but rather as dutiful civil servants who were only doing their job. This “obedience alibi” led one writer to characterize the atrocities as representing a “banality of evil” (Arnedt, 1965), carried out with efficiency rather than enmity.

Not everyone accepts Milgram’s thesis that most Germans were merely following orders. In an award-winning book entitled *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Harvard professor Daniel Goldhagen (1996) notes that many Germans eagerly volunteered for service in the German army. This was not true in Milgram’s research. Milgram’s participants volunteered for an experiment on learning and suddenly found themselves in a situation very different from the one they expected. Milgram’s analysis also ignores the social conditions that existed in Germany prior to and during the war. At this time, Germany was in economic decline and searching for a convenient scapegoat. The Jews were vilified and subjected to discrimination. In fact, Germans had hated Jews for centuries. Economic pressure and long-term hatred did not exist in Milgram’s laboratory.

Table 8.7 summarizes a number of other important differences between Milgram’s experiment and the Holocaust. For example, in Milgram’s experiment, participants watched as the learner consented to be shocked. Although the learner later withdrew his approval, he clearly participated on his own accord. This was not true of Germany’s Jews. The participants in Milgram’s studies were also told that although the shocks were painful, they would not cause any permanent damage. This, too, fails to mirror the situation in Germany when Jews were rounded up and slaughtered. Finally, obedience in Milgram’s studies dropped to zero when peers rebelled (see again Figure 8.13, Experiment 17). Many Germans aided Jews, but this did not stop other Germans from attempting to exterminate them.

We can appreciate these differences by considering the actions of Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of the German Order Police (Goldhagen, 1996; Mandel, 1998).