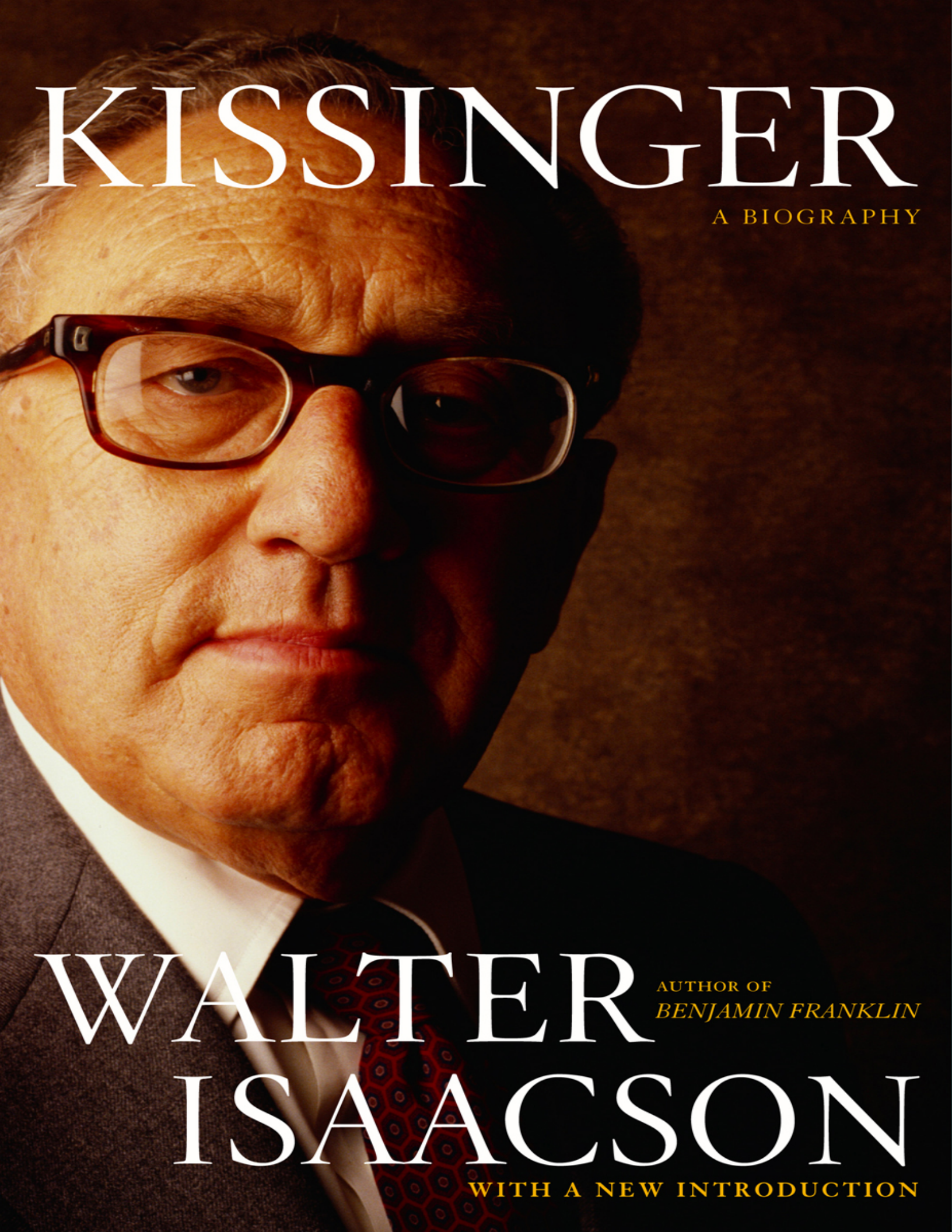
KISSINGER
A BIOGRAPHY
WALTER ISAACSON
AUTHOR OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION

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KISSINGER

A Biography

Walter Isaacson

SIMON & SCHUSTER PAPERBACKS
NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY

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To
Betsy, who is worthy of her name

INTRODUCTION

Kissinger's Realism and Today's Crusading Idealism

Three decades after he left office, Henry Kissinger continues to exert a fascinating hold on the public imagination as well as intellectual sway over the nation's foreign policy conversation. The longevity of his influence—and of his celebrity—is greater than that of any other statesman in modern times. He remains the most prominent foreign policy intellectual in the world, his advice sought by corporate and political leaders, his rumbling voice a regular on the airwaves, his byline stamping frequent analytic essays.

Partly this prolonged prominence is due, as even his detractors concede, to the power of his intellect. Nowadays, policy discussion too often tends to be polarized, partisan, and propelled by the type of talking points that work well on cable TV shows. Even people who disagree with Kissinger tend to be impressed by the rigor, nuance, depth, and unsentimental sharpness of his arguments. His writings and pronouncements combine historical axioms with timely insights to produce the same mixture of sweep and specificity that distinguished his memoirs.

Now that global politics is no longer oversimplified by the clarity of the cold war, Kissinger's approach of understanding and emphasizing balances of power has become even more relevant. Likewise, his fingertip feel for the world's webs of interdependence—how an event in one corner of the planet will reverberate in another—has become more important in an era of complex globalization.

Despite his continuing prominence, however, he has been notably absent from any official role in government. From the time he left office at the end of

the Ford administration through the terms of the younger George Bush, there have been three Republican presidents in office for almost twenty of the last thirty-two years. Yet none appointed Kissinger to any high post. Why?

The answer says as much about the political changes in the Republican Party, and in the country, as it does about Kissinger. Kissinger represents a conservative internationalism that is largely rooted in realism, realpolitik, power balances, and pragmatism. In this book, I have described how the opponents who did him most harm were not those on the dovish left or liberal Democratic side, but rather the neoconservatives or highly ideological Republicans who saw America's global struggle in crusading, values-based, moral, and sentimental terms.

Ronald Reagan, as readers of this book will see, ended up being Kissinger's most wounding ideological adversary. Although Reagan at various points considered having a rapprochement with Kissinger, in the end he was excluded from the administration. More important, Reagan's approach to foreign policy —as a crusade for freedom rather than as a quest for a stable balance of power —came to define the Republican view.

