Hitler's Furies

Women of the Third Reich
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56 minutes, 42 seconds

Speaker: Wendy Lower, Ph.D.

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Time	Transcription
00:03	[uctv / University of California Television / WWW.UCTV.TV]
00:19	[Read Write Think Dream / The Library UC San Diego Channel]
00:22	[Read Write Think Dream / www.uctv.tv/library-channel]
00:27	[The UC San Diego Library and The Judaic Studies Program at UC San Diego Present]
00:33	[The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Hitler's Furies: Ordinary Women? / Featuring / Wendy Lower, Ph.D. / John K. Roth Professor of History Claremont McKenna College / Author of Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields / November 13, 2014]
00:41	Susanne Hillman: Good evening. I am delighted to welcome you to today's workshop. My name is Susanne Hillman and I am the pro-, the project coordinator, or the project manager of the Holocaust Living History Workshop, an outreach and education program dedicated to commemorating or to remembering the suffering caused by the Holocaust. Before I introduce our guest or guests, I would like to thank our sponsors the UCSD [University of San Diego] Library and Judaic Studies. And I also take great pleasure in acknowledging the important role taken in today's event by Dr. Joel Dimsdale, one of our former sponsors. It was actually his idea to invite Professor Wendy Lower to this event and Joel has a particular interest in malice and the kinds of deeds committed by these German women.
0:1:38	Susanne Hillman: Today's lecture is the second in a year-long series of events titled Hidden Stories: Legacy of Pain. The series focuses on individuals, groups, and experiences that have often been neglected by Holocaust scholars. For a number of reasons, in our workshop, we have tended to emphasize the experience of the victims, but I think it is, well it is obviously impossible to talk about the Holocaust and not talk about the other groups, the bystanders, and, as in this case, the perpetrators. So this is what we'll learn about tonight, about uh female perpetrators. The person who is introducing our speaker, uh is about to complete a dissertation on German nurses during World War II and she has had ample occasion to consider some of the problems, or the difficulties, that scholars have had in analyzing the experience of women implicated in the Shoah, or in World War II. And it is now my pleasure and I ask you to help me welcome Amy Zroca.
02:57	Amy Zroka: Thank you. Thank you, Susanne. Can you all hear me well? Yes, all right. Well, first I'd like to thank Dr. Susanne Hillman for inviting me here this evening and of course Professor Wendy Lower for coming here to UCSD [University of California, San Diego]. Um, Dr. Lower is a prolific scholar on the Holocaust and genocide studies. She is the John K. Roth Professor of History at Claremont McKenna College. She is also a research associate with the University

of Munich. And in the past, and I think this is especially significant for what we do here in the Workshop, she has worked with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as the project director of an oral history project titled *German Witnesses to the War and its Aftermath*, and as the director of the visiting scholars program at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. I was also particularly excited to hear that professor Lower was visiting UCSD because her monograph *Hitler's Furies* has made waves recently in the field of history, especially, especially Holocaust history. Her work offers a perspective on female perpetrators that really poses some challenges to older histories of the war, and of the Holocaust. And it's, it's really taken a while for these kind of histories, um like *Hitler's Furies* to really reach a wide public - to reach wide public attention, for you to be able to hear about this today.

04:29 Amy Zroka: So I thought I could give a little bit of background to show how we've gotten up to the studies that we have today. So in most historical investigations of the Holocaust, German men play the main role as perpetrators. Students of the Holocaust are familiar with the the figure of Joseph Mengele, the notorious Auschwitz SS officer, and physician. Histories of the ordinary German men are also well known, such as Christopher Browney's stud, Browning's study of Reserve Police Battalion 101. However, there are many fewer histories that have really considered the actions of German women and what they were doing on the Eastern front during the War. And it wasn't really, and even until the 1980s that until historians began to take a strong interest in the actions of German women in the Third Reich. So one of the first important studies that came out was in 1986 and there was a study by a German historian named Gisela Bock. And in her study, she demonstrated that German women, who were living inside of Germany during the Third Reich has some of them became actually victims of the regime because they had um perceived racial or social qualities that were deemed unacceptable. And so, these women were subjected to forced sterilization and this was one of the first major studies that came out.

06:02 Amy Zroka: And then, one year later - so 1986, Gisela Bock - 1987 an American historian named Claudia Koonz came out with another important study about German women in the Third Reich and she had a very, very different perspective. She argued that German middle-class women, by maintaining stable homes and by supporting their husbands' political, and vocational activities, that they contributed to the functioning of the Nazi state and thereby the Holocaust. And so what happened is these two publications really set off a debate within the field of women's history and in German's history about German women and the Third Reich. Were they victims or were they perpetrators? And so, for some years the focus of this debate was on women's actions within the borders of Germany. And it's only more recently that historians have moved the realm of this investigation outside of Germany, and onto the occupied territories, especially in Eastern

Europe. So there have been studies about female concentration camp guards who demonstrated unthinkable brutality against inmates.

