

**The Stab-in-the-Back Legend:
How conspiracy-laden communication destroyed the Weimar Republic**

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Historical Paper

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Process Paper

Recent events in America have revealed conspiracy theories' destructive impact when individuals in power indulge in propagating them. I wanted to study conspiracy theories and their influence on the course of history. A visit to the Dallas Holocaust Museum introduced me to the conspiracy theories that Hitler and his Nazi party exploited to gain and consolidate power. I discovered how conspiracy theories weakened the Weimar Republic and tarnished Jews' reputation in Germany. I found this subject fascinating, having contemporary relevance, and connected to the NHD theme of Communication in History. So I chose to focus on this topic for my project.

I researched this topic in greater depth after visiting the exhibits at the Dallas Holocaust Museum. I searched the Internet to gather the necessary background information and visited my public library to find books about the rise of Nazi Germany, including literature containing primary sources of testimonies and propaganda. I looked through German archives to find government publications and used translations from the University of California to understand primary sources written in German. To explore multiple perspectives, I scanned archives of newspapers in the US and England and read pamphlets and publications by right-wing German political parties. I connected with Holocaust survivors through the Dallas Holocaust Museum and asked them how conspiracy theories were woven into the anti-Semitic rhetoric in the years leading up to the war.

I chose to write a paper for my History Day project. I enjoy writing and have been competing in this category for a few years. I like researching history from multiple perspectives and then writing about it in a paper with my analysis. After researching my chosen topic, I compiled what I found in chronological order and grouped events based on the types of

communication – newspaper articles, parliamentary hearings, trial testimonies, influential pamphlets, images, etc. – and specific conspiracy theories Nazis used. I crafted the narrative by first describing the historical circumstances that Germany found itself in at the end of the First World War and then explaining the origins, evolution, and exploitation of the stab-in-the-back myth. My central argument is that the effective exploitation and communication of conspiracy theories played a significant role in the destruction of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism in Germany.

My topic relates directly to the theme of “Communication in History: The Key to Understanding.” In my paper, I discuss how conspiracy-laden communication and misinformation campaigns made the German public misunderstand history. This misunderstanding eventually made possible the ascent of the Nazis with all its tragic consequences. Communication of conspiracies has been a problem throughout history. The rise of mass communication and social media today exacerbates this problem by making it even easier to spread unfounded conspiracy theories to the public rapidly. Current events in several democratic nations have an eerie resemblance to those in post-WWI Germany, reminding us that we must learn from the past and recognize how detrimental the spread of conspiracy theories can be to the future of democracy.

History is often determined not by the actual events of the past but by the stories told to describe them. Stories that explain the occurrence of improbable and unsettling events using powerful narratives with emotional appeal hold more power than a dry telling of events using verifiable facts. *Dolchstoßlegende*, or the stab-in-the-back legend, and related myths that were spread after Germany's defeat in the First World War were among the most consequential of such stories. According to *Dolchstoßlegende*, Germany did not lose the war because they were defeated by the Allies on the battlefield; instead, Germany was betrayed by unpatriotic civilians on the home-front: liberal democrats, socialists, and especially Jews. The effective exploitation and communication of this powerful myth led to the destruction of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism in Germany.

Dolchstoßlegende first emanated from the German military leadership's desire to absolve themselves of responsibilities for defeat. In the fall of 1918, as the Allied offensive toward Germany on the Western Front appeared unstoppable, it became clear to Chief-of-Staff Erich Ludendorff that German war efforts were doomed. He concluded the best option for Germany was a negotiated armistice.¹ Instead of the military negotiating the terms of surrender, as was conventional, he got the elected politicians of the Reichstag to do so.² Ludendorff, an extreme nationalist, wanted to keep his fingerprints off the surrender. He calculated that Germans would blame the liberals and democrats instead of the military if the armistice terms were harsh and unpopular.³

¹ Weitz, Eric D. *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy, Weimar Centennial Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

² Von Baden, Max. 3 Oct. 1918. German Sources on the History of the First World War, Berlin. https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=989

³ Doerr, Paul W. "November 1918 as a Transition in Twentieth Century War Termination." *War and Virtual War: The Challenges to Communities*, edited by Raymond Westphal Jr, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2003, 99-107.

The news of sudden defeat left most Germans shocked and dismayed. Despite the heavy toll the war had inflicted on German society – over two million deaths and widespread hunger⁴ – government communications during the war had stressed that victory was within grasp. When the German public was told about the imminent defeat on October 5, 1918, there were no Allied forces on German soil.⁵ The German army was still occupying conquered territories to the west and east.

The events of November 1918 further unsettled the Germans. A sailors' mutiny in Kiel against a naval order for a last-ditch battle against the British spiraled into a large-scale revolt by workers and soldiers across many German cities.⁶ On November 9, amidst continuing civil unrest, Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated, and a new Republic (later named the Weimar Republic) came to power with Social Democratic leader Fredrick Ebert as President.⁷ On November 11, the new government signed the armistice ending the war. The dizzying progression of events was utterly shocking and confusing to Germans.⁸ They were looking for answers to make sense of seemingly inexplicable events. In short, conditions were ripe for conspiracy theories to take root.

On December 18, 1918, a reactionary newspaper *Deutsche Tageszeitung* carried a short notice proclaiming that an English general had acknowledged the German Army's strength when the armistice was signed and claimed that it was "stabbed-in-the-back" by the home front.⁹ This brief article received wide circulation and uncritical acceptance across a spectrum of nationalist

⁴ Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin, 2005.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Doerr, Paul W. "November 1918 as a Transition in Twentieth Century War Termination." *War and Virtual War: The Challenges to Communities*, edited by Raymond Westphal Jr, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2003, 99-107.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vascik, George S, and Sadler, Mark R. *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

opinion leaders and became the foundation stone of *Dolchstoßlegende*. To many Germans, the articulation of *Dolchstoßlegende* by an enemy general confirmed their own suspicions.