This was especially true after September 11, 2001, during the George W. Bush administration. Some Kissingerian realists, most notably Brent Scowcroft and to some extent Lawrence Eagleburger, went public with their skepticism of a crusading foreign policy. Kissinger likewise had qualms, but he expressed them in a hedged, nuanced, subtle way.

That was typical for two reasons. First, his views are invariably rather nuanced, and the complexities he saw involving Iraq and the greater Middle East were typically subtle, smart, and filled with ambiguities that turned out to be prescient. The world is a complex and dangerous place, and Kissinger's great strength as an analyst (and his weakness at fitting in with more ideological conservatives) is that he is not very good at oversimplification. In addition, he is instinctively averse to open and outright challenges to people in power. This is particularly true when it comes to conservative Republicans in power, because he knows that their distrust of his ideological fervor is what has kept him exiled from office.

This relates to a core issue explored in this book, one that is, I think, even more valid today. I contend that Kissinger was one of the few realists—as

opposed to idealists—to shape American diplomacy. In that approach he was a master. He had a feel for balances of power, spheres of influence, and realpolitik relations. He brilliantly created a triangular structure involving the U.S., Russia, and China, and that architecture preserved the possibility of America's power and global influence after the debacle of Vietnam.

On the other hand, he did not always have the same feel for the role that idealistic values—sentiments, he would call them—play in allowing a democracy to operate openly and with sustained confidence at home and abroad. Nor did he fully appreciate, I argue, that the openness and messiness of America's democracy is what gives strength, not weakness, to its foreign policy. He was thus—under Nixon's dark tutelage—too fond of secrecy, and too much in need of it.

Kissinger was not exactly thrilled by this argument or by this book when it first came out, even though he had given me many interviews. I think he was surprised that its critique came from the conservative side as much as from the liberal side. I also suspect, given the fact that he is not known for his thick skin, that he would probably be outraged if he reread his Nobel Peace Prize Citation or his own memoirs on the grounds that they are not favorable enough.

For a while after the book came out, he didn't speak to me. Then, after I had become the managing editor of *Time*, he was invited back to an anniversary party featuring all who had been on the cover. The phone rang and his distinctive voice came on to say, "Well, Walter, even the Thirty Years War had to end at some point. I will forgive you." (He did allow that his wife, Nancy, both loyal and smart, was partial to the Hunded Years War.) Since then, we have worked together on various projects, including a Middle East program at the Aspen Institute.

In our recent conversations, Kissinger has contended, persuasively, that he has always recognized the role of values in forging a sustainable foreign policy. For him there is a balance that must be struck between a nation's interests and its ideals, and that balance is best struck unsentimentally.

For a fuller expression of this argument, readers of this book should also read Kissinger's own works written subsequent to his time in office. Most notable is his 1994 tome *Diplomacy*, which traces the balances made in foreign

policy, including that of realism and idealism, from the times of Cardinal Richelieu through brilliant chapters on Theodore Roosevelt the realist and Woodrow Wilson the idealist.

Kissinger, a European refugee who has read Metternich more avidly than Jefferson, generally tilts his book toward the realist camp. "No other nation," he wrote in *Diplomacy*, "has ever rested its claim to international leadership on its altruism." Other Americans might proclaim this as a point of pride; when Kissinger says it, his attitude seems that of an anthropologist examining a rather unsettling tribal ritual. The practice of basing policy on ideals rather than interests, he pointed out, can make a nation seem dangerously unpredictable.

Both in *Diplomacy* and in his other writings and pronouncements over the past two decades, Kissinger makes the most forceful case by any American statesman since Theodore Roosevelt for the role of realism and its Prussian-accented cousin realpolitik in international affairs. Just as George Kennan's odd admixture of romanticism and realism helped shape American attitudes at the outset of the cold war, Kissinger's emphasis on national interests rather than moral sentiments defined a framework for dealing with the complex world that emerged after the end of Soviet communism. As he put it in the conclusion of *Diplomacy:* "American idealism remains as essential as ever, perhaps even more so. But in the new world order, its role will be to provide the faith to sustain America through all the ambiguities of choice in an imperfect world."

In fact, America's idealism and realism have been interwoven ever since Benjamin Franklin played an ingenious balance-of-power game in France while simultaneously propagandizing about America's exceptional values. From the Monroe Doctrine to Manifest Destiny to the Marshall Plan, the U.S. has linked its interests to its ideals. This was especially true during the cold war, which was a moral crusade as well as a security struggle.

Kissinger realized, of course, that there was such a balance to be struck, and he appreciated the need for a values-based idealism to be part of this balance. However, my contention in this book, which I believe still holds, is that this balance was tilted in the 1970s a bit too much toward the secrecy and backchannel maneuverings that sometimes seem necessary in conducting a realist diplomacy in a democracy. When the third volume of his own memoirs,

dealing with the Ford years, came out in 1999, well after I had written this book, he defended rather than denied this tilt. "The United States," he concluded, "must temper its missionary spirit with a concept of the national interest and rely on its head as well as its heart in defining its duty to the world." Although that sentence was written at the end of the Clinton years, it could be directed at the subsequent Bush administration as well.

Kissinger's realist power approach during the 1970s succeeded at building a worthy framework for stability, but it failed to sustain support from either end of the political spectrum, was not fully compatible with the sentiments that permit sustained international engagement in a democracy, and therefore tended to encourage an unhealthy secrecy.

Today, however, the questions facing the American polity may be from the reverse side: Have we tilted too far in the idealistic direction? Do we need a bit more Kissingerian realism and subtlety? Has the nation's international approach, in its zeal to spread freedom, become so driven by a sense of moral mission and crusading spirit that it could now use a sobering dose of caution, pragmatism, realism, cold calculation of interests, and traditional conservatism?

In answering these questions, I think it is crucial that we appreciate the role of the Kissinger conservative realpolitik tradition in the context of his forty-year struggle against what he regarded as the sentimental idealism of both crusading neoconservatives and moralistic liberals. An understanding of Kissinger and of his sense of global dynamics is just as relevant now as it was in the aftermath of Vietnam and at the end of the cold war.