07:14 Amy Zroka: There have also been studies of women who lived outside of the camps, but still on the Eastern front. So for example, scholars such as Elizabeth Harvey or Gudrun Schwarz, or Lora Wildenthal, they all argue that German women living on the Eastern front, whether they were teachers of ethnic German settlers, or colonial settlement workers, or the wives of concentration camp commandments, commandants, that these women did indeed know about the ghettos and the mass murders. And their evidence points to two lines, um that two lines of argument that appear again. It's a pattern in, in these works, and it's, it goes like this - that women in the East, excluding those women who worked within the concentration camps as guards, that they did not actively and directly contribute to the final solution. Instead, they contributed indirectly by continuing in traditionally feminine tasks - be that teaching or mothering, for example. So this is, this, there's now been a change, where we've had more very, very recent studies about that show that how women were actively contributing to the regime, not necessarily through feminine tasks, um, on the Eastern front. And so, for example, there's a recent study about female army auxiliaries. That these are German women who actually served in the armed forces during the Second World War and so this has really broadened the the lens of analysis, the scope of analysis, and most recently um 2013 Professor Lower's book demonstrates that the women who lived on the Eastern front, who took on a range of roles, that they did actively contribute.

09:09 Amy Zroka: So, there's really been kind of an arc of studies, that began a long time ago and that have um, now we have much more detail than in new studies today. And so, I thought that I would just conclude by just raising a few interesting points that I've had to consider in my own research, which is on German Red Cross nurses who worked actually with the army during the Second World War. And the first question that I urge you to think about, and that I have to think about all the time, is one of motives. So, why did these women decide to go to the East? And if they did become perpetrators, why did they do so? Did they do so for the same reason that the men did, or was there a different reason? The second question is one of punishment, is why were these women not tried like male perpetrators? Or if they were, why perhaps was there a different outcome? My third question is much more open-ended, and that is where do we go now? Um, what questions remain unanswered? And how can all of this past research that we have going all the way up today, how can that direct our questions for historical investigations for the future? So now, set. Professor Lower.

10:38 Wendy Lower: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you Amy for that wonderful introduction. You, you covered a lot of ground on the historiography - so you actually - it was very helpful. Uh, it was like the first chapter of the book, kind of.

That was just really terrific and it shows you've got incredibly good training here at San Diego. I spoke with you about your research this morning on nurses and I know that you're um, love to go to the archives and now I know that you're actually an avid reader of all the, uh, published literature as well. So that's, that's wonderful, and thank you Susanne Hillman for making all the arrangements, and professor Deborah Hertz for being so gracious today at the Graduate Seminar, and opening her office to me while I was here on campus. It's really just a pleasure to be here and to be part of this workshop. I really don't have tonight the opportunity to share all my latest research with you. I think you'd be overwhelmed if I tried to cover it all, and we'd all be exhausted, and we just don't really have that much time. Actually, we have about, about an hour, about 45 minutes. So I thought what I would do today, is to try to give you a sense of some of the highlights of the book *Hitler's Furies,* and leave enough time for your questions, and just tell you the story of how this book came, and how it was realized on the kind of the origins of the book.

11:45 Wendy Lower: Um my research on women and the Holocaust, and female witnesses to and perpetrators of the Holocaust actually began in 1992, in the summer of 1992. And at that point, I was a graduate student at American University and I was looking for a good dissertation topic and it wasn't this one. It was another book, um, and I decided the Soviet Union had collapsed, the wall had come down and this was a moment, an opportunity, to go into these - not only the terrain, the so-called bloodlands of the Holocaust, - but also to go into these archives that had been off-limits for - during the Cold War. Um, and in this case, I decided to go to Ukraine because the town of Zhytomyr, which maybe some of you have heard this, okay? Um, it's near Berdichev, Vinnytsia. It's about 100 kilometers west of Kyiv. Now I hadn't heard about it either, before the summer of 1992, I confess. I was reading about it in the the work of my, who, who became my Doktorvater, my doctoral advisor, Richard Brightman, had written a biography of Heinrich Himmler called the *Architect of Genocide.* And I came to know in this book that Heinrich Himmler had his field headquarters in this town Zhytomyr, Ukraine and Hitler had his headquarters just south of there in the town of Vinnytsia and that this particular region was was quite important in Nazi, um, policymaking and and even and in the Holocaust in the Eastern front.

13:06 Wendy Lower: It happened to be kind of the heartland of Russian Jewry in the Tsarist Empire, the heart of the Pale of Settlement. Um, so these were - this was a territory with a very high concentration, high population density of, of Jews. And when the Holocaust began, the killing actions began in the summer of 1941, it was, it was really directed against these communities. So I wanted to go there and see for myself, um, what happened there, and talk to people, and try to understand, you know, the history of the Jews who lived there, and the witnesses, and so forth. And see if, maybe since Hitler and Himmler had their headquarters there, maybe there'd be some really good German documentation that hadn't

made it back to Western archives in, in Berlin or in Washington [D.C.] for instance. Um, and I'll confess as well that I kind of naively thought that I was going to find like - the order - right? At that point we were trying to figure out, scholars are trying to figure out, the scholarship I was reading - Christopher Browning and others - you know, when decision making, when did the Nazis make this fateful move, this choice to pursue mass murder.

14:10 Wendy Lower: And it had been, you know, narrowed down to the summer of 1941 and, and at these very sites that I referred to Berdichev, Vinnytsia, um Minsk, Breslitovsk, during the invasion of the Soviet Union. And we were looking, they were looking for that, that document, that order - that kind of Hitler order - that started this all in this [unknown], in this, in this dictatorship. I didn't find that order. You would have heard about it if I had. But I did end up finding a lot of rich material in the local regional archives on how the Nazi's regional leaders pursued, developed the policy of the final solution from the ground, to kind of level up. The initiatives that were taken at the, at the ground level. And among those files, I started to just to find these very, kind of, basic personnel list. The kind of thing that you might pass over, um, in your research because there's not, you know, there's not a story here on the face of it. It's lists of names, but what was curious about it was lists of names of women, uh most of them Fraulein, most of them young German women. And this particular document actually is from Riga in 1943 says secret, Geheim, and you've got the names of women, uh, secretaries, working telephone operators. It's from 1943, they're being instructed to destroy documentation as the Germans are are departing, being forcibly evacuated, because of the Red Army's advance.