It turned out that the *Tageszeitung* piece was an egregious misinterpretation of an article written in London newspapers by Frederick Maurice, a highly respected British general and military analyst.¹⁰ Although the article alluded to a prevailing British view that civilians stabbed the German Army in the back, Maurice's central argument was that Germany lost the war. The failure of the German Spring Offensive and the exhaustion of its reserves, the collapse of its allies - Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria-, and the entry of US forces against it made it impossible for Germany to win.¹¹ Later, in 1919, Maurice reiterated this argument in his book *The Last Four Months*, firmly stating that "[t]here is no question that the German armies were completely and decisively beaten in the field."¹² Regardless of these facts, for those against the November Revolution, just hearing that "an English General has said" was sufficient to cement the idea that liberal revolutionaries caused the surrender.

Dolchstoßlegende was a central idea in the communications produced by the various right-wing nationalist political parties that sprang up in the Weimar Republic's early days. These included the German National People's Party (DNVP) and Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), or the Nazi Party. For Hitler himself, who learned of Germany's defeat while in the hospital recovering from injuries following a gas attack, *Dolchstoßlegende* offered a convincing explanation for Germany's unexpected loss.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Maurice, Sir F. *The Last Four Months: How the War was Won*. 1919.

¹³ Brendon, Piers. *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s*. Vintage, 2007.

The stab-in-the-back myth gained more momentum during the official investigation into the war's conduct by the German National Assembly elected in 1919.¹⁴ The Assembly, then dominated by centrist and left-leaning parties, expected to use the investigations to interrogate and discredit military leaders and officials for their expansionist wartime policies that led to Germany's humiliating defeat. However, it was the nationalists and opponents of the Weimar Republic that benefitted from these. Prominent nationalists and war leaders used their time on the witness-stand to make lengthy speeches extolling the German military and vilifying the leftists and liberals for their appeasement and surrender.¹⁵ The nationalist press lambasted the investigations as a disgrace and seized every opportunity to communicate testimonies favoring the stab-in-the-back idea.¹⁶

The testimony of Field-Marshal Paul von Hindenburg caused the biggest sensation at the hearings. Hindenburg, the Commander-in-Chief during the war and the architect of several victories in the eastern front, was a revered figure in post-war Germany.¹⁷ On November 18, 1919, he declared, "[w]e could have carried on the struggle to a successful conclusion if there had been undivided and unified cooperation between the army and the homeland."¹⁸ Referring to General Maurice's article, he said that "the German Army was stabbed in the back."¹⁹ This

¹⁴ Evans, Richard J. *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Protocols - the Stab in the Back - the Reichstag Fire – Rudolf Hess - the Escape from the Bunker*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Wistrich, Robert S. "From Weimar to Hitler." *Hitler and the Holocaust*, Modern Library, 2001, pp. 30-66.

¹⁷ "Hindenburg Departs." *The Times*, pp. 12.

¹⁸ Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin, 2005.

¹⁹ Paul von Hindenburg. "The Stab in the Back." (November 18, 1919). Text from: *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Available from: University of California Press. Accessed January 1, 2021.

stunning testimony of Hindenburg endorsing *Dolchstoßlegende* led to its widespread acceptance in Germany. Though he did not specify who was responsible for backstabbing, several media outlets presented their own interpretations. One anti-Semitic construal of Hindenburg's testimony appeared as a cartoon in the nationalist *Kladderadatsch* magazine, which showed a Medusa-headed female with Jewish features sporting a Social Democrat hat piercing a German soldier with a knife (Appendix A).²⁰

By lending his authority to the myth, Hindenburg helped make it the ideological linchpin of the opposition to the Weimar Republic. It became a big part of DNVP propaganda. The party wrested more seats away from the Social Democrats in the 1920 election by accusing them of having stabbed Germany in the back. DNVP effectively exploited the broad appeal of *Dolchstoßlegende* to weld together its previously disparate coalition of conservatives, monarchists, annexationists, and anti-Semites to become the most successful right-wing party until the rise of the Nazis.²¹

In the early 1920s, nationalist parties continued to discredit the Weimar Republic by alleging that their leaders had undermined German war efforts by supporting labor unrest at home during the war.²² Earlier in January 1918, left-leaning parties had endorsed the strike by laborers in munition and metal factories.²³ These mass strikes were motivated by deteriorating factory conditions and were resolved through negotiations that led to improvements in wages and

²⁰ Vascik, George S, and Sadler, Mark R. *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Wistrich, Robert S. "From Weimar to Hitler." *Hitler and the Holocaust*, Modern Library, 2001, pp. 30-66.

²³ Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin, 2005.

working conditions and more effective organizing of production and supply. The strikes were not an organized attempt to make Germany lose the war. Nevertheless, President Ebert was often accused of "treason" by the extreme right.^{24,25} Ironically, the court trials that followed these accusations only helped further entrench the stab-in-the-back myth.

In 1924, an anti-Semitic, nationalist newspaper, *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, published an article accusing Ebert of committing treason by supporting striking munition workers in 1918 and permitting the strikers to disobey conscription orders.²⁶ Following a charade of a libel trial, in a confusing ruling that would further damage the republic, the conservative judge conducting the trial declared that the accusations against Ebert were proven right while sentencing the magazine publisher to 3 months in prison for libel.²⁷

Later in the year, during the 1924 election cycle, *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, a Munich cultural magazine, published a series of articles blaming the Social Democrats and trade unions for Germany's defeat.²⁸ These were based on materials divulged during the high-treason trial of Hitler and Ludendorff following the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch.²⁹ The magazine included an infamous image on its cover that depicted a large dagger protruding from a fallen soldier's neck, presenting a clear picture that the German Army had been betrayed (Appendix B). This publication led to the so-called "Stab-in-the-Back Trial" in Munich in late 1925. Witness

²⁴ Vascik, George S, and Sadler, Mark R. *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

²⁵ "The Ebert Libel Suit." *The Times*, 11 Dec. 1924, p. 12.

²⁶ Fulda, Bernhard. *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nikolaus Cossmann, Paul. "The Effects of 'Dolchstosses'." *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, May 1924, marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/projects/reception/dolchstoss/245SueddeutscheMonatshefte.htm.

