

(Read free) Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust

Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust

Evgeny Finkel

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#902010 in Books Finkel Evgeny 2017-03-07Original language:English 9.30 x 1.10 x 6.10l, #File Name: 0691172579296 pagesOrdinary Jews Choice and Survival During the Holocaust | File size: 24.Mb

Evgeny Finkel : Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ordinary Jews: Choice and Survival during the Holocaust:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerGood.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. a tale of three citiesBy Michael LewynThis book addresses Polish Jews' survival strategies during the Holocaust from a political science perspective, focusing on three large cities with Nazi-created ghettos: Cracow, Bialystok, and Minsk.Finkel suggests that these three cities' radically different political histories shaped the actions of ordinary Jews. Minsk had been part of the Soviet Union for decades and had a highly Russified, assimilated Jewry.

Krakow was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which encouraged Jews to assimilate into the broader society, but allowed religious freedom) and then the Polish Republic; as a result, its Polish-speaking Jewish population was less secular than that of Minsk but still somewhat integrated into the general society. By contrast, Bialystok was under oppressive Russian rule for centuries, and then part of Poland. As a result, Bialystok's Jewish population was Yiddish-speaking, physically segregated from Christian Poles, and generally did not get along well with the Polish population. According to Finkel, these distinctions affected Jews' survival strategies. In Minsk (and to a lesser extent Cracow) Jews who were able to obtain forged papers had a chance of blending into the general population. So Jews were more willing to escape the ghetto and try to "pass" as non-Jews. (However, the risk of being "outed" by non-Jewish acquaintances still meant that escape was not risk-free; in fact, some Polish-speaking Jews avoided this problem by moving to Germany and posing as Polish laborers, deciding that Germans would be unlikely to tell the difference between a Christian and a Jewish Pole). By contrast, Bialystok Jews could never become Poles; most of them did not speak flawless Polish, have Polish friends, or know enough about Polish Christian culture to plausibly pretend to be Christian Poles. However, Bialystok Jews' community cohesion enabled them to create powerful communal institutions that made ghetto life less unbearable than in the other two cities.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. a very well-written book on this topic

By K. Kennedy "Ordinary Jews" by Evgeny Finkel is a study of three ghettos during World War II, and his comparison of their communities, and the options available to their residents regarding their chances of survival. Recognizing that luck and fate play a role, Mr. Finkel provides a very readable analysis of individuals and the choices they made in seeking to survive, and negates many of the myths relating to why some survived and others didn't, as well as about the purported passivity of the Jews when facing wholesale slaughter.

Focusing on the choices and actions of Jews during the Holocaust, *Ordinary Jews* examines the different patterns of behavior of civilians targeted by mass violence. Relying on rich archival material and hundreds of survivors' testimonies, Evgeny Finkel presents a new framework for understanding the survival strategies in which Jews engaged: cooperation and collaboration, coping and compliance, evasion, and resistance. Finkel compares Jews' behavior in three Jewish ghettos--Minsk, Krakw, and Biaystok--and shows that Jews' responses to Nazi genocide varied based on their experiences with prewar policies that either promoted or discouraged their integration into non-Jewish society. Finkel demonstrates that while possible survival strategies were the same for everyone, individuals' choices varied across and within communities. In more cohesive and robust Jewish communities, coping--confronting the danger and trying to survive without leaving--was more organized and successful, while collaboration with the Nazis and attempts to escape the ghetto were minimal. In more heterogeneous Jewish communities, collaboration with the Nazis was more pervasive, while coping was disorganized. In localities with a history of peaceful interethnic relations, evasion was more widespread than in places where interethnic relations were hostile. State repression before WWII, to which local communities were subject, determined the viability of anti-Nazi Jewish resistance. Exploring the critical influences shaping the decisions made by Jews in Nazi-occupied eastern Europe, *Ordinary Jews* sheds new light on the dynamics of collective violence and genocide.

"A political scientist turns fresh eyes on the problem of how European Jews responded to the Holocaust as it was unfolding. . . . Of much interest to students of modern history but also to those engaged in humanitarian relief efforts, refugee relocation, and the like."--Kirkus

"Instances of . . . mass hysteria have been appearing on a weekly basis, revealing an historical illiteracy so vast that it could contain 1,000 books on the Holocaust. If the ignorant could read only one of them . . . *Ordinary Jews* would be an excellent way to begin their education."--Stefan Kanfer, *City Journal*

"Finkel provides a fresh and often fascinating analysis. . . . He makes a compelling case that the response of Jews was based in no small measure on their experiences before the war."--Glen Altschuler, *Jerusalem Post*

"Finkels book on an individuals choice and survival during the Holocaust focuses on how victims from three Jewish ghettos--Minsk, Krakw, and Bialystok--reacted in response to danger from the Nazis and their allies. . . . This study is fascinating in how Finkel weaves personal narratives from the victims with social science foundations in order to reach some macro conclusions. . . . Finkels book is provocative and worth reading for scholars looking to understand the victims within these wretched ghettos."--Choice

"As more Holocaust works push through the barrier of the Holocaust as unknowable, restoring Jewish life and agency before, during--and after--the Shoah is essential. Finkels work makes a solid contribution in this regard without losing sight of the people, actions, policies, and laws most responsible for creating the contexts of such life-or-death choices."--Peter Admirand, *Reading Religion*

From the Back Cover "Why do only some people targeted in genocide fight back? In this sensitive and original investigation, Evgeny Finkel shows that resistance to violence is a function of the skills and habits at a community's disposal. Finkel reveals the pattern of constrained choices that drove communal behavior during the Holocaust and, in the process, returns the idea of agency to discussions of victimhood and survivorship."--Charles King, author of *Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams*

"How do people react when they are targeted for genocide? Who cooperates with the killers? Who resists? Who flees and who simply tries to cope? In *Ordinary Jews*, Finkel's answer combines compelling historical

evidence, convincing theory, and a moving narrative. This is a truly extraordinary book--rich with lessons for us all."-- Nancy Bermeo, University of Oxford "In this arresting and important book, Evgeny Finkel explains why individuals choose different courses of action when targeted by genocidal violence. Skillfully merging a large body of testimonial evidence from the Holocaust with archival-based case studies and statistical analysis of new datasets, Finkel highlights the critical roles of prior political experience and broad social integration. Ordinary Jews is a landmark work, as moving as it is incisive."--Stathis Kalyvas, Yale University "Superb and pathbreaking, Ordinary Jews places victim agency at the center of its analysis. For too long genocide scholars have been concerned with uncovering the sources of perpetrator behavior while ignoring victim reactions as the genocide unfolded. The individual victim stories told here are heartrending yet fascinating in their complexity. The narrative was so compelling, I was reluctant to put the book down."--Manus Midlarsky, Rutgers University "This is a very important and fascinating contribution to our understanding of genocide and the choices made not only by the perpetrators and bystanders but also by the victims. In explaining the different types of strategies the targets of genocide might use to ensure their survival, ranging from compliance to resistance to evasion, this compelling analysis returns agency to the victims."--Anna Grzymala-Busse, Stanford University

About the Author Evgeny Finkel is assistant professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University.