15:37 Wendy Lower: So I thought, oh well. You know there, why are these young German women here, and in this particular case, um, they're involved in the destruction of the evidence of the Holocaust at the end, right? They're not just, um, the secretarial roles matter when you're talking about a massive uh campaign - administrative campaign - a state-sponsored campaign of genocide. That those operatives in those offices actually had a role to play. Um, now these young German women, what I found surprising was that they were actually there. So there, so it's documentation that lists them um in these settings in Zhytomyr, in Riga, in Vinnytsia, in Minsk. And that really got me thinking more about how did they get there? I thought they were back in the Reich, you know holding down the fort, as it were, waiting for their men to come back from the front, fulfilling these very, kind of, traditional roles that we think of that women are supposed to fulfill during times of war. And not only were they not at home, but in this very - in what Tim Snyder calls the bloodlands. So in these settings, the so-called killing fields of the Holocaust, raising all kinds of new questions. Back in the Western archives, I also started to know, I started to realize that the testimonies that, um, scholars had been using - Christopher Browning, Richard Breitman, and others - in reconstructing the decision-making debate, that many of those stories of events

had been culled from testimonies given by women, right. So if thousands of women were being called to testify as witnesses, um you know, why had, why hadn't we questioned the existence of their testimony? That they know so much, and vivid details - often graphic details - of the killing operations in the Eastern territories. Plus many of the women, women who described what they saw and experienced remained callous and cavalier in their recountings.

17:29 Wendy Lower: One former kindergarten teacher in Ukraine begrudged that Jewish thing during the war. She and her female colleagues have been briefed as they crossed the border from Germany into the Eastern occupied zones in 1942. She remembered that a German official in a gold-brownish uniform had reassured them that they should not be afraid when they hear gunfire. It was just that a few Jews were being shot. And I became curious about the published literature, and Amy has referred to that already so I won't go into detail, but essentially what I came to discover was that female Nazis fell into two pretty extreme categories. Popular depictions of the camp guards, Irma Grese, the so-called beautiful beast at Belsen, Hermine Braunsteiner the guard from Majdanek, and the other portrait of the Jewish woman, or excuse me of the German woman, who was valued for her reproductive ability as Hitler's babies machine. So there was, you know, the passive follower - Hitler follower - um in this maternal mode, motherhood mode, of serving the the Fuhrer by reproducing. And then where there was agency, it was in this camp guard, um, and that camp guard uh was often, as Claudia Kunst observed, sensationalizing Nazism by locating evil in eroticized women.

18:51 Wendy Lower: And then I wondered, you know, where do German women fit into the growing literature on the Holocaust, which was moving into studies of killing outside the camp system - in the open-air settings of Eastern Europe, where half the victims were killed in mass shootings, ghetto liquidations, and death marches. And part of this inquiry, and, and research into where are German women once we open up this terrain of the, of the Eastern territories and we start to read a documentation with this question of where are they, who are they, were they um, why are they there. Photographic evidence is also part of this inquiry. I went back to some pretty well-known photographs. If you do if you're in this field doing this research, this is a book that's widely used. I often assign it to my students, *The Good Old Days.* And you'll see here, in this group photograph, um, this is August Hengst, a cook in Treblinka and then the caption underneath there says an unknown woman. And this was typical, so you can place them there. And down below, there's a woman carousing with the staff, with Franz Stangl from Treblinka. So they're there. They're, they're present but we don't know who they are, why they're there, and what they did when they got there. The extent of literature on female - male perpetrators was um moving in the other direction. All right, it was becoming increasingly nuanced in terms of how we understood perpetration. As Amy has alluded to, we have Christopher Browning's work on the ordinary men, Daniel Goldhagen the eliminationist anti-Semite, many of you are probably familiar

with *Portraits of Eichmann,* starting with Hannah Arendt's depiction of him as a kind of thoughtless bureaucrat, the voracious plunderers, the Nazi doctors uh the habitual killers who succumbed to peer pressure.

20:33 Wendy Lower: So, all of this was becoming incredibly complicated and and raised the question to - in my mind, well where do women fit into this picture? Can we think about women as potentially being the, the desk murderers, the thoughtless bureaucrats, the voracious plunderers, um the operatives of the machinery of destruction - as, as Royal Hillbrook referred to it. And, and did it make sense to study evil and cruelty as a gendered phenomenon? If we presume a female nature of innocence do we end up removing women from the history of genocide and losing sight of genocide as a human problem of behavior that applies to men as well as women? In historian Ann Taylor Allen's words, women - while they remain in the female sphere - are thus endowed with innocence of the crimes of the modern state but at the price of being placed outside of modernity and indeed outside of history itself. I started to see a blind spot which, over time, became a glaring omission. It became clear to me that the list of teachers and other female Nazi party activists that I had found in 1992 in Ukraine was the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of thousands of German women went East and they were indeed integral parts of the Nazi machinery of destruction. I was able to put ordinary German women on the map of Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.

