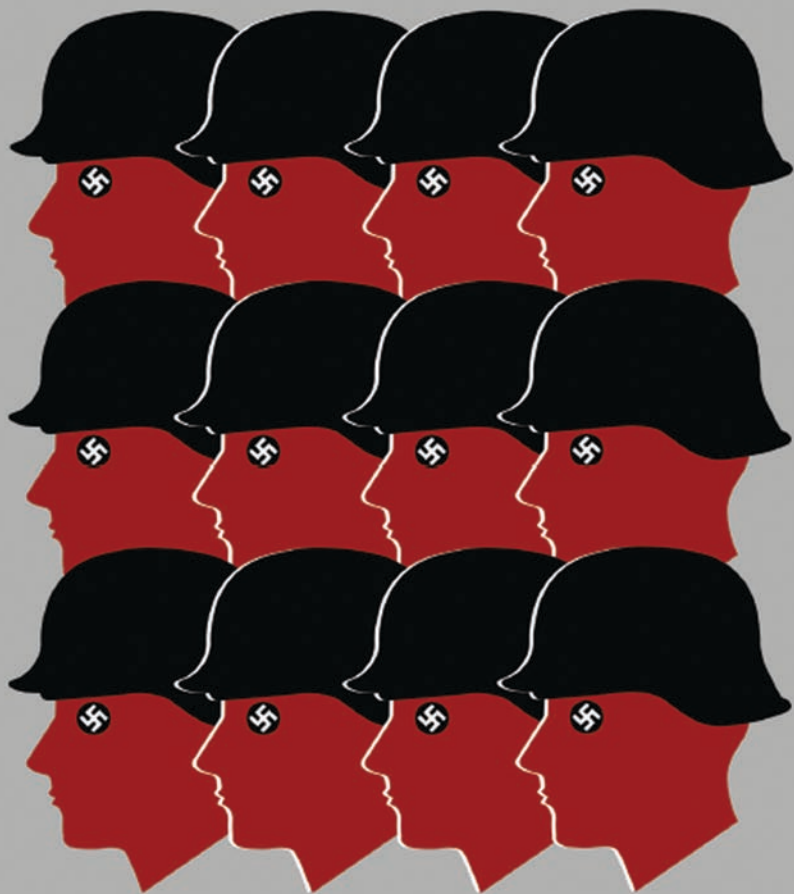


A MACAT ANALYSIS

CHRISTOPHER BROWNING'S
ORDINARY MEN





An Analysis of

**Christopher R.
Browning's**

Ordinary Men

Reserve Police Battalion 101 and
the Final Solution in Poland

James Chappel
with
Tom Stammers



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THE MACAT LIBRARY

The Macat Library is a series of unique academic explorations of seminal works in the humanities and social sciences – books and papers that have had a significant and widely recognised impact on their disciplines. It has been created to serve as much more than just a summary of what lies between the covers of a great book. It illuminates and explores the influences on, ideas of, and impact of that book. Our goal is to offer a learning resource that encourages critical thinking and fosters a better, deeper understanding of important ideas.

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Three allow us to fully understand a problem; three more give us the tools to solve it. Together, these six skills make up the

PACIER model of critical thinking. They are:

ANALYSIS – understanding how an argument is built

EVALUATION – exploring the strengths and weaknesses of an argument

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PROBLEM-SOLVING – producing strong solutions

REASONING – creating strong arguments

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CRITICAL THINKING AND *ORDINARY MEN*

Primary critical thinking skill: EVALUATION

Secondary critical thinking skill: INTERPRETATION

Of all the controversies facing historians today, few are more divisive or more important than the question of how and why the Holocaust occurred.

What led thousands of Germans – many of them middle-aged reservists with little Nazi zeal – to willingly commit acts of genocide? Was it ideology? Was there something rotten in the German soul? Or was it – as Christopher Browning argues in this highly influential book – more a matter of conformity, a response to intolerable social and psychological pressure?

