

To Power, a Dictator:

An Evaluation of Midwestern Religious and Secular News About Early Nazi Germany

Part I: Introduction and Key Questions

News media has the unique ability to shape the perceptions of a mass audience. Writing or relaying messages directly influences the collective consciousness of the audience by painting a portrait of events. The pre-war coverage of Nazi Germany is no exception to this rule. This paper aims to evaluate the coverage of midwestern newspapers and the perceptions that their respective audience would have had of Nazi Germany. This includes two religious newspapers, *The Jewish Press* of Nebraska and the *Catholic Advance* of Kansas, and two secular newspapers, *The Lincoln Journal-Star* of Nebraska and *The Kansas City Star* of Missouri. In reading these papers, one finds that they each present very different interpretations and perceptions of what exactly the Nazi state was. *The Kansas City Star* saw Germany as an unstable nation whose leader was scarcely competent but who eventually evolved into a tyrannical and iron-fisted dictator. *Lincoln Journal Star* was concerned with the concept of reasonability that caused it to question any and all actions taken. The religious papers both concerned themselves with their faiths within Germany, with *The Catholic Advance* focusing on persecution of Catholics and the thoughts of the Vatican and *The Jewish Press* opting to focus on Nazi aggression against Jews as well as protests and events within the United States hoping to raise awareness of Nazi atrocities.

Newspapers were very important in the 1930s. While radios were relatively common, the vast majority of people still got their news from their local paper. If they did not get the news

from a local paper, they got the news from a paper that had a wide circulation from a major media market, whether that be from the general area or one of the few national newspapers.¹ Because of this fact, newspapers formed the perception of most people on political or international issues.

Religious papers carry a different mission from secular ones. *The Catholic Advance* and *The Jewish Press* frequently wrote stories about local events within the community and state, as well as covering international issues that would concern followers of the faith internationally. The political issues that were covered by the paper were viewed almost exclusively within the context of their respective faiths and how that affected them. In other words, much of the political coverage comes as a consequence of their desire to cover religion, not vice versa. The first and foremost focus of evaluating these papers is how they link news in Germany to their respective religious communities.

In Deborah E. Lipstadt's book entitled *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, she provides a model of analysis for how national media covered events within Nazi Germany. One of Lipstadt's primary points is that there was some knowledge of the atrocities being committed. Her argumentation regarding the merit of news coverage and the public consciousness will most be expanded upon in this work. She states that while the press does not directly affect what people think, it does directly affect what people think *about*.² For example, as Hitler was taking power, one concern of the national media was about the risks of Hitler following through on his campaign promise of nullifying the Treaty of Versailles, but the

¹ History Unfolded. (n.d.). "How Americans got their news in the 1930s and 1940s". Retrieved February 24, 2023, from https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/news_historical_overview.pdf

² Deborah E Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945*. (New York: Free Press, 1986), 4

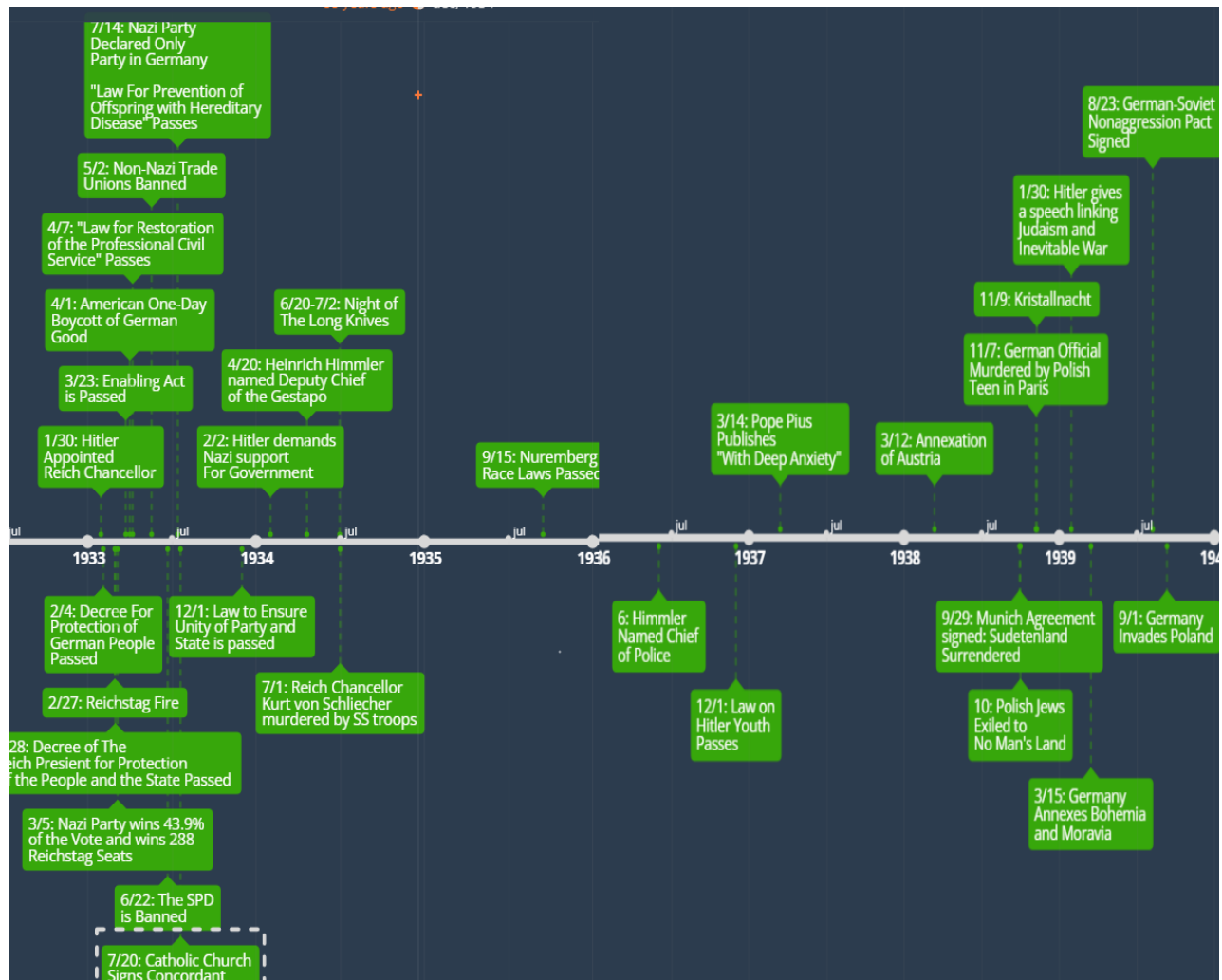
primary concern was his fight against Communism. Therefore, the public perception was focused infinitely more on Hitler the anti-communist than Hitler the nationalist.³

The aim of my work is to expand upon the common themes in the book and apply them to newspapers in the Midwest, both religious and secular. Lipstadt's work largely focused on either national papers or papers largely based in the East or West coasts. In doing so, the evaluation of local midwestern papers and perceptions goes largely undiscussed, barring a brief mention of *The Kansas City Star*. In short, Lipstadt's work aimed to see how much the American people knew about the Holocaust and Nazi policies through the press and if that knowledge at all influenced the relative inaction of American policy. This paper aims to expand upon that and answer the question of "if one were to read just these papers, what would their perception of Nazi Germany be?"

Part II: Timeline and Events Given Special Focus

Certain events shape perceptions more than others, both in the moment and after historical study. The events give cause to the coverage, which therefore shapes the perception that people have of the event itself. This is the principle of "shaping perception" that Lipstadt discusses in her book. The timeline below intends to show the events that historians such as Catherine Epstein and Richard Evans have used to shape modern academic perceptions of Nazi Germany.

³ Ibid., 51



The prevailing academic theme many of these events carry is that of coordination. There are several definitions that historians have used for this word. The definition that this paper will be operating under is coordination as the attempts of the Nazi Government to influence the people and government policy towards the ends of the Nazis, most notably focusing on issues regarding race and supremacy. This definition, while relatively simplistic, creates a framework by which the news coverage can be viewed. It also coincides with and compliments the definition used by Catherine Epstein, who uses the work "*Gleichschaltung*" to describe the

intertwining and control the Nazi state had over Germany society.⁴ Viewing the coverage using this framework allows for development of a consistent theme by which the newspapers can be analyzed. For example, if a given newspaper states that a policy was made to unite the people behind a Nazi goal, that would be considered a perfect point of emphasis for the paper and how the paper told the story of Nazism through the theme of coordination.