21:57 Wendy Lower: Uh, when I refer to the Nazi East, I'm referring to this terrain here on the screen. Basically, the gray, this, this area here going up into Stalingrad but concentrating on the Reich Commissariat, which was Ukraine the Nazi-occupied Ukraine, and the Ostland, which is the Baltics - a Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Belarus. So most of my research concentrates on these on these areas which were in fact - and Poland, Nazi-occupied Poland - um, the main sites of, of the Holocaust both the killing centers and the mass shooting actions. But so much more work has to be done and within the different, um, professions as well as - Amy's working on the nurses - and work into these, all these other areas. I mean, to what extent were women in the axis countries like Hungarian women, or Romanian women, also engaged and involved um in the Holocaust? And that you know I, I want to encourage people to, um, pursue that - students and and scholars - to pursue that. So this is just kind of the beginning, I think, of a lot more work to be done.

22:58 Wendy Lower: 640,000 women in the German Red Cross and some 400,000 of them in the occupied territories, a half a million German women in the Army's support positions, in the clerical positions, 30,000 women in Himmler's SS and police offices, 10,000 in the uh, Reichskommissariat Ukraine and the Reichskommissariat Ostland, um 3,000 women working as teachers in Poland. Um these are just to give you an idea of the magnitude and it's not this, the, the, I didn't collect all the numbers. There are more numbers to be collected by looking

at specific agencies. For instance, I know that there were secretaries in the IG Farben operations, um in the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. I don't have a biographies of them. I don't have full numbers of them, so again this is the beginning of, I think, a lot more research to be done. The files started to grow and the stories started to take shape, piecing together personnel files, and lists, and court records archived in Germany, Ukraine, Poland, Israel, and the U.S. [United States]. One of the outstanding files, one of the outstanding cases, in the book is that of Erna Petri. In the summer of 2005, I was in the archives of the U.S. [United States] Holocaust Memorial Museum sitting at a microfilm reader and new files had been digitized and made available to researchers. These were the files of war crimes investigations of the Stasi, the East German police, that were conducted in 1950s and 1960s and these files extended all the way up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 19- of the wall 1989.

24:28 Wendy Lower: This is the confession that Erna Petri, um, gave - you know in written form here, the protocol - from September 1961. And up in the right-hand corner, it was taken, it was given at Erfurt. The interrogation starts at around eight in the morning and ends at 21:45. Erna Petri confessed to shooting six Jewish children. As I read the full report, um, and all the details I had the luxury of reading this material decades and miles removed from the events, all the more reason not to turn the page - or in this case the screen - and move on to the next file. And I knew that story had to come out, but I had to try to track down more information to corroborate its contents. Someone like Erna was the worst, but her crimes are not the full story. And the intent of my book was not to shock readers into a numb state of disbelief, or to repulse, but to explain, understand - not condone - how someone like Erna and many more like her did what they did. And to reconstruct the historical era, to define the actual settings and experiences that shape these young women's convictions and actions. As a German patriot, sent to the East to carry out Hitler's revolution, Erna was ordinary, representative of a lost generation of German women. The post-WWI baby boomers, I call them because I also came to realize that nearly all of the women featured on these lists were born in 1920, 1921, 1922. I had, I realized I had a generational story that was emerging that they had come of age in the 1930s.

26:06 Wendy Lower: The interwar era gave rise to more extreme forms of conservative German female activism, not feminism. The first WWI baby boomers experienced childhood in the tumult and insecurity of incessant electioneering, runaway inflation, and all the bewildering and exciting prospects of modernity. In Hitler's fascist dictatorship they matured into a founding generation a female idealists, careerists, and revolutionaries of the Third Reich, who aligned themselves with a bolder experiment - even than Weimar - and they did so with much greater engagement than their foremothers. And the consequences of their politicization and mass mobilization were much more devastating. Here is an image of the um, swearing-in ceremony of Naz- of nurses, Red Cross nurses in Berlin. And you can

just see, um, you know, the scale of this. Uh, I think it's interesting, um, and how important this was, this, the community that was built up around this particular profession of nursing, so-called female profession. And then the other image is a recruiting poster, "The East Needs You - German women - German girls." And these are women being, um, called to serve as you know welfare workers in this case in the Vaterland - in, um, the annexed territories of Poland. Hitler propagated that a woman's place was in the home, as well as in the movement. And in the Nazi party rally of 1934, he employed the typical martial rhetoric declaring that for the National Socialist community of the Volk was established on a firm basis - this is his declaration - precisely because millions of women became our most loyal, fanatical, fellow combatants.

27:49 Wendy Lower: Now we have to be wary of this Nazi propaganda and taking it as fact. Of course, the aim of propaganda is to inform and mobilize and it's also a form of kind of wish fulfillment. Because the reality is that after 1935, the birth rate declined, the divorce rate increased, and statistics show that most German women were not married, were not constantly getting pregnant, and not staying at home. German women who felt empowered by the movement did not themselves see themselves as feminists who wish to challenge the patriarchy, but as agents of a conservative, racist revolution. They were political despite themselves. In fact, the women question was not shelved but refashioned in the Nazi era. The private became political. The tentacles of the movement reached into the home and pulled women and girls out to the streets, and public rallies, and parades, to labor assignments on farms, and gatherings, and summer camps, marching exercises, domestic science courses, medical examinations, flag-raising ceremonies. I was really struck in the reading of the, um, memoir literature. And here's another, uh, image. This is placing now Hitler in the Zhytomyr region actually, uh, with the Red Cross nurses in August of, of [19]41. I was really struck in my interviews with, with women from this period, um, and in the reading the memoir literature, that they wrote, or explained to me, that they really wanted to make something of themselves, um, you know. They wanted to see the world. They wanted to get out and they wanted to become something. Which sounds very cliche, and it's something that we tell our students and we tell our children today. And it's usually got a very positive, uh, kind of inspirational message.

