation, transport, and 'redistribution' made them complicit in the actions of the Third Reich. Common Germans, whether they were true believers in the Nazi Cause or not, contributed to the environment that enforced increasingly, intentionally antisemitic policies in German-controlled areas. This shift in culture allowed the art world, and society at large, to be used as an arm of the Holocaust. These acceptances of persecution, theft, and eventually murder of former neighbors, etc. laid the groundwork of acceptance for later genocidal actions among all Germans. The confiscated possessions of Jewish people in German areas ended up in the common homes of ordinary Germans or the prestigious collections in vast homes of the Nazi elites, while the former owners were abused and murdered in the camp system.

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