Ordinary Men is a microhistory, the detailed study of a single unit in the Nazi killing machine. Browning evaluates a wide range of evidence to seek to explain the actions of the “ordinary men” who made up reserve Police Battalion 101, taking advantage of the wide range of resources prepared in the early 1960s for a proposed war crimes trial. He concludes that his subjects were not “evil”; rather, their actions are best explained by a desire to be part of a team – and hence not to shirk responsibility that would otherwise fall on the shoulders of comrades – together with a readiness to obey authority.

Browning’s ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of arguments – both the survivors’ and those advanced by other historians – is what sets his work apart from other studies that have attempted to get to the root of the motivations for the Holocaust, and it is also what marks *Ordinary Men* as one of the most important works of its generation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE ORIGINAL WORK

American historian **Christopher Browning** was born in 1944. His academic career had not received widespread attention until the 1992 publication of *Ordinary Men*, but this book caused a stir—particularly in relation to another work on the Holocaust by Daniel Goldhagen, at the time a forthright Harvard academic. Their vastly differing opinions about the Nazis and their killing, and the subsequent public debate, drew worldwide attention. Browning's views were commonly seen as more credible, and he is now regarded as the foremost American historian of the Holocaust.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THE ANALYSIS

Dr James Chappel completed his PhD in modern history at Columbia University and is currently teaching at Duke University. His work focuses on the intellectual, political and religious history of modern Europe.

Dr Thomas Stammers is lecturer in Modern European history at Durham University, where he specialises in the cultural history of France in the age of revolution. He is the author of *Collection, Recollection, Revolution: Scavenging the Past in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Dr Stammers's research interests include a wide range of historiographical and theoretical controversies related to the history of modern Europe.

ABOUT MACAT

GREAT WORKS FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Macat is focused on making the ideas of the world's great thinkers accessible and comprehensible to everybody, everywhere, in ways that promote the development of enhanced critical thinking skills.

It works with leading academics from the world's top universities to produce new analyses that focus on the ideas and the impact of the most influential works ever written across a wide variety of academic disciplines. Each of the works that sit at the heart of its growing library is an enduring example of great thinking. But by setting them in context – and looking at the influences that shaped their authors, as well as the responses they provoked – Macat encourages readers to look at these classics and game-changers with fresh eyes. Readers learn to think, engage and challenge their ideas, rather than simply accepting them.

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Andreas Schleicher
**Director for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic
Co-operation and Development**

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Prof Lord Broers,
former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge

‘The Macat vision is exceptionally exciting. It focuses upon new modes of learning which analyse and explain seminal texts which have profoundly influenced world thinking and so social and economic development. It promotes the kind of critical thinking which is essential for any society and economy.

This is the learning of the future.’

Rt Hon Charles Clarke, former UK Secretary of State for Education

‘The Macat analyses provide immediate access to the critical conversation surrounding the books that have shaped their respective discipline, which will make them an invaluable resource to all of those, students and teachers, working in the field.’

Professor William Tronzo, University of California at San Diego



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WAYS IN TO THE TEXT

KEY POINTS

- Christopher Browning is an internationally respected historian of the Holocaust.*
- *Ordinary Men* changed the way the Holocaust is studied.
- *Ordinary Men* was the first work to try to explore the Holocaust through the eyes of its perpetrators.

Who Is Christopher Browning?

Christopher Browning is the leading American historian of the Holocaust. He was born in Chicago in 1944, and as a young man he was profoundly marked by the turbulent events of the 1960s and 1970s. The country was divided: first over the Civil Rights Movement,* then over reactions to the violence—and atrocities—of the Vietnam War.* Then in the early 1970s came revelations of political corruption during the presidency of Richard Nixon.* These events made Browning question *why* people commit terrible crimes. And this led him to study the Holocaust.

Browning's early research looked at the role of government officials, the bureaucrats who had formulated Nazi* policy in Eastern Europe. He then went on to study the men who had carried out these policies. Indeed, this was the topic of *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Browning's vivid and harrowing account of a German police force in an occupied country.