The exception to the above is undoubtedly both the appointment of Adolf Hitler as the Reich Chancellor and *Kristallnacht*, both for very different reasons that will have their own sections of discussion in the evaluation of the coverage below. It is also worth noting that while the timeline lists events after *Kristallnacht*, this paper opts to stop coverage shortly afterwards. This is largely because there became a national consensus that nearly every major media outlet and market came to, that being Germany had committed atrocities and that they were a nation capable of intense horrors, leading to more suspicion and general harmony among coverage.⁵

Part III: An Evaluation of the Coverage and What News Meant

These papers each represent a large media market in the Midwest: Kansas City, Missouri, population 399,746 (*The Kansas City Star*), Wichita, Kansas, population 111,110 (*The Catholic Advance*) with a Catholic population of more than 36,905, Lincoln, Nebraska, population 75,933

⁴ Catherine Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*. (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell,) 2015, 45

⁵ Norman Domeier, "A Scream, Then Silence.: Kristallnacht and the American Journalists in Nazi Germany: The 'Night of Broken Glass' as an Unwanted Transnational Media Event," In *New Perspectives on Kristallnacht: After 80 Years, the Nazi Pogrom in Global Comparison*, edited by Steven J. Ross, Wolf Gruner, and Lisa Ansell, 91–114, (Purdue University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh9w1k7.9>.

(*The Lincoln Journal-Star*), and Omaha, Nebraska, population 214,066 (*The Jewish Press*) with a Jewish population not exceeding 15,000.⁶

The Kansas City Star: The “War on Communism and Democracy”

The Kansas City Star is unique in that it has had its own book written about it; Harry Haskell’s *Boss-Busters and Sin Hounds: Kansas City and Its “Star”*. The book speaks towards one key aspect of the *Kansas City Star*: it had a desire to be recognized more nationally. The book serves as evidence that *The Kansas City Star* wished to be viewed in the same way as *The New York Times* or *Chicago Tribune*: a paper with national appeal and respect through their constant collaboration between them.⁷ *The Kansas City Star*’s portrayal of Nazi Germany has two primary pillars: the character and rise of Hitler himself, and Germany’s lack of stability that would lead to the collapse of the nation or outright war, both of which were concerns in the national media and consciousness.

Occasionally, there are articles cited as being from a segment called “The News Behind the News”. This segment had several purposes. First, it acted as a section in which shorter blurbs were written about larger stories, predominantly to provide context to other larger stories. Secondly, it was used as a form of editorial section that hosted articles that did not fully warrant its own larger article. The context portion is especially important as they supplement coverage surrounding it, although it mostly comes in the days after a larger editorial was published.

The first thread is easy to follow. From the very beginning of the Nazi regime in 1933, *The Star* addresses Hitler’s rise to power as a consequence of political infighting that the German

⁶ Boston Public Library, 1921, *The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1921*. Internet Archive, (New York : P.J. Kenedy,) <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1921unse/page/646/mode/2up>. AND Carol Gendler, "The Jews of Omaha: The first sixty years" (1968), Student Work, 581, <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/studentwork/581>

⁷ Harry Haskell, *Boss-Busters & Sin Hounds: Kansas City and Its Star*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 24

people got tired of. An article on February 2, 1933 specifically states that Hitler only rose to power because of his willingness to work with other conservative politicians, noting that the people would have viewed this as a refreshing breath of fresh air from the usual political backbiting of the Weimar Republic.⁸ The paper implied is that Hitler is not particularly clever or special, merely the beneficiary of a dissatisfied population that saw someone who was willing to build up some form of coalition. Both of these ideas have held up after historical study, although *The Kansas City Star* does discount Paul von Hindenburg's role in the procedure. The Weimar Republic had its moments of prosperity under Gustav Stresemann, but always had intense discontent among the political right-wing and the inefficiencies that usually came with a parliamentary democracy.⁹ It was this discontent that propelled Hitler to power, as the author of this article correctly assessed.

Hitler's rise to power was directly caused not only by dissatisfaction with the system in practice, but how the system came to be within Germany. The Weimar system of democracy came to Germany after the end of the First World War. Not only was the system hated by the political right wing of Germany, but it was at best uneasily accepted by the German population. This hatred on the right and skepticism elsewhere made it easy to propagate myths about Weimar Germany and democracy itself. This is precisely what happened with the "stab in the back" myth that the political right in Germany pushed forward. The myth, in short, states that Germany was betrayed by Jews or socialists (often referring to the SPD, the socialist party in Germany) into giving up their previously great empire, and the democracy was the result of that betrayal. This

⁸ "Hitler Cooperates," *The Kansas City Star*, February 2, 1933, 18

⁹ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 17-19

became a key talking point for Hitler in taking advantage of the discontent within Germany, especially his discussions on The Treaty of Versailles that he noted as the ultimate betrayal.¹⁰

A short time after Hitler took power, the paper compared him to Mussolini, specifically in the realm of their rise to power being sudden and formed from a frustrated populace that was tired of the failings of democracy. This article changed the paper's implication of Hitler's lack of leadership traits to an outright statement. In its comparison between the two, it specifically states that Hitler does not have the political cunning, power, or "ability" to act that Mussolini does, and portrayed Hitler as someone way over his head. It also implies that Hitler and his party will flare out on its own due to his lack of political cunning or intelligence.¹¹ These comparisons and linkage to Mussolini would continue for the rest of the pre-war years, with several articles viewing the two governments and their leaders as nearly inseparable. Hitler himself viewed the support of Mussolini as critical for the legitimacy of the Nazi regime and attempted to model certain aspects of Fascist Italian life into Germany, most notably the strong central leadership to emphasis on the nation above all else.¹²

Hitler's rise to power was the result of several political factors both within the population and within the government. Despite the myriad of factors, it is entirely true to say that Hitler's chancellorship and dictatorship were both attained, as Benjamin Carter Hett put it: "in a constitutionally legitimate, even democratic way."¹³ Disregarding votes and the people for a moment, the internal politics that led to Hitler taking power is important as well. In 1932, Paul von Hindenburg, then president, wanted a right-wing coalition that would create a sense of

¹⁰ Benjamin Carter Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic*, (New York, Henry Holt and Company.) 28-29

¹¹ "The Shadow of a Duce," *The Kansas City Star*, February 8, 1933, 16

¹² Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, (New York, Henry Holt and Company.) 117

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3

“national unity – as he understood it.” The Nazis were the largest right-wing party during this era and this privilege meant that its leader, Adolf Hitler, wanted more power given to him.

Hindenburg initially did not want to grant him additional powers in the form of the Chancellorship, and as such Hitler promised that he would actively work against Hindenburg until offered the position.¹⁴ This promise, alongside Hindenburg controversially declaring a state of emergency, created fears within Hindenburg that he would be impeached, something he viewed as uniquely shameful.¹⁵ Thusly, Hindenburg gave Hitler the power and position he wanted, hoping that he would calm his rhetoric and work alongside Hindenburg. The logic at the time, as stated by Hett, was “power always made radical leaders act reasonably, didn’t it?” Despite the hopes of Hindenburg and his administration, Hitler’s attitudes were hardly tempered by power and more violence occurred that was previously seen.¹⁶

A part of this violence, even if not officially and directly linked to the Nazi party, was the Reichstag Fire. The Reichstag Fire and ensuing elections would do little to change the perception of Hitler as a person and of his character as an opportunist, even though *The Kansas City Star* does finally begin to acknowledge that he was serving as a dictator on March 2. The same article that mentioned Hitler serving as dictator stated that Germany is at extreme risk of “prolonged civil disorder, if not of civil war” due to Hitler’s leadership and the repression of not just communists, but all government enemies, again painting him as generally incapable of maintaining a normal government that satisfies the populace.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 135-156

¹⁵ Ibid., 176

¹⁶ Ibid., 5-7

¹⁷ “A ‘Fast One’ on Von Hindenburg?,” *The Kansas City Star*, March 2, 1933, 18

The Nazis won 43.9% of the Reichstag's seats in the March 1933 election, and this alarmed the writers of *The Star*. While this number would fall well-short of Hitler's intentions of having control of two-thirds of the Reichstag, he still was the head of the largest party in Germany.¹⁸ An article published on March 6 stated that Hitler's previous actions were not that of a legitimate politician -- something that they would expand upon the next day by implying that Hitler only won those votes through intimidation -- and that Hitler has begun a "war on communism and democracy."¹⁹ The coverage was not strictly negative. It is instead skeptical and stated that Hitler would be judged by history via the actions of his government and how stable it would make a notoriously unstable Weimar Republic. In this sense, it is the first article that displayed any degree of optimism regarding the Nazi Party. This optimism serves as the best explanation for their response to the Enabling Act that would pass a short time later.

The Reichstag Fire and The Enabling Act that quickly followed it open the door for the opening stages of coordination. Even before the fire on February 4, Hitler had used the emergency powers given to him as chancellor to actively suppress any discontent or political activity not favorable to the Nazis by issuing the Decree for the Protection of the German People. This gave rise to things such as "protective custody", a form of arrest that permitted a given person to be held in custody for up to three months without trial or due process, and this set forth the precedent that political coordination was just as much a goal of social coordination, and that any resistance would not be tolerated. The Reichstag Fire was labeled as a communist uprising by Hitler, and therefore was used to justify even more political repression. This resulted in another emergency decree that suspended any and all personal liberties afforded to people as

¹⁸ Ibid., 46-47

¹⁹ "A Campaign of Suppression," *The Kansas City Star*, March 6, 1933, 5

well as extending protective custody to being permitted indefinitely. These two decrees were the opening stages of political coordination under the Nazi banner, something that would only be expanded upon with The Enabling Act.²⁰

The next step for Hitler was The Enabling Act, which is both critical for how Hitler was portrayed as well as the shift away from democracy. The Enabling Act is covered by a March 24 article stating that the Reichstag had “legislated itself out of existence” and that Hitler would serve as the dictator for at minimum the next four years. *The Kansas City Star* did not cover the margins by which the law passed (441-94) or the legality of it being voted on by a Reichstag that did not have the opposing party, the SPD, present.²¹ It did accurately assess that it gave Hitler dictatorial power. The concept of “dictatorship” did not by itself bother *The Kansas City Star*: it wrote that Italy and Soviet Russia had survived their “authoritarian experiments” without much disruption of the democratic order, even going as far as to call both of the leaders of those nations' geniuses.²² While certainly a different tone from previous mentions of authoritarianism and its worries in the paper, it still kept with it a skepticism regarding Hitler's capacity to rule, something that it would continue well into the year.