²⁹ Wistrich, Robert S. "From Weimar to Hitler." *Hitler and the Holocaust*, Modern Library, 2001, pp. 30-66.

testimonies from the trial provided material for the nationalist press to highlight and further communicate the myth. This propaganda drowned out the fact that the trials resulted in the vindication of the Social Democrats' patriotism during the war and its aftermath.³⁰ As more investigations and trials continued through the 1920s, *Dolchstoßlegende* entered the nationalist rights' discourse as an unchallengeable truth and was effectively used to gain more seats in the Reichstag and weaken the Weimar Republic's legitimacy.³¹

Though the stab-in-the-back legend initially targeted the socialists and revolutionaries that led the November Revolution, more insidious versions of the myth included elements of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The strain of anti-Semitism that emerged in the late nineteenth century was more pernicious than that based on religious antagonism and economic stereotypes during the Middle Ages and early modern period.³² Influenced by Social Darwinist theories, a racist notion had emerged that Jews were innately subversive and unpatriotic, bent on sowing social disharmony and cultural decay.^{33,34}

During the war, German Jews were labeled as "shirkers."³⁵ Nationalists alleged that Jewish soldiers were underrepresented in the army and predominantly served behind the lines, away from danger. These allegations led to the 1916 *War Ministry Census on Jewish Participation in the War*.³⁶ When the census found that over 100,000 Jews did their military

³⁰ Vascik, George S, and Sadler, Mark R. *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

³¹ Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin, 2005.

³² Crowe, David M. *The Holocaust: Roots, History, and Aftermath*. Routledge, 2018.

³³ Ibid 66.

³⁴ Aly, Götz. *Why the Germans? Why the Jews?: Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust*. Metropolitan Books, 2014.

³⁵ Ibid 84.

³⁶ Grady, Timothy L. *A Deadly Legacy: German Jews and the Great War*. Yale University Press, 2017.

service, 12,000 were killed, and 35,000 were decorated for bravery,³⁷ the Ministry suppressed the report and allowed the "shirker" suspicion to continue unchallenged.³⁸ In 1919, Alfred Roth, the leader of the German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation, the largest anti-Semitic party, published a widely circulated pamphlet, *The Jew in the Army*.³⁹ The text communicated the false narrative that most Jews involved in the war only took part as profiteers and spies and that Jewish officers cultivated a defeatist attitude among soldiers.

For Hitler and his Nazi Party, Jewry was the main perpetrator of the stab-in-the-back. Hitler believed that the November Revolution of 1918 was organized by "the international Jew" to establish "the rule of the Jew" in the form of the Weimar Republic.⁴⁰ From the heydays of the Stormtroopers to Goebbels' campaigns, *Dolchstoßlegende* was a core element of Nazi propaganda. It was relentlessly communicated in rallies and speeches, newsletters, pamphlets, posters, and pictorial exhibits.⁴¹ Nazis also exploited the fact that *Dolchstoßlegende* was evocative of the legendary dragon-slayer hero of German mythology, Siegfried, who was stabbed in the back by a treacherous Hagen bent on acquiring the ring to rule the world.⁴² The Siegfried legend, immortalized in Richard Wagner's opera *The Twilight of the Gods*, had powerful emotional resonance with the German public.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Roth, Alfred. *The Jews in the Army*. German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation, 1920. <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:source-133.en.v1>.

⁴⁰ Herf, Jeffrey. *The Jewish Enemy*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁴¹ Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin, 2005.

⁴² Glosecki, Stephen O. *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*. Mrtts, 2007, pp. 281-306.

⁴³ Evans, Richard J. *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Protocols - the Stab in the Back - the Reichstag Fire – Rudolf Hess - the Escape from the Bunker*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Another myth against the Jews originated from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁴⁴ The *Protocols* was a forged Russian document that claimed Jews had a secret plot to control the world.⁴⁵ The documents' German translations circulated wildly in Germany, and the popular *Völkisch* publication *Der Reichswart* disseminated its core message.⁴⁶ The *Protocols* was required reading for Nazi Party members, along with Theodor Fritsch's *Antisemitic Correspondence*.⁴⁷

For Hitler, the Jew's plan for complete world domination was the ultimate Jewish crime. Commenting on the *Protocols*, he wrote that "it is completely indifferent from what Jewish brain these disclosures originate; the important thing is that with positively terrifying certainty they reveal the nature and activity of the Jewish people and expose their inner contexts as well as their ultimate final aims."⁴⁸ His obsessive fear of Jewish world domination drove much of Hitler's rhetoric and actions.

Hitler also viewed Bolshevism, the communist ideology of the 1917 Russian Revolution that many Germans feared, as an ideology for world domination by the Jews. Drawing on the *Protocols'* ideas, he propagated the canard of Judeo-Bolshevism, which alleged that the Jews held primary power among the Bolsheviks.⁴⁹

For their successful dissemination, conspiracy theories often rely on traces of truth as much as outright lies, and Hitler's theory of Judeo-Bolshevism was no exception. For instance,

⁴⁴ Unknown. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Znmayya, 1903.

⁴⁵ Fay, Brendan. "The Nazi Conspiracy Theory: German Fantasies and Jewish Power in the Third Reich." *Library & Information History*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2019, pp. 75-97.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf - My Struggle*. 1988.