Walter Isaacson
Washington, D.C.
June 2005

Introduction*

> *"As a professor, I tended to think of history as run by impersonal forces. But when you see it in practice, you see the difference personalities make."—KISSINGER, in a background talk with reporters on his plane after his first Middle East shuttle, January 1974*

As his parents finished packing the few personal belongings that they were permitted to take out of Germany, the bespectacled fifteen-year-old boy stood in the corner of the apartment and memorized the details of the scene. He was a bookish and reflective child, with that odd mixture of ego and insecurity that can come from growing up smart yet persecuted. "I'll be back someday," he said to the customs inspector who was surveying the boxes. Years later, he would recall how the official looked at him "with the disdain of age" and said nothing.[1]

Henry Kissinger was right: he did come back to his Bavarian birthplace, first as a soldier with the U.S. Army counterintelligence corps, then as a renowned scholar of international relations, and eventually as the dominant statesman of his era. But he would return as an American, not as a German. Ever since his discovery, upon his arrival in New York City, that he did not have to cross the street to avoid being beaten by non-Jewish boys coming his way, he was eager to be regarded as, and accepted as, an American.

And so he was. By the time he was made secretary of state in 1973, he had become, according to a Gallup poll, the most admired person in America. In addition, as he conducted foreign policy with the air of a guest of honor at a cocktail party, he became one of the most unlikely celebrities ever to capture the world's imagination. When he visited Bolivia, protocol prevented the president of that country from being part of the welcoming party; but he went to the airport that night anyway, incognito, and stood in the crowd anonymously so that he could witness Kissinger's arrival.[2]

Yet Kissinger was also reviled by large segments of the American public, ranging from liberal intellectuals to conservative activists, who in varying ways considered him a Strangelovian power manipulator dangerously devoid of moral principles. Among the mandarins of the mainstream foreign policy establishment, it became fashionable to deride him even while calling him Henry. When George Ball, the veteran American diplomat, sent the manuscript of a new book to an editor, he was told: "We've got one big problem here. In almost every chapter you stop what you're saying and beat up again on Henry Kissinger." Ball replied: "Tell me what chapters I've missed and I'll add the appropriate calumnies."[3]

Because people hold such divergent opinions of Kissinger, and hold them so strongly, the first question that a person writing a book about him must answer is, Will it be favorable or unfavorable? It's an odd query, not the sort one would make of a biographer of Henry Stimson or George Marshall or even Dean Acheson. Years after he left office, Kissinger still aroused controversy of a distinctly personal sort—hatred and veneration, animosity and awe, all battling it out with little neutral territory in between.

Kissinger's furtive style and chameleon instincts, which make capturing his true colors on any issue difficult, compound the problem of producing an objective assessment. Different people who dealt with him directly on major events—the invasion of Cambodia, the mining of Haiphong harbor, the Christmas bombing of Hanoi, the resupply of Israel during the 1973 war—have conflicting impressions of what he really felt.

That may be why most books about his policies seem to set sail on either a distinctly favorable or unfavorable tack, and also why there has never been a full biography of him. Though I leave it to the reader to decide whether I have succeeded, my goal was to produce an unbiased biography that portrayed Kissinger in all of his complexity. It seemed to me that enough time had passed to permit an objective look: the main players were in the twilight of their careers, still in possession of their memories and personal papers but freed from old strictures of secrecy and ambition.

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This is not an authorized biography. Kissinger did not get to approve—or even see—its contents before it was published, nor did he have any authority over what I put in. It contains disclosures and judgments that he would surely dispute, especially since his ego and sensitivity are such that he would probably feel that even his own memoirs do not quite do justice to his achievements.

Yet it is not, on the other hand, an unauthorized biography. When I first decided to write it, my only contact with Kissinger had been an interview for a book involving some other modern American statesmen, *The Wise Men*. As a courtesy, I sent him a letter when I decided to undertake a biography of him.

His reply betrayed minimal enthusiasm. He could do nothing to stop me, he said, but he had no desire to see me pursue the project. But as I proceeded to interview his former associates and gather documents, I began to sense a growing interest on his part.

The subject of the book was, after all, one that fascinated him deeply. He had never written any memoirs about his life before the Nixon administration, nor about his personal life, nor about the Ford administration and afterward. Part of his personality is that he cares obsessively about trying to make people understand him: like a moth to flame, he is attracted to his critics and displays a compulsion to convert them, or at least explain himself to them.

So when the time came for me to talk to him, he ended up cooperating fully. He gave me more than two dozen formal interviews plus access to many of his public and private papers. In addition, he asked family members, former aides, business associates, and past presidents to work with me. He even helped me track down some old adversaries.

Although I tried to embark on this project without any biases, certain themes emerged during the reporting that I hope will become evident to the reader, and perhaps even convincing. The most fundamental, I believe, is that Kissinger had an instinctive feel—*Fingerspitzengefühl*, to use the German word—for power and for creating a new global balance that could help America cope with its withdrawal syndrome after Vietnam. But it was not matched by a similar feel for the strength to be derived from the openness of America's democratic system or for the moral values that are the true source of its global influence.

In addition, I have sought to explore how Kissinger's personality—brilliant, conspiratorial, furtive, sensitive to linkages and nuances, prone to rivalries and power struggles, charming yet at times deceitful—related to the power-oriented realpolitik and secretive diplomatic maneuvering that were the basis of his policies. Policy is rooted in personality, as Kissinger knew from studying Metternich.

Kissinger came to power amid a swirl of great historical forces, including Moscow's achievement of strategic parity with Washington, the American humiliation in Vietnam, and China's need to end its generation of isolation. But it was also a period when complex, larger-than-life personalities played upon the world stage, including Nixon, Mao, Sadat, and Kissinger himself.

As a young academic, Kissinger once wrote of Bismarck and his era: "The new order was tailored to a genius who proposed to constrain the contending forces, both domestic and foreign, by manipulating their antagonisms." Much the same could be said of Kissinger and his era. And Germany in the 1930s was a good place for a sensitive and brilliant child to learn about contending forces and the manipulation of antagonisms.

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* To the 1992 edition.

ONE

FÜRTH

Coming of Age in Nazi Germany, 1923–1938

> *"The point of departure is order, which alone can produce freedom."—METTERNICH*

THE KISSINGERS OF BAVARIA

Among the Jews of Rodelsee, a small Bavarian village near Würzburg, Abraham Kissinger was known for his piety and profound religious knowledge. Because he was successful as a merchant, he was able to honor the Sabbath by closing before sunset on Fridays. But he feared that his four sons might not have that luxury if they, too, went into trade. So he decreed that they should all become teachers, as his own father had been, and thus always be able to keep the Sabbath.