Both the Enabling Act and the March elections were important factors in the formation of the Nazi state, something Hitler was acutely aware of. During the negotiations to make him chancellor, he put forth the terms that new elections would be held after he was put into office, and that Reichstag would be made to pass an “Enabling Law” that gave Hitler power to essentially dictate all parts of life within Germany.²³ This was critical to Hitler, because he knew

²⁰ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 47

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48

²² “The “New Deal” in Germany,” *The Kansas City Star*, March 24, 1933, 26

²³ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, (New York, Henry Holt and Company.) 160

that if he were to make such a power grab, he had to do it legally and not through violence.²⁴ This was largely because he was aware that if he took power through direct revolution and violent means, his regime would be treated with less respect internationally.

The skepticism regarding his ability to rule extended to his ability to maintain public relations. The paper named three groups that he had to placate during his tenure in an editorial published on April 9. These groups were the Brownshirts, his friends, and the laboring class. The first two groups were placated by changes in the civil service that made the Brownshirts the police force and his friends being given positions within his cabinet and as heads of cities, but the third group was predicted be his downfall due to what the author believes as a lack of credibility and general ability to build a stable state. This relationship of Hitler to the people would be a sticking point. To *The Kansas City Star*, Hitler was not a competent leader capable of maintaining stability and the people would be the first to fall away once they realized exactly what was happening in Germany.²⁵ Despite these predictions, the regime would remain in power far past the expiration date given by the editorial board. While intimidation and bullying tactics were used by Hitler, specifically using the brownshirts and SA, his regime was shockingly popular among those that he did not actively seek to terrorize. He only sought to terrorize those actively against him or his political enemies, and as such much of the general population was spared.²⁶ This created a system of insiders and outsiders, in which the insiders stood to benefit by simply existing and agreeing that outsiders needed to be designated as such.

This fear of the people that the paper wrote about, while a touch simplistic by broadly stating it would be the people generally, was indeed held by Hitler. Benjamin Carter Hett notes

²⁴ Ibid., 190

²⁵ "News Behind the News," *The Kansas City Star*, April 9, 1933, 13

²⁶ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 97

that there were three major voting blocs within Germany: “the socialist camp (basically made up of the social democrats and the Communists), the Catholic Camp (the center party...); and the Protestant middle-class camp (consisting of the conservative German Nationals, the liberal German Democratic Party and German People’s Party) ...” These blocs would remain the same even amid the massive changes within Germany, and Hitler only truly had the consistent support of the third camp.

It was the socialist camp that especially worried Hitler due to most of those voters being members of the working class.²⁷ This working class was not only politically critical for reasons of production, but also critical for their support because of how much of the voters that the group made up. These fears were so great that Hitler had a special focus on programs that would benefit the working classes in an effort to coordinate their support to the regime. A part of this, as noted by Catherine Epstein, was the attempted creation of a classless “people’s community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*), but also programs to improve the lives of the working classes like the Beauty of Labor (*Schönheit der Arbeit*) and Strength through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*) programs.²⁸ This was all in an effort to placate this group, not necessarily only just to avoid a worker’s revolution, but also to have the support of those who would produce for the regime and nation.

Hitler would continue to be portrayed as a leader who had stumbled into his position for several years, even after he had successfully become dictator with The Enabling Act.²⁹ This changed in 1934, when coverage shifted from Hitler being an incompetent political revolutionary who stumbled into power to that of him being the ringleader of a widespread campaign of

²⁷ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, 67-69

²⁸ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 100-103

²⁹ “Final Act For Hitler,” *The Kansas City Star*, July 3, 1934, 7

misinformation and intimidation. This change in attitude happened almost overnight and carried with it a few implications for the readers and writers. The paper compared Hitler to Al Capone and the immediacy with which they attempted to liken Hitler's attitudes, policies, and rise to that of organized crime within the United States. The author claims that Hitler used "his mob" to keep people in line and punish any dissidents who threatened his authority or his regime.³⁰ This was quite the reversal from their previous portrayal of someone whose ability to lead a stable government was questioned. A part of this attitude was that Hitler could not survive as a leader without the constant need of an enemy, an other, or a scapegoat. The last part about requiring a scapegoat is very much true, but as previously mentioned the terror of the general populace is not.

The coverage for much of 1934 to 1938 remained uneasy about Hitler and his new dictatorship. In 1938, perhaps the most interesting coverage of Hitler from an American newspaper occurred. *The Kansas City Star* commissioned a psychiatric evaluation of Hitler, albeit one without an interview, on April 13.³¹ This article followed the annexation of Austria, and diagnosed Hitler with a messiah complex, and this diagnosis formed the rest of the coverage that the paper would have of the regime. The article itself may have seemed very strange to readers given how the paper had spent a great deal of time delegating coverage of Germany to AP reports, including coverage of the annexation. Modern psychiatric evaluations come very close to the diagnosis in *The Star*, with the most popular diagnosis being Narcissistic Personality Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder.³² The March 15 article would preempt this diagnosis and paint Hitler as a megalomaniac who led a country that will prosecute Austrian

³⁰ "News Behind The News," *The Kansas City Star*, July 4, 1934, 7

³¹ "Upon Hitler's Marriage Hang Hopes For Perpetuation of Nazi Idealism," *The Kansas City Star*, April 13, 1938, 26

³² Frederick Coolidge, 2007, *Understanding Madmen: A DSM-IV Assessment of Adolf Hitler. Individual Differences Research* 5 (1): 30–43. 30 <https://agingandmentalhealthlab.uccs.edu/sites/g/files/kjihxj1911/files/2020-07/DSM-Assessment-of-Hitler-IDR-2007.pdf>.

Jews even more harshly than German ones. This article stated that any “civilized elements” that normally check this behavior are gone, implicitly calling Hitler and the German state as an uncivilized nation.³³

The portrayal of Hitler by *The Kansas City Star* is one that evolved from a political revolutionary who was in over his head to one that portrayed him as a dictator who was at least marginally competent at maintaining stability. The ways that he maintained that stability is what *The Kansas City Star* noted most via comparison of him and his regime to organized crime and the need to have an enemy. Special attention was given to the actions that were seen as dictatorial or heavy-handed to demonstrate his brutality and lack of ability to find a diplomatic solution, such as the passage of The Enabling Act and his measures taken during The Night of Long Knives. To *The Kansas City Star*, Hitler was not a cunning or savvy political leader, but rather a heavy-handed and unflinchingly opportunistic leader.

The Kansas City Star would not only portray Hitler in a negative light, but also perpetuate the belief that the government he instilled would not last long, largely due to a lack of satisfaction from the public. This would trace back to the beginning of the Nazi regime in 1933. The perceived dissatisfaction mentioned above manifested itself into another opinion piece on February 4, 1933.³⁴ This article stated that Germany has a tendency towards militarism and strongmen as leaders, and especially states that democracy was never fully in favor within Germany’s borders. The tendency towards militarism was used as an explanation for why the First World War broke out. This provides another explanation for why Hitler and the Nazis rose to power, especially in the paper’s direct mentioning of the Brownshirts wing of the Nazi Party

³³ “Barbarism Strikes,” *The Kansas City Star*, March 15, 1938.

³⁴ “Dominated By Army, Germany Drifts From Democracy Back To Militarism,” *The Kansas City Star*, February 4, 1933, 6

serving as a military arm of the party. Once again, this largely contributes to the perception of Hitler that was being built early by this paper: it paints him as an opportunist who simply fulfilled a role that anyone could have.

Militarism in Germany was indeed a significant part of German politics during this era. The values that it brought, however, were only consistently propagated by the political right wing, the side of Weimar politics that favored a return back to the old imperial systems. This wing did not like the democratic system and especially the limits on the military. These were their primary concerns, and their values were deeply tied to these issues much more than any other. Hett notes that the German right wing's values were "military rather than commercial", which not only fed in Hitler's aforementioned fears of the working class, but also explained how he was able to benefit off of the right wing coalition within Germany that Hindenburg had worked towards.³⁵

This constant cycle of Hitler's government being predicted to fall due to its own inconsistencies and the perceived lack of public support by this paper would continue well into 1937, and it was always predicted that it would happen from the bottom up. This is a claim the paper would constantly assert with very little evidence other than occasional appeals to the German people not liking some actions taken by the party, again with sparse explanation. Even when the paper mentioned that Germany had become a one-party state and how people within Germany were generally very satisfied with their lives as of February 1934, it came with the caveat of the implication or outright statement that it would not last long.³⁶ It has already been mentioned that the Nazi regime was quite popular and that the threats of a bottom-up revolution

³⁵ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, 72

³⁶ "Nazi Benefits At Home: A Survey of the Domestic Phases of Hitlerism," *The Kansas City Star*, February 5, 1934, 5

were massively overstated, but fears still very much existed within the Nazi party of worker dissatisfaction, as has been already mentioned.