⁴⁹ Evans, Richard J. *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Protocols - the Stab in the Back - the Reichstag Fire - Rudolf Hess - the Escape from the Bunker*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

the disproportionate presence of Jews in the leadership of the Communist movement in various countries was cited as evidence; Leon Trotsky in Russia, Bela Kun in Hungary, and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany happened to be Jews by birth though not by conviction or practice.⁵⁰ Similarly, the disproportionate representation of Jews in media and finance was taken as proof that Jews were sinister manipulators behind the scenes pulling the levers of government and global financial markets to their own benefit.⁵¹ When the 1929 US stock market crash led to mass unemployment and economic depression again in Germany, Hitler and his Nazi propaganda machine argued that the Jews were the ultimate capitalists controlling global finance to take over the world.⁵²

Hitler viewed capitalism and Bolshevism as two sides of the same international Jewish coin.⁵³ By making "International Jewry" the central enemy, Hitler offered a perniciously simple explanation for all of Germany's post-First World War travails that appealed to both the right and the left.^{54,55} Hitler and the Nazi party successfully communicated these false explanations and persuaded many Germans to support them politically. In the July 1932 election, the Nazis won 37.3% of the votes, the largest among all parties, a staggering rise from their 2.8% vote share in 1928 (Appendix C).⁵⁶ After a few months of political maneuvering, Hitler was named Chancellor in January 1933. Within weeks, invoking emergency powers, Hitler effectively killed the Weimar Republic and began the Third Reich.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fay, Brendan. "The Nazi Conspiracy Theory: German Fantasies and Jewish Power in the Third Reich." *Library & Information History*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2019, pp. 75-97.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Herf, Jeffrey. *The Jewish Enemy*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁵⁵ Hitler, Adolf. "Hitler Campaign Speech." 22 July 1932, Waldenburg, Germany. Speech.

⁵⁶ Kerwin, Jerome G. "The German Reichstag Elections of July 31, 1932." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, Oct. 1932, pp. 921-926.

Historians have cataloged many reasons for the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis. The Versailles Treaty, the burden of reparations, the Weimar constitution's flawed design, the Great Depression, political intrigues, and other contingent events were significant factors.⁵⁷ However, one cannot deny the influential role of the communication of conspiracy theories in creating an environment of mistrust and deceit in German society during the fragile years of Germany's experiment with democracy. The effective propagation of these conspiracy theories by the Nazis was crucial to their successful ascent to power—an ascent that ultimately led to the Second World War and the genocide of over 6 million European Jews.

Post-WWI Germany's history offers important lessons on the corrosive impact that conspiracy theories and falsehoods, particularly when communicated by influential leaders, can have on society and how they can lead to the rise of authoritarianism. Though far from exact, one can see troubling parallels to post-WWI German history in many democracies today, including Hungary⁵⁸, Brazil⁵⁹, India⁶⁰, and the United States. It reminds us of the fragility of liberal democracy, its vulnerability to the spread of misinformation, and the need for constant vigilance to protect it from falling prey to the impulses of authoritarianism.

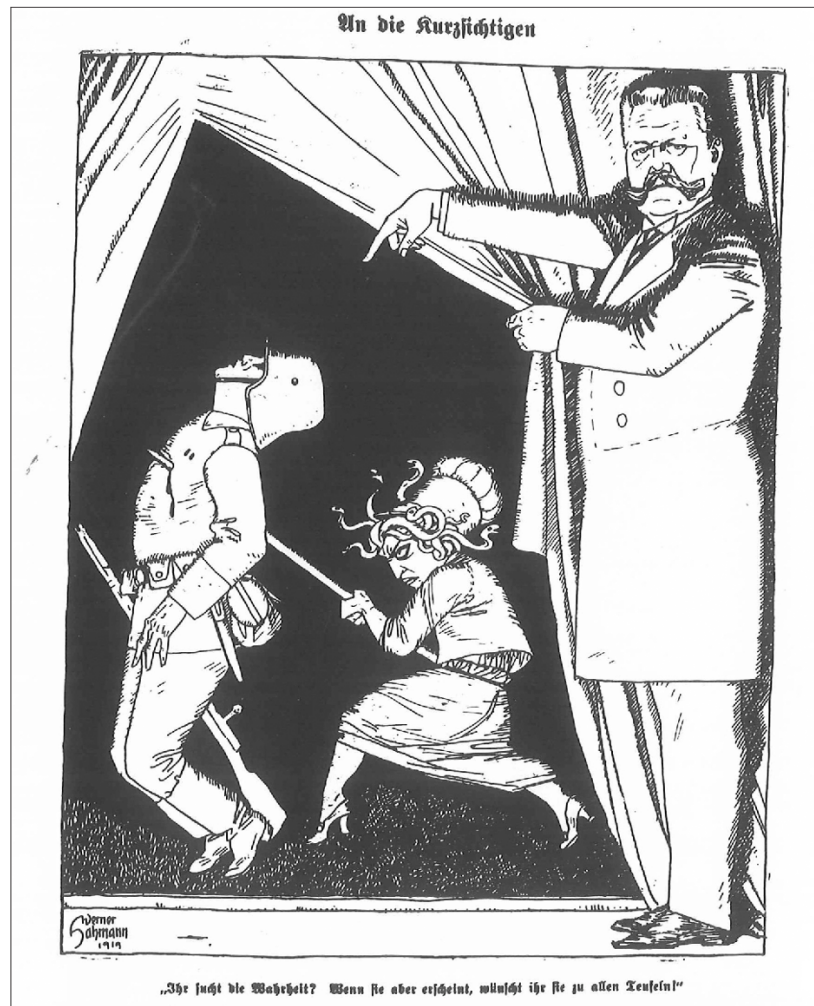
⁵⁷ Weitz, Eric D. *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy, Weimar Centennial Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

⁵⁸ Applebaum, Anne. *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Doubleday, 2020.

⁵⁹ Bevins, Vincent. "Where Conspiracy Reigns." *The Atlantic*, 16 Sept. 2020.

⁶⁰ Komireddi, K.S. *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*. Hurst, 2020.