29:33 Wendy Lower: You want to feel that you're used, to be empowered, to, to change, go out and change the world in a good sense. Um, but that sentiment was emerging among women in the interwar period, um, uh, and that, that in of itself was revolutionary. Uh, the problem was that it collided with, or merged with this genocidal regime, and the construction of this dictatorship. So this notion of self-actualization - or the realization of the self - was occurring, you know, um, comparing in this context of the, uh, Third Reich and of the, and ultimately of the Holocaust, and the in in these settings of the killing fields that I'm going to describe in a minute. With the outbreak of the war in fall 1939, the Reich labor leader called

for enlistment of single girls between the ages of 17 and 25, and this labor duty - it was expanded in the summer of 1941 - by placing more women in war-related industries offices and hospitals. Nazi leaders prepared for a total war, and a total empire. Historically aiming to surpass what the last German Kaiser had successfully, unsuccessfully attempted. Eventually, all of Europe was to be an Aryan stronghold, governed from Hitler's Metropole in Berlin. And such global ambitions required the creation of a new caste of German imperial elites, composed of young men and women. Here is an image of Erna. The initial one that I put up was a kind of mug shot from when she was arrested in 1961, and here she is in the [19]30s. I have this image in my book and I don't know, maybe I'm reading too much into it, but I just found - it's from her personal photo album which was confiscated during the investigation, the Stasi investigation - but it just struck me.

31:18 Wendy Lower: Um, when I think of the new woman of the Weimar period, I think of the short haircut, smoking a cigarette in a, in an urban setting - on a metropolitan cosmopolitan type - maybe wearing shorts, or short pants, or a short skirt, and sitting on a bicycle or a motorcycle. Um and so that, there are traces of that here but, but, it's not quite the same, right? So here we have, she's sitting on the motorcycle, um with the hands-on the hands on the handlebars, ready to go and this is about speed, and um, and uh, the Nazi party was, her husband was in the motorcycle club, um and she's got her feet on the pedals, but she's got her hair pulled back, um in a bun, uh and she's wearing the apron, and very much that Hausfrau, kind of domestic, um, kind of dress. So I, I think, when I look at this picture, I think of it as a kind of um example of the hybridity, of the perversion on one hand, but how these two worlds kind of came together at this time. At this point in my research, and plans for a book, I thought about how best to tell the story of these young women who went East. How can a generational history of this magnitude be written in a manner that does not reduce the variation of individual experiences into a one-dimensional caricature? If I took the collective biography approach, which persons could I include, and how would they be chosen? Certainly, the availability of source material was decisive. Biographies would allow me to explain the origins of their behavior, their wartime experiences, their postwar attempts to make sense of what they witnessed and did. I realize that the biographical approach, intertwined as a generational cohort, could represent German history in the 20th century, at least from the World War I era to the present, and through the eyes of German women.

33:13 Wendy Lower: The Nazi era would be properly contextualized. Biography also had the added benefit of showing how human beings change, and these women changed a lot. They were adept at slipping in and out of roles over time. The biographies in *Hitler's Furies,* 13 of them, represent a spectrum of young German women and I would like to stress that they responded to and contributed to the violence in the East and to the Holocaust in a number of ways. I can only touch on

a few examples this afternoon, to illustrate how one woman expressed her revulsion and tried to persuade male colleagues not to participate, while other women exploited their power and even chose to kill. And after these, presenting these examples, I hope we have time. I can suggest possible explanations that appear in the book, and again leave time for your questions. Annette Schueking Homeyer, Annette Schueking Homeyer - you'll see she, she's still alive - um, and this, that's a portrait of her, obviously. And then, that image there um, uh, to to your left is from her personal photo album of a soldier's home in Novgorod-Volynsk, which is also not too far from Zhytomyr, in Ukraine. Now Annette hailed from a family of German literary figures stemming back to the revolutions of 1848. She completed her law degree at the University of Muenster in the 1930s - entered the, her studies with a certain idealism. She had witnessed and heard about the tortures and crimes, including the persecution of her own father, who was a member of the social democratic party. But she soon realized that she was helpless to change the system. She described herself as timid, a timid young woman in 1941, when I spoke to her in March 2010.

35:01 Wendy Lower: She had a sense of adventure. She preferred an assignment in the open spaces of the East over mundane desk or factory job. In the summer of 1941, she volunteered for the German Red Cross. But she was not trained in medical procedures, she was asked to help establish one of these soldiers' homes. And that's the interior of this home in Ukraine. I think there were probably about 300 of these soldiers' homes, by my estimate. So I think there were probably about 1,500 to 1,700 Annettes, who were in this kind of role in the Eastern territories. These were retreats where soldiers socialized with German women, ate German food, and enjoyed cultural activities. Schueking Homeyer was an ideal assignment, an ideal fit for this assignment: young, attractive, cultured, hardworking, and patriotic. She worked in the Novgorod-Volynsk soldiers' home from October [19]41 until September [19]42. When I asked her about what she knew before she arrived in Ukraine in 1941, and she explained she did not need to be told about why they were at war. There was enough propaganda and plenty of antisemitism. She did recall a casual exchange with a friend, a journalist friend, in Berlin who told her on the eve of her departure, Annette, Russia is no place for you. They are killing all the Jews there.