And so it was that Joseph, Maier, Simon, and David Kissinger each went forth from Rodelsee and founded distinguished Jewish schools in the nearby German villages. Of their children, at least five, including David's eldest son, Louis, would also become teachers. And years later, at a famous college in a faraway country, so would Louis's elder son, a studious and introverted young man who, until his family fled to America, was known as Heinz.[1]

The Jews of Bavaria had suffered recurring onslaughts of repression since they first settled in the region in the tenth century. As merchants and moneylenders, they were protected in many Bavarian towns because of the contribution they made to the economy, only to find themselves brutally banished when the mood of princes and populace changed. They were expelled from upper Bavaria in 1276, beginning a wave of oppression that culminated

with the persecutions following the Black Death in 1349. By the sixteenth century, few significant Jewish communities remained in the region.

Jews began returning to Bavaria, mainly from Austria, at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Some were bankers brought in to help finance the War of Spanish Succession; others came as traders and cattle dealers. Despite occasional outbreaks of anti-Semitism, they gradually regained a secure place in Bavarian society, or so it seemed. A series of laws between 1804 and 1813, during Napoleon's reign, allowed Jews to attend state schools, join the militia, and enjoy full citizenship. In addition, they were accorded the right to be known by family surnames.

The first member of the family to take the name Kissinger was Abraham's father, Meyer, who was born in Kleinebstadt in 1767. As a young man, Meyer went to live in the resort town of Bad Kissingen, a popular spa north of Würzburg. At the time, Kissingen was home to approximately 180 Jews out of a population of just over 1,000. Later he moved to Rodelsee, where Meyer of Kissingen legally adopted the name Meyer Kissinger in 1817. Abraham was born the following year.[2]

Abraham was the only one of Meyer's ten offspring to survive childhood. He lived until he was eighty-one and became the patriarch of a family that included the four sons who followed his wishes and became teachers, four daughters, and thirty-two grandchildren. Although they were all Orthodox Jews, they were a solidly middle-class German family, one that felt deep loyalty to a nation that treated them well.

David Kissinger, the youngest of Abraham's sons, was born in Rodelsee in 1860 and moved to Ermershausen where he founded a small school and served as the cantor in the local synagogue. Later, he taught in the Jewish seminary in Würzburg. Always somberly dressed, he was referred to by friends as the "Sunday Kissinger," to distinguish him from his brother Simon, a more casual dresser, who was known as the "weekday Kissinger."[3]

David and his wife, Linchen, known as Lina, were sophisticated and well read, the type of Germans who would give their first son, born in 1887, a French name, Louis. Louis was the only one of their seven children to take up teaching, but unlike his father, he decided to do so in secular rather than

religious schools. After studying at Heidelberg University, he enrolled in the teachers' academy in Fürth, a town on the outskirts of Nuremberg.

Because Germany needed teachers, Louis was exempted from service during World War I. He took a job at the Heckmannschule, a bourgeois private school. Directed by gentiles, but with half of its students Jews, it typified the extent of Jewish assimilation in Fürth, a city with a history of religious tolerance.[4]

Fürth had flourished in the fourteenth century, when Jews were denied entry into Nuremberg and settled instead in the riverbank village just outside the walls of the fortified city. Traders, craftsmen, and metalworkers, they turned Fürth into a vibrant commercial center and one of Bavaria's few undisrupted seats of Jewish culture. By 1860, Fürth had a population of 14,000, about half Jewish.

During the industrial revolution, many of the Jewish businessmen built textile and toy factories. The most prosperous formed a Jewish aristocracy, led by such families as the Nathans and the Frankels. Their large sandstone villas overlooked the town, and they endowed a wide array of philanthropies, including an orphanage, hospital, school, and orchestra. The town's seven synagogues were crowded around a large square, which was dominated by that of the most liberal congregation, patronized—at least on the High Holy days—by the more socially prominent Jews.

Louis Kissinger, who joined the most Orthodox of the town's synagogues, the Neuschul, was not part of the world of the Frankels and Nathans. But teaching was a proud and honorable calling in Germany, and Herr Kissinger was a proud and honorable member of the German middle class. In his politics, he was a conservative who liked the kaiser and yearned for him after his abdication. Despite his religious faith, Zionism held no appeal for him; he was a German, patriotic and loyal.

When the kaiser's government shut down most private schools, the Heckmannshule was dissolved. But Louis was able to find a new job as a *"Studienrat"*—a combination of schoolmaster, teacher, and counselor—in the state-run system. First, he worked at a girl's junior high school. Then, he taught geography and accounting at a secondary school, the Mädchenlyzeum, which soon merged with a trade school, the Handelsschule.[5]

Louis Kissinger took great pride in his status as a *Studienrat*, an eminent position in German society. Years later, after he had lost his job at the hands of another German government and fled his homeland, he would write to old acquaintances, signing himself, in his neat handwriting, *"studienrat ausser dienst,"* retired schoolmaster. He was strict but popular. "Goldilocks," the girls called him, sometimes to his face, and also "Kissus," which amused him even more. He had a slight paunch, a faint mustache, a prominent jaw, and a deferential manner. "He was a typical German schoolteacher," according to Jerry Bechhofer, a family friend from Fürth and later New York City. "He was professorial and stern, but wouldn't hurt a fly."[6]

When Louis first came to the Mädchenlyzeum, the school's headmaster told him about a girl named Paula Stern who had graduated the previous year. The headmaster knew how to entice the sober new teacher: he showed him Paula's grades. There were enough A's to kindle Louis's interest. But those marks were a bit misleading. Instead of having the same scholarly demeanor as Louis, Paula was sharp, witty, earthy, and practical. It was a fine pairing: Louis was the wise and somewhat aloof teacher, Paula the energetic and sensible decision-maker.

The Sterns lived in Leutershausen, a village thirty miles east of Nuremberg. Paula's great-grandfather had gone into the cattle trade in the early nineteenth century. Her grandfather, named Bernhardt, and her father, named Falk, built the business into a healthy enterprise.

