

UCSD, Dept. of Political Science
Freshman Seminar PS 87 – Winter 2009
Becoming Evil:
How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing

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What motivates people to kill whole groups of other people? What happens to normal human inhibitions when they do? In this seminar, we will use James Waller's study, *Becoming Evil*, among other resources, to consider these haunting, very timely, questions.

Requirements:

- * Attendance (participation is encouraged!)
- * Short presentation during the third or fourth session

Book for purchase:

James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford, 2002)

Schedule

Week One: Introduction

Week Two: Inhibition and the Power of the Situation

Reading: Extracts from Locke, Rousseau, Smith, Levinas, Himmler, handout. Available online on the course website: <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~fformanb/>

SHORT FILM: *The Power of the Situation*

Week Three: Becoming Evil I: Traditional Interpretations of Extraordinary Human Evil

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Reading: James Waller, *Becoming Evil*, Part I

Week Four: Becoming Evil II: Beyond Demonization: How Ordinary People Commit Extraordinary Evil

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Reading: James Waller, *Becoming Evil*, Parts II-III

Quotes relating to genocide

1. Collective fear stimulates herd instinct, and tends to produce ferocity toward those who are not regarded as members of the herd.

Bertrand Russell

2. Genocide begins, however improbably, in the conviction that classes of biological distinction indisputably sanction social and political discrimination.:

Andrea Dworkin

3. ...it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them.

Sigmund Freud, AThe Taboo of Virginit

4. Why is propaganda so much more successful when it stirs up hatred than when it tries to stir up friendly feeling?

Bertrand Russell

5. Altogether national hatred is something peculiar. You will always find it strongest and most violent where there is the lowest degree of culture.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

6. What connects two thousand years of genocide? Too much power in too few hands

Simon Weisenthal

7. I...want to speak to you...of a really grave chapter. Amongst ourselves...it shall be said quite openly, but all the same we will never speak about it in public... I am referring... to the extermination of the Jewish people... Most of you men know what it is like to see 100 corpses side by side, or 500, or 1,000. To have stood fast through this and ... to have stayed decent B that has made us hard. This is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory in our history... All in all..., we can say that we have carried out this most difficult of tasks in a spirit of love for our people. And we have suffered no harm to our inner being, our soul, our character.

Heinrich Himmler (Chief of the SS), From a speech to senior SS officers, Poznan, 4 October 1943

8. Hate and force cannot be in just a part of the world without having an effect on the rest of it.

Eleanor Roosevelt

9. "All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family, and each one of us is responsible for the misdeeds of all the others. I cannot detach myself from the wickedest soul."

Mahatma Gandhi

10. There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

Mario Savio, student leader of the 1960s free speech movement at the University of California Berkeley (December 3, 1964)

11. "One of the reasons for our failure in Rwanda was that beforehand we did not face the fact that genocide was a real possibility. And once it started, for too long we could not bring ourselves to recognize it, or call it by that name."

Kofi Annan, April 2004 (speaking on the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide)

12. "Genocide's not a word that I think should be bandied around lightly, for fear of devaluing the term. No-one doubts that there've been massive human rights violations, certainly crimes against humanity, committed in Darfur."

Chris Mullin, British Foreign Minister on Darfur, 2004

13. "Our strength consists in our speed and in our brutality. Genghis Khan led millions of women and children to slaughter - with premeditation and a happy heart. History sees in him solely the founder of a state. It's a matter of indifference to me what a weak western European civilization will say about me.

I have issued the command - and I'll have anybody who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad - that our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction of the enemy. Accordingly, I have placed my death-head formations in readiness - for the present only in the East - with orders to them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space (Lebensraum) which we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Adolf Hitler, August 22, 1939 In preparation for the impending invasion of Poland, to Reichmarshal Hermann Goering and the commanding generals at Obersalzberg...