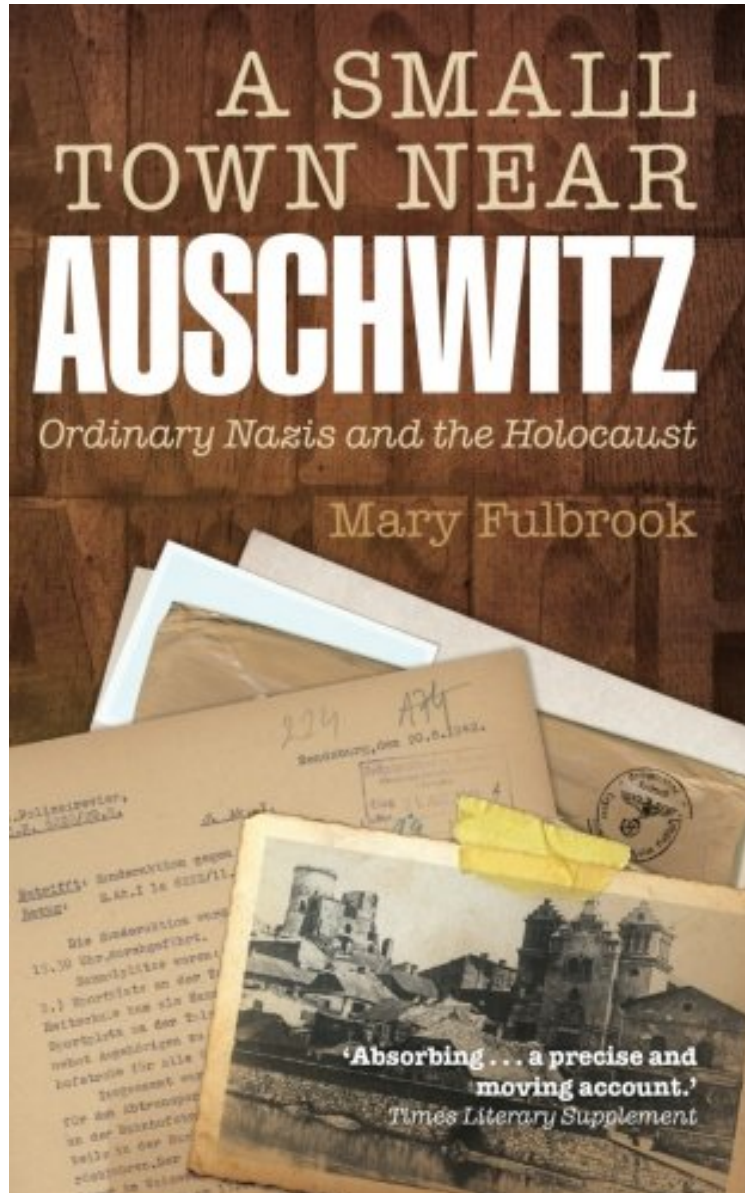


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# A Small Town Near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust

Mary Fulbrook

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**Mary Fulbrook : A Small Town Near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Small Town Near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An unusal approach to a nasty historyBy melwestWhile researching

a book about the war, Mary Fulbrook, a professional historian, stumbled on the fact that her godmother had been married to a senior Nazi official. What made this all the more shocking was that Mary Fulbrook's her mother had been forced to flee Nazi Germany in the early 1930's because of her Jewish roots. After the war, Ms. Fulbrook's mother got back in touch with her best friend, sending her packages of food and clothing from England and, over the years, spending vacations and quality time together. That woman became Fulbrook's godmother. But this close family friend never let on that her husband had been a senior Nazi official in charge of the civil administration in Bedzin, the small town near Auschwitz. As such, the husband was in charge of implementing the progressively harsher racial policies that stripped Jews of their property, segregated them into ghettos, dehumanizing them over time. After the war this official rewrote much of his timeline and escaped punishment for his activities. Ms. Fulbrook uses this very compelling personal story as a starting point for a much more important examination of "ordinary Nazis" vs "real Nazis". She notes that after the many thousands of Germans were able to persuade themselves that they weren't "real Nazis" because they had not engaged first hand in the genocide and mass murder of Jews and others. But it was these "ordinary Nazis" that enabled the Nazi state to function efficiently -- civil servants -- who made sure policies were carried out without question. She examines how this active compliance, the willful refusal to see where Nazi policies were headed, morphed into convenient self-denial after the war. It is a disturbing, excellently documented, nuanced book. If there is one criticism, it's that Ms. Fulbrook, in the name of fairness to her godmother's family, bends over backward to demonstrate her objectivity: well, maybe the former Nazi was experiencing remorse, maybe he really did try to get out of the situation he found himself in...but the historical evidence Ms. Fulbrook uncovers is just too damning. (Ms. Fulbrook is aware of this, and admits her personal connection to the family made her give more attention to the excuses than perhaps warranted). Overall, for those with interest in this subject, this is a worthwhile read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Day-to-day life of a German "middle-manager" in occupied Poland