Falk Stern, a prominent figure among both the Jewish and gentile communities in the area, was far more assimilated than the Kissingers were. His imposing stone house, with its large courtyard and carefully tended garden, was in the center of the village. Yet he remained a simple man: he went to bed every evening shortly after nine P.M. and took little interest in politics or scholarly subjects. His first wife, Beppi Behr, also from a cattle-dealing family, died young. They had one child, Paula, born in 1901. Though her father remarried, Paula remained his only child.

When Paula was sent to Fürth for school, she stayed with her aunt, Berta Fleischmann, wife of one of the town's kosher butchers. Berta helped encourage the match with Louis Kissinger, even though he was thirty-five and Paula only twenty-one. The Sterns also approved. When the couple married in

1922, the Sterns bestowed upon them a dowry large enough to buy a five-room, second-floor corner apartment in a gabled sandstone building on Mathildenstrasse, a cobbled street in a Jewish neighborhood of Fürth. Nine months later, on May 27, 1923, their first child was born there.[7]

Heinz Alfred Kissinger. His first name was chosen because it appealed to Paula. His middle name was, like that of his father's brother Arno, a Germanicized updating of Abraham. From his father, Heinz inherited the nickname Kissus. When he moved to America fifteen years later, he would become known as Henry.[8]

Young Heinz

By the time Heinz Kissinger was born, the Jewish population of Fürth had shrunk to three thousand. A new period of repression was under way: in reaction to the emasculation Germany suffered in World War I, a nationalism arose that celebrated the purity of the Teutonic, Aryan roots of German culture. Jews were increasingly treated as aliens. Among other things, they were barred from attending public gatherings—including league soccer matches.

Nonetheless, Heinz became an ardent fan of the Kleeblatt Eleven, the Fürth team that had last won the German championships in 1914. He refused to stay away from their games, even though his parents ordered him to obey the law. He would sneak off to the stadium, sometimes with his younger brother, Walter, or a friend, and pretend not to be Jewish. "All we risked was a beating," he later recalled.

That was not an uncommon occurrence. On one occasion, he and Walter were caught at a match and roughed up by a gang of kids. Unwilling to tell their parents, they confided in their family maid, who cleaned them up without revealing their secret.[9]

Kissinger's love of soccer surpassed his ability to play it, though not his enthusiasm for trying. In an unsettled world, it was his favorite outlet. "He was one of the smallest and skinniest in our group," said Paul Stiefel, a friend from Fürth who later immigrated to Chicago. What Kissinger lacked in strength he

made up in finesse. One year he was even captain of his class team, selected more for his leadership ability than his agility.

The Jews in Fürth had their own sports club. "My father once played for the city team," said Henry Gitterman, a classmate of Kissinger's. "When the Jews were thrown off, they formed their own teams at a Jewish sports club." The field was merely a plot of dirt with goalposts, and the gym was an old warehouse with a corrugated roof. But it served as a haven from roving Nazi youth gangs and an increasingly threatening world.[10]

Young Kissinger could be very competitive. In the cobblestone yard behind their house, he would play games of one-on-one soccer with John Heiman, a cousin who boarded with his family for five years. "When it was time to go in," Heiman recalled, "if he was ahead, we could go. But if he was losing, I'd have to keep playing until he had a chance to catch up."

Kissinger was better at *Völkerball*, a simple pickup game, usually played with five on a side, in which the object was to hit members of the opposite team with a ball. Kissinger liked being the player who stood behind the enemy lines to catch the balls that his teammates threw. "It was one of the few games I was very good at," he would later say.[11]

It was as a student rather than as an athlete that Kissinger excelled. Like his father, he was scholarly in demeanor. "A bookworm, introverted," recalled his brother, Walter. Tzipora Jochsberger, a childhood friend, said she "always remembered Heinz with a book under his arm, always."

His mother even worried that books had become an escape from an inhospitable world. "He withdrew," she recalled. "Sometimes he wasn't outgoing enough, because he was lost in his books."[12]

Heinz and his brother, Walter, who was a year younger, looked a lot alike. Both were skinny with wiry hair, had high foreheads and their father's large ears. But their personalities contrasted. Heinz was shy, observant, detached, somewhat insecure, earnest, and reflective like his father. Walter was impish, sociable, lively, practical, a better athlete, and down-to-earth like his mother. Though something of a loner, Heinz became a leader because his friends respected his intelligence. Walter, however, was more socially adroit, a wheeler-dealer and an instigator rather than a leader. "Henry was always the thinker,"

his father once said. "He was more inhibited. Wally was more the doer, more the extrovert."[13]

Louis badly wanted his two children to go to the *Gymnasium*, the state-run high school. After years at a Jewish school, Heinz was likewise eager to make the change. But by the time he applied to the state-run school, the tide of anti-Semitism had risen. Because he was Jewish, he was rejected.[14]

The Israelitische Realschule, where he went instead, was every bit as good academically: the emphasis was on history—both German and Jewish—foreign languages (Kissinger studied English), and literature. It was small, with about thirty children in each grade, half boys and half girls. But it eventually grew to about fifty per class as the state school system barred Jews and as many Orthodox children began commuting there by trolley from Nuremberg. Religion was taken seriously. Each day, Kissinger and his friends spent two hours studying the Bible and the Talmud.

Kissinger regarded his father fondly, but with a touch of detachment. "He was the gentlest person imaginable, extraordinarily gentle," Kissinger later said. "Good and evil didn't arise for him because he couldn't imagine evil. He couldn't imagine what the Nazis represented. His gentleness was genuine, not the sort of obsequiousness that is really a demand on you."

Louis was a cultured man, with a great love of literature and classical music. He had an extensive record collection and an upright piano, both of which he played with great verve. ("Unfortunately, his favorite composer was Mahler," Paula recalled.) Wise and compassionate, he was the sort of person neighbors often called upon for counsel. "He did not hold himself out as a moralist," his son said, "but his own conduct was so extraordinary it served as a lesson."

His children, however, were more reticent about bringing their problems to him. "He couldn't understand children having problems and didn't think they should have real problems," Kissinger recalled. "Nor could he understand the type of problems a ten-year-old would have."

Paula Kissinger, on the other hand, had a knack for handling family crises. "My father was lucky he had an earthy wife who made all the decisions," Kissinger said. She was a survivor, very practical. "She didn't occupy her mind with grand ideas or with ultimate meanings. She looked after necessities."[15]

Paula had sharp eyes and keen instincts. Hidden behind her smile and unaffected grace was a toughness when it came to protecting her family. Though less reflective than her husband (or her son), and less intellectual, she had a better sense of herself and of what people around her were thinking.

