

**THE  
HOLOCAUST  
AND  
HISTORY** The Known,  
the Unknown, the Disputed, and  
the Reexamined

EDITED BY

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Published in association with the  
**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**  
*Washington, D.C.*

**Indiana University Press**  
*Bloomington and Indianapolis*

1998

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### A Past That Will Not Go Away

About two decades ago, Professor Robert Alter of California published a piece in *Commentary* that argued that we had had enough of the Holocaust, that a concentration of Jewish intellectual and emotional efforts around it was counterproductive, that the Holocaust should always be remembered, but that there were new agendas that had to be confronted. He and others have argued, rightly, that the Holocaust is not to be confused with Jewish history or Jewish identity. Elie Wiesel has expressed the view that with the passing on of the generation of Holocaust survivors, the Holocaust may be forgotten, misinterpreted, or misused. No doubt some of these arguments have validity today as well, but the memory is not going away; on the contrary, the Holocaust has become a cultural code, a symbol of evil in Western civilization. Why should this be so? After all, there are other genocides: Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, possibly Ibos in Nigeria, Biharis in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and of course the dozens of millions of victims of the Maoist purges in China, the Gulag, and so forth. Yet it is the murder of the Jews that brings forth a growing avalanche of films, plays, fiction, poetry, TV series, sculpture, paintings, and historical, sociological, psychological and other research. Contrary to pessimistic prophecies, the flood is increasing, not decreasing. Some of it, it is true, is kitsch. Some is not, however. And we must never forget that massive interest in the Holocaust in the United States and Canada arose from the 1978 NBC series *Holocaust*, a kitschy production if there ever was one. Do we then *have* to have kitsch to help produce real interest, real scholarship, real art? Social historians will have to map out these developments and attempt to find answers that will clarify the whys and the wherefores.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., which has become the central symbol of public memory of the Holocaust in America, must be American—it addresses, primarily, the population of this country and it has to answer the question why an event that took place far away from here, to people who were not Americans, should be commemorated on the Washington Mall, in a governmental framework, with the active involvement of American Presidents and the American Congress. The answer must, of necessity, include the international side of the museum's *raison d'être*, the fact that it must be compared to other instances of genocide, and that it is of world importance. If it were not, there would be little interest in having it. On the other hand, the central concern of the Holocaust Museum must be the specific Jewish tragedy. If it were to be ignored, then the whole effort would disintegrate into a diffuse universalistic babble.

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We still have no overall histories of the Holocaust in a number of European countries (such as Germany, Poland, the USSR); we still lack a great deal of knowledge regarding the "how" of the Holocaust. However, we should increasingly be concerned with the "why." True, we cannot begin to answer the very difficult "why" questions without studying the "how," and we are, most of us, still very much engaged in the latter. But a study of German, or for that matter, Jewish, or other, bureaucracies or social structures will not answer the question as to what motivated them, except perhaps marginally. Bureaucracies, as Raul Hilberg has so clearly shown us, do have a momentum of their own and can organize death trains using the principles of the organization of children's summer outings. But that does not answer the question why they do the one rather than the other. Nor are efforts such as that of Zygmunt Bauman in his *Modernity and the Holocaust* of great help: Bauman argues that the reason why the Holocaust occurred was the spread of industrial, technological civilization. But modernity, whatever the definition of the concept, did not affect only Germany, and in any case, it does not explain why the Jews were the victims. I believe that the study of the social consensus formed by ideologies and attitudes transmitted over historic time produces the possibility of answering the "why" questions. Nazified society, Nazi leadership, and parts of the Nazi intelligentsia, at the very least, believed in a pseudoreligion that demanded action. It is possible, and it has been done in part, to trace the origins of these ideologies and show how they developed a murderous consensus.