By johnn

The book was not what I was expecting. It seemed to me to be an anguished expression of the author's discomfort with the fact that her godmother was the wife of a "good Nazi" civil servant. Nevertheless I felt that the book gave some real insight into the workings of a "middle manager" of the Nazi regime in western Poland. It had never occurred to me that there was a civil government in the occupied territories to attend to the day-to-day business of populating the resettlement camps and ultimate demise of the "unwanted" sub-humans. Nor had I realized that these unwanted sub-humans were valuable as slave labor. The book was thus enlightening in many aspects of day to day life in occupied Poland. I found the book to be a difficult read but in the end a valuable read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Must-Read For Perspective on How So Many Germans Claim No Knowledge of the Holocaust

By Richard A. MacKinnon

A very unusual but original book. It seeks to answer how perfectly "normal" Germans could have little or no knowledge of The Holocaust {in their view}. The author focuses on officials and the Jews in a small town just 25 miles on the main railroad line to Auschwitz. The reader is warned that it takes some commitment to endure the repetition of the author's thesis and conclusions which appear time and again in the book. Just when you're ready to put the book down {"I've read enough already"} another aspect of the story emerges and I pressed on. The arguments are subtle but the repetition ensures that they emerge. In sum the reader is nicely rewarded for staying the reading course. In this day and age, this book shows helpful light on issues and consequences of obedience to The System and Government. The military has the concept of "unlawful orders" and civilians need to be so-equipped as well. I have seen this book reviewed ONLY in the "NY Review of Books" and were it not for that review I would never know this book existed. For anyone seeking some answers to this huge topic area, this book strikes me as a must-read.

The Silesian town of Bedzin lies a mere twenty-five miles from Auschwitz; through the linked ghettos of Bedzin and its neighbouring town, some 85,000 Jews passed on their way to slave labour or the gas chambers. The principal civilian administrator of Bedzin, Udo Klausas, was a happily married family man. He was also responsible for implementing Nazi policies towards the Jews in his area - inhumane processes that were the precursors of genocide. Yet he later claimed, like so many other Germans after the war, that he had 'known nothing about it'; and that he had personally tried to save a Jew before he himself managed to leave for military service. A Small Town Near Auschwitz re-creates Udo Klausas's story. Using a wealth of personal letters, memoirs, testimonies, interviews and other sources, Mary Fulbrook pieces together his role in the unfolding stigmatization and degradation of the Jews under his authority, as well as the heroic attempts at resistance on the part of some of his victims. She also gives us a fascinating insight into the inner conflicts of a Nazi functionary who, throughout, considered himself a 'decent' man. And she explores the conflicting memories and evasions of his life after the war. But the book is much more than a portrayal of an individual man. Udo Klausas's case is so important because it is in many ways so typical. Behind Klausas's story is the larger story of how countless local functionaries across the Third Reich facilitated the murderous plans of a relatively small number among the Nazi elite - and of how those plans could never have been realized, on the same scale, without the diligent cooperation of these generally very ordinary administrators. As Fulbrook shows, men like Klausas 'knew' and yet mostly suppressed this knowledge, performing their day jobs without apparent recognition of their own role in the system, or any sense of personal wrongdoing or remorse - either before or after 1945. This

account is no ordinary historical reconstruction. For Fulbrook did not discover Udo Klausa amongst the archives. She has known the Klausa family all her life. She had no inkling of her subject's true role in the Third Reich until a few years ago, a discovery that led directly to this inescapably personal professional history.

"Not limited to the perspective of the perpetrators and bystanders, the book illuminates the destiny of the 85,000 Jews who went through the ghettos of the county, thus pioneering an integrative history of the Holocaust. Summing Up: Highly recommended." --CHOICE About the Author Mary Fulbrook is Professor of German History at University College London. She has written widely on modern German history, including *A Concise History of Germany*; *A History of Germany 1918-2000: The Divided Nation*; *German National Identity after the Holocaust*; *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR*; and *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*. Her most recent book is *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships*. A fellow of the British Academy, she is former Chair of the German History Society and a member of the Academic Advisory Board of the Foundation for the former Concentration Camps at Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora.