



## How to Assist Evil

“Engineering Evil” is a documentary recently shown on the Military History channel. It’s a story of Nazi Germany’s murder campaign before and during World War II. According to some estimates, [16 million Jews and other people died at the hands of Nazis](#).

Though the Holocaust ranks high among the great human tragedies, most people never consider the most important question: How did Adolf Hitler and the Nazis gain the power that they needed to commit such horror? Focusing solely on the evil of the Holocaust won’t get us very far toward the goal of the Jewish slogan “Never Again.”

When Hitler came to power, he inherited decades of political consolidation by Otto von Bismarck and later the Weimar Republic that had weakened the political power of local jurisdictions. Through the Enabling Act (1933), whose formal name was “A Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich,” Hitler gained the power to enact laws with neither the involvement nor the approval of the Reichstag, Germany’s parliament. The Enabling Act destroyed any remaining local autonomy. The bottom line is that it was decent Germans who made Hitler’s terror possible — Germans who would have never supported his territorial designs and atrocities.

The 20th century turned out to be mankind’s most barbaric. Roughly 50 million to 60 million people died in international and civil wars. As tragic as that number is, it pales in comparison with the number of people who were killed at the hands of their own government. Recently deceased Rudolph J. Rummel, professor of political science at the University of Hawaii and author of *Death by Government*, estimated that since the beginning of the 20th century, governments have killed 170 million of their own citizens. Top government killers were the Soviet Union, which, between 1917 and 1987, killed 62 million of its own citizens, and the People’s Republic of China, which, between 1949 and 1987, was responsible for the deaths of 35 million to 40 million of its citizens. In a distant third place were the Nazis, who murdered about 16 million Jews, Slavs, Serbs, Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians and others deemed misfits, such as homosexuals and the mentally ill.





Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on April 9, 2014

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We might ask why the 20th century was so barbaric. Surely, there were barbarians during earlier ages. Part of the answer is that during earlier times, there wasn't the kind of concentration of power that emerged during the 20th century. Had Josef Stalin, Mao Zedong and Hitler been around in earlier times, they could not have engineered the slaughter of tens of millions of people. They wouldn't have had the authority. There was considerable dispersion of jealously guarded political power in the forms of heads of provincial governments and principalities and nobility and church leaders whose political power within their spheres was often just as strong as the monarch's.

Professor Rummel explained in the very first sentence of *Death by Government* that "Power kills; absolute Power kills absolutely.... The more power a government has, the more it can act arbitrarily according to the whims and desires of the elite, and the more it will make war on others and murder its foreign and domestic subjects." That's the long, tragic, ugly story of government: the elite's use of government to dupe and forcibly impose its will on the masses. The masses are always duped by well-intentioned phrases. After all, what German could have been against "A Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich"? It's not just Germans who have fallen prey to well-intentioned phrases. After all, who can be against the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act"?

We Americans ought to keep the fact in mind that Hitler, Stalin and Mao would have had more success in their reign of terror if they had the kind of control and information about their citizens that agencies such as the NSA, the IRS and the ATF have about us. You might ask, "What are you saying, Williams?" Just put it this way: No German who died before 1930 would have believed the Holocaust possible.

*Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).*

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