THE BUSINESS OF GENOCIDE

The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps

MICHAEL THAD ALLEN

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the text. For additional abbreviations used in the notes, see pages 287–88.

A-4	Aggregate-4 (V-2 rocket)
AG	Aktien Gesellschaft (joint-stock company)
BI	Bauinspektion (Building Inspection)
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Workers Front)
DAW	Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke GmbH (German Equipment Works)
DESt	Deutsche Erde- und Steinwerke GmbH (German Earth and Stone Works)
DWB	Deutsche Wirtschaftsbetriebe GmbH (German Commercial Operations)
GmbH	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (corporation with limited liabilities)
HAHB	Hauptamt Haushalt und Bauten (Main Office for Budgets and Building)
HSSPF	Höhere SS- und Polizei Führer (Higher SS and Police Führer)
IG	Interessengemeinschaft
IKL	Inspektion (Inspekteur) der Konzentrationslager (Inspectorate [Inspector] of Concentration Camps)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers Party)
ODBS	Ost-Deutsche Baustoffwerke GmbH (East German Building Supply Works)
OSTI	Ost-Industrie GmbH (East Industries)
RFSS	Reichsführer SS (Heinrich Himmler)
RKF	Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums (Reichskommissar for the Reinforcement of Germandom)
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office)

SA	Sturmabteilung
SS	Schutzstaffel
SSPF	SS- und Polizei Führer (SS and Police Führer)
TexLed	Textil- und Lederverwertung GmbH (Textile and Leather Utilization Ltd.)
V-2	Vergeltungswaffe-2 (rocket)
VuWHA	Verwaltung- und Wirtschaftshauptamt (Administration and Business Main Office)
VW	Volkswagenwerke
WVHA	Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt (Business Administration Main Office)
ZBL	Zentralbauleitung (Central Construction Directorate)

THE BUSINESS OF Genocide

INTRODUCTION

Before January 1944 less than a fifth of all Allied bombs dropped throughout the entire course of the war had fallen on Axis targets, but in just the next six months, between January and July, the total tonnage increased by almost half again as much. The pace and ferocity of bombing only increased from that point onward, leaving the famous "rubble mountains" in every major German city. The previous summer the Red Army had lured the Germans into a trap at Kursk, after which Hitler's armies never again mounted any major offensive against the Red Army. And yet in the spring of 1944, to the Allies' great consternation, German war production continued to rise. Moreover, the Allies were yet to land at Normandy; the Soviets had yet to launch the major offensives that would lead them on to Berlin; Wehrmacht officers had yet to stage their abortive assassination of Adolf Hitler; and Hitler and his leading paladins were increasingly enthusiastic about "wonder weapons" like the V-2 rockets and the V-1 cruise missile. These proved vain hopes, but especially for those who wished to remain blind, obvious signs of utter collapse were still several months away.

German engineers and midlevel managers were chief among those who refused to give up. Not the least of their contributions was the oversight of millions of forced laborers who had come to make up one-fourth of Germany's total work force. To German management fell the daily task of reconfiguring modern production around these laborers in a last-ditch effort to match the Allies tank for tank and plane for plane.[1] Foreign civilians made up the majority of this compulsory labor force. Limited recruitment campaigns for foreign workers had started as early as 1940, but after March 1942 a special "General Plenipotentiary for the Labor Action" began large roundups of "Eastern Workers" to ship west to German factories. Over 700,000 concentration camp prisoners labored under the most brutal conditions, and even if they formed only a small part of the overall German war economy, by 1944 hardly a single locale with any factory of note lacked a contingent of prisoners. Every morning columns of somber workers, starving and bruised, could be seen marching from fenced enclosures down the streets of ordinary German towns. By 1944 Heinrich Himmler's SS (Schutzstaffel) was parceling out these

inmates by the thousands for everything from aircraft factories to chain-gang-style construction.

This book is about the managers of that process. They worked in a special division of the SS called the SS Business Administration Main Office (Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt, or WVHA). This office spread a network of slavery across German-occupied Europe. From its pool of prisoners came the bulk of the work force for the V-2 rockets as well as other "wonder weapons." Most concentration camp prisoners, however, worked under the WVHA's elite corps of civil engineers, which specialized in breakneck construction projects, among them the conversion of underground tunnels into factories such as the eerie caverns where V-2 rocket assembly took place.

By the spring of 1944, these efforts were reaching a climax. At the time, a relatively obscure midlevel manager, Kurt Wisselinck, like so many other officers of the WVHA, was working longer and harder hours trying to squeeze production out of desperate and expiring prisoners in this system of slavery and murder. Introducing Wisselinck is perhaps a good way to introduce the WVHA as a whole, for he was a compulsive doodler and left a clear image of how the WVHA viewed itself and its mission. Amid his work Wisselinck took the time to sketch a handsome, square-jawed man on office stationery. The man gazes sidelong down a string of telephone poles with focused intensity. Rings around his eyes betray fatigue, but his determination is undimmed. He holds a telephone to his ear, and it is impossible to say whether he is giving or receiving orders, but the pose—ready for action—portrays virtues that the SS's industrial managers wished to see in themselves. The man is dynamic, the master of modern technology, and, with his high forehead and perfectly straight nose, he is a model of Teutonic racial fortitude.[2] At the margin of this sketch Wisselinck also scribbled an almost unreadable note about some kind of reimbursement for petty cash. Taken as a whole, this curious artifact bears witness to both a heroic ambience in managerial tasks imagined by SS officers like Wisselinck as well as the trivial paper pushing that filled their days, even as they presided over the life and death of human beings. The latter, the inane details of administration that made the Nazi genocide possible, has preoccupied historians since Hannah Arendt first published *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* in 1963; yet Wisselinck's steady-eyed, vigorous Nordic hero hardly squares with the image of Adolf Eichmann, who had become a vacuous, middle-aged man with thick spectacles when he was put on trial in Israel.

When Arendt wrote her biography of Eichmann, she created much more than a portrait of one desperate ex-Nazi indicted for his crimes. She fixed, for the next forty years and likely more, popular conceptions of the Nazi bu-

Sketch by Kurt Wisselinck, drawn sometime in 1944.
U.S. National Archives Microfilm Collection T-976, Roll 18.

reaucrat. Here was a failed vacuum oil salesman who had become one of civilization's all-time greatest killers. Indeed, it was almost as if the foolish Willy Loman of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, by some horrible accident, had escaped fiction and become the engineer of the Holocaust. Although Arendt by no means trivialized Eichmann or his crimes, she brought out his pathetic bathos in the same way that Miller, the playwright, had made the empty life of the Western "organization man" the subject of his drama. The major difference, of course, is that Eichmann killed other people while Loman killed himself.

Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann tapped into a widespread tendency to view midlevel managers in modern society as the twentieth century's numb and inane one-dimensional men. Eichmann was, in other words, the classic, atomized "organization man" or what Lewis Mumford called the "penny-in-the-slot automaton, this creature of bare rationalism."[3] Arendt's famous book asks us to see an utter emptiness in Eichmann's conscience and, worse, a complaisance in that emptiness. That is, she did not condemn Eichmann for having stupid, inconsistent, or condemnable ideals but for being "thoughtless," for having no ideals whatsoever. In consequence, SS men like Eichmann are not, as Arendt falsely promises, condemned for enacting evil but for being amoral; for being "perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong"; for being

afflicted by an "inability to think."[4] Thus the human engagement of Nazis in bureaucratic function—the kind that emanates from the shrewd eyes of Wisselinck's sketch—has receded from view.

A paradox has always rested at the center of Arendt's judgment, a contrast between the Kafkaesque torpor of bureaucracy and frenetic genius. First there is the miserably stupid Eichmann, afflicted by an "utter ignorance of everything that was not directly, technically and bureaucratically, connected with his job."[5] Yet simultaneously Eichmann has been accorded a perverse intelligence as vast as his worldly conscience was small. In Vienna in 1939, as he confronted the monumental task of cataloging all the Jews of Austria for deportation, he proved so innovative that contemporaries and historians alike have marveled. "This is like an automatic factory. . . . At one end you put in a Jew . . . and he goes through the building from counter to counter, from office to office, and comes out at the other end without any money, without any rights."[6] The paradox is resolved by attributing managerial creativity to the very source of its banality: "This use of human beings," as James Beniger notes about modern organization, "not for their strength or agility, nor for their knowledge or intelligence, but for the more objective capacity of their brains to store and process information."[7] Max Weber is perhaps most renowned for casting this enduring image of administrators in the famous metaphor of the iron cage. Bureaucracy supposedly constrains because it imposes cultural meaninglessness and renders the individual impotent to resist its imperatives. Thus rationality generates power precisely by driving humane sensitivity to the margins. In Nazi Germany this meant the failure to oppose the genocide.[8]

Weber introduced his metaphor of the iron cage by comparing the disenchanted but efficient bureaucrat to the universal humanity embodied in Goethe's Faust, and the comparison is instructive. At the end of Goethe's play, Faust takes part in a kind of Holocaust. We find him embarked upon the construction of a perfectly ordered society, and he directs Mephisto to remove an elderly husband and wife who have settled in the path of one of his massive social engineering projects. Unbeknownst to Faust, Mephisto murders the couple and provokes the protagonist's final grief. By contrast, the genocide was hardly such an absentminded distraction and could not have issued from any isolated individual decision. At every stage institutions, especially the SS, mediated the horror. Furthermore, the SS did not need Mephisto's supernatural smoke and mirrors. It could rely upon midlevel managers, and these, unlike Faust, rarely repented their deeds.

Historians have documented the willing and energetic identification of individuals with the new organizational milieus of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Wisselinck's sketch confirms that he did not feel

imprisoned in an iron cage. He felt empowered. Therefore, as this book examines the management of slave labor and murder, it questions not how modern structures divested Nazi "technocrats" of moral agency but rather how perpetrators endowed their institutions with personal significance.[9] Much scholarship that seeks to understand the barbarity of the SS begins by asking the question, Why were those involved not repulsed by their actions? or, to quote Hans Mommsen, "Why did so many who participated in the series of events that led directly and indirectly to the extermination of the Jews fail to withdraw their contribution either through passive resistance or any form of resistance whatsoever?"[10] Entire books are dedicated to explaining how Nazi perpetrators were able to overcome repugnance for their deeds, which presupposes that they indeed found them repugnant.[11] Historians essentially ask why SS men did not have the good sense to act as we hope we would have acted in their position, that is, as moral, upstanding citizens who would have saved fellow human beings. But the SS confronts us with a world of murderers, not good citizens; more precisely, SS men were the model citizens of a murderous regime. Instead of asking why SS men did not feel what they did not feel or why they failed to act as they might, should, or could have done, this book poses the question, Why did they believe it was the right thing to do?

We may use Arendt's biography of Eichmann as a point of departure. First, historians have long overturned her portrait of the miserably blinkered Eichmann. Hans Safrian, with much broader access to evidence than that available to Arendt, has documented the conscious moral dedication—anything but a banal "inability to think"—of Eichmann and the officers gathered around him.[12] The slave-labor moguls of the WVHA were dedicated in equal measure. Second, Arendt's picture of the perversely brilliant Eichmann, the manager of industrial genocide, invites further inquiry on one smaller point: namely, Eichmann never managed a factory in his life but made his career as a police administrator (in the SS Reich Security Main Office, or Reichssicherheitshauptamt). Unlike Eichmann, our sketch artist Wisselinck worked in real rather than metaphorical "factories of extermination." He and his co-workers shifted prisoners to labor sites across the breadth of Europe and collected their broken bodies for liquidation when this "human material" (as WVHA correspondence put it) had been used up.[13] Looking back upon the twentieth century, in which genocide now seems more likely to recur than it did to Arendt in the 1960s, some have claimed that the bureaucratic and technological nature of the Nazi genocide is the sole feature that distinguishes it from Bosnia, from Stalin's collectivization campaigns, from Rwanda, or from Pol Pot.[14] WVHA engineers arranged for the "stationary crematoria, incineration stations, and execution installations of various kinds" built in the camps after

1942.[15] Yet while Eichmann and Reinhard Heydrich have become common names of infamy, who recognizes the leaders of the WVHA: Oswald Pohl, Wilhelm Burböck, Gerhard Maurer, or Hans Kammler, let alone the obscure Kurt Wisselinck?

Why did the SS set out to broker hundreds of thousands of prisoners to Hitler's war industries? Many speculate that the SS wanted to gain "control over the economy." To me this answer is unsatisfactory, for it discounts any real motivation. The image of banal careerists immersed in the office work of murder too often dovetails with such an image of institutions in which a purely pragmatic "will to power" supposedly eclipsed decisions about moral right and wrong. Although the Third Reich, like any complex state, played host to numerous conflicts, we should not be too hasty to label it, as did Franz Neumann, as a Behemoth, eaten up from within by a war of all against all in a raw bid for power. Who would ever deny that the Third Reich was exceptionally fragmented? Neumann's great service was to point this out. Two executive organs existed for agricultural policy; there were two justice systems (SS and civilian), two armies (Waffen SS and Wehrmacht), two chancelleries (party and state). Sometimes three or four institutions overlapped, and they fought each other incessantly. But histories of the Third Reich have dwelt too much on struggles for power; likewise, they have too readily attributed inefficiency and conflict to what is commonly known as "polycracy," defined as the "rule of many" and first established by the German historian Peter Hüttenberger. The historian Peter Hayes once remarked that, on one hand, we are led to believe that Hitler's Germany was polycratic and thus incapable of concerted organizational effort because everyone struggled against his fellows; on the other hand, this small country in central Europe kept the entire world at bay well through 1942, even into 1943, while losing about the same number of soldiers in combat (3–4 million) over the course of the whole war as the number of Red Army prisoners the Wehrmacht captured in the first six months of the Soviet invasion.[16]

Beyond the Nazis' startling efficiency at many different tasks, it is in the very nature of multiple, overlapping institutions that they created as many venues for cooperation as for infighting. I would argue that "polycracy" relied on cooperation, and that this followed ideological consensus precisely because—with so many agencies—the historical actors had to constantly exercise their initiative and conscious choice. Motivation mattered more, not less, due to the higgledy-piggledy nature of National Socialist organizations. In fact, the progressive rationalization of the camps could not have proceeded without the help and encouragement of Reich ministries, private industrialists, and civilian managers.[17]

WVHA officers also made their careers in the midst of a curious generational break. They mostly came from a relatively new class, the white-collar workers whose numbers began to swell at the end of the nineteenth century and were beginning to dominate the twentieth. Often they had grown up in old-middle-class families; their fathers had been farmers, shopkeepers, or countless other petty tradesmen. The white-collar workers had deserted these backgrounds to enter the novel work-world of the factories and large urban firms with their branching managerial systems. This new class departed from Weber's (or Arendt's) image of modern managers as much as Wisselinck's determined Aryan at the field telephone departed from Kafka's pusillanimous bureaucrat. For that matter, Kafka's *Castle* describes a world of traditional administration from which modern management differed just as Ford's factories differed markedly from craft or traditional batch production. For example, as richly described by Reinhart Koselleck, the small cadre of Prussian civil servants and bureaucrats at the beginning of the nineteenth century relied on prose reports; in fact, many disdained statistical shorthands for their duties. Accordingly they sank beneath mountains of paper that recall Kafka's Sordini, whose "every wall is covered with pillars of documents tied together" and whose workroom reverberated with the thunder of falling tomes.[18] By contrast, in 1944 Wisselinck called for the WVHA to rationalize the management of Gross-Rosen and, needless to say, did not call for pillars of ledgers. He used the language of charts and graphs and imposed the terse statistical surveillance of input and output. Indeed, it is little known that scrupulous tables to tot up the "fit," "unfit," and the dead—statistics almost synonymous with the coldly efficient Nazi temperament—appeared in the concentration camps only after 1942, when WVHA officers began to take charge in an effort to serve modern industry.[19]