There is a recent vogue that claims that antisemitism does not explain the Holocaust; that is, in my view, totally misleading. No one claims that there is a straight line from traditional antisemitism to its Nazi form, nor does the background to the Nazi murder project consist only of antisemitism. But the disconnection between the two raises a very simple question: if there is no connection between antisemitism and the Holocaust, then why, pray, did the Nazis murder Jews and not bicycle riders? There is, quite clearly, both a strong element of continuity and also a *novum* of a nationalistic-racist character in Nazi antisemitism. Against the background of the crisis of modern Western society, against the background of political and economic dislocations, as well as of the specific impact of these crises on German society, Nazi antisemitism was the central motivation that drove the regime into the murder of the Jews. They could do it, as the British historian Ian Kershaw explained some years ago at a conference in Haifa, not necessarily even because of the identification of the German society with murderous antisemitism, which was the program of the governing elite, but because of the identification with the regime as such of vast masses of the German people, and especially the intelligentsia, who became the transmission belt from the elite to the rest of the population. To argue for a disconnection between antisemitism and the Holocaust makes absolutely no sense at all.

However, if we want to answer these "why" questions, there are a number of important preliminary issues that have to be addressed. We are still battling with the problem of the definition of the very subject we are dealing with. Let us be clear: the Holocaust, Shoah, Churban, Judeocide, whatever we call it, is the name we give to the attempted planned total physical annihilation of the Jewish people, and its partial

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perpetration with the murder of most of the Jews of Europe. The problem whether this is unique in more than the banal sense that every historical event is unique is still a topic of sharp disagreement, and I have stated my position too often to have to detail it here: to me, the uniqueness lies in the motivation of the murderer, the quest for an annihilation that sentenced all people born of three or four Jewish grandparents to death for the crime of having been born, for purely illusory, ideological, abstract, "universal" reasons, in order to do away with a mythical, non-existent Jewish world conspiracy; but it was also unique because of the unique place of the Jews in the history of Western civilization; in other words it was the result, though by no means a necessary result, of a long historic process.

A theory is being offered that as the Nazi policy of murder of German mental and other patients deemed to suffer from hereditary illnesses, the so-called euthanasia program, the murder of many Gypsies, and the murder of the Jews were all based on so-called racial, that is, hereditary or genetic principles, that they are all part of the Holocaust. But Nazi policy toward Italians, Romanians, and Japanese was also based on racist principles, and I would suggest that there is a world of difference between problems that Nazis had with the "purity" of their own "race" and the social irritant they saw in the Romani people, whom they accused of being hereditary asocial criminals, on the one hand, and the universal threat to Nazi humankind they saw in the Jews. The attitude to Jews was a central pillar of Nazi ideology, and it could, in the end, be solved only by total murder. The attitudes to the Gypsies was not a central part of Nazi ideology, and to the best of my knowledge there never was a plan to murder all the Gypsies. The T4 program of murder of the handicapped was a derivative of internal German-Nazi concerns. To equate these issues is, I think, to confuse them. It does not do any service to the cause of the Romani people to mix them up in the same analytical framework with the Jews by defining the Holocaust as pertaining to both Gypsies and Jews. The Roma (Gypsies) must be recognized as a legitimate ethnic entity, with its own cultural, political, and economic rights. Unlike the Jews, they are still, after the defeat of Nazi Germany, discriminated against, persecuted, reviled. They must receive compensation for what was done to them by the Nazis, and by post-Nazi society. The suffering of each Gypsy was exactly the same as the suffering of a Jew, a Pole, or anyone else. But the motivation of the perpetrator was different, the place of the different victims in the historical development of so-called Western civilization was different, and therefore the steps to be taken to right the radical evil that was done are different also.

Let me now turn to something else, namely the various forms of Holocaust denials. Apart from the gutter writings of American, French, and other Nazi intellectuals who deny the Holocaust totally, and whose antics have been analyzed so well by Deborah Lipstadt's recent *Denying the Holocaust*, there is perhaps the even more threatening phenomenon of relativization and falsification that is lapped up by a public eager to have this horrible business laid to rest by trivializing it one way or the other. In Germany, Berlin historian Ernst Nolte continues his untenable propagation of myths about the Nazis who supposedly copied the death camps from the Soviet Gulags, arguing that what the Nazis did was no different from Allied war crimes such as the firebombing of Dresden, or the Stalinist or Maoist purges. The purpose is clearly to free German society from bearing any particular responsibility for World

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War II generally, and the Holocaust in particular; for Germans, as the late German conservative politician Franz Josef Strauss said, to walk tall again. Nolte has found imitators, in Germany and elsewhere, including the United States. And when a Holocaust survivor such as Arno J. Mayer of Princeton University (in his book *Why Did the Heavens Darken?*) popularizes the nonsense that the Nazis saw in Marxism and bolshevism their main enemy, and the Jews unfortunately got caught up in this; when he links the destruction of the Jews to the ups and downs of German warfare in the Soviet Union, in a book that is so cocksure of itself that it does not need a proper scientific apparatus, he is really engaging in a much more subtle form of Holocaust denial. He in effect denies the motivation for murder and flies in the face of well-known documentation. There are others like that. The great German historian Andreas Hillgruber, who unfortunately became, toward the end of his life, identified with the Nolte group, unwittingly so, I believe, and unwillingly, but very significantly nevertheless, made clear the relationship between Hitlerian antibolshevism and antisemitism as far back as 1972. Hitler saw bolshevism as an expression of the corrupt and destructive Jewish spirit; his enemy was the power that in his view had created bolshevism and was using it to achieve world domination. "The communist," says a Nazi document of 1937, "is an enemy of the people, and nothing else but an instrument of Judaism, which finds here (in communism) a tool for the achievement of its aim: world supremacy."<sup>1</sup>

There is yet another, internal Jewish and very basic issue at hand, which arises when one contemplates, for instance, Emil Fackenheim's recent statement that the victims of the Holocaust were *kedoshim*, holy persons, because they were Jewish martyrs, killed because of their Jewishness, and hence suffering just like their ancestors had suffered, for the Sanctification of the Name. I believe this hides the fact that there is no meaning to the Holocaust, because the only meaning it could have would be a Nazi meaning: for the Nazis there was a purpose in the killing, murder was meaningful. For the Jews it was totally meaningless. They had done nothing to earn the deadly enmity of Nazi antisemitism. Their faith—as far as they were observant in any sense—was not at issue. They were ordinary people, victims of murder; this does not make them holy, it makes them victims of a crime. People were taken from their homes or hiding places and murdered, for no apparent reason but the consensual will of a murderous society. This is extremely difficult to accept, because the conclusion is that the deaths of our dear ones were meaningless, and I must admit that I resisted this conclusion for years. The argument usually is that the meaning lay in the innumerable instances of sacrifice, as when children sacrificed their lives to try to save their parents or, more often, the other way around, or friends for their friends, or just Jews for other Jews. Rebels chose one kind of death over another. But Jews generally did not have the option to either live or choose sacrifice for some purpose, holy or otherwise, as they had had throughout their history, though some Jews at least went to their deaths in the manner of their forefathers, believing they were dying for the Sanctification of the Holy Name.

One of the most terrible things the Nazis did was to deprive the victims of a last satisfaction that their death might have some meaning. There is a perfectly understandable tendency to ritualize the Holocaust so that it may acquire some meaning, and of course there are meanings we ascribe to it post factum. This is in fact what we

do when we argue that the meaning lay in the sacrifices, in the Sanctification of the Name, or in armed rebellions, and so on. For us, with our constantly changing understanding of the past, there are good reasons to derive this or that so-called "lesson" from the Holocaust, meanings that make sense for us, but they are quite extraneous to the event and its contemporaries, and they are bound to change over time. Many of these meanings, as Professor Saul Friedlander has pointed out many times, including in his book *Kitsch and Death*, are distorted, because they are based on a misuse of the Holocaust and provide the kitsch that society apparently needs. In Israel, for instance, governments of the Right and the Left viewed the PLO, or alternatively, the Israeli army on the West Bank, as Nazis; President Bush spoke of Saddam Hussein as a Hitler; senseless comparisons were made elsewhere—but in all these cases real comparability is missing, and there is a clear misuse of the Holocaust for political purposes.

There is also, as we know well, artistic and cultural misuse—low-culture films, sensationalist television series, pop artists who have no idea what they are ranting about, and much more.

I would like to make a suggestion to explain why this should be so. I believe that it is, on the one hand, the instinctive rather than the cognitive understanding that the murder of the Jews was unique, in the sense that I tried to outline before; that never before in human history has a well-organized state, representing a social consensus, tried to murder, globally, every single member of an ethnic or ethno-religious group as defined by the perpetrator, for purely ideological reasons that bore not the slightest relation to reality. There is the dim understanding that the Nazi rebellion against civilization and the murder of the Jews that resulted from it form a universal threat to every person everywhere.