In that same year, the revolution that the paper predicted actually happened, or at least what they believed would be that revolution. This was The Night of the Long Knives in June of 1934. It was first mentioned on June 21 that the paper had heard rumbling from government officials and correspondents in Berlin that there was to be a revolution against Hitler and his government.³⁷ Interestingly, this revolution would not occur from the bottom-up as was predicted, but rather from within Hitler's own party. The Brownshirts leadership supposedly plotted against Hitler, and this is what prompted Hitler's crackdown of the SA and the murder of any officials involved.³⁸ This time, there was no speculation on whether it would collapse the Nazi Regime. It was just a mere statement of fact.

The Star's coverage of The Night of Long Knives is a perfect example of the Nazi propaganda machine being used to great effect in influencing American media. The reality of the situation is that there was no grand plans of revolution by the Brownshirts against the government or Hitler.³⁹ The German population was increasingly growing wary of Nazism, and had an outright hatred of the Brownshirts due to their tendency towards violence and their resulting thuggish reputation. Furthermore, Hitler himself was in a political position that made it exceedingly difficult to justify the actions of the increasingly hated Brownshirts and was caught in between them and the German army backed by a conservative establishment. This precarious position was described by Hett as being "trapped between the conservative establishment on one

³⁷ "Alarm Grows In Berlin: A 'Second Revolution' In the Fall Now is Talked," *The Kansas City Star*, June 21, 1934, 10

³⁸ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 53

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-53

side and the radical stormtroopers on the other.”⁴⁰ The conservative establishment also began to seek ways to limit Hitler’s power, mostly by beginning discussions of re-implementing a monarchy after the death of President Hindenburg. Hitler even feared the idea of being dismissed by this establishment.⁴¹

The Night of Long Knives was not the suppression of a revolution, but rather a deliberate political move designed to consolidate more power by allaying concerns of the political establishment about the violent wing of vehement Nazi supporters. The logic behind this move was encapsulated by Catherine Epstein: “By suppressing the SA, Hitler could allay military leaders’ fears, thereby taking away their impetus to forge a military–conservative alliance.”⁴² The move was simply spun after the fact as the suppression of a rebellion. Not only did this spin work outside of Germany, but it even worked within Germany itself both within the population and government. Hindenburg himself, the head of the conservative coalition, praised the decisive action taken by Hitler on this night, completely crushing government resistance to any further consolidation of power.⁴³ The popularity of the party within the population also was reinvigorated due to the perception that Hitler had put down the undesirable wing of his party.⁴⁴

Just three days after the Night of Long Knives on June 24, *The Star* published an article that once again predicted the downfall of the Nazi government, but this time in more concrete and less idealistic terms. The primary concern was that the Nazi Party was “tired in the elbows” politically, socially, and economically.⁴⁵ The author then states that the only reason that the Nazis were even granted power to begin with was the idea that Germans had some

⁴⁰ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, 228

⁴¹ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 53

⁴² *Ibid.*, 54

⁴³ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, 230

⁴⁴ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 53

⁴⁵ “The Nazi Salute Sags: German Public is Getting Tired In the Elbows,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 24, 1934, 18

“revolutionary fervor” that pushed them into voting for Hitler’s party. In the sentence that follows, the final thought from the article is that the very same fervor that put Hitler into power was dying out. A mere two days later, *The KC Star* boldly proclaimed that Hitler would be stripped of all of his political power within a matter of weeks.⁴⁶ Once again, this prediction would not come true and the vague generalities about why the government would collapse continued to be incorrect.

After the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, there was another significant shift in how *The Kansas City Star* covered Nazi Germany. The paper shifted focus to economics or events that concerned the writers in what eventually became a 4-year-long prediction of war. Commentary on Germany stopped for the vast majority of 1935, and only began briefly to once again state that there was a movement that was going to oust Hitler in June of 1936, something that the editorial board presented without evidence and provided little elaboration of.⁴⁷

The last coverage was of *Kristallnacht*, and while initially the paper relied on AP reports of the event, it publishes an article alongside the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* that denounces the event and the German government on November 14. This denunciation ends with Germany being declared a “nation of terror” in which no one was truly safe.⁴⁸ This largely coincides with the paper’s desire to be within the national consensus and to be nationally recognized. *Kristallnacht* was the event that caused the most widespread condemnation from the American media, and as such this paper would follow that example.

⁴⁶ “Trouble for Hitler,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 26, 1934, 18

⁴⁷ “Unions Would Oust Hitler,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 2, 1936, 9

⁴⁸ “Path of Violence,” *The Kansas City Star*, November 14, 1938.

The Kansas City Star is by far the paper that came closest to the national consensus of Nazi Germany: it reported they were not an inherently evil state in 1933, just one that by virtue of their militaristic nature fell victim to an authoritarian leader who led them down a path that the world could not abide. Readers of this paper would have likely viewed Germany itself as a state that had unfortunately fallen from grace, and that Hitler himself was nothing more than someone who did not deserve his power and abused it at every opportunity he got to create a state of repression and make himself a dictator.

***Lincoln Journal Star*: “For That Would Not Be Sane”**

The *Lincoln Journal Star* did not have as clear an identity as the other papers. The religious papers naturally leaned towards issues regarding faith and their religious communities, and the *Kansas City Star* leaned toward desires to be a nationally relevant paper that just so happens to represent the Kansas City metro. The *Lincoln Journal Star*, however, was more a traditional local paper. It focused on Nebraska issues, and the paper's the national coverage tended to focus on how it affects the state. It covered foreign news in a similar way to the *KC Star*, in that it included newswire coverage, but the commentary is interesting in the way it is presented. *Lincoln Journal Star's* coverage is characterized by its timid nature when it came to questions of action against Germany and its relationship to the concept of “reason”, which made it the paper that seemed most fearful of the large-scale political ramifications of upsetting Hitler.

This fear of action under the guise of reasonability is something not wholly uncommon within this era in America. The same fear of action not only prompted questions about what America knew, but even served as the starting off point for Lipstadt's work regarding news and

public perceptions of Germany.⁴⁹ Even while the academic usage of the term “isolationism” has waned in recent years, many historians still use the word to describe the attitudes of Americans during the 1930s. The American population was exceedingly skeptical of meddling in European affairs, not because they viewed it as a point of being independent, but rather because they feared warfare above all else. This is precisely what prompted Brooke Blower to write about American political culture in foreign policy and attempt to reconcile the phrases “isolationism” and “neutrality”. The following quote especially applies to any *Lincoln Journal Star* articles:

“...what is now labeled as isolationism was almost never an argument for actual isolation. The so-called isolationist position, it is important to remember, was not about keeping the United States out of the world. It was about keeping it out of war. It was about severing trade or alliances with ‘warring’ nations not all nations... calling someone an isolationist was a smear...”⁵⁰

The attitudes of the time applied to Germany just as much as any European nation: the moment that trouble began to arise, people became wary of getting involved due to them fearing being dragged into another war. This serves as an explanation not only for fears of consequences of action, but the fear of any action at all.

Questions regarding action would serve to be the primary anxiety that *Lincoln Journal Star* (abbreviated *LJS*) would write about. It was intensely focused on its commitment to reason to such an extent that it believed any negative action taken against Germany would only harm everyone, foreign and domestic, in the long run.⁵¹ The primary fear of *LJS* was a dissatisfied

⁴⁹ Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, IX-X

⁵⁰ Brooke L Blower, “From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 345–76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26376561>.

⁵¹ “Must Live Together,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, April 8, 1933, 4

German population that would do something rash or insane, and that any American action, either internal or external, would simply exacerbate the problem. An article on February 1 told of dissatisfaction in the German populace regarding Hitler's ascension. The first reaction of the paper was that the German people should not "generally strike" against the government, as this would not be a rational or "sane" action.⁵² The paper condemned any and all violence related to protests against Adolf Hitler on February 4, even going as far as to advocate for early elections in order to quell the violence and restore some degree of sanity.⁵³ This desire for sanity and fear of action would extend even to American movements. The American Jewish protest of Germany on April 3 by American Jews was criticized as "wholly unnecessary", and they believed it would worsen the treatment of Jews in Germany via punishment that they would inevitably endure due to foreign action.⁵⁴

This coverage of the Jewish boycott of German goods would extend to *LJS*'s coverage of how the United States should handle Germany. Under the constant guise of reasonability, the paper explicitly advocated for the United States to be kinder towards and cooperate with Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime. The primary justification for this? That nothing stood to be gained from antagonizing Hitler, implying that the primary concern of the paper is not international or even individually focused. This is perhaps the most consistent theme of all of the coverage: it is so intrinsically reliant on its own interpretation of what is reasonable that it finds itself nearly incapable of advocating for any meaningful action to be taken.