Kurt Wisselinck again serves as a brief introductory example of how this modern management operated within the SS. First, there is no denying that power struggles marked Wisselinck's career with the WVHA, as Neumann and Hüttenberger would quickly point out. In 1944 Wisselinck was Chief Factory Representative (*Hauptbetriebsobmann*) within the SS to a rival institution, the German Workers Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, or DAF). The DAF had crushed the German trade unions in the first year of Hitler's seizure of power, but it also demanded social welfare programs and appointed representatives like Wisselinck to enforce its decrees. Private industry disliked many of these policies. Management often viewed DAF representatives as usurpers who sought to trample its prerogatives. The DAF had also founded industries of its own, which posed unwanted competition to private corporations. (The most famous was Volkswagen, organized to manufacture the Beetle, the "peo-

ple's car.") Beyond claiming the right to place representatives in SS companies, the DAF had set up its Volkswagen plant as a model of technological efficiency and National Socialist principles.[20] The WVHA—which managed state rather than private corporations—had cause to fear the DAF's encroachment, for the WVHA's own corporations also posed as beacons of Nazi ideals. Robert Ley, head of the DAF and by all accounts an ambitious and fanatic Nazi, might well have perceived the SS as a threat to his own industrial empire and vice versa. And if it came to a pitched bureaucratic struggle, Wisselinck, as SS officer and DAF representative simultaneously, held key leverage. He might undermine the SS from within; on the other hand, he might act as an agent of the SS and undermine DAF intervention. Yet when conflict erupted, as it did in February 1944, the issue did not turn on the extension of bureaucratic influence but on ideological principle, and the outcome differed from that which orthodox interpretations of "polycracy" might lead us to expect.

Wisselinck had heard of misconduct at the SS Granite Works of Gross-Rosen. The Granite Works had started as one of the SS's first large-scale industrial projects in the concentration camps, founded to provide stone for the Nuremberg Party Rally Grounds. After the advent of total war, the SS also tried to convert its facilities to take in armaments production. Wisselinck routinely visited such SS factories on rotation, but this time his trip was different. He had put through a special request to the WVHA to inspect Gross-Rosen because he sensed a severe transgression of DAF policies toward civilian employees. Since its inception, the quarries had worked prisoners to death, but this was not what Wisselinck considered unjust. Rather, his interest had been piqued by rumors that Gross-Rosen was not exploiting the prisoners enough. Thus, when he heard that no one had distributed clothing confiscated from Jews to SS manager-trainees as specified, he acted quickly to make the factory conform to Nazi policy. What he learned upon arrival further appalled him. Trainees complained that their instructor was a drunk and was sleeping with his secretary. Wisselinck also suspected embezzlement. In addition, he alerted the headquarters of the WVHA that one cook seemed to favor the prisoners: "The apprentices complain that they are being withheld additional portions of potatoes with the justification that there are no more left, while it can be observed that the prisoners receive the food as additional rations."[21]

Anyone who has seen documentary footage of the camps knows what the prisoners began to look like in 1944, emaciated skins stretched over skeletal bodies. Mortality statistics, which fluctuated wildly, were running at about 10 percent a year at Gross-Rosen. The WVHA tracked them carefully.[22] Something as simple as an occasional potato could have made the difference be-

tween surviving the last year of war or perishing of starvation and disease within a few weeks. Furthermore, a steady diet—even of leftovers—might have even benefited production. Gross-Rosen's managers in fact mentioned this in their own defense. They complained that Wisselinck's presence endangered efficiency. To no avail. The head of the entire WVHA, Oswald Pohl, personally communicated his "sharpest disapproval" to the Granite Works.[23] The message was clear: nothing should be given to starving prisoners. So important were the issues involved that the chief of the WVHA backed Wisselinck, a DAF representative, against others in the SS's own management.[24]

If a war of all-against-all defined the Nazi period, does this explain Pohl's and Wisselinck's deeds? After all, polycratic interpretations of National Socialism can account for cooperation. Institutions often worked together to eliminate mutual rivals and thus increase their own influence. Alliances of convenience were indeed common. But Wisselinck's trip to Gross-Rosen did nothing to enhance the DAF's or the WVHA's authority, nor did the pursuit of power seem to define his purpose. Wisselinck neither extended the DAF's reach nor advanced the WVHA's factory operations. At stake was not the expansion of bureaucratic authority; rather these events proceeded along ideological lines in which the DAF and WVHA shared common commitments. Within the WVHA—and other Reich institutions as well—most believed that the bereavement of concentration camp prisoners was just. Although one cook at Gross-Rosen saw things somewhat differently, Wisselinck mobilized the entire apparatus of SS bureaucracy against her: he wrote reports, compiled statistics, called in his superior. In the end he actually demanded the "rationalization" of the camp's kitchen. More strict bookkeeping would ensure that such "embezzlement" could not happen again.[25] Moreover, if Wisselinck had "just followed orders" as a man constrained to an "iron cage," he might have overlooked the camp entirely. His visit was a matter of personal initiative, and he comported himself not like Arendt's banal Eichmann, but as an interventionist manager who thought it necessary to act on principle. He went out of his way to ensure that Gross-Rosen's management *did not* help prisoners to survive, to insure that it *did* give confiscated Jewish belongings to SS recruits; and he carried through with his inspection in spite of complaints that he was actually endangering efficiency.