On the other hand, it was the character of the victim, the peculiar history and presence of the Jews that lay at the basis of this. The Jews provided one of the basic pillars for what we call Western civilization. The others, the Greeks, the Romans, are no more, but we are still very much around. A Nazi rebellion against the civilization from which they sprang almost *had to* target the Jews for destruction.

In Christian mythology the quintessential Jew was crucified to atone for humanity's sins, and when the people of the crucified Messiah are murdered, the image seems to return. The Jews have to suffer, be victimized, that is their role in Christian history. When they do, it is seen as their peculiar gift to Christian and post-Christian society; it is natural. When they resist, rebel, and successfully establish their own political independence in their original land, they fall out of their role. An increasing number of concerned Christians totally reject these traditional antisemitic images of the Jews, and see with horror that their society has not changed much and that the Holocaust is the crucible through which their faith has to pass. Anti-Jewish attitudes, as well as pro-Jewish ones (which sometimes are the other side of the same coin) are projected through a fascination with the Holocaust.

Among many Jews in Western countries, especially in North America, there are opposite attitudes toward the memory of the Holocaust: one is to universalize the Holocaust to the extent that people include in it the fate of the Gypsies, of Poles, Czechs, Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs, and the German handicapped. This is of course

welcomed by the unpleasant subject: "man's inhumanity to man." Jewish fate: they were not the Poles, Russians, and other ethnic groups; they were not the group to which they aspired and proportionately toward the Gypsies, the dubious distinction of annihilation for them had to be complete about, and all the efforts by their ancestors seated insecurity; all the others." Unfortunately, no

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welcomed by those non-Jews who would like to escape from dealing with this unpleasant subject of the Jews and bury it in vague, stupid phrases such as the famous "man's inhumanity to man." They, and many Jews, in effect deny the specificity of the Jewish fate: they refuse to see that the Nazis were not out to murder all the Gypsies, Poles, Russians, etcetera, and that the Nazis did not consider these and other nations and ethnic groups to be global, indeed universal threats to the kind of Nazi humanity to which they aspired. There was terrible mass murder committed against all of these, and proportionately more against the Gypsies than anyone else; and Nazi policy toward the Gypsies and the Poles can only be defined as genocidal. The Jews had the dubious distinction of being the only ethnic group that was destined for total physical annihilation for purely ideological reasons, as a satanic force in human society that had to be completely eradicated. That is what the Nazi project to kill the Jews was all about, and all these universalizing attempts seem to me to be, on the Jewish side, efforts by their authors to escape their Jewishness. They are expressions of a deep-seated insecurity; these people feel more secure when they can say "we are just like all the others." The Holocaust should have proved to them that the Jews were, unfortunately, not like the others. Obviously it did not.

The other attitude is the opposite one: a disappointed, ethnically exclusive turning inward, a denial that the Holocaust has anything to do with general Nazi policies, or with other genocides, a denial of the possibility of comparing it to the Armenian, Gypsy, Polish, Cambodian, or other disasters, in our century or in past ages. Those who hold this attitude forget, of course, that you cannot argue for a uniqueness of the Holocaust if you do not compare it to other similar events. They refuse to see in concerned Gentiles, and concerned Christians, their natural allies; they want to go it alone. They close themselves in, in a traditional and totally counterproductive Jewish gesture of defiance toward the world, whether they are ultra-orthodox, or even if they are avowed liberals or secularists. Their attitude is clearly counterproductive because in the end it deprives the Holocaust of all universal implications, and removes it from the concern not only of non-Jews but also of Jews who see themselves as both intensely Jewish and also active in the affairs of the societies in general, indeed of the world at large.