36:24 Wendy Lower: And then, as she was traveling by train to her new position with her colleague Lily, two soldiers or SS men - she wasn't sure they were in uniform she didn't know which agency - entered her compartment when the train stopped in Breslitovsk and struck up a conversation with her. All of a sudden she remembered, one of them told us how he had been ordered to shoot a Jewish woman. We were horrified, but we didn't say anything. She would learn more in the coming months, from the other German soldiers and SS men. I asked her, why did these perpetrators talk about, or even boast about their gruesome deeds? She answered, well oftentimes conversations with soldiers got personal fast. They were

all men who hadn't been around women for a long time. There were the Ukrainian women of course, but they couldn't talk to them, and they all had an intense need to talk. On another occasion, I was riding in a truck when all of a sudden the driver started telling me that in Koziatyn, they had allowed several hundred Jews to go hungry for two days before shooting them to death because the firing squads had been busy working somewhere else. When she arrived in Novgorod-Volynsk - it's an old fortress town with about 18,000 inhabitants, half of them Jewish - she was told that all the Jews had been killed. A German officer stated this matter of factly as they all dined. Then she was touring the town and an engine, a man from the engineering staff pointed out that over there on the bank of the Sluch River is where 450 Jewish men, women, and children were buried.

37:51 Wendy Lower: Schueking Homeyer was one of two women working in this Soldatenheim, the soldiers' home. She was extremely busy and kept to her work. Surrounded by thousands of soldiers, she carefully avoided the rough ones in the crowd. Only after a few weeks in Ukraine, seeing the evidence of mass murder, and the deteriorating condition of the few Jewish laborers who remained in - who worked in her soldiers' home actually - she wrote home to her mother, what papa says is true. People with no moral inhibitions exude a strange odor. I can now pick out these people, and many of them really do smell like blood. Oh what an enormous slaughterhouse the world is. I made another decision, in organizing and writing this book, I introduced the women in the first chapter without giving away too much about their wartime reactions because after all, these young women - even the most fanatical - could not have imagined what they would see in the Eastern territories. Only one had traveled beyond her native Germany, most had not ventured beyond their hometowns. They underwent their own transformations when they went East where their ideological commitment and character were severely tested. Another woman I would like to introduce to you is Liselotte Meier, and she is in this picture here - right here, um to my left, next to this gentleman whose face is crossed out. That's, that's part of the post-war investigative record, and apparently, the investigators determined that he was either innocent or he was dead, that's why his face is crossed out. That was not done during the war time period. And then also, another interesting figure in this community I'm going to talk about in a minute, is Frau Apfelbaum, standing there in the forest with a rifle.

39:38 Wendy Lower: And at the center of this community of a violence that emerged in Lida is the gentleman to the right, um in the uniform commissar, the [unclear] commissar the regional governor of Lida, Hermann Hanweg. And here he is pictured with his family and all of them were in Leda, stationed in Leda. Leda might be familiar to some of you if you've seen the movie about the Bielski Partisans because many of the um, Jews who fled Vilnius kind of went through Leda. Kind of, and that's how they made their way into the forest. There was a very important um, uh, network of kind of workshops that Commissar Hanweg oversaw, of Jewish craftsmen. And this allowed for these Jewish populations to survive for a certain

period of time, and eventually, some of them were able to escape to the forest and survive the war. Commissar Hanweg met Liselotte Meier in 1941. They had an orientation in Minsk. Now Liselotte Meier was born in 1922. She had training as an accountant. She had to fulfill her labor duty and she decided that she would rather go to Belarus, to Minsk, than work in the automobile factory in Leipzig. She was, she grew up near Leipzig. When Liselotte and, and Hermann met at this orientation, they fell in love.

41:00 Wendy Lower: Now, not only was she assigned to him as his kind of executive secretary, but they were carrying on this relationship, um in the so-called killing fields. Hanweg's kids knew her as vice-mama. The wife of the Commissar called her Brutus. In fact, several post-war statements about crimes committed by the Commissar's office in Lida stressed that Liselotte Meier was the most knowledgeable - better informed than many of the officials in the station. There's quite a bit of survivor testimony that describes Liselotte Meier's actions, and this relationship, and how that was tied into the history of the Holocaust. And how recreational outings that they, um and, and their their lifestyle - uh, they built a villa - they forced the Jews to build a, a uh, swimming pool for them - that how the experience of of Jews in Lida was intersecting with this affair that was going on, and the the intimacy of this like, that she was the - The Commissar was giving her more authority, more power because of this relationship. Um, within the local hierarchy of the German female administrators, she emerges as this kind of desk murder. I asked in the beginning of the talk, was there a female version of it what the Germans called Schreibtischtäter, or desk murderer? And this this figure, Liselotte Meier, is the one who comes out in my study, in this, in this form. The secretary to the District Commissar, like an executive assistant, she controlled who had access to the Regional Governor, and other officials in the office. The head of the Jewish Council over, as part of these workshops, he always had to go through Fraulein Meier and, before she could um have access to the Commissar.

