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## ADOLF HITLER

*Mein Kampf*, 1926

Hitler (1889–1945) wrote *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) in prison where he was jailed after an unsuccessful attempt to take over the German government in Munich in 1923. As he wrote in the Epilogue, included at the end of this selection, the German National Socialist Labor (Nazi) Party, banned after the attempted coup in 1923, was revived by 1926 to become a force in German politics.

We read from this rambling 700-page book today because of what happened in the years after its publication in 1926. In the context of the global depression after 1929, the Nazi party grew to be the largest party in the German Parliament by 1932 with 37 percent of the popular vote. In January 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg. He proceeded to concentrate all power in his hands as *Fuhrer* (Dictator), militarize the German economy, and mobilize for war. In 1938, while the rest of Europe stood by, he annexed his native Austria and German-speaking regions of Czechoslovakia. In March 1939, he added the rest of Czechoslovakia. On September 1, 1939, the German invasion of Poland triggered World War II in Europe.

During the same period the Nazi regime imposed increasingly discriminatory restrictions on German Jews. As early as 1933, Jews were banned from government service, law practice, some medical careers and some schools, and Dachau, the first concentration camp in Germany, was built. In 1935 the Nuremberg laws outlawed any civic life for Jews and any sexual contact between Jews and non-Jews. In the next couple of years Jews were banned from all other occupations, Jewish children were banned from public schools, and German properties were seized. With the outbreak of war, Jews in Germany and in German-occupied countries were rounded up and put in concentration

Source: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 11–13, 15, 20–21, 34, 51–52, 56–58, 65, 78, 126, 134–36.

camps where they were forced to work in factories for private corporations or government producers of war materials. In 1941 the Nazis began building extermination camps, first in Poland, to annihilate Jews, Poles, and other enemies of the Nazis. These included communists, socialists, political dissenters, homosexuals, Romani (Gypsies), Slavs, and other ethnic and religious minorities. By 1945, upwards of 11 million Jews and other "undesirables" had been killed.

It would be a mistake to try to see all of this in embryo in a young artist in Vienna twenty years before, or even in the vitriolic ruminations of a prison inmate ten years later, but what do these selections suggest to you about Hitler's motivations and the roots of Nazism?

#### THINKING HISTORICALLY

To understand the unthinkable it is necessary to resist the temptation to demonize. To call someone a "Devil" or "Evil Incarnate" obviates the need to understand and learn. The English word *understand* is equivalent to the German word *verstehen*, which social scientists have used to connote empathetic knowledge: relating to another human, putting oneself in their shoes. This is a technique to gain knowledge; it has nothing to do with excusing or forgiving. Try this with probably the hardest subject in history: How did that aspiring art student become Hitler? What went wrong? How did his background, environment, and experience produce a future monster?

### In the House of My Parents

Today it seems to me providential that Fate should have chosen Braunau on the Inn as my birthplace. For this little town lies on the boundary between two German states which we of the younger generation at least have made it our life work to reunite by every means at our disposal.

German-Austria must return to the great German mother country, and not because of any economic considerations. No, and again no: even if such a union were unimportant from an economic point of view; yes, even if it were harmful, it must nevertheless take place. One blood demands one Reich. Never will the German nation possess the moral right to engage in colonial politics until, at least, it embraces its own soil within a single state. Only when the Reich borders include the very last German, but can no longer guarantee his daily bread, will the moral right to acquire foreign soil arise from the distress of our own people. Their sword will become our plow, and from the tears of war the daily bread of future generations will grow. . . .

too, while still comparatively young, had an opportunity to take part in the struggle of nationalities in old Austria. Collections were taken in the *Südmark*<sup>1</sup> and the school association; we emphasized our convictions by wearing corn-flowers<sup>2</sup> and red, black, and gold colors; 'Heil' was our greeting, and instead of the imperial anthem we sang '*Deutsch über Alles*,' despite warnings and punishments. In this way the youth received political training in a period when as a rule the subject of the so-called national state knew little more of his nationality than its language. It goes without saying that even then I was not among the lukewarm. In a short time I had become a fanatical 'German Nationalist,' though the term was not identical with our present party concept.

This development in me made rapid progress; by the time I was fifteen I understood the difference between dynastic '*patriotism*' and national '*nationalism*'; and even then I was interested only in the latter. . . .

Did we not know, even as little boys, that this Austrian state had and could have no love for us Germans?

Our historical knowledge of the works of the House of Habsburg was reinforced by our daily experience. In the north and south the poison of foreign nations gnawed at the body of our nationality, and even Vienna was visibly becoming more and more of an un-German city. The royal House Czechized wherever possible, and it was the hand of the goddess of eternal justice and inexorable retribution which caused Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the most mortal enemy of Austrian-Germanism, to fall by the bullets which he himself had helped to mold. For had he not been the patron of Austria's Slavization from above! . . .