The question of reasonability created the fears of Germany for *LJS*, and this is best evidenced by how it chose to cover Hitler's regime during the entirety of the pre-war years.

⁵² "State Journal," *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 1, 1933, 4

⁵³ "Kaiser To Return Only As Emperor," *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 4, 1933, 7

⁵⁴ "Discuss Boycott," *Lincoln Journal Star*, April 3, 1933, 9

From the very beginning of Hitler's regime, it operates using calmer language such as "leader" rather than "dictator". The author's even-handedness should not be confused with approval, however, but rather skeptical optimism. It stated that Hitler truly did want to rule Germany similarly to Mussolini did Italy, which at the time would not have been viewed as a negative feature.⁵⁵ This is the closest that any of the papers would get to correctly identifying the goal of coordination outright, and it came directly from a comparison to Benito Mussolini. Despite this, it once again overstates Hitler's involvement by incorrectly implying that Hitler made every decision himself.⁵⁶

Most notably, however, is that the articles published very early on attempt to paint Hitler as someone who was very reasonable and even in a sense cunning politically. The very same article that states he took power noted that his past was checkered, but that he was "calmer and more responsible" than he was before. The very next day, *LJS* asserted that Hitler did not demand "all or nothing" dictatorial power, nor was he particularly fond of it, and that he was more than willing to accept limitations on his own power for the good of his country.⁵⁷ This was partially true: he did not demand end-all power at the start, but rather worked towards it through coordination.⁵⁸ A significant part of his "wild card to reasonable actor" portrayal is the omission of his antisemitism at the beginning of his reign, something that likely would have dampened the reasonability narrative that the paper would attempt to show. While there were questions about his long-term viability as a leader, the paper pushed forth the belief that Hitler was not an

⁵⁵ "State Journal," *Lincoln Journal Star*, January 30, 1933, 4

⁵⁶ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 60

⁵⁷ "State Journal," *Lincoln Journal Star*, January 31, 1933, 4

⁵⁸ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 61

irrational solution to the problems Germany faced, even if he would not get the time with which to solve them.⁵⁹

In comparison with the other secular paper covered in this paper, *LJS* is much more even-handed and does not paint Hitler as the oft-incompetent opportunist that *The Kansas City Star* does. While both papers struggle with the true magnitude of the antisemitism within Germany, *LJS* treats it as much more of a footnote than *The Star* does. *LJS* also seemed more confident that Germany would eventually gain a degree of stability, and that largely has to do with their general optimism regarding Hitler's competency.

LJS did criticize Hitler in a few articles, but its true exceptions to his dictatorship began in the Reichstag elections, in which a March 7 article stated that the people within Germany had "resisted Hitler" for as long as they could before voting him into power. Notably, it states that Hitler himself was the one voted into power, with the mention of the Nazi party gaining the most seats treated as a sidenote.⁶⁰ In reality, Hitler's party had 43.9% of seats in the Reichstag, 51.9% if you consider their coalition partners in the conservative parties.⁶¹ Hitler lost favor with *LJS* almost as quickly as he had gained it. This painted the coverage for the future, despite occasional glimpses of optimism regarding the state.

LJS's attempts to apply reasonability even extended into Jewish policy. An April 5 article asserted that the borders were closed for Jews to leave Germany. While one may immediately view this as alarming, *LJS* took the opposite approach. It reasoned that the sealing of the borders and the inability for Jews to leave will force German policy to be kinder to Jews, stating that the

⁵⁹ "State Journal," *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 2, 1933, 3

⁶⁰ "State Journal," *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 7, 1933, 4

⁶¹ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 47

previous treatment was insane and that there's a hope that "a saner treatment of citizens may follow".⁶² This is evidence that *LJS* was not only searching reasonability in any place they could find it, but that they were also using reasonability as an outlet and potential outcome worthy of optimism. *LJS* eventually believed that sanity would return to the German people. This was not particularly uncommon: many papers across the United States sought to paint Hitler as someone who was seeking peaceful outcomes and co-existence, regardless of any evidence that pointed to the contrary.⁶³

The rest of 1933 was spent speaking in vague generalities about Hitler's "blustering" and how the party seemed relatively aimless outside of their antisemitism and violent tendencies. The most notable part of coverage for the rest of the year was on June 21, in which the paper pointed out how violent the brownshirts were. Once again, it used the framework of what made sense to them from an American perspective, and used an analogy of if American political parties had paramilitary units to show how absurd the concept is.⁶⁴ Such would be their coverage for the entirety of 1934: an intense focus on calling things unreasonable without much elaboration on any concrete detail. *Kristallnacht* received the typical condemnation from the national newswire that seemingly every paper participated in, once again showing that the event served as a uniting factor for media across disciplines, regions, and mediums. For the rest of the pre-war years, *LJS* would continue to speak in vague generalities about Hitler and his regime while constantly hoping that reasonability would eventually return to the nation.

Lincoln Journal Star is fascinating in that it has one consistent throughline that permeated all of the coverage: the desire to find reason. From the very beginning, the paper tried

⁶² "State Journal," *Lincoln Journal Star*, April 4, 1933, 4

⁶³ Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 47

⁶⁴ "Men and Things," *Lincoln Journal Star*, June 21, 1933, 4

to either justify the actions of Nazi Germany itself or why Germany would fall through this lens of reasonability. In many ways, it was the perceived irrationality of the German state that caused *LSJ* to sour on the nation more than anything else. This constant mentioning of logic versus barbarism portrays Nazi Germany as a state that has fully lost its capacity for reason, and that Hitler alone through this seeming lack of ability for traditional thought would plunge the world into war once more. The people who read this paper would have likely believed that war was inevitable as quickly as 1937, two years before the war would actually begin. The paper lost any sense of optimism regarding the rationality of Germany, and that is what why the paper wrote about Europe in such a way that painted war between Britain and France against Germany was destined to occur. The lack of rationality and reason in Germany initially caused a desire to not act, but the fears of actions simply delayed the predictions of war much further down the line.

The Catholic Advance: "...After the Scalps of the Catholics Now..."

The Catholic Advance makes its stance and purpose abundantly clear in every issue: it is a paper that first and foremost wishes to cover issues that either affect Catholics or the Catholic faith. It linked their Catholic perspective to its coverage of Nazi Germany. This matters for several reasons, but the primary reason requires a deeper explanation about the relationship Catholicism had to Nazism and Germany more wholistically.

Foremost among the issues inherent to Catholics in Nazi Germany was Hitler's fear and respect of the Catholic Church as an institution. Despite numerous members of the Nazi party being Catholic, Hitler always felt that Catholics could not be fully committed to the ideals of Nazism based on their faith and adherence to rules from the Vatican. This would cause the majority of the mistrust between the Nazi party and Catholics, including a 1936 declaration that Jews and Catholics were both to be treated as enemies of the Nazi state due to their supposed

lack of loyalty to Nazism. Despite this, Hitler admired the discipline and “closeness” to the “common people” that the Church had. This is why any and all legal action taken against Catholics would be done gradually, even amid Catholic resistance to dissolving groups that were meant to be consolidated into Nazi groups to further aid coordination of the population.⁶⁵ Even outside of Nazism, the German population had a fragmented relationship with Catholics, with East Prussia implementing numerous policies against Catholics in order to spite the religion and Poland.⁶⁶ This, alongside the longstanding history of Catholic suppression in Germany since the Protestant Reformation was likely the cause of much of the suspicion that *The Catholic Advance* had about Germany policy.

Despite the lack of criticism from the paper at the onset of the regime, Catholics in Germany had long since been a point of contention in the Hitler administration. This largely has to do with party loyalty during the Weimar years. Catholics notoriously voted for the Catholic Centre Party to such an unwavering extent that it served as the base for the party for the entirety of the Weimar Republic’s existence. A part of this undying party loyalty was the refusal for Catholics to vote for the Nazi Party. In the 1932 election, the socialists within Germany, the voting bloc that was most attacked by Hitler for their linkage to the SPD, voted for Nazis *more* than Catholics.⁶⁷ Even after most Catholics had begrudgingly supported the Nazis after 1933, there still existed a great deal of mistrust. This is in stark contrast to the Protestant elements within Germany, who had sizeable groups devoted to forming things such as The People’s Church that was designed to counter the democratic values of the Weimar Republic. There was a

⁶⁵ Richard J Evans, 2005, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939*, (London: Allen Lane,) 234-237

⁶⁶ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, 69

⁶⁷ Hett, 2018, *The Death of Democracy*, 68

saying within Germany about this phenomenon: “the church is politically neutral, but it votes German National”.⁶⁸

Much of the coverage of Germany from *The Catholic Advance* comes from a correspondent by the name of Dr. Max Jordan, a man much more known for his NBC Radio Broadcasting of German news than his writing, but who nevertheless corresponded with this paper.⁶⁹ Dr. Max Jordan initially was a writer for the International News Service (the newswire *Lincoln Journal Star* subscribed to) before eventually associating with NBC in 1934. Jordan was a news correspondent for NBC that brought back home news regarding Nazi Germany and more on-the-ground happenings in the form of letters and broadcasts and was often credited as one of the most important journalists in Germany by American media.⁷⁰ He was a devout Catholic born in Italy who had spent a great deal of his life abroad, and most importantly lived in Germany during the rise of Nazism and the years that immediately followed. His letters were published in the *Catholic Advance* and made the paper one of the best in assessment of events from the perspective of the average Catholic and the average journalist within Germany.