42:39 Wendy Lower: She made sure that special orders were completed on time. A special department handled leather leftovers received from boot factories that were made into leather items such as belts, wallets, purses, stripe-colored boxes, leather jewelry. And this um, requisitioning this, this, these orders for creating jewelry and, and for - you know - fur coats that were tailored, this was part of how, in this case, the officials were charming. You know, they were actually, um, courting the other women in the office. And these items that they were making, the Jews produced in the factories, were then used as part of this kind of courtship ritual. And Hanweg gave Meier special access to the office safe, where the most secret orders were stored. She had security clearance. She did not take simple dictation from the Commissar, but transmitted orders on behalf of her boss. After the war, she could not recall if she had issued one that authorized the shooting of 16 Jews who appeared late for work, an order that others later accused her of writing. There was little written traffic about Jewish actions, she revealed after the

war, that was absolutely secret. The details were not to be documented. She also had the special office stamp that could be used to issue the labor identification cards. The so-called gold cards, these were life-saving documents. For a Jewish person, other than flight to the forest and suicide the only way to escape the shooting pits was to secure a labor assignment.

44:06 Wendy Lower: Secretaries participated in the selection of Jewish laborers. Here we have an image, it's quite striking, from Leda, March 1942. I, I can't tell who that is, that woman standing next to that gentleman. But it does, um, it reminds me of some of the testimony - kind of visual representation of the testimony. These Jews are being marched through town and are going to be incarcerated and, and then shot two kilometers outside of town. And, um, Fraulein Meier for instance, she pulled someone out of a, uh a lineup like this - a deportation march - because it was her hairstylist, and she wanted to keep her as her personal hairstylist. Another secretary in Slonim testified that she selected a Jewess who had not finished knitting a sweater for her. What about the German women who were not working in the Nazi administration, but arrived in the East with their husbands and lovers? Officially, they had no business in the ghettos and they were not supposed to get mixed up in Nazi policies, which was supposed to be man's work. Well, it turns out that the wives and mistresses of SS men and Order Police battalion commanders were, besides the nurses in the Nazi euthanasia program, among the worst female perpetrators. Women like Liesel Willhaus, who appears on the cover of the book, Josefine Block, a former Eichmann secretary in Vienna who was stationed in Drohobych, and Erna Petri who is featured in a chapter on the killers.

45:26 Wendy Lower: I mentioned that Erna was arrested with her husband. They stood trial in Erfurt in 1962, um, and her husband was guillotined, and she got a life sentence. I want to just explain a little bit more about, share with you a little bit more about, the um, testimony that Erna gave. These are, by the way, uh, from the SS marriage application. So, Himmler had to sign off on every marriage, sign off on the prospective bride. So, SS officers would present his fiancee to Himmler and these women had to go through some pretty extensive gynecological exams. That's why we have these photos in the file of them. You have a front shot because they're examining their racial measurements, their characteristics. You have a profile shot, and then you have a full-body shot. And so, this is the rest of that imagery that - she's on the cover of the book. And this is another, uh, very famous woman, the wife of Order Police Battalion 101, uh, Vera Wohlauf, who's featured in Chris Browning's work. And there's Vera Wohlauf recreating with, her husband's to her left, and this is a picnic. Again, just to represent how the Holocaust intersects with, you know, these communities that are part of this violence that emerges. Recreational activity, um, and women are also there, among the men. And this was in Hrubieszów, Poland, end of August 1942. And this is at the end of the day after, the the town had been cleared. Uh, deportations

to Treblinka, close to a thousand Jews were - bodies littered the streets of this town and Vera was at the center of this, uh, many witnesses testified to that.

47:01 Wendy Lower: Erna and Horst were convicted for killing Jews and Ukrainian and Polish laborers on their estate in western Ukraine. Their crimes occurred outside the camp system, in this kind of plantation setting. Erna went from a very small town, um, in what was, uh, Eastern Germany near, uh, Erfurt. I think, this like one street in the town and about five houses, to this very lavish estate. It was, for her, a big boost. So this is also about social mobility and advancement in the East. And on this estate, and it's about 14 kilometers outside of Lviv, Lwów, Lemberg. It turns out that the railway line running from Lviv to Belzec and Sobibor paralleled their grounds of this estate. And what happened was Jews who realized after the first wave of deportations that they were being sent to their deaths, escaped, tried to break out of these boxcars. And in the summer of 1943 these Jewish children, whom she confessed to killing the six of them, the boys, they had broken out of the transport and they were trying to find refuge on the estate and she recognized them. She said they were naked. They were not well clothed and so they could be easily distinguished from the Ukrainians and Poles living in the area. This is all according to her, her testimony. Um, she said the Jewish children whom I shot were only clothed shreds or were naked. So I assumed that these Jews had broken out of one of those transports. And she brought them back to the estate. And then she and her husband had established this, this spot on their estate where they actually carried out these shootings. They didn't bring these Jews whom they encountered to the local police station or issue any kind of documentation in a report about this. They kind of took care of matters, the two of them, on their on their own in in their in this household setting.

49:04 Wendy Lower: The interrogator on that document I showed you asked Erna, why did you shoot the Jewish children? In those times, she said, she explained, as I carried out the shootings I was barely 25 years old. Still young and inexperienced. I lived only among SS men who carried out shootings of Jewish persons. I seldom came into contact with other women, so that in the course of time I became more hardened. I did not want to stand behind the SS men. I wanted to show them that I, as a woman, could conduct myself like a man. So I shot four Jews and six Jewish children. She also shot four Jewish men. I wanted to prove myself to the men. Besides in those days, in this region, everyone, everywhere, she said, one heard that Jewish persons and children were being shot, which also caused me to kill them. Erna was released in 1992 for health reasons and she died in July 2000. A few months before her death, she enjoyed her 80th birthday which was a big affair in her hometown. At her funeral, about 200 people appeared. The entire village, and many persons whom the family did not know. Many anonymous persons also sent flowers and condolence cards. How do we make sense of the cruelty and extreme violence of these ordinary German men and women in the Nazi era?