### Years of Study and Suffering in Vienna

When after the death of my mother I went to Vienna for the third time, to remain for many years, the time which had meanwhile elapsed had restored my calm and determination. My old defiance had come back to me and my goal was now clear and definite before my eyes. I wanted to become an architect, and obstacles do not exist to be surrendered to, but only to be broken. I was determined to overcome these obstacles, keeping before my eyes the image of my father, who had started out as the child of a village shoemaker, and risen by his own efforts to be a government official. I had a better foundation to build on, and hence my possibilities in the struggle were easier, and what then seemed to be the randomness of Fate, I praise today as wisdom and Providence. While the

<sup>1</sup> Another term for Austria. Apparently devised in imitation of the old imperial Marks by the *Verein für Deutschum im Ausland*, founded in 1881 to defend the endangered nationality of Germans in the border territories.

<sup>2</sup> The corn-flower was the emblem of Germans loyal to the imperial House of Hohenzollern and of the Austrian Pan-Germans.

Goddess of Suffering took me in her arms, often threatening to crush me, my will to resistance grew, and in the end this will was victorious.

I owe it to that period that I grew hard and am still capable of being hard. And even more, I exalt it for tearing me away from the hollow comfort of comfortable life; for drawing the mother's darling out of his downy bed and giving him 'Dame Care' for a new mother; for hurrying me, despite all resistance, into a world of misery and poverty, thus making me acquainted with those for whom I was later to fight.

In this period my eyes were opened to two menaces of which I had previously scarcely known the names, and whose terrible importance for the existence of the German people I certainly did not understand: Marxism and Jewry. . . .

In the years 1909 and 1910, my own situation had changed somewhat in so far as I no longer had to earn my daily bread as a common laborer. By this time I was working independently as a small draftsman and painter of watercolors. Hard as this was with regard to earnings—was barely enough to live on—it was good for my chosen profession. Now I was no longer dead tired in the evening when I came home from work, unable to look at a book without soon dozing off. My present work ran parallel to my future profession. Moreover, I was master of my own time and could apportion it better than had previously been possible.

I painted to make a living and studied for pleasure. . . .

Today it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to say when the word 'Jew' first gave me ground for special thoughts. At home I do not remember having heard the word during my father's lifetime. I believe that the old gentleman would have regarded any special emphasis on this term as a cultural backwardness. In the course of his life he had arrived at more or less cosmopolitan views which, despite his pronounced national sentiments, not only remained intact, but also affected me to some extent.

Likewise at school I found no occasion which could have led me to change this inherited picture.

At the *Realschule*, to be sure, I did meet one Jewish boy who was treated by all of us with caution, but only because various experiences had led us to doubt his discretion and we did not particularly trust him; but neither I nor the others had any thoughts on the matter.

Not until my fourteenth or fifteenth year did I begin to come across the word 'Jew,' with any frequency, partly in connection with political discussions. This filled me with a mild distaste, and I could not rid myself of an unpleasant feeling that always came over me whenever religious quarrels occurred in my presence.

At that time I did not think anything else of the question.

There were few Jews in Linz. In the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanized and had taken

human look; in fact, I even took them for Germans. The absurdity of this idea did not dawn on me because I saw no distinguishing feature but the strange religion. The fact that they had, as I believed, been persecuted on this account sometimes almost turned my distaste at unfavorable remarks about them into horror.

Thus far I did not so much as suspect the existence of an organized opposition to the Jews.

Then I came to Vienna.

Preoccupied by the abundance of my impressions in the architectural field, oppressed by the hardship of my own lot, I gained at first no insight into the inner stratification of the people in this gigantic city. Notwithstanding that Vienna in those days counted nearly two hundred thousand Jews among its two million inhabitants, I did not see them. In the first few weeks my eyes and my senses were not equal to the flood of values and ideas. Not until calm gradually returned and the agitated picture began to clear did I look around me more carefully in my new world, and then among other things I encountered the Jewish question. . . .

Once, as I was strolling through the Inner City, I suddenly encountered an apparition in a black caftan and black hair locks. Is this a Jew? was my first thought.

For to be sure, they had not looked like that in Linz. I observed the man nervously and cautiously, but the longer I stared at this foreign face, scrutinizing feature for feature, the more my first question assumed a new form:

Is this a German?

As always in such cases, I now began to try to relieve my doubts by books. For a few hellers I bought the first anti-Semitic pamphlets of my life. Unfortunately, they all proceeded from the supposition that in principle the reader knew or even understood the Jewish question to a certain degree. Besides, the tone for the most part was such that doubts again arose in me, due in part to the dull and amazingly unscientific arguments favoring the thesis.

I relapsed for weeks at a time, once even for months.

The whole thing seemed to me so monstrous, the accusations so boundless, that, tormented by the fear of doing injustice, I again became anxious and uncertain.