Similar to *The Kansas City Star's* “News Behind the News” segments, *The Catholic Advance* had the “This Week” segments. These segments, however, were considerably more fleshed-out than *The Star's*. The purpose of the segment was to provide a place where news that had more political topics could be placed. This would host the majority of their American politics and foreign policy news, but would still keep its Catholic focus and interpretation of these issues. This is why most of the coverage of German politics is in these segments.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 101-102

⁶⁹ “A Job for Jordan,” TIME, February 15, 1945. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0%2C9171%2C774305%2C00.html>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The Catholic Advance had a very clear focus. Every single article it published about Germany had an intense focus on Catholics and how they were being affected by Nazi policy. This means that the portrayal of Nazi Germany by *The Catholic Advance* is one formed by religious news much more than political news, and the political news is informed mostly by Catholic traditions and attitudes. This creates two clearly defined themes: the prioritization of religious news, and how any political news would affect Catholics in the area.

It began from the very day that Hitler took power and how the authors covered it. Or, rather, how they chose not to cover it with any urgency. Hitler was appointed chancellor on January 30 of 1933. The first time that Hitler is mentioned by name in *The Catholic Advance* is on March 4, with coverage of dictatorial concerns of the government being published on February 18. The paper instead opted to report the death of a local priest born in Germany who had worked in Germany.⁷¹ This is without question the most important theme that appears in this paper: it is concerned with Catholic events first and foremost, even in its coverage of foreign nations.

There also is quite a bit of attention paid by the paper towards the actions of Nazis against specific Catholic individuals. For example, the story of Dr. Hans Rost on April 29 reported the arrest of Dr. Rost for publishing a pamphlet entitled “Christ, Not Hitler” attacking the Nazi Party. Not much is known about the pamphlet other than what the paper describes as a document that urged Germans to worship God and Christ over the deification of Hitler. In the general history of Nazi Germany, Dr. Rost is a relative footnote with this being his major contribution. The primary concern of *The Catholic Advance* is not that this was a form of open

⁷¹ “Rev. Anthony Schaefer,” *The Catholic Advance*, February 18, 1933, 4

resistance against oppression, but rather that a notable Catholic figure had been arrested.⁷² The same thing occurred on July 8, where a passport fee had been assessed against Austrian and German Catholics at the border between the two while they were traveling back and forth to an important meeting in Austria. The same article notes that these important Catholic individuals (no elaboration on who) were being searched by the Brownshirts and how none of these people were permitted to express their beliefs openly within Germany.⁷³

After the passport debacle, there is a notable reversal in how *The Catholic Advance* covers Hitler. It was a neutral stance before, only really taking issue with the government's actions and not particularly caring about him as a human being. This changed on July 15 in which *The Catholic Advance* first mentions that Hitler calls himself a Catholic.⁷⁴ Not only do they accept this statement at face value, they allow an article written by G.C. Heseltine, a relatively unknown author, on August 5 that praises Hitler for his fight against communism to be published. Not only does this writer say that Hitler should be praised for this fight, but that Catholics across the world should actively support Hitler and the Nazi regime... because Hitler declared himself a Catholic.⁷⁵

Even into 1934, the paper does not seem keen on criticizing Hitler as a person or politician, rather focusing on issues that his government caused without mentioning him by name. In some ways, it seems as if the paper is attempted to separate Hitler the man from the Hitler who lead the Nazi party that passed the legislation that they were so critical of. This continued well into 1934, when a paper on March 3 stated once again that Hitler is Catholic

⁷² "Noted Catholic Writer Arrested In Germany," *The Catholic Advance*, April 29, 1933, 4

⁷³ Dr. Frederic Funder, "Catholic Congress To Defy Berlin," *The Catholic Advance*, July 8, 1933, 2

⁷⁴ "Anglican Dean Quotes Hitler as Declaring for Church Freedom," *The Catholic Advance*, July 15, 1933, 7

⁷⁵ G.C. Heseltine, "Will A Saint Save Germany? Faith Has Not Been Uprooted," *The Catholic Advance*, August 5, 1933, 4

without much elaboration as to why that is important.⁷⁶ Hitler did self-identify as a Catholic, but rarely followed many Catholic traditions. In many ways, he was Catholic in name only, refusing to participate in things such as Mass or respecting the Pope's authority. This is an important distinction that *The Catholic Advance* never made, and instead focused on the self-declaration. Despite his own self-identification, many Catholics within Germany refused to support him until it was absolutely necessary for their survival.⁷⁷

Such legislation includes the January 13 coverage regarding sterilization practices in Nazi Germany. *The Advance* was first paper that mentioned sterilization, and condemns it wholly based on religious grounds. Notably, however, it also says that the United States has similar sterilization practices.⁷⁸ It makes no commentary on the similarity, and simply stated that both are bad. This is especially true given that the sterilization practices would become a deep point of contention not only for the Catholic Church but also for the authors of *The Catholic Advance*.

Dr. Jordan writes on January 27 that Hitler wants to merge every youth group into the Hitler Youth, but the focus is that there is a mistrust between the Nazi government and the Catholic church based on the sterilization laws and Hitler's attempt to reach into realms typically held by Catholic organizations.⁷⁹ Much of this relationship, information, and hope for any positive change came from the tendency of many of the religious leaders of Europe's interactions with and support of one another, even across religious lines, with many religious groups across the world being hostile towards Nazi Germany due to their persecution of religious people.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ "Hitler Again Lists Himself As A Catholic," *The Catholic Advance*, March 3, 1934, 1

⁷⁷ Richard J Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2015), Accessed April 14, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central 119

⁷⁸ "This Week," *The Catholic Advance*, January 13, 1934, 2

⁷⁹ Dr. Max Jordan, "Merging of All Youth Groups In Germany Is Hitler's Program," *The Catholic Advance*, January 27, 1933, 2

⁸⁰ Victoria J Barnett, "Track Two Diplomacy, 1933-1939: International Responses from Catholics, Jews, and Ecumenical Protestants to Events in Nazi Germany," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 27, no. 1 (2014): 76-86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43100162>, 77

This uneasy relationship was not one that both sides were content to let fester. The Church and Nazi government had been negotiating with one another ever since Hitler took power, and the culmination of those negotiations was the concordant signed in July of 1933. The concordant, while intentionally vague, was meant to smooth the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Nazi party by mandating that Catholic churches were to be strictly religious places, free of any political messaging or interference. This, however, was quickly subverted in its enforcement within Germany, with Catholic leaders writing to the Vatican about German attempts to “co-ordinate” the churches.⁸¹ Nazi leaders frequently ignored the central party of the concordant: political non-participation in exchange for no state interference. Cardinal Pacelli, one of the figures most known for his work on finalizing the deal itself, wrote hundreds of detailed letters to the Nazi government informing them of police and official violations. They all went ignored.⁸² This created hostilities between the Vatican and Germany.

The hostilities would be made even more obvious after March 10, 1937, when an encyclical entitled *Mit Brennender Sorge* (English: *With Deep Anxiety*) was published within Germany. *The Catholic Advance* not only recapped what was in the encyclical itself and how it was written to directly combat the German violations of the concordant previously mentioned and signed, but also goes as far as to say that this encyclical was a method of direct resistance against Hitler and the Nazi government. *The Catholic Advance* then actively encouraged people to resist the Nazi government due to their actions and how this encyclical should not only apply to Catholics, but all religious people in Germany.⁸³ To make even more abundantly clear how much the attitudes had changed, the usually politically timid writing style of this paper gives way

⁸¹ Richard J Evans, 2005, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939*, (London: Allen Lane,) 235

⁸² *Ibid.*, 241

⁸³ “Encyclical Challenges Nazi Regime of Hitler,” *The Catholic Advance*, April 3, 1937, 5

to charging the German government with using “methods of terrorism” against its people and people abroad. This sealed the portrayal of *The Catholic Advance* of viewing the Nazi State as anti-Catholic, even outside of its political actions.