Skeptical readers will doubt that Wisselinck was really ideologically engaged in the whole matter. Might he not simply have been striving for his superiors' attention? Yet at about this time, at no one's bidding, he wrote a lengthy memorandum with no apparent reader other than himself: "The business undertakings of the Schutzstaffel are the best means to breath new life into National Socialist ideals, to let them become reality, to blaze new trails

in the area of applied socialism. We must live socialism as the deed! Our example must spur other corporations forward to emulate us in order to see the growth of a healthy, satisfied, and happy *Volk*." Wisselinck operated neither as an agent of the DAF nor as an agent of the SS but as both, for he went on to express spontaneous enthusiasm for a plexus of ideologies that formed the raison d'être of the SS's business enterprises *and* those of the DAF as well. Every SS company should offer its German employees generous social benefits (programs championed by the DAF). In turn, he connected these to Nazi racial imperialism. Affordable SS housing should encourage Aryan families "rich in children" and tie them to their "Motherland." "Blood and Soil" should unite the Nazi homestead and further garner loyalty to the factory community, a microcosm of the larger national community of Nazism. Before Hitler's rise to power, Wisselinck claimed, "primitive housing" had proved a "breeding ground of immorality" and a "feeding trough [*Nährboden*] of Marxism."[26] He also blamed banks, thus condemning communism and capitalism in the same breath. Ideals like these could make the distribution of leftover potatoes seem like an issue of national security and cultural renaissance.

As extraordinary as Wisselinck's manifesto may sound, it was by no means unusual within the WVHA, and we will have ample opportunity to encounter other midlevel managers as ideologues. Of special interest here, Wisselinck was fixated not by one monomaniacal drive but by many, mingling them in his manifesto to the point of incoherence. Much has been written of single ideas that caused the worst crimes of National Socialism. If Arendt or "polycratic" interpreters of Hitler's Germany have erred by underplaying agency and motivation, others err by attributing the Holocaust to one "crisis of German ideology" and one alone, whatever it may be. Most prominent among them are "anti" ideologies: anti-Bolshevism, anticapitalism, anti-Semitism, and antimodernism.[27] Similarly, some authors attribute the violence of Nazi hatred to a pathological "fear" of the Third Reich's victims.

While no one should discount the Nazis' rabid suppression of communism, their hatred of Jews, their fantasies of a romantic German past, and their intervention in the national economy, Wisselinck did not apply himself so energetically merely because he feared this or that. It is well to remember the words of Richard Evans regarding right-wing violence: "The murderers' actions, and the brutal language accompanying their deed, suggest that it was not fear, but loathing and contempt, which motivated them."[28] Wisselinck's proactive assertion of identity filled his prose and his actions. This was Nazi activism, not reaction: "The SS . . . must be an example and ever again an example in social policy."[29] Even in 1944, when the Reich was already beyond saving, he still saw himself in the vanguard of social change.

I have used the admittedly awkward term "plexus of ideologies" because I believe the image of a complex network, one with branching, even partial systems of ideals, provides a better understanding of how organization men like Wisselinck worked. They operated within a broad current whose tenets sometimes ran together, sometimes followed parallel courses, and sometimes collided. Wisselinck did not become an accomplice to murder by following any single tributary but by working within the whole. He felt competent to switch and modify his course continually and was encouraged by the National Socialist emphasis upon passion and activism over logic and consistency, upon syncretism over synthesis. On the other hand, this did not mean that the WVHA, or any other National Socialist institution for that matter, acted arbitrarily. The organization as a whole tended toward efficient action when multiple ideals, individuals, and institutions reinforced each other. In the case of Gross-Rosen, Wisselinck was able to mobilize his superior officers through the WVHA's bureaucratic edifice in favor of DAF policies. The outcome was no accident. Shared ideals reached into constituencies outside the WVHA and lent coherency to this collective action. A useful metaphor is perhaps a river delta in which currents may eddy or alter direction but nevertheless eventually and inevitably issue into the ocean. Precisely because of the importance of consensus, Nazi ideology issued, finally, in one massive sea of blood. Understanding the multiple valence of ideological tributaries, their conjunctions and contradictions, best explains why SS men like Wisselinck chose to do what they did.

Questioning why they did what they did brings us directly to the junction of modern organization and ideological motives. This book argues that ideology is embedded in the quotidian tasks of bureaucratic operations because it lies at the root of collective identity and consensus. The function of consensus is best understood by considering the nature of modern management, whose techniques transform local, particular experiences and artifacts into fungible information amenable to collation, interchangeability, and abstract transfer. Above all modern organizations do so through statistics. At issue here is the role of consensus in evoking individuals' identification with impersonal institutions and abstract information. The most banal statistics have always depended upon the input, trust, and collective work among white-collar workers.[30] At the juncture of personal as well as collective trust among managers, ideological consensus has always played an indispensable role by helping render the information they worked with fungible. Information could be more readily transferred when SS officers trusted each other than when they had cause to doubt each others' motives. Ideals also served a function by animating large bureaucratic hierarchies—which are otherwise impersonal

and even alienating—with a sense of individual purpose, a sense of personal mission. SS men worked harder and information within the WVHA flowed better when they believed in what they did. Again, I do not argue that one motive inspired all SS men; likewise no one individual needed to identify with each and every principle of the SS. Above all, ideology cannot be reduced to a single-minded goal, which organizations then set about to instrumentalize. But the WVHA functioned best when it succeeded in evoking the active identification of its officers—for whatever reason—with elements of its social cause. Once officers identified with the institution and their fellows, if only with fragments of larger, grander visions, their specialized skills could be mobilized in unison for the whole.[31]