As a child, Kissinger was more comfortable having one close friend than being part of a group. In Fürth, his inseparable companion was Heinz Lion (pronounced like *Leon)*, who later became a biochemist in Israel and changed his name to Menachem Lion. They spent almost every afternoon and weekend together. On Saturdays, Lion's father would teach the boys the Torah, then take them on hikes.

Kissinger used to discuss with Lion and his father those problems he could not broach with his own father. "They lived near us and he would ride over on his bike," Lion recalled. "It seems to me he had a problem with his father. He was afraid of him because he was a very pedantic man. His father was always checking his homework. He told me more than once that he couldn't discuss anything with his father, especially not girls."

Kissinger and Lion used to take walks on Friday evenings through the park with girlfriends, sometimes stopping to skate on the frozen lake. One Sabbath evening, the two boys were enjoying themselves so much that they came home late. "In Germany, in those days, it was one of the most sacred rules of behavior to return home on time and never to stay out after dark," Lion's mother later said. "And so my husband took off his belt and gave them a thrashing." Rather unfairly, Herr Lion blamed Kissinger for being a bad influence, and he forbade his son to see him for a week. Later, Lion's parents sent him to a summer camp in Czechoslovakia for six weeks to get him away from Kissinger.[16]

When Kissinger was seven, his cousin John Heiman moved in because his native village had no Jewish school. He slept in the same room as Heinz and Walter, becoming a part of the family. "I was very homesick those first few days," recalled Heiman, who later became a hobby-kit manufacturer in Chicago. "I carried on pretty badly." One evening Paula found him in tears. He wanted a school cap, he cried, a blue one like the other boys at the Realschule wore. "The next day I woke up and there was the school cap. That's the type of person she was."[17]

For the young Kissinger, one place was particularly magical: his mother's family home in Leutershausen, where the Kissingers spent the summer. The Stern home was stately and secure, built around a cozy courtyard where Heinz would chase the family's brood of chickens and, as he grew older, play *Völkerball* with his friends.

Falk Stern, with his weathered face, would watch from the window as the boys played, and his wife, Paula's stepmother, would bustle about in her apron. A fastidious woman, she cleaned house every Wednesday, and the children were barred from the living room until the Sabbath ended on Saturday evening. Leutershausen had only a tiny Jewish community, about twenty families. Consequently, the Sterns had many non-Jewish friends, unlike the Kissingers in Fürth.

One of young Kissinger's best friends in Leutershausen was Tzipora Jochsberger. Her family had a big garden where the children would organize their version of a circus. They borrowed ladders and mats in order to produce acrobatic acts. "Even Henry got interested for a while," she recalled. "Usually he was too serious for that sort of thing."

When Tzipora was fourteen, she was expelled with the other Jewish children from her public school. Even though they were Reform Jews, her parents sent her to an Orthodox school. When she came back that summer, she had become an Orthodox Jew, much to her family's chagrin. "My parents were not very religious, and they didn't understand my conversion," she said. "They were very upset." Since she had determined to keep kosher, Tzipora could not even eat with her family. Kissinger, himself Orthodox, was the only person she felt could understand her change. They went on long walks to discuss it. Faith was important, he told her, and she should remain Orthodox if that is what she felt was right for her. "Henry seemed to understand the change. I always liked to listen to him explain matters because he was so smart."[18]

Along with John Heiman and Heinz Lion, Kissinger went to synagogue every morning before school. On Saturdays, Lion's father read and discussed the Torah with them. Young Kissinger "would be totally engulfed in the atmosphere of piety," according to Lion's mother. "He would pray with devotion."

Kissinger, who had mastered the Torah and had a sonorous voice even as a child, chanted the passages at his bar mitzvah with such beauty that those who were there would remark on it years later. Presiding over the service was Rabbi Leo Breslauer, who would later move to New York and officiate at Kissinger's first wedding. At the party after the bar mitzvah, Paula read a poem she had written for the occasion.[19]

When Kissinger graduated from school in Fürth, he went to study at the Jewish seminary in Würzburg. His time there was pleasant enough: life in a dormitory, endless books to distract the mind from the threats of the outside world, and daily visits to his wise grandfather David. But Kissinger had not gone to Würzburg to become a Jewish teacher, for it had become clear that there was no future for Jewish teachers, or even Jews, in Germany. Instead, he went to Würzburg for lack of anything better to do for the moment. By then, the Kissinger family, led by Paula, was coming to an anguishing decision.[20]

A World Destroyed

In 1923, the year that Kissinger was born, Julius Streicher had founded the rabid anti-Semitic weekly *Der Stuermer* in Nuremberg, where he headed the local branch of Hitler's Nazi party. His incitement of hatred against the Jews was not only fanatic, but sadistic. He demanded the total extermination of Jews, whom he called "germs" and "defilers."

Streicher's newspaper, which achieved a circulation of five hundred thousand, stoked the fire of anti-Semitism in Fürth and Leutershausen. The atmosphere of their summers in Leutershausen changed, Paula Kissinger recalled. "Some gentiles had been our friends, but after Streicher began publishing we were isolated. A few people stuck by us, but only a few. There was hardly anyone for the boys to play with."[21]

Streicher paved the way for the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. These statutes negated the German citizenship of Jews, forbade marriages between Jews and German Christians, and prevented Jews from being teachers in state schools or holding many other professional positions.

As a result, Louis Kissinger was suddenly deemed unfit to teach true Germans and lost the job of which he was so proud. For a while, he worked to

establish a Jewish vocational school in Fürth, where he taught accounting. But he was a broken man, humbled and humiliated by forces of hatred that his kindly soul could not comprehend.

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In later years, Henry Kissinger would minimize his Jewish heritage. When he discussed his childhood (which he did only rarely and reluctantly), he would describe it as "typical middle-class German," adding only as an afterthought that of course it was German Jewish. His family, he would say, was assimilated, and the Jews of Fürth were not all that segregated or tribal.