50:29 Wendy Lower: And in *Hitler's Furies* I explore some explanations out of Cesare Lombroso, Sigmund Freud, primatologist Franz Duvall, and I end up agreeing with professor of social psychology James Waller who underscored that all men and women have the potential to commit evil acts but it is our environment and social conditioning that brings out this capability and it is a minority who go to the extreme of killing. I also took very seriously the observations of a state prosecutor in Germany who had investigated many Nazi perpetrators, including some of the women featured in my book. And he told me that he did not encounter anyone who could be described as psychopathic. In his words, the individuals were not insane. It was the Nazi system that was crazy. He was convinced that many of the thousands of perpetrators whom he investigated had committed the crimes but these individuals were no longer a threat to society. They were normal law-abiding citizens in the new democratic Germany. Ostensibly, they were successful chameleons. After reading thousands of pages of wartime documents, court records, and testimonies I decided to visit a wartime crime scene. The archival record of Erna Petri's trial contains sketches and photographs of the Grzenda plantation in western Ukraine. And this is from her photo album that was confiscated by the Stasi. And this is, as you can see from 2010 when I went with colleagues to visit it.

51:56 Wendy Lower: I was not sure what I would find there. I did not know if the place actually still existed or what I would do once I got there. I persuaded two colleagues from the Holocaust Museum to join me. We found the location on a local map, a short taxi trip from Lviv, heading north. We drove north, paralleling the same railway lines that had taken hundreds of thousands of Polish and Ukrainian Jews to the gassing facilities of Belzec and Sobibor. We turned down the same road that Erna Petri took that fateful day when she spotted the Jewish boys who had fled from the boxcar. We entered the long driveway leading to the manor, which had changed from a stately home to a decrepit structure overgrown with weeds. The porch was two pillars with a sagging middle, precariously standing on cinder blocks. Given what I knew the place felt haunted. But to the poor elderly Ukrainians who eeked out an existence there, it was home. The gilded iron work on the terrace where Petri had served cake and coffee was rusted and flaking, like brittle bones crumbling at the joints. Clean laundry was hung there to dry. The women living there immediately appeared when they saw us, strangers, in city clothes with cameras, stepping out of a taxi. We walked a few hundred meters in the direction of the location that was described in the court record as the murder site. It was a strip of forest along a gully that divided two fields. I was momentarily distracted by the scene around me, which was picturesque and peaceful. Fields were being harvested by farmers with horse-drawn plows and by hand. A crisp colorful September sunset illuminated the rolling hills and flashed off several of Ukraine's newly restored church steeples.

53:37 Wendy Lower: Every acre was being cultivated, except for two weedy swaths, an overgrown graveyard, and the forested gully. The graveyard was an impenetrable mass of thorny bushes. One could descend into the gully, but the prospect was not inviting. Passers-by threw their garbage there, plastic bags, rags, and booze bottles, or perhaps the rain had carried the waste into this crevice. This is not the only site in Ukraine where mass graves from the Holocaust - the bones and often personal possessions of Jewish victims - lie a few meters below a surface covered with weeds empty bottles and other refuse. I stood there meditating, praying, and thinking about what had happened there, and what those frightened Jewish children - who whimpered when Erna Petri drew her pistol - might have achieved how they lived. I apparently stood there too long. A Ukrainian peasant with a wool cap, flannel shirt, threadbare jacket, and mended pants accosted me. It was time for me to go.

54:39 Wendy Lower: In many ways, *Hitler's Furies* is about how we fail to reckon with the past. Not so much as a historical reconstruction, or morality tale, but as evidence of a recurring problem in which we all share responsibility. What are the blind spots and taboos that persist in our retelling of events in memoirs and in our national histories? Why does this history continue to haunt us generations and many miles removed in places like Grzenda? The consensus in Holocaust and genocide studies is that the systems that make mass murder possible would not function without the broad participation of society, and yet nearly all histories of the Holocaust leave out half of those who populated that society. As if women's history happens somewhere else. It is an illogical approach and puzzling omission. The dramatic stories of these women reveal the darkest side of female activism. They show what can happen when women are mobilized for war and acquiesce in genocide. Thank you very much.

55:47 [Read Write Think Dream / The Library UC San Diego Channel]

55:52 [Read Write Think Dream / www.uctv.tv/library-channel]

55:57 [The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Hitler's Furies: Ordinary Women? / Featuring / Wendy Lower, Ph.D. / John K. Roth Professor of History Claremont McKenna College / Author of Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields]

56:03 [Presented by The Judaic Studies Program at UC San Diego and The UC San Diego Library]

56:10 [The Audrey Geisel University Librarian, Brian E.C. Schottlander / Director of Communications and Outreach UC San Diego Library, Dolores Davies]

56:15 [Director, The Judaic Studies Program UC San Diego, Deborah Hertz / Program Coordinator, The Holocaust Living History Workshop, Susanne Hillman]

56:20 [UCSD-TV / Producer, Shannon Bradley / Camera Operators, John Menier, Josh Stolze / Editor, Matt Alioto]

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