Managing concentration camp industry involved three separate professional communities, each with its own distinct style and career patterns. Their interconnections, conflicts, and consensus all shaped the brutality of the concentration camps and slave labor. Two developed internally to the SS. First were the managers of the WVHA—businessmen, accountants, and engineers, among them Kurt Wisselinck. Second were the Kommandanten, the leadership core of the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps. The third community was external to the SS and entered only when the German economy plunged into total war late in the winter of 1941–42, namely, the state planners and industrialists within the Reich Ministry for Armaments and Munitions. Each community had its own vision of how to foster managerial teamwork and marshal "organization men." In general, these overseers of forced labor considered themselves idealists and wished to convert their visions into reality. Their ideals were manifold, as Wisselinck's manifesto has already hinted.

Some currents developed uniquely within the SS. First, the SS consciously set out to remake Europe in its own image. Police surveillance of the private and public lives of citizens in the name of "German values" was only one aspect of this drive. The SS also wished to build what came to be known as the "New Order," a program both to extirpate "unworthy" races from eastern Europe and to place model Nazi communities in their stead. Wisselinck's manifesto referred to this program when he wrote of "settlement houses . . . to maintain a perpetual stream of fresh [Aryan] blood."[32]

Second, a strong commitment to the Führer principle—a doctrine of Nazi leadership and national unity—drove decision-making and organizational structure. The Führer principle was Janus-faced, as much a communitarian ideology as a spur to "internecine strife," for it stressed unity and individual initiative at one and the same time. It did so by emphasizing that individual leadership grew out of collective identity. Every "Führer" conceived himself as the manifestation of the "will" of his subordinates; likewise, he conceived

himself as a man in confluence with the will of his own "leaders." Adolf Hitler sat at the top, nothing less than the supposed embodiment of the historical mission of the German will. The Führer principle prompted individuals both to act spontaneously *and* to close ranks obediently, to act out *but also* to act in communion with other like-minded men. This dovetailed with the very structures of modern, centralized bureaucracy, which depend on the creative initiative of organization men but which focus that initiative upon collective endeavor in order to accomplish what no single individual can do alone. As Ronald Smelser has elegantly put it, "One could hope for success not as an isolated atom in a highly individualistic society, where failure or bad luck could bring precipitate social destruction, but rather as an integral part of a dynamic organization reaching out in an almost chiliastic fashion for total transformation of the world."[33] Oswald Pohl, the chief of the WVHA, made the very structure of his institutions and corporations reflect this goal.

Third, as we have seen, the SS emphasized the socialism in National Socialism. WVHA managers wished their businesses to serve goals of Nazi community without regard for pecuniary gain. They resented the threat that international markets posed to homogeneous "German" culture. Whether profitable or not, the SS wanted to manufacture a National Socialist renaissance, and they suspected businessmen of being loyal only to their purse strings. If we were to describe this as an anti-ideology, cultural anticapitalism is perhaps least awkward. It differed from anticapitalism of other stripes. The SS did not oppose monopolies or joint-stock companies, as did many liberal critics, because of the threat they posed to individualism; nor did the SS wish to redistribute the means of production to the working class, as did many socialists and communists; rather the WVHA opposed capitalism because of the threat that it posed to a homogeneous German culture.

For this doctrine, "productivism" serves as a better label. Productivist ideology meant that companies should not so much do business and make products as make Germans and Germanness. It promised to make the factory floor into a system with which to stamp managers and workers alike with an indelible national harmony. In industrial terms, this meant an elevation of factory organization and technology as a supreme concern over consumption, marketing, or distribution, which both Richard Overy and Mary Nolan have noted from quite different methodological approaches.[34] As Detlev Peukert pointed out, "The consumer-goods market promotes the individualism and freedom of movement that the political system [attempted] to obliterate."[35] This was another reason why liberal capitalism disgusted SS men like Wisselinck: it had spawned the "vulgar" street life of the Weimar Republic, materialistic pursuits, and a corresponding proliferation of tastes. When Nazis

imagined revolutionizing consumption, rigidly standardized products like the VW Beetle or the Volks Radio were the result. These foresaw little room for consumer choice. The national organization in charge of distribution in Nazi Germany actually advertised its services as delivering the "IMPULSES OF THE ECONOMY to the daily life of the people" (emphasis in original).[36]

By contrast to the varieties of consumer impulse and expression, a well-run factory displayed unified organization and bent the material world to a collective human will. Specialized machine tools, standardization, and assembly lines had captured the fantasy of Hitler in the 1920s. The SS followed this lead. In 1924, just a month before delivering his first political speech, Heinrich Himmler had written to a close friend, "So you're reading Henry Ford . . . one of the most worthwhile, weighty, and most spirited predecessors in our fight."[37] It is significant that Himmler praised Ford for his "spirit" and not his wealth. To many ardent National Socialists, Ford's River Rouge was not so much a business as a manifestation of supreme will and the harbinger of a new world. To the WVHA, production was the forge of national identity, not first and foremost an act of economic output. (The WVHA actually pooh-poohed the dictates of economic rationality.) Wisselinck was tapping into this productivism when he proselytized for the modern factory as the locus of ideal German community.

