

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF NORMATIVE DISCRIMINATION SHEDS LIGHT ON THE EVENTS OF KRISTALLNACHT

You are all familiar with the Rodney King case where several officers beat Rodney King far beyond the need to restrain a potential criminal. King sued the L.A. police and won a large settlement. At the point when King was lying completely helpless on the ground, an officer who had not participated in the violence walked over and kicked King several times. Sociologists have a term to explain the motivation of the last officer's act of violence against King: normative discrimination. It refers to individual acts of discrimination, which are motivated primarily by a need to conform to the perceived norms, beliefs, and values of an organization. In relationship to the King case, the officer who had **not** previously joined in on the beating of King, felt he had to prove to his police colleagues that "he was one of them" that he believed in what they were doing.

This type of behavior, defined as normative discrimination, can often be seen among groups. There is no middle ground: "you are either with us or against us." In hate organizations, individuals who may have doubts about what they are doing, must prove their commitment to the values and beliefs of the organization by active participation in acts of violence. Normative discrimination is dramatically depicted in the film, *History X*.

Now let's turn to Nazi Germany and to the events of Kristallnacht. Here too we have a very clear case of normative discrimination. You have read what took place: stores and apartments of Jews were destroyed or looted; synagogues were set on fire, holy relics burned, religious Jews humiliated by having their beards shaved or "burnt off." Average German Jews, who had lived peacefully next to their non-Jewish, German neighbors, were dragged from their homes and mercilessly beaten by the very people whom they had known for years, people whom they had, in many cases, considered as friends.

1. How could you apply the definition of normative discrimination to explain why so many average German citizens either participated directly in the violence of Kristallnacht or simply stood by and watched silently as members of Hitler's SA (Storm Troopers), young Hitler youths and average German citizens attacked Jewish people, their homes, shops and houses of worship? The following eye-witness account of the destruction of a Jewish orphanage in the town of Dinslaken will help you find an answer:

. . . the mob standing around the building had grown to several hundred. Among them I recognized some familiar faces suppliers of the orphanage or trades people, who only a day or a week earlier had been happy to deal with us as customers. This time they were passive, watching the destruction without emotion.

NOTE: The police did nothing to stop the violence. They had their orders (see Handouts Document entitled **Heydrich's Instructions, 1938**)

2. Certainly fear for the safety of oneself and one's family played a role in Germans either joining in the mob violence or remaining silent bystanders. But this was not the only motivation.

Normative discrimination refers to the need for individuals to "buy into" to conform to the belief system of an organization whose goal is discrimination. What were some of the beliefs and values of the Nazi regime which would have motivated individual citizens to commit violent acts against Jews and their property on November 9/10, 1938?

3. One eyewitness, after discovering that the men in his town under 60 years of age, were being transported to concentration camps writes, "I learned very soon from a policeman, who in his heart was still an anti-Nazi, that most of the Jewish men had been beaten up by members of the SA before being transported to Dachau."

According to the definition of normative discrimination, how do you think this policeman acted during Kristallnacht, even if he was an "anti-Nazi" in his heart?