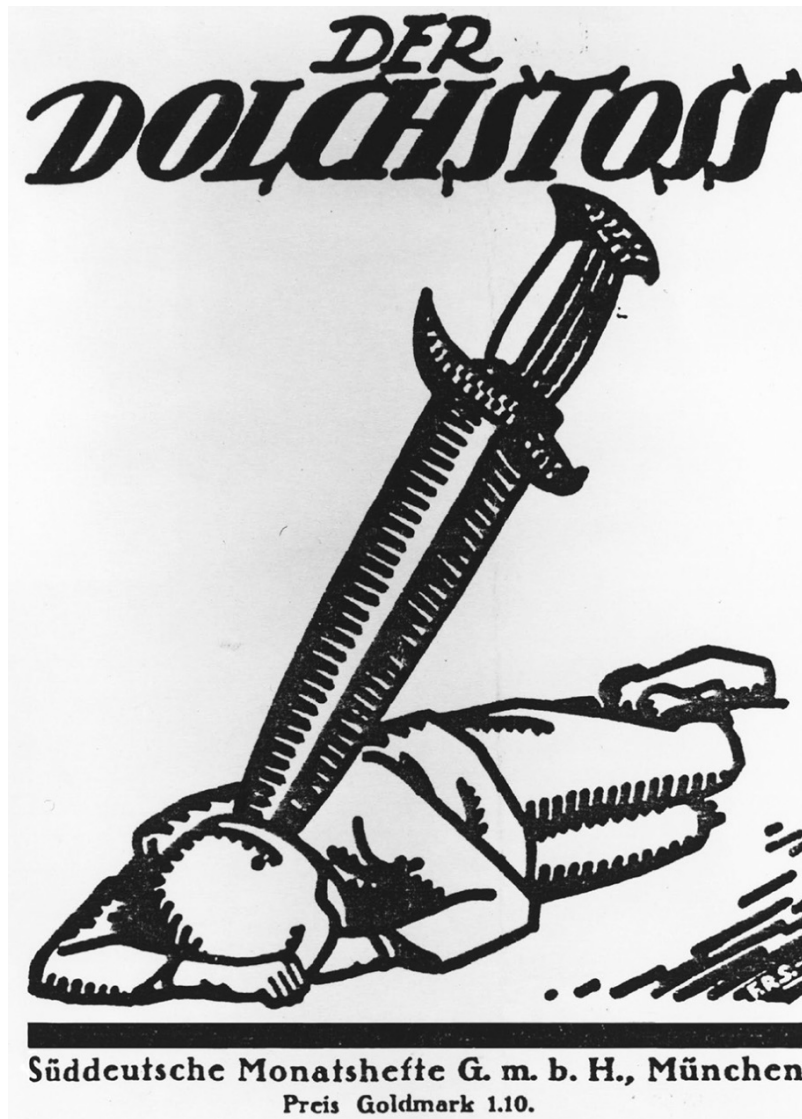
Appendix A



This is the nationalist *Kladderdatsch* magazine cover that depicted an anti-Semitic interpretation of the famous Hindenburg testimony. This shows a German infantry being stabbed in the back by a Medusa-headed female with Jewish features and a Social Democrat hat.

Hahmann, Werner. "An die Kurzsichtigen". Illustration. *Kladderdatsch*, 30 Nov. 1919, *University of Heidelberg Digital Newspaper Collection*. Accessed 31 Dec. 2020.

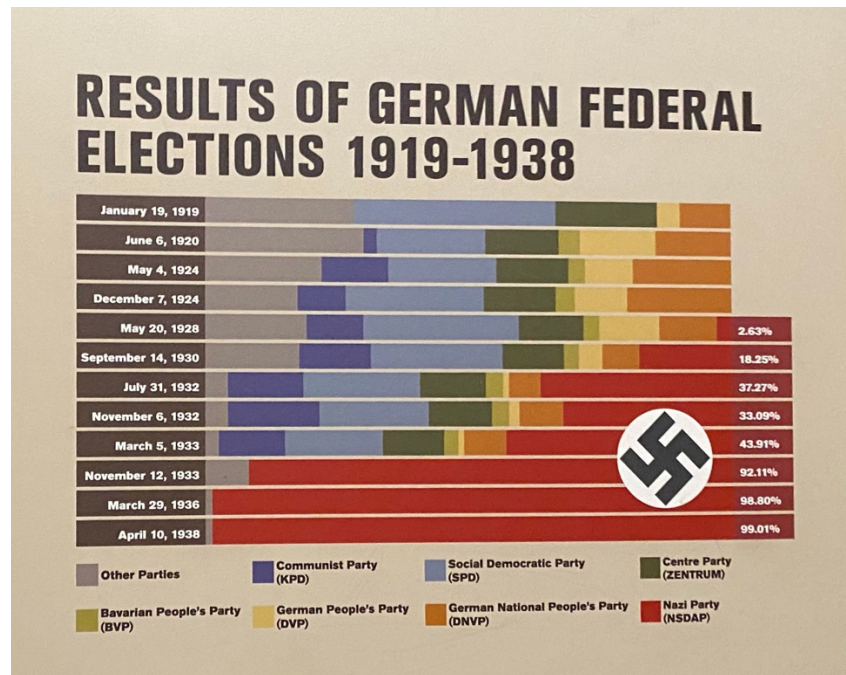
Appendix B



This was the original image that reflected the stab-in-the-back theory. A large dagger is protruding from the neck of a fallen German soldier. The image was printed on the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* Magazine's cover to reflect the idea that the German Army had been betrayed.

Nikolaus Cossmann, Paul. "The Effects of 'Dolchstosses'." *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, May 1924, marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/projects/reception/dolchstoss/245SueddeutscheMonatshefte.htm.

Appendix C



As illustrated, from the 1928 election to the 1938 election, the Nazi party continuously gained more seats in the Reichstag. The proportional representation policy from the Weimar Constitution allowed the Nazi party to exert influence even with only 2.4% of the vote in 1928, a springboard for them to further their power in subsequent elections.

Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum. "Results of German Federal Elections, 1919 – 1938."

Primary Sources

Interviews

Schloss, Eva. Personal Interview. 24 Dec. 2020.

My interview with Eva Schloss allowed me to understand the personal gravity of the Holocaust, along with how Jews were treated in the years leading up to the genocide. Her recollection of the anti-Semitism she faced in her childhood was chilling. This allowed me to contextualize pre-war Germany from the perspective of Jews.