By praising Ford, who had popularized these techniques, Himmler was merely echoing the widespread enthusiasm for the visionary potential of modern production. Nazi productivism reinforced a strong current of modernization, a fourth mission within the multivalent ideology of the WVHA. Even in seemingly old-fashioned industries like stone quarrying, the SS tried to introduce modern machines, despite their unsuitability to the conditions of forced labor. Modern factories may be defined by their operations, which took in raw materials and yielded finished product in a continuous stream, displacing traditional, small-scale batch or craft production. New technologies had made this possible by substituting machines for the work of human hands as well as for the human regulation of labor. As a vanguard of National Socialism, the SS wished to claim such futurism for itself. Jeffrey Herf has coined the phrase "reactionary modernism" to describe this impulse. In his view, the Nazis sought to reject Enlightenment doctrines of reason and individualism while using technological rationality in order to pursue their preposterous, irrational dreams. Who could deny this was true? But Herf also proposes that this represented a burdensome ideological contradiction. How can one reject the Enlightenment, equated more or less straightforwardly with modernity, but then champion technological prowess? This is a dilemma, however, only if we mistake the Enlightenment for modernity in general and mistake tech-

nological rationality as the pinnacle of all human reason derived from the Enlightenment. By and large, National Socialists were not among those who indulged in these assumptions. Moreover, the supposed contradiction between technical rationality and romanticism never bothered industrialists in Germany or anywhere else. As such it was never unique to the German engineering profession or National Socialism and seems to have manifested itself already during the French Revolution as well.[38] At least in the way that SS men spoke and acted, modernity had less to do with eighteenth-century political philosophy and more to do with a claim to futurism staked in terms of their mastery of the machines and modes of organization new to the twentieth century.

Ernst Jünger, for example, captured this fascination more than fifty years ago in terms that professional historians and sociologists would summarize again in the "modernization" debates of the past three decades. With near exaltation, he wrote: "Here the following must be named: the technological engagement of industry, economy, agriculture, traffic, administration, science, public opinion—in short, each special substance of modern life in a self-enclosed and elastic space, inside of which a common character of power manifests itself."[39] Jünger was a novelist and a man of letters, but the phenomenon he celebrated filled the imaginations of quite ordinary German managers and engineers. Witness Wisselinck's sketch. Their organizations and the novel technology that they commanded, not to mention the new social group of white-collar workers to which they belonged, had changed the visage of what all recognized as the "modern age." The SS officers at the focus of this book were no different. They consciously sought to articulate and construct a Nazi modernity and heralded their institutions and technological systems with no less enthusiasm than Jünger, even if they did so in much worse prose.

One last ideal appears in this study only in context with the other four, not because it is of lesser significance but because it pervaded all other ideological currents. Its separate treatment could not do justice to its influence. Namely, those who led SS technological enterprise shared a deep-seated belief in their own racial supremacy. They therefore believed in the legitimacy of murder and the forced labor of Jews and whoever did not count as "Aryan." Describing their sentiments as racial supremacy in no way downplays their anti-Semitism. Rather Nazi racial supremacy was much more prodigious in generating contempt for human life than an anti-ideology alone can account for. If we hold, as does Elie Wiesel, that "those who speak about the 11,000,000 [total victims of Nazi extermination] do not know what they are talking about . . . it is 6,000,000 Jews," we can never explain why the WVHA worked myriad concentration camp inmates to death and not only Jews.[40] There were differ-

ences of degree and number, to be sure, but slave labor was not a discriminating business in the fate that awaited the SS's victims.

Neither racial supremacy nor an unswerving belief in modernization was in any way peculiar to the SS. These two ideals were discussed in normal managerial communities throughout Germany and the West even before the Nazi era.[41] The SS rarely proved creative except in radicalizing general sentiments, and here again ideological consensus comes to center stage. Only rarely did outsiders, even powerful ones, oppose SS aims. As the movement to write the "history of everyday life" (*Alltagsgeschichte*) in the 1980s has shown, the Nazis proved successful in prosecuting only those policies that encountered no inveterate resistance in the population at large. Citizens on the sidelines seldom rose to impassioned activism in the Nazi cause; for this, only a few institutions like the SS were necessary. But the Nazis' most fanatic policies proved most successful when citizens had nothing against them or passively acquiesced.[42] What was true of Nazi society at large was no different in the microcosm of concentration camp industry. On one hand, the power of convictions could stir some individuals to resistance, but this happened rarely. On the other hand, ideological consensus moved others to passive toleration and cooperation. Some individuals opposed the SS on certain issues while complying on others. Put simply, at every stage in the WVHA's history, whether it lost or gained influence, ideology and its multivalent content mattered.