True, one of the problems of the specificity of the Holocaust and of the universal concerns it arouses are the ambivalent attitudes of Christians and Christianity to Jews and Judaism in the wake of the Holocaust. Christians have to learn to live with the self-definitions of Jews, and with Jewish bitterness at Christianity for having provided the background from which the anti-Christian, secular, and racist version of Christian antisemitism sprang; they have to live with the terrible question about the validity of a faith that bases itself on Jewish texts and worships a Messiah who came from the Jews, sacrificed himself to expiate humanity's sins, and whose people, nineteen hundred years after that act, were murdered by baptized Gentiles, as Franklin Littell and others have taught us. Jews, on the other hand, have to recognize that the Hebrew Bible provides texts that call for genocide, that there were Christian Gentiles—not enough of them by a very, very long way, but they existed—who saved Jews and some sacrificed their lives to do this. Jews must recognize, too, that in this quest for a common humanity some Jews and some Christians, and hopefully more and more of both, are in the same boat, and that there have been crucially important

first steps by some very central Christian denominations to change theology and attitudes to the Jews—from the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate* in 1965 to the Protestant Rhineland Synod in Germany in 1980, to the Polish Catholic declaration of January 1991, and beyond. First steps, to be sure, hesitant steps, to be sure, but steps nevertheless. Jews have to realize that unless the Holocaust is internalized by Christians and Gentiles generally—and this can only happen if Jews do not lock themselves into precocious groups trying to protect the memory of the Holocaust from Christian invasion—both sides can only lose, and the heathens will have an out for their antisemitism and their denial of the Holocaust.

There is another, major issue on the historical agenda, within the Jewish world. The event was so overpowering that specifically Jewish forms of denial have become endemic. These are rooted in a terrible, overwhelming self-accusation. It is said, in effect, that we know that the Nazis murdered the Jews but that we have to move beyond that and ask who *really* was responsible—who could have rescued but did not? The answer is—the Jewish leadership, who had the means, the intelligence, the political clout, and the unlimited funds, but did not rescue because of a mixture of political wrongheadedness, cold disregard for Jewish lives, Zionist prejudices, and stupidity. Or else, and this is the Jewish orthodox argument, because Jews had angered God by not following His commands, either because their leaders were reform Jews, or nonbelievers, or Zionists, or anti-Zionists, or because they were stupid enough to make the Nazis angry.

Israeli secular, liberal writers such as Tom Segev, in his best-selling *The Seventh Million*, have argued that Ben-Gurion and his colleagues were unfit to guide the Jewish people; they were puny, narrow-minded individuals, bent only on achieving a Jewish independence in Palestine in order to enhance their power. He concludes that they misunderstood the Holocaust and failed to do anything of importance to rescue Jews. In *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David*, which was published before Segev's book, Dina Porat had already responded to such arguments as these by presenting a balanced picture of the Palestine Jewish leadership. Though they are lacking in historical basis, the arguments presented by Segev find a ready audience among a people traumatized by the Holocaust and incapable of accepting the sad fact that the Jews during the Holocaust were absolutely powerless. There are other authors in Israel who follow Segev's line; in the United States, there was an effort by a so-called Commission of Inquiry, headed by New York professor Seymour Finger, to do the same for the American Jewish leadership. Journalists and historians of the Jewish left and right, liberals and conservatives alike, joined and are still joining in the witch-hunt against the Jewish leadership of the 1930s and 1940s. There are balanced accounts, that do not fall into the trap of a hagiographic defense of Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldman, or of Ben-Gurion or Moshe Sharett, for that matter. Such balanced accounts can be read in the works of David S. Wyman, Henry L. Feingold, Ariel Hurwitz, and others, with all the disagreements between these authors. But the popular and mistaken Jewish perception is that of a leadership that betrayed the Jews of Europe.

The Jewish ultra-orthodox world, and some in the orthodox camp as well, argue for the same conclusions, but from different premises. Everywhere, among secularists as well as orthodox, the explanations and analyses are an often unconscious