Books

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf - My Struggle*. 1988

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* provided a chilling and chaotic account of why Hitler believed, with such certainty, that Jews and liberals were to blame for all of Germany's strife. I was amazed by how immersed Hitler was in his own false narrative. Reading excerpts from this book helped me understand why the stab-in-the-back myth was believable for many soldiers and civilians in Germany.

Maurice, Sir F. *The Last Four Months: How the War was Won*. 1919.

This book helped me understand General Sir Frederick Maurice's actual perspective regarding Germany's downfall in WWI. It helped me solidify my own argument regarding why the notion that Germany could have won was fundamentally incorrect while also allowing me to introduce multiple perspectives to my writing.

Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996), 240-245

This book provided me with excerpts of the Weimar Constitution, which had some inherent flaws. The Constitution used a 'proportional representation' system of elections, wherein citizens voted for a party, not a candidate. The percentage of total votes each party received would translate to the portion of representation they would be given in the Reichstag. This system forced the Reichstag to be too splintered, and it allowed the Nazi Party to gather seats without much support.

Unknown. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Znmaya, 1903.

This was the original Russian forged document that discussed the Jewish plot to gain control of the world. In reading its English translation, I realized how fake the suggestions were. I was able to identify the parts of the document that Hitler exaggerated and used to exploit the public to his advantage.

Newspapers and Magazines

"Hindenburg Departs." *The Times*, pp. 12.

This was written in a prominent British newspaper by a British correspondent. Many of the other primary sources regarding the Hindenburg testimonies were written in German, so this English document allowed me to understand the events as they were happening. Furthermore, the British perspective helped me analyze how foreign nations viewed the events in a humiliated Germany.

Nikolaus Cossmann, Paul. "The Effects of 'Dolchstosses'." *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, May 1924, marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/projects/reception/dolchstoss/245SueddeutscheMonatshefte.htm.

This was a magazine article that helped me understand the type of rhetoric people in power used to justify why the stab in the back theory was correct. It also helped me contextualize the conspiracy politically since this is a source directly associated with an election. This article aided the development of my argument about the fall of Weimar democracy.

"The Ebert Libel Suit." *The Times*, December 11, 1924, p. 12.

This was written in a prominent British newspaper by a British correspondent. The article covered the proceedings and discussed the public's reactions to the Ebert Libel trials' charges and decisions. It helped me realize that the people did not support Ebert, even when the law did. I found this to be a pivotal moment in the narrative, as it indicated crumbling support for the Weimar Republic and its leaders. Furthermore, many of the other primary sources regarding the libel trials were written in German, so this English document allowed me to understand the events as they were happening.

Speeches and Testimonies

Larsen, Egon. "Adolf Hitler Attempts a Coup, 1923," Eyewitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2005).

This is an eyewitness testimony of Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch, during which he attempted to seize power in Munich. The account details how aggressive and passionate Hitler and his accomplices were during the coup and how they were entirely sure to take control. I found it interesting because, in this early demonstration, Hitler did not speak of any anti-Semitic conspiracies but instead focused on attacking the Weimar Republic by spreading the stab-in-the-back theory.

Hitler, Adolf. "Hitler Campaign Speech." July 22, 1932, Waldenburg, Germany. Speech.

This speech was beneficial because it gave me the plain language that Hitler used to scapegoat the Weimar Republic as the cause of Germany's problems. It is also one of the few recorded speeches I could find that suggested anti-Semitic rhetoric in Hitler's speeches before becoming Chancellor.

Luxemburg, Rosa. "Rosa Luxemburg Condemns the SPD Government." Dec. 1918, Speech.

A Jewish Communist Leader gave this speech to condemn President Ebert and the SPD government. Luxemburg touches on the Sailors' Mutiny and other events that brought the governments' corruption into light in the speech. She argues that the unity of socialist parties was simply a ploy to suppress the imminent revolution. This speech helped me understand why such a publicly outspoken Jewish Communist would be targeted as an enemy by the Nazi party.

Paul von Hindenburg. "The Stab in the Back." (November 18, 1919). Text from: *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Available from: University of California Press. Accessed January 1, 2021.

This is the original testimony of Paul von Hindenburg during the Reich investigation, in which he continuously accuses the government of purposefully stabbing the Germans in the back. Hindenburg was the German Army General, so his testimony served as confirmation that the theory had some accuracy. It was clear to me after reading this why the German nationalists would popularize this conspiracy theory.

Reports

Kerwin, Jerome G. "The German Reichstag Elections of July 31, 1932." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, Oct. 1932, pp. 921-926.

This source gave me the number of votes that each party received during the pivotal 1932 election, and it helped me understand how the lack of a clear majority allowed Hitler to gain control. It was not written by German officials or commentators, which made the publication very objective.

Roth, Alfred. *The Jews in the Army*. German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation, 1920. <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:source-133.en.v1>, December 31, 2020.

This was the original report about Jews and their contribution to the German Army. I also read a book (secondary source) that discussed the same topic, and reading this primary source allowed me to compare the style of rhetoric between the two. The information published in this pamphlet supported my thesis because the suggestions are anti-Semitic and objectively false.

Von Baden, Max. October 3 1918. German Sources on the History of the First World War, Berlin. https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=989

This was the first of several correspondences between the German government and the United States near the end of the war. When Ludendorff told the Kaiser that any hope for victory was futile, the German government decided to negotiate with President Woodrow Wilson, hoping his 14-point philosophy would offer them a lenient peace. This primary source helped me understand the web of lies that the German military leadership spun and how those lies served as a basis for conspiracies.

Government Publications

Knox, Philander C. *Treaty of Versailles*. [Washington, Govt. print. Off, 1919] Web. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[lcn.loc.gov/43036001](https://www.loc.gov/43036001)>

I read the War Guilt Clause of the Treaty of Versailles to understand better how many reparations and territorial compromises Germany was forced to surrender. It was clear that the agreement was highly unfair to the German government, but they had no choice but to accept it. Reading the clause allowed me to understand better the anger and humiliation that many German citizens would have felt.