When directly covering political news, the paper still focuses mostly on the Catholic worldview. In the coverage that it does provide of Hitler’s rise to power, the February 18 article stated that Catholics should not judge Germany or even be particularly concerned about the dictatorial or “monarchal” [sic] structure that the government is heading towards. It even says that Catholics may consider it to be a positive. Why? The Catholic Church, as reasoned by the author, is a monarchial structure, therefore Catholics should not be concerned with this governmental structure.⁸⁴ This is despite the fact that the paper states that many Americans in general are horribly concerned with the events in Germany and the places that the authoritarian government might go. Hitler later used similar reasoning as to why the Catholic Church would be considered an enemy of the Nazi Party: the structure inherently put the Pope above the nation, something that Hitler feared would cause split loyalties.⁸⁵

After this coverage, the first mention of Hitler occurred on March 4, and simply stated that Hitler had shifted his attention away from his antisemitism – something they had never mentioned before this day – and towards suppression of Catholic media outlets and that he is “after the scalps of the Catholics now”.⁸⁶ This short article points out the second most crucial point of view that this paper would constantly push forth: anything that happens to Jews in Germany *will* happen to Catholics as well. This was likely an extension of the fact that the only major representation the Catholics in Germany got was the Catholic Center Party, which quickly

⁸⁴ “This Week,” *The Catholic Advance*, February 18, 1933, 2

⁸⁵ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 108

⁸⁶ “This Week,” *The Catholic Advance*, March 4, 1933, 2

became one of the only German political parties who did not centrally feature antisemitism.⁸⁷

Even when a Cardinal by the name of Hayes lamented the treatment of Jews in Germany as barbaric and a treatment that “should have been left in the past”, the newspaper interpreted it as the Cardinal believing the same treatment would soon come to Catholics.

The Catholic Advance believed that the Nazi state and the Catholic Church were at odds with one another to the extent of being wholly incompatible, especially in terms of political action. On April 8, Dr. Jordan planted the seed of the hyper-nationalism of the Nazis as incompatible with the teachings and attitudes of the Church. He put into words for the first time what will be repeated over and over: that Nazism viewed the state as the ultimate authority rather than that of the Church and God.⁸⁸ This also blends with Dr. Jordan stating that Hitler is specifically at odds with the Catholic Church due to it being an international religious organization. Every attempt from a German writer, bishop, or minister to rectify this discrepancy was met with intense criticism from the paper, with an April 15 article posing a question about “German Christianity” and how a reverend in the nation viewed the racial purity of Germany as “ordained by God” being particularly lambasted as ridiculous by the author, thought admittedly not in the exact same article.⁸⁹

The paper was correct in naming the phenomenon of “German Christianity”. Similar to nearly everything in the Nazi State, there were active attempts to coordinate and consolidate the churches of Germany into state-backed church. This church would be a protestant one and would prioritize nationhood above everything.⁹⁰ This mistrust and incompatibility between the Catholic

⁸⁷ Barnett, “Track Two Diplomacy”, 79

⁸⁸ Dr. Max Jordan, “The Situation in Germany Is Much Confused,” *The Catholic Advance*, April 8, 1933, 1, 8

⁸⁹ “This Week,” *The Catholic Advance*, April 15, 1933, 2

⁹⁰ Doris L. Bergen, “Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals? A Response to Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 25–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036426>, 27

Church, Nazi Party, and the church the Nazis sponsored was shared by several religious scholars, such as G.E.W. Johnson in writing in 1934 on the subject. The conflict came down to the “totalitarian claims upon the whole population” that both entities had. This created what many people at the time called a “war between Hitler and the Catholic Church”.⁹¹ While *The Catholic Advance* never calls it a war, they certainly are skeptical of the Nazi Party.

This skepticism of linkage between the Church and State would continue well into the year, with Dr. Max Jordan questioning the legitimacy of a rumored concordant on May 6. As was mentioned, this Concordant would eventually serve to limit the political actions of the Catholic Church in exchange for being left alone by the Nazi Party.⁹² He believed it would not be effective for various reasons, one of which being the lack of any German diplomats being sent to the Vatican despite them being sent to Italy multiple times.⁹³ This is somewhat reversed by Dr. Jordan on June 10 in an article saying that the Church’s freedom had been guaranteed so long as they do not do any “political actions”, and later his piece on July 29 saying that the recently signed concordant guarantees the freedom of any previous arrested priests.⁹⁴ Despite this, there still remains questions by the paper itself about the efficacy and truth of the Nazi government on this issue.

1937 marked the years where this paper began to be openly hostile towards the Nazi Regime and Hitler in particular. It begins on January 16, with the paper claiming that Hitler taking the Rhineland was not only caused by the Treaty of Versailles being written by “godless”

⁹¹ G. E. W Johnson, “Hitler and the Catholic Church,” *The North American Review* 238, no. 5 (1934): 438–47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25114533>. 439

⁹² Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 108

⁹³ Dr. Max Jordan, “Visit of German Statesmen to Rome Arouses Question of Concordant,” *The Catholic Advance*, May 6, 1933, 3

⁹⁴ Dr. Max Jordan, “Hitler States Church Will Have Freedom,” *The Catholic Advance*, June 10, 1933, 5 AND Dr. Max Jordan, “Era of Cooperation For Germany Under New Concordant is Seen,” *The Catholic Advance*, July 29, 1933, 6

people, but also that the act itself was a result of this lack of religion.⁹⁵ For a Catholic newspaper that has espoused Hitler's alleged Catholicism, this is not only a notable reversal, but a serious claim. Hitler's boasting about the event within Germany led to additional condemnation from the paper on January 23, stating that eventually the Hitler administration will fall due to its arrogance and how "people soon get their number".⁹⁶ It only vaguely touched on *Kristallnacht* in the context that Hitler would target Catholics next and on December 3, 1938, said Hermann Goering was a bloodthirsty monster.

The Catholic Advance presented itself as one of the more focused and pessimistic papers regarding events within Nazi Germany. Their focus on Catholic events made them generally uncaring about politics within the nation, but that exact same focus allowed them to draw parallels between the intense religious discrimination that the Jews were facing as a race to the potential discrimination that Catholics could have faced. In this sense, while initially neutral and sometimes even complimentary of the Nazi Regime, the ultimate view that a reader would believe is that Nazi Germany was a land of oppression and a nation that did not stand with the Catholic Church, and therefore was against the principles of Catholicism that these readers of the paper likely held dearly.

The Jewish Press: "The Reign of Terror"

The Jewish Press had one primary focus, and it is focusing on issues regarding Judaism, especially in areas that Jews may be facing hardship. Their mission statement, posted on the front page of every issue, is "dedicated to the ideals of Judaism". They carry this out throughout all of their coverage, both of Nazi Germany and domestically. *The Jewish Press* regularly posted

⁹⁵ "This Week," *The Catholic Advance*, January 16, 1937, 2

⁹⁶ "This Week," *The Catholic Advance*, January 23, 1937, 2

news of religious services in Germany as well as posted advertisements for talks in America that rabbis would host to discuss what steps to take. In many ways, this paper was the most dedicated to direct action. Very little is known about the two principal editors, David Blacker and Frank Ackerman, other than the former owning another paper in Omaha: *The South Omaha Sun*.

As one might expect, the *Jewish Press* was wholly committed to the coverage of Jewish events within Germany. In taking this action, it adopted a near-universal tone of condemnation, even from the very beginning of the Nazi regime with Hitler taking power. A significant part of this condemnation, however, also made their coverage remarkably more thorough and in-tune to the politics within the nation. For example, even three days before Hitler gained the chancellorship, the paper published an article that told about his and his party's financial troubles alongside the massive debts that they had and would continue to accrue.⁹⁷ From the onset, the paper painted Hitler as an irresponsible leader by focusing distinctly on his and the party's financial history, something that would only continue as time went on. Even before Hitler came to power, *The Jewish Press* was likely very aware that there was violence in Germany against Jews, given they were also connected to a network of religious figures similar to *The Catholic Advance*, even having knowledge of plans of violence before 1933 due to connections with Dr. Bernhard Kahn, a Swedish-Jewish doctor who established the information network.⁹⁸ This network notably worked within the nation to spread awareness across the world about atrocities carried out by Nazis.

The first coverage provided after Hitler took power was the February 3 issue that covered it in by far the most detailed out of any of the previous newspapers. Not only did was the political process behind him getting the chancellorship recalled, they also were the only newspaper that

⁹⁷ "Hitler Has His Financial Woes," *The Jewish Press*, January 27, 1933, 1

⁹⁸ Barnett, "Track Two Diplomacy," 77

dove into his cabinet choices such as Hermann Goering and Wilhelm Frick. They also note that all of Hitler's promises are ridiculous, and that "[Hitler's] followers will find that a wave of the Hitler magic wand will not miraculously restore Germany to economic stability overnight". All of this is completely separating the most prevalent issue that the paper covers: the antisemitism of the party. The newspaper predicted impossibly dark days for German Jews, with the antisemitism and hatred not only being embedded within the Nazi Party but having already seeped into the Germany general consciousness.⁹⁹

The idea that Nazism had embedded the ideals of antisemitism into the population is one of the key academic markers of coordination. Catherine Epstein writes that while Jews were certainly one of the most targeted groups in Nazi efforts to create a "racial state", it was the deeply-rooted nationalism and desire for an "Aryan race" that truly made the racial coordination policies of the Nazi regime accepted by those who were deemed racially pure.¹⁰⁰ It was these attitudes that were deeply engrained within Nazi society, and Jews were a victim of the desire for a racially pure state. These attitudes would later become legally encoded the Reich Citizenship Laws which actually set forth to define what it meant to be Jewish in order to societally and civilly isolate them.