Yet I could no longer very well doubt that the objects of my study were not Germans of a special religion, but a people in themselves; for since I had begun to concern myself with this question and to take cognizance of the Jews, Vienna appeared to me in a different light than before. Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. Particularly in the Inner City and the districts north of the Danube Canal swarmed with people which even outwardly had lost all resemblance to Germans. . . .

What had to be reckoned heavily against the Jews in my eyes was when I became acquainted with their activity in the press, art, literature,

and the theater. All the unctuous reassurances helped little or nothing. It sufficed to look at a billboard, to study the names of the men behind the horrible trash they advertised, to make you hard for a long time to come. This was pestilence, spiritual pestilence, worse than the Black Death of olden times, and the people were being infected with it! . . .

If, with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the other peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity and this planet will, as it did thousands of years ago, move through the ether devoid of men.

Eternal Nature inexorably avenges the infringement of her commands. Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: *by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.* . . .

### Political Reflections Arising out of My Sojourn in Vienna

The Western democracy of today is the forerunner of Marxism which without it would not be thinkable. It provides this world plague with the culture in which its germs can spread. In its most extreme form, parliamentarianism created a 'monstrosity of excrement and fire,' in which, however sad to say, the 'fire' seems to me at the moment to be burned out. . . .

### Munich

In the spring of 1912 I came at last to Munich. . . .

. . . A German city! What a difference from Vienna! I grew sick to my stomach when I even thought back on this Babylon of races. In addition the dialect, much closer to me, which particularly in my contacts with Lower Bavarians, reminded me of my former childhood. . . .

Assuredly at a certain time the whole of humanity will be compelled, in consequence of the impossibility of making the fertility of the soil keep pace with the continuous increase in population, to halt the increase of the human race and either let Nature again decide or, by self-help if possible, create the necessary balance, though, to be sure, in a more correct way than is done today. But then this will strike all peoples, while today only the races are stricken with such suffering which no longer possess the force and strength to secure for themselves the necessary territories in this world. For as matters stand there are at the present time on this earth immense areas of unused soil, only waiting for the men to till them. But it is equally true that Nature as such has not reserved this soil for the future possession of . . .

particular nation or race; on the contrary, this soil exists for the people which possesses the force to take it and the industry to cultivate it.

Nature knows no political boundaries. First, she puts living creatures on this globe and watches the free play of forces. She then confers the master's right on her favorite child, the strongest in courage and industry.

When a people limits itself to internal colonization because other races are clinging fast to greater and greater surfaces of this earth, it will be forced to have recourse to self-limitation at a time when the other peoples are still continuing to increase. . . .

For us Germans the slogan of 'inner colonization' is catastrophic, if for no other reason because it automatically reinforces us in the opinion that we have found a means which, in accordance with the pacifistic tendency, allows us 'to earn' our right to exist by labor in a life of sweet chambers. Once this doctrine were taken seriously in our country, it would mean the end of every exertion to preserve for ourselves the place which is our due. Once the average German became convinced that he could secure his life and future in this way, all attempts at an active, and hence alone fertile, defense of German vital necessities would be doomed to failure. In the face of such an attitude on the part of the nation any really beneficial foreign policy could be regarded as buried, and with it the future of the German people as a whole.

Taking these consequences into account, it is no accident that it is always primarily the Jew who tries and succeeds in planting such morally dangerous modes of thought in our people. He knows his customers so well not to realize that they gratefully let themselves be swindled by the gold-brick salesman who can make them think he has found a way to play a little trick on Nature, to make the hard, inexorable struggle for existence superfluous, and instead, sometimes by work, but sometimes by plain doing nothing, depending on how things 'come out,' to become the lord of the planet.

It cannot be emphasized sharply enough *that any German internal colonization must serve to eliminate social abuse particularly to withdraw the soil from widespread speculation, but can never suffice to secure the future of the nation without the acquisition of new soil.*

If we do not do this, we shall in a short time have arrived, not only at the end of our soil, but also at the end of our strength. . . .

## Conclusion

On November 9, 1923, in the fourth year of its existence, the National Socialist German Workers' Party was dissolved and prohibited in the German Reich territory. Today in November, 1926, it stands again free and stronger and inwardly firmer than ever before.

All the persecutions of the movement and its individual leaders, all vilifications and slanders, were powerless to harm it. The correctness of its ideas, the purity of its will, its supporters' spirit of self-sacrifice, have caused it to issue from all repressions stronger than ever.

If, in the world of our present parliamentary corruption, it becomes more and more aware of the profoundest essence of its struggle, feels itself to be the purest embodiment of the value of race and personality, and conducts itself accordingly, it will with almost mathematical certainty some day emerge victorious from its struggle. Just as Germany must inevitably win her rightful position on this earth if she is led and organized according to the same principles.

A state which in this age of racial poisoning dedicates itself to the care of its best racial elements must some day become lord of the earth.

May the adherents of our movement never forget this if ever the magnitude of the sacrifices should beguile them to an anxious comparison with the possible results.

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