He also minimized the traumas he faced as a child, the persecution and the beatings and the daily confrontations with a virulent anti-Semitism that made him feel like an outcast. As he told a reporter from *Die Nachrichten*, a Fürth newspaper, who was writing a profile of him in 1958: "My life in Fürth seems to have passed without leaving any lasting impressions." He said much the same to many other questioners over the years. "That part of my childhood is not a key to anything," Kissinger insisted in a 1971 interview. "I was not consciously unhappy. I was not acutely aware of what was going on. For children, these things are not that serious."[22]

Kissinger's childhood friends regard such talk as an act of denial and self-delusion. Some of them see his escape from memory as a key to his legendary insecurities. The child who had to pretend to be someone else so that he could get into soccer games, they say, became an adult who was prone to deceit and self-deception in the pursuit of acceptance by political and social patrons.

Paula Kissinger was more forthcoming about the traumas of the Nazi period. "Our children weren't allowed to play with the others," she said. "They stayed shut up in the garden. They loved football, Henry most of all, but the games in Nuremberg were banned to them." She especially remembered her children's pitiful fright and puzzlement when the Nazi youths would march by taunting the Jews. "The Hitler Youth, which included almost all the children in Fürth, sang in ranks in the streets and paraded in uniform, and Henry and his brother would watch them, unable to understand why they didn't have the right to do what others did."[23]

"Anti-Semitism was a feature of Bavaria and did not start with Hitler," said Menachem Lion. "We didn't have much if any contact with non-Jewish children. We were afraid when we saw any non-Jewish kids coming down the street. We would experience things that people couldn't imagine today, but we took it for granted. It was like the air we breathed."[24]

Other childhood friends of Kissinger's recalled similar traumas. Werner Gundelfinger: "We couldn't go to the swimming pool, the dances, or the tea room. We couldn't go anywhere without seeing the sign: *Juden Verboten*. These are things that remain in your subconscious." Frank Harris: "We all grew up with a certain amount of inferiority." Otto Pretsfelder: "You can't grow up like we did and be untouched. Every day there were slurs on the street, anti-Semitic remarks, calling you filthy names."[25]

The rise of the Nazis was hardest on Paula Kissinger. Her husband Louis was baffled, almost shell-shocked, struck mute; but Paula was acutely sensitive to what was happening and deeply pained by it. She was the sociable one, the sprightly woman with gentile friends who loved to go swimming every day during the summer in the Leutershausen municipal pool. When her gentile friends began to avoid her, and when Jews were barred from using the pool, she began to realize there was no future for her family in Germany.

"It was my decision," she later said, "and I did it because of the children. I knew there was not a life to be made for them if we stayed."

She had a first cousin who had immigrated years before to Washington Heights on Manhattan's far Upper West Side. Although they had never met, Paula wrote to her late in 1935, just after passage of the Nuremberg Laws, to ask if Heinz and Walter could come live with her. No, replied her cousin, the whole Kissinger family should emigrate, but not the children alone.

Paula was very devoted to her father, who was then dying of cancer. She did not want to leave him. But by the spring of 1938, she realized there was no choice. Her cousin had filed the necessary affidavits to allow them into the U.S., and the papers had come through allowing them to leave Germany.

For the final time, the Kissinger family went to Leutershausen to visit Paula's father and stepmother. "I had never seen my father cry until he said good-bye to my mother's father," said Kissinger. "That shook me more than anything. I suddenly realized we were involved in some big and irrevocable

event. It was the first time I had encountered anything my father couldn't cope with."[26]

By that time, Kissinger was ready to leave. The Lion family had immigrated to Palestine in March. They sold their apartment a week before they left, and Heinz Lion moved in with the Kissingers for those final days. The two boys talked about being apart, about leaving Germany, about whether they would ever return. Lion's father offered some parting words for the young Kissinger: "You'll come back to your birthplace someday and you won't find a stone unturned." With Heinz and Herr Lion gone, Kissinger had little reason to want to stay. "That was when his first real loneliness came," his mother recalled.

On August 20, 1938, less than three months before the mobs of Kristallnacht would destroy their synagogue and most other Jewish institutions in Germany, the Kissingers set sail for London, to spend two weeks with relatives, and then on to America. Henry was fifteen, his brother, Walter, fourteen, his father fifty, and his mother thirty-seven.

Packing was a simple task: even though they had paid a fee to move their belongings out of Germany, they were permitted to take only some furniture and whatever personal possessions could fit into one trunk. Louis had to leave his books behind, and they were allowed to take only a small sum of pocket money.[27]

Kissinger would return, both as a soldier and as a statesman. In December of 1975, when he was secretary of state, he was invited back—along with his parents—for a ceremony awarding him Fürth's Gold Medal for Distinguished Native Citizens. German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Mayor Kurt Scherzer were on hand, along with a thousand onlookers and a choir from the school that once would not accept the Kissinger boys. Kissinger's remarks were brief and avoided any mention of the horrors that caused his family to flee. When invited to tour the neighborhood where he used to play soccer and study the Torah and face beatings by Hitler Youth members, Kissinger politely declined.

"My memories are not all that glorious," he later told reporters. "I did it mostly for my parents. They never lost their attachment for this city." His father seemed to agree. At a lunch with the few friends of his still in Fürth, he

quoted Euripides and said, "We forget all the bad memories on this day." His mother, however, forgot nothing. "I was offended in my heart that day, but said nothing," she recalled. "In my heart, I knew they would have burned us with the others if we had stayed."[28]

At the restored synagogue where the Kissingers once worshiped there is a plaque. "On the 22d of March 1942," it says, "the last occupants of this building, 33 orphan children, were sent to their deaths in Izbica with their teacher, Dr. Isaak Hallemann."

While on their 1975 visit, the Kissingers visited Falk Stern's grave. He was lucky; he died in his home before the holocaust began. At least thirteen close relatives of Kissinger were sent to the gas chambers or died in concentration camps, including Stern's wife.

One reason so many of them perished is that, as Kissinger has said, they considered themselves loyal German citizens. His grandfather David and granduncle Simon both felt that the family should ride out the Nazi era, that it would pass. David did not flee until after Kristallnacht, when he joined his son Arno (Louis Kissinger's brother) in Sweden. But Simon, even after Kristallnacht, forbade his family to leave. Germany, he said, had been good to the Jews. They should stick with the country and be loyal to it as it went through this phase.