Even outside of attitudes used to construct the "racial state", Jews were especially targeted by Hitler as the cause of all of Germany's woes and took special care to link them to the ideals Marxism and raved about "international Jewry" ruining the world and Germany. Germany had passed numerous laws intended to degrade the Jewish people within Germany as early as 1933 in order to coerce them to emigrate out of the nation. They also were sensitive to any action taken from international actors, not only taking them as proof of there being an international Jewish

⁹⁹ "Adolph Hitler – Chancellor," *The Jewish Press*, February 3, 1933, 2

¹⁰⁰ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 69

conspiracy against Germany, but also using it to justify further repression of the Jews. For example, the protest of German goods by American Jews was met with condemnation by Germany and a counterprotest of Jewish goods in Germany.¹⁰¹

This pessimism extended well into the next week, when *The Jewish Press* predicted that measures would be taken against the Jews, both legally and socially (something that did happen). Most interestingly, it notes that there is no one party or person that is known to stand in direct opposition to these antisemitic measures, and even if there were there would be no stopping the discrimination from a societal and day-to-day standpoint.¹⁰² This was compounded by the Nazis winning what *The Jewish Press* incorrectly called a majority within the Reichstag elections, something that the paper speculated as the justification for Hitler to “waste no time in setting up a virtual dictatorship”. The paper even states that the election was simply a formality, and that the “Hitlerites” were always going to win the election based off of their intense suppression of opposition.¹⁰³ The elections were indeed mostly a formality. They were a part of the deal Hitler had made with Hindenburg to gain the chancellorship, and the Nazi party was already the key to the conservative coalition that Hindenburg had wanted. Despite this, they did not win the majority in the Reichstag, but just enough to “finagle” a Reichstag vote in their favor for The Enabling Act.¹⁰⁴

This marked the beginning of a six-year period that *The Jewish Press* would consistently refer to as “The Reign of Terror”. It started as early as March 24 with the recapping of the murder of two innocent Jews at the hands of Brownshirts and the fallout that occurred from that.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 84

¹⁰² “German Jewry Await Events With Anxiety,” *The Jewish Press*, February 10, 1933, 1

¹⁰³ “Hitlerites Win Decisive Victory at German Polls,” *The Jewish Press*, March 10, 1933, 1

¹⁰⁴ Epstein, *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths*, 47

Most interestingly, however, is how that exact same article noted the responses from American organizations. It notes the Jewish conference in Omaha and the complaints lodged to the United States State Department, both of which were intended to be starting points to helping Jews within Germany.¹⁰⁵ This presents the second major theme: that the Jews in Germany were totally and completely alone within their own nation and that there were at least some efforts to try to think of how to help. They call for and promote acts of resistance and meetings regarding how to help Jews in Germany, including the Jewish protests of German goods that went sparsely mentioned by other papers.¹⁰⁶

As far as the international scene was concerned, the Jews in Germany indeed were largely on their own. This perception the paper had was likely exacerbated by attitudes that many within the United States had. Many people within the United States and England, especially within the media, propagated the idea that Jews were constantly given legs-up in things such as economics. As such, when asked by a national poll in 1938 if Jews had brought the antisemitism in Germany upon themselves, sixty percent of people responded “absolutely yes”. This attitude had even pervaded into the United States government in the Roosevelt administration, who notably refused to allow for an increase in Jewish immigration from Germany.¹⁰⁷

The paper’s optimism in these actions having any results quickly faded away. On April 14, they note how the Jewish protests within America were ineffective in stopping Hitler’s regime from continuing his oppression of the Jews, and in many ways viewed it as only getting worse.¹⁰⁸ Hitler was portrayed as a fanatic whose mind cannot be changed, and whose violent

¹⁰⁵ “Nazi Excesses Against Jewry in Germany Increase in Intensity,” *The Jewish Press*, March 24, 1933, 1

¹⁰⁶ “Mass Meeting on Situation in Germany at J.C.C. at 8 P.M.,” *The Jewish Press*, March 31, 1933, 1

¹⁰⁷ Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 47-49

¹⁰⁸ “Open Boycott Gives Way to Cunning as the Nazis Continue Oppressions,” *The Jewish Press*, April 14, 1933, 1

tendencies would not be contained. Despite this, the paper does predict that eventually Hitler would fall due to his intense mistrust of everyone around him, especially every European state that he views as direct competition and enemies.¹⁰⁹ This is also where *The Jewish Press* blends the attitudes of the Nazi Party with that of the entirety of Germany. They truly do not believe they have any friends within the country, and that the paranoia of Hitler permeates the nation so much that everything they dislike is considered “Jewish”, even Catholic organizations.¹¹⁰ This cycle would continue well into 1934, with nearly every paper mentioning news of oppression within Germany or some other form of action that they surmised did not help. An event of protest would be mentioned once as an announcement, and then come and go without any success or fanfare. The most important effects of these protests would be keeping anti-Jewish violence in the front of the minds of the American people. This allowed for information to be important for journalists to keep reporting on it, therefore facilitating the previously mentioned information network.¹¹¹ In many ways, it was not necessarily the action of the protests that made significant change, but rather the principle of them.

Despite this pessimism, they continued to hold out some belief that things within Germany would improve. Similarly to *The Kansas City Star*, they began predicting the fall of the Hitler regime, but for vastly different reasons. *The Jewish Press* simply believed that the German people would begin to believe that Hitler had overstayed his welcome as a leader, and that his lack of immediate economic results would ultimately harm the government’s ability to maintain any degree of power, with “events in Germany” seemingly pointing towards Hitler falling out of favor.¹¹² Interestingly, despite this coverage of German being amid a regime change, the Night of

¹⁰⁹ “Spectator Junior,” *The Jewish Press*, July 14, 1933, 4

¹¹⁰ “Who Else is Jewish?,” *The Jewish Press*, July 21, 1933, 2

¹¹¹ Barnett, “Track Two Diplomacy,” 81

¹¹² “Rumors Grow Hitler Regime About to Fall,” *The Jewish Press*, June 29, 1934, 1

Long Knives goes largely uncovered. In fact, many political events after the initial rise of Hitler goes uncovered.

The focus is instead on the continued oppression of the Jewish people within Germany. It ranges from general condemnations to the poison that Nazi Germany has had in Europe. In other words, the paper seems to imply the main reason why so few nations are willing to help Jews in Germany is that the ideas of antisemitism that Hitler himself put forth were tainting the attitudes of all nations surrounding him, forcing Jews into Palestine. The paper even views these attitudes of having seeped into Hollywood, with Jewish producers being constantly dismissed and this being a trend across the world.¹¹³ Again, it is worth saying that they were largely correct in this assessment.

The coverage presented in this paper largely remained static: Hitler was an evil megalomaniac, Nazism pervaded every part of German life, and Jews were often left to fend for themselves against the horrid atrocities being committed against them. This was the perception Jewish readers were left to have of Nazi Germany. The rise of the Nazi regime had caused a great deal of pain for their fellow Jews in Germany, and there was very little that they could do to stop it. Even if they attempted to call attention to causes that raised awareness for the plight of Jews, it was met with either apathy or was so ineffective at creating any change that the events they advertised would never be mentioned again.

¹¹³ "Our Film Folk," *The Jewish Press*, September 20, 1935, 3

Part IV: Conclusion

These papers had vastly different interpretations of Adolf Hitler as a leader and politician. *The Kansas City Star* viewed him as an opportunistic man who simply stumbled into power, until eventually shifting towards the belief that he was a mob boss that simply bullied and blustered to concentrate his power. *Lincoln Journal Star* initially had optimism regarding his rule, but that quickly faded away as they started to believe that he was not the proper fit for their reasonability framework. *The Catholic Advance* seemed to want to separate Hitler the politician from Hitler the Catholic, and largely pinned everything they disliked to the Nazi Party rather than Hitler himself. *The Jewish Press* despised Hitler from the very beginning, being uniquely in-tune to his antisemitism and the consequences it had for Germany.

The other overwhelmingly obvious theme is the general lack of meaningful coverage that occurred during 1936. This can be easily explained by the Berlin Olympics and how Nazis were relatively quiet in policy actions during that time and the tendency of media to push controversies to the side in the name of promotion of the Olympics. There were no grand calls to boycott the Olympics from these newspapers, and they rather focused inward during these years. This was the exact intentions of the Nazi Regime: to ensure that the American media would view the games positively in order to distract from the negative coverage that they had attracted over the years.

Each of these papers presented remarkably different worldviews, and the readers of these papers would each individually walk away with differing opinions based solely off the newspapers they chose to read. The one unifying factor was *Kristallnacht*, which ultimately created the consensus that Germany was a tyrannical state that eventually would plunge the

world back into war. Each of the papers, however, arrived at this conclusion at different times, with some of them viewing war as inevitable as far back as 1935, and some waiting up until the days after the pogrom that destroyed the lives of millions of Jews in Germany.

The midwestern news media each interpreted the information they were given in different ways, and that is what makes the study of news coverage so interesting. Using Lipstadt's framework of influence, the people that subscribed to these newspapers thought about Nazi Germany a considerable amount, and even it took one of the worst atrocities in human history to unite them behind the cause of anti-Nazism, the papers still nevertheless covered them. The Midwest as a region would have been aware of the persecution of Jews to a degree, but likely would have felt powerless to stop it. This was the extent of the knowledge they would have, and the extent of the action they could take.

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