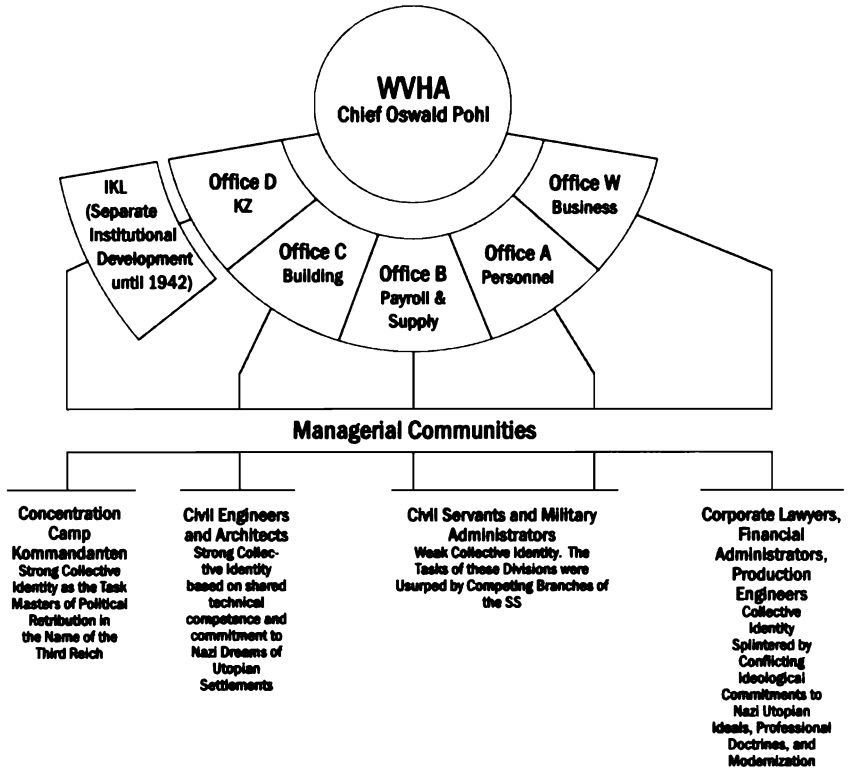
Within the WVHA a distinct community of officers inhabited each departmental division. Each depended on its members to solve problems with expert knowledge and to forge a working consensus—that is, on the ability to act on ideals as well as mere issues of problem solution. Failure could result from a deficit of either sound business skills or consensus, while neither alone sufficed in and of itself to ensure success. The WVHA's construction corps presents an example of managerial success in which both consensus and skill coincided. Here Oswald Pohl recruited a tightly knit cadre of civil engineers and architects who had already worked together in a parallel branch of the state, the German Air Force. They represented the highest concentration of technically trained officers within the WVHA and, in all likelihood, within the SS as a whole. Not insignificantly, they came from an engineering tradition with the longest-standing connection to state service and the military. Further, a significant proportion had overt commitments to the Nazi cause. Many were activists. Their chief, Hans Kammler, was able to inspire their cooperation, and their success during the war was horrific for its brutal efficiency. Here "extermination through work" became a reality as civil engineers managed productive labor and genocide on the same projects.

If the WVHA's corps of engineers fostered concerted action through shared

goals, other managerial echelons proved dysfunctional due to ideological strife. For example, during the general shortage of all white-collar personnel in Germany after 1936, Oswald Pohl had to look for competent factory managers outside his close circle of SS ideologues but failed to elicit their dedication to the plexus of ideological goals embedded in the SS's prison factories. As a result, dedicated managers soon complained that they could not work with the newcomers; meanwhile, the newcomers complained about the hostility of the old guard. No one worked together, and their enterprises fell apart accordingly.

It was part of the absurdity of Nazi Germany that prisoners paid most dearly for such mismanagement. Among Kommandanten, the commanders of the concentration camps, and their staffs a core had formed who shared a homogeneous sense of purpose, albeit one that demanded the brutalization of prisoners. On the other hand, the Kommandanten had few managerial skills, administrative or technical. They excelled only at terror and wreaked havoc on industrial production. In fact, industries proved successful in utilizing the SS's slaves only when they removed concentration camp guards from the direct technical supervision of production (dealt with in chapters 6 and 7). Most SS factories crumbled along fault lines of managerial inconsistency and conflicting commitments. They failed, however, not because rational managers cannot operate under fanatic ideological influences, as is commonly held. Rather, SS industry broke down because SS managers came to loggerheads over antinomic issues, issues in which they believed.

This book is organized narratively and begins with the origins of the WVHA in the SS administration of the early thirties. It ends with the utter collapse of the Third Reich, which brought the SS's empire down with it. Throughout, however, the emphasis falls on what it meant to be an SS "organization man" and how SS managers strove to establish their own identity as members of a modern German "race" by dehumanizing the Third Reich's outcasts. This is not to "adopt" the viewpoint of the criminal but to lay bare the capacity of otherwise normal, modern organizations for barbarity. The SS Business Administration Main Office is of twofold importance. First, it reveals the historically unique use of modern means in slave labor and genocide. Second, this institution operated with the same basic structure as any other modern organization in the West. In this sense its managers were "ordinary men." Because the WVHA worked in such familiar ways, here the Nazi catastrophe cannot be conceived as an unfathomable exception in Western history.[43] "I suppose you would feel better if I told you all those who implemented the holocaust were demented," Raul Hilberg once remarked.[44] Had they been, the task of maintaining a just and equitable society would certainly



Community structure of the WVHA after 1942. Drawing by Steve Hsu.

be much easier. We would only have to round up the cretinous madmen who conform to the caricatures of evil presented as the bad guys in American Saturday morning cartoons. Sadly, however, the task is much more difficult and requires understanding how men and institutions that differed little from those found in any other modern industrialized society became the eager tools of genocide.