Diaries

Solmitz, Louise. *Diary of Louise Solmitz*. January 30, 1933. Alpha History.
<https://alphahistory.com/weimarrepublic/appointment-of-hitler-1933/>

In Louise's diary, she writes about the day Hitler was appointed Chancellor with apparent excitement. She was a schoolteacher, and her writing reflects many of the conspiracies that Hitler had used to convince everyday citizens of Weimar's illegitimacy. Specifically, she speaks about how Weimar must have purposefully brought about the economic downfall of Germany. I found it helpful to read this diary entry, as it gave me a different perspective to look at the effect of conspiracies.

Images

1932 German Election Ballot. Ballot. 1932. Germany. *Facing History*,
www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/image/1932-german-election-ballot. Accessed January 4, 2021.

This image of a 1932 Federal Election Ballot featured 36 parties, many of which existed only on paper. Since there were so many different groups, it was difficult for any single party to gain a true majority. This gave context for why Hitler had to do political maneuvering to achieve his ultimate victory.

Secondary Sources

Books

Aly, Götz. *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust*. Metropolitan Books, 2014.

The third chapter of this book was beneficial to me, as it allowed me to understand how Jews were grouped in with socialists and liberals as the enemy of Germany. The book also discussed the anti-Semitic perspectives in Germany that traced back to Otto von Bismarck's reign. The author discussed how the Nazis exploited an entire race to gain political power.

Applebaum, Anne. *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Doubleday, 2020.

This book allowed me to draw connections between the conspiracies used in Germany to destroy the Weimar Republic and the rise of similar authoritarian regimes in other nations, particularly in Eastern Europe. This book focused on more modern examples, and so it was interesting to read about how events in history often repeat themselves in disturbing ways.

Brendon, Piers. *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s*. Vintage, 2007.

The early chapters of this book provided a context for Hitler's personal motivation to rise to power. He had been recovering from the WWI trenches when the Germans surrendered. As a soldier, he, alongside many others, was confused about why the government would choose to retreat so abruptly after having been fed lies about a potential victory. I found that reading about Hitler's experience in World War I helped me understand why he would be so evil later on.

Brotherton, Rob. *Suspicious Minds: Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

This book helped me understand the human psyche for why conspiracies are so believable. It helped me realize the tangle of lies and falsehoods that were webbed into the minds of Germans to make them believe the stab-in-the-back theory. The book also gave examples of other conspiracies beyond just Germany, which helped me identify my argument's relevance.

Crowe, David M. *The Holocaust: Roots, History, and Aftermath*. Routledge, 2018.

This book provided me with quite a few direct quotes from influential personalities leading up to and during World War II. Reading Hitler's harsh anti-Semitic rhetoric in his speeches helped me understand how his passion grew over the years leading up to the war and how he managed to twist historical events to tell a false narrative. Before becoming Chancellor, Hitler did not use as much anti-Semitic rhetoric in his speeches, but it was evident in publications and propaganda. I was intrigued by this evolution in his rhetoric.

Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. Penguin, 2005.

The first few chapters of this book helped me understand how the end of WWI and the Weimar Society provided the perfect atmosphere for conspiracy-laden communication to be exploited for power. The book discussed why the Weimar Republic's weakness led to an economic and social crisis in the 1920s and 1930s. This was perhaps the most valuable secondary source in my research, as the narrative truly helped me understand the anger and frustration German citizens felt for their government.

Evans, Richard J. *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Protocols - the Stab in the Back - the Reichstag Fire - Rudolf Hess - the Escape from the Bunker*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

This book was one of the most useful in my research. It focused on the numerous conspiracies that Hitler propagated: Judeo-Bolshevism, the stab-in-the-back, the Elders of Zion. The book explained how Hitler took the small truths behind each of these – Jewish communist leaders, wealthy Jews after the war, etc. - and exaggerated them to portray Jews and Weimar as Germany's greatest enemy. The book helped me identify multiple perspectives, truths, and lies.

Friedlander, Saul. *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume 1: The Years of Persecution 1933-1939*. HarperCollins, 2009.

This book had a lot of information about the period after the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, specifically after Hitler had become Chancellor of Germany. I found Judeo-Bolshevism and Nazi propaganda analysis to be especially useful in extending my argument beyond just the initial rise of Hitler.

Fulda, Bernhard. *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

This book gave me context for the libel trials during the Weimar Republic. I learned about the event that led up to the trials and how the public responded to them. It provided primary evidence for how the trials were covered to the public and why this was perceived negatively by citizens.

Glosecki, Stephen O. *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*. Mrts, 2007, pp. 281-306.

This book was cited in some of my early research. I found it particularly useful because it gave me an understanding of many traditional German myths relevant to the conspiracies discussed in my paper. Specifically, I learned that the Siegfried myth related to the stab-in-the-back myth and thus likely invoked Germans' emotional response, making the myth more acceptable by the public.

Grady, Timothy L. *A Deadly Legacy: German Jews and the Great War*. Yale UP, 2017.

This book provided information about how Jews contributed to the German effort during World War I. I was amazed to see how patriotic Jews had been during the war, only to be chosen as the scapegoat for the loss.

Herf, Jeffrey. *The Jewish Enemy*. Harvard UP, 2009.

This book had several images of anti-Semitic propaganda that emphasized the idea that the Jews had sabotaged Germany. I also used much of the information I learned in the book regarding the 'International Jewry' to analyze why the conspiracy theories of Judeo-Bolshevism and *Dolchstoßlegende* were believable to the public.

Hett, Benjamin, C. *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic*. Henry Holt and Company, 2018.

This book was beneficial because it gave me a lot of information about the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It helped me understand how this conspiracy theory was related to the stab-in-the-back idea and how the general rhetoric of the Nazi party was not only anti-Weimar but also consistently anti-Semitic.

Komireddi, K.S. *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*. Hurst, 2020.

This book provided a short history of modern India. Despite witnessing strong secular democratic tradition since its independence, the book argues that India has begun to slip toward authoritarianism in recent decades. With Hindu nationalists gaining power in India, current events show that the government has pursued policies detrimental to India's minorities and curtailed its press freedom. This book allowed me to extend my argument to a broader context.