Simon was killed in a German concentration camp. So, too, were his sons Ferdinand and Julius, who like their father and uncles were teachers. All three of Kissinger's aunts—his father's sisters—also perished in the holocaust: Ida and her husband, Siegbert Friedmann, who was a teacher in Mainstocken, and one child; Sara and her husband, Max Blattner, and their daughter, Selma; Fanny and her husband, Jacob Rau, and their son, Norbert. Fanny's daughter, Lina Rau, who had boarded with the Kissingers, managed to escape to New York. "My parents did not expect Hitler to last," she said. "Nobody did. We thought it would blow over."[29]

Legacies of a Lost Childhood

Kissinger rarely spoke of the holocaust other than to protest now and then that it did not leave a permanent scar on his personality. "It was not a

lifelong trauma," he said. "But it had an impact: having lived under totalitarianism, I know what it's like." Only once did he ever show any signs of anger about what happened. During an early visit to Germany as national security adviser, Bonn announced that Kissinger might visit with some of his relatives. "What the hell are they putting out?" he grumbled to aides. "My relatives are soap."[30]

Despite Kissinger's demurrals, the Nazi atrocities left a lasting imprint on him. "Kissinger is a strong man, but the Nazis were able to damage his soul," said Fritz Kraemer, a non-Jewish German who left to fight Hitler and became Kissinger's mentor in the U.S. Army. "For the formative years of his youth, he faced the horror of his world coming apart, of the father he loved being turned into a helpless mouse." Kissinger's most salient personality traits, Kraemer said, can be traced to this experience. "It made him seek order, and it led him to hunger for acceptance, even if it meant trying to please those he considered his intellectual inferiors."[31]

A desire to be accepted, a tendency to be distrustful and insecure: these were understandable reactions to a childhood upended by one of the most gruesome chapters in human history. Kissinger's desire for social and political acceptance—and his yearning to be liked—was unusually ardent, so much so that it led him to compromise his beliefs at times.[32]

One of Kissinger's insecurities as an adult was his feeling, sometimes half-confessed through mordant humor, that he would not fit in if he was too closely identified with his religion. Only partly in jest, he grumbled that too much reporting about his family background could "bring every anti-Semite out of the woodwork" to attack him.

For Kissinger, the holocaust destroyed the connection between God's will and the progress of history—a tenet that is at the heart of the Jewish faith and is one of the religion's most important contributions to Western philosophy. For faithful Jews, the meaning of history is understood by its link to God's will and divine justice. After witnessing the Nazi horror, Kissinger would abandon the practice of Judaism, and as a young student at Harvard he would embark on an intellectual search for an alternative way to find the meaning of history.[33]

Kissinger's childhood experiences, not surprisingly, also instilled in him a deep distrust of other people. In his self-deprecating way, he would joke about his famous paranoia and his perception that people were always plotting against him. Another noted American statesman, Henry Stimson, lived by the maxim he learned at Yale's Skull and Bones that the only way to earn a man's trust is to trust him. Kissinger, on the other hand, was more like Nixon: he harbored an instinctive distrust of colleagues and outsiders alike. Stimson rejected the notion of a spy service by saying that "gentlemen do not read other people's mail"; Nixon and Kissinger established a series of secret wiretaps on the phones of even their closest aides.

Another legacy of Kissinger's holocaust upbringing was that later in life he would avoid revealing any signs of weakness—a maxim he applied to himself personally and, as the basic premise of his realpolitik, to foreign policy. Kissinger's father, whom he loved deeply, was graced by gentleness and a heart of unquestioning kindness. But such virtues served only to make him seem weak in the face of Nazi humiliations. As Kissinger grew older, he repeatedly attached himself to forceful, often overbearing patrons with powerful personalities: the boisterous and self-assured Prussian Fritz Kraemer in the army, the grandiose Professor William "Wild Bill" Elliott at Harvard, Nelson Rockefeller, Richard Nixon.

In addition, Kissinger, who spent his childhood as an outcast in his own country, became driven by a desire for acceptance. What struck many people as deceitfulness was often the result of Kissinger's attempts to win approval from opposing groups; during Vietnam, for example, he would attempt to convince dovish Harvard intellectuals that he was still one of them while simultaneously trying to impress Nixon with gutsy hardline advice. Kissinger would go out of his way to curry favor with the American Right after they attacked him over détente—while at the same time making disparaging comments about Reagan and prominent Reaganites to his intellectual friends. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a longtime friend of Kissinger's, referred to this trait as "his refugee's desire for approval."[34]

Still another legacy of his childhood was his philosophical pessimism. His worldview was dark, suffused with a sense of tragedy. He once wrote that Americans, who have "never suffered disaster, find it difficult to comprehend a

policy conducted with a premonition of catastrophe." Although he rejected Spengler's notion of the inevitability of historic decay, he came to believe that statesmen must continually fight against the natural tendency toward international instability.

The Nazi experience could have instilled in Kissinger either of two approaches to foreign policy: an idealistic, moralistic approach dedicated to protecting human rights; or a realist, realpolitik approach that sought to preserve order through balances of power and a willingness to use force as a tool of diplomacy. Kissinger would follow the latter route. Given a choice of order or justice, he often said, paraphrasing Goethe, he would choose order. He had seen too clearly the consequences of disorder.

As a result, Kissinger would become—philosophically, intellectually, politically—a conservative in the truest sense. He developed an instinctive aversion to revolutionary change, an attitude that he explored in his doctoral dissertation on Metternich and Castlereagh and that affected his policies when he came to power.

He also became uncomfortable with the passions of democracy and populism. Like George Kennan, his philosophical predecessor as a conservative and realist, Kissinger would never learn to appreciate the messy glory of the American political system, especially when it affected foreign policy.

Intellectually, his mind would retain its European cast just as his voice would retain its rumbling Bavarian accent. He felt comfortable plunging into Hegel and Kant and Metternich and Dostoyevski. But he never showed any appreciation for such archetypal American imaginations as Mark Twain and Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin.

Nonetheless, perhaps the most important effect of the horrors of his youth was the one that Kissinger himself always cited: it instilled a love of his adopted country that far surpassed his occasional disdain for the disorderliness of its democracy. When young Heinz reached Manhattan and became Henry, America's combination of tolerance and order would provide an exhilarating sense of personal freedom to a boy who had never walked the streets without fear. "I therefore," he would later say, "have always had a special feeling for what America means, which native-born citizens perhaps take for granted."[35]