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To conquer this evil, forget the root causes

By late 1942, after Adolf Hitler had invaded most of the nations of Europe, relentlessly bombed England and declared war on the United States, the vexing question naturally arose: What's better, to fight back or to sit down and study the root causes of Germany's behavior?

Some impetuous students simply rushed off campus to defend their homelands. But their professors knew that many hours of study lay ahead. The root-causists agreed that Germany had been misunderstood and Britain and America had brought the war upon themselves. Some pointed to misguided policies in not handing over the Rhineland and Czechoslovakia to Hitler quickly enough, for example. Others thought the deepest roots of the root causes were in the 8th century, when the Teutonic knights were treated discourteously by newly Christianized Slavs.



One problem with the growing sympathy for Hitler was the unsettling news that the Nazis were rounding up and killing Jews, some 6 million of them. But the Episcopal bishops of the United States were able to put this in perspective. In a soothing statement titled "Wage Reconciliation, Not War," they said that while killing so many people is surely not a good thing, it is also true that 6 million children die of natural causes every few years without attracting nearly as much attention.

When President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill put together their "broad coalition" of allies to fight Hitler, they ran into unexpected problems. One ally said it would fight only if the war could end within two months. And one said we are with you all the way, but we can't send troops and you can't use our airfields or our airspace. And please don't mention that we're on your side.

As if that weren't bad enough, the Allies had to confront the ticklish question of whether to suspend the bombing of Germany during Oktoberfest, even though the Nazis had al- ready killed several million people during previous October beer-drinking festivals.

"What's next? Bombing during Lent?" asked a New York Times editorial.

Another problem was that German saboteurs were known to be crawling all over America, but the FBI was reluctant to arrest any lest it be accused of "racial profiling" or outright ethnic insensitivity.

National Public Radio weighed in with a 19-part series re- porting widespread bias against German-Americans. NPR also reported that most members of the Berkeley, Calif., city council and all 10,000 students at Berkeley lighted candles and declared themselves individual hate-free zones.

Somehow, however, America and Britain won the war and es- tablished the peace, probably because they ignored all the amazing nonsense around them and just fought the good fight. But then some people always prefer standing around with scented candles instead of attacking the darkness.

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Stanley Crouch's column will appear Thursday.

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