Vascik, George S, and Sadler, Mark R. *The Stab-in-the-Back Myth and the Fall of the Weimar Republic: A History in Documents and Visual Sources*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

The introduction to this book provided a well-written summary of the events that justified the several conspiracies that brought the Weimar Republic's fall. Furthermore, I found all the primary documents shared within the book (newspapers, propaganda, government publications, etc.) to be very useful in giving historical context and perspective to the overarching events I discuss in my paper. The narrative of this book helped me outline my paper in a manner that was easy to follow.

Weitz, Eric D. *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy, Weimar Centennial Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2018.

This book was primarily helpful in understanding why conspiracies were able to spread so readily in Weimar Germany. The book discussed how Berlin had changed after World War I and how these changes provided an excuse for anti-Semitic conspiracies. I also used several of the primary sources and quotations supplied in the book to better understand the multiple perspectives about conspiracies during the rise of Nazism.

Wistrich, Robert S. "From Weimar to Hitler." *Hitler and the Holocaust*, Modern Library, 2001, pp. 30-66.

The second chapter of this book helped me understand the chronology of how conspiracies began to spread in Germany. It also specifically focused on Hitler's use of effective communication (through Mein Kampf, publications, and propaganda) to garner public support. In other sources, Hitler's contribution was not emphasized as much compared to the more general contribution of right-wing parties, making this source uniquely valuable.

Periodicals

Bevins, Vincent. "Where Conspiracy Reigns." *The Atlantic*, September 16 2020.

This article provided a brief overview of how conspiracy theories and miscommunications have been exploited for political gain in Brazil throughout the twentieth century. More recently, there has been a resurgence of conspiracy theories against socialism, communism, and Judaism. The current Brazilian government is exploiting these to keep the population in fear and gain political leverage. I found the article very interesting to read because of its similarities to the events that had happened in Germany.

Kramer, Alan. "The Poisonous Myth: Democratic Germany's 'stab in the Back' Legend." *The Irish Times*, January 21, 2019,
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/the-poisonous-myth-democratic-germany-s-stab-in-the-back-legend-1.3751185>

This article primarily discussed how the German government spread false information throughout their state by suggesting that their army was on the brink of victory. Propaganda in Germany continuously supported that success was undoubted. Thus, when the Germans lost, the public was utterly taken aback. I found the pre-history analysis of the conspiracy theory's development to be particularly useful in my research.

Maurice, Frederick. "Says Germany Can't Fight Allies." *The New York Times*, December 6, 1919, pp. 3.

This source gave me the American perspective on the Allied victory since it was published in an American magazine. This helped me because it showed the contrast between news reports in the United States/Allied nations compared to the reports being spread through Germany, which were full of false information.

O'Malley, JP. "How Hitler Used Jews' Failed WWI-era Idealism to Feed the World's Worst Genocide." *The Times of Israel*, January 16, 2018, www.timesofisrael.com/how-hitler-used-jews-failed-wwi-era-idealism-to-feed-the-worlds-worst-genocide/. Accessed December 28, 2020.

This helped me understand the anti-Semitic aspects of conspiracy theories. I knew that the stab-in-the-back conspiracy theory was directed at socialists, liberals, and existing regime members. Still, this source allowed me to realize that the theory shifted to include Jews as well, which had the most tragic consequences.

O'Shaughnessy, Nicholas. "The Nazis' Propaganda Trick: Invite the Public to Help Create an Alternate Reality." *Slate Magazine*, March 14. 2107, slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/03/how-nazi-propaganda-encouraged-the-masses-to-co-produce-a-false-reality.html. Accessed December 28, 2020.

This source helped me understand the public's role in Weimar's fall because it identified how Nazis managed to convince German citizens of an 'alternate reality.' This helped me analyze how the public's perception of events and decisions favored the Nazi perspective, which was the catalyst for the party's rise to power.

Philpot, Robert. "75 Years After Fall of Third Reich, Hitler Conspiracy Theories Even More Viral." *The Times of Israel*, November 9, 2020, www.timesofisrael.com/75-years-after-fall-of-third-reich-hitler-conspiracy-theories-even-more-viral/. Accessed December 28, 2020.

This article helped me extend my general argument about conspiracy theories beyond just the stab-in-the-back myth. I was able to get a better understanding of the similarities between the stab-in-the-back myth and other conspiracy theories such as the JFK assassination and 9/11 theories.

Journals and Essays

Angress, Werner T. The German Army's "*Juden-zählung*" of 1916: Genesis – Consequences – Significance, *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, Volume 23, Issue 1, January 1978, Pages 117–138, <https://doi.org/10.1093/leobaeck/23.1.117>

This publication spoke about the Jewish census ordered by the War Ministry to portray Jews as Germany's saboteurs. The census instead revealed that Jews contributed patriotically to the war effort, so the government chose to hide the data and continue propagating their false narrative. This report discussed why the census caused mistrust for the government from the Jewish perspective and mistrust for Jews from the German public perspective.

Doerr, Paul W. "November 1918 as a Transition in Twentieth Century War Termination." *War and Virtual War: The Challenges to Communities*, edited by Raymond Westphal Jr, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2003, 99-107.

This essay gave me a good view as to how World War I came to an end, the dynamics of the negotiations, and the tactics used by both Germany and the Allies. Specifically, it discussed how the German military used the politicians of the Reichstaag to negotiate the terms of surrender to ensure that they would not take the blame and could maintain their position as 'heroes'. I used this essay to help me understand the context of the situation that allowed for the emergence of conspiracy theories.

Fay, Brendan. "The Nazi Conspiracy Theory: German Fantasies and Jewish Power in the Third Reich." *Library & Information History*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2019, pp. 75-97.

This journal article was extremely useful in pinpointing how conspiracies shifted over the years leading up to WWII. Specifically, the author focused on three main stages of conspiracy theory propaganda. I found the narrative to simplify the events into an apparent chronology that I aimed to introduce into my paper.