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continuation of the ancient model of Jewish explanation for disasters that befell the Jews. In past centuries, such disasters were always explained as having been caused by the sins of the Jews themselves. They were the result of divine wrath caused by nonobservance of the Torah. Applied to the Holocaust by orthodox and ultra-orthodox commentators, the explanation is threefold, and contradictory: first, that all history is directed by God, and that He is the source of both good and evil, hence the Holocaust is the work of the deity. His intent is educational, that is, to cause the Jews to mend their ways (see, for instance, the late Lubavicher Rebbe's outpourings on this in *Mada Ve'emunah* [Kfar Chabad, Israel, 1980, pp. 115 ff.]); second, that humans cannot understand the reasons that cause the deity not to prevent the Holocaust—this argument holds whether the writers believe that God "hid His face" or not, because even if God hid His face He is still all-powerful, all-knowing, and just; third, that although we cannot know why God did what He did or desisted from doing what He could have done, we do know that it was a punishment for misbehavior, largely due to the growth of the Reform movement, and/or Zionism (in the case of the famous Hungarian ultra-orthodox rabbi, Issacher Teichthal, the opposite is the case: the anti-Zionism of his own group is said to have been the cause of the Holocaust). Zionism is accused of rebelling against the nations of the world in order to establish a Jewish state, in contravention of God's command and in contravention of the rule that Jews should await the coming of the Messiah. The wartime leadership therefore, writers like Moshe Shenfeld or Yoel Teitelbaum argue, knowingly sacrificed the Jews of Europe in order to create their sinful state in Palestine. To my mind, these are forms of a tragic Jewish antisemitism.

Balanced historical accounts present well-grounded descriptions of whole Jewish societies whose reactions to the Holocaust were very problematic. This is true especially for Palestine, where Jews were engaged in everyday pursuits, including Purim balls and party political bickering, while the Holocaust was going on. Why this happened is rarely asked, and the psychological problems of a society that is powerless to help its immediate relatives who are the victims of a massive murder program are rarely addressed. Serious commentators still speak in terms of accusations bearing a moral tinge and not in terms of contextual explication.

Some of these constructs, political, ideological, and/or religious, really reflect the internalization of antisemitism by Jews. Like antisemites, these writers believe, or pretend to believe, that the Jews during the Holocaust were capable of preventing it because they had unlimited financial and political resources at their command; and it was a matter either of ill will or incompetence that they did nothing to rescue the victims. This leads to a form of denial, derived—as I have just pointed out—from Jewish tradition, that says that the Holocaust is really the fault of the Jews themselves, thus fully agreeing with the arguments of some of the neo-Nazi deniers.

There is quite possibly a sort of parallel with other societies that were involved with World War II. However, in these societies, such as the American, accusations against the wartime leadership sound quite different, because there were real power bases and real options from which leaders or groups chose. The Jewish case is different in that the options of the leaders were severely circumscribed, though not completely absent.

The fact that the books of these Jewish historical revisionists, as I propose to call

them, sell considerably better than the tomes produced by those who call themselves serious historians, and that the Jewish revisionists, or at least some of them, have access to television screens, is not only due to their talents but also to the willingness of the Jewish public to listen to their message. This is not surprising, because traumatized Jewish society seeks ready answers to its questions, and what the Jewish revisionists say will be in accord with traditional explanations: it was really our own fault. When we come to deal with our future agenda, especially those of us who work on Jewish history, we must be careful to devote energy and time to a balanced description of the Jewish reaction of the time. The leaders then were powerless, and we have to teach the unpalatable truth that even the Western powers, between 1941 and 1944, could not have saved the Jews even had they wanted to, which demonstrably they did not. The millions were doomed, and rescue could have been marginal at best, though the margin might have been of tremendous importance, for what is a margin in terms of human lives? Thousands? Tens of thousands? We cannot talk of these things in terms of numbers only, forgetting that each number represents the whole world of a human being.

I admit that my personal starting point, my bias if you will, is formed by my overriding interest in the fate of the Jews, their communities, their reactions. It is influenced no less by the desire to know *what* was destroyed, not only how and by whom. Russian, Ukranian, and Belorussian archives have many of the answers. But you may ask—why document another village, another town, another group of partisans? Do we not have enough already?

As with other major historical questions, here too we have to go beyond the historical craft (after all, history is not a science, but the art of telling the story of the past according to certain sets of agreed rules). We all have biases, which have to be reconciled with the overarching demand for objective writing. Clearly, responsible scholars are against antisemitism and view the Holocaust with horror while affirming democratic rule. These are also "biases," and they do occasionally have to be stated, because there are people who write with an antisemitic bias, deny the Holocaust altogether or in part, and do not favor democratic rule. But there are other biases as well, derived from training, tradition, or what have you. There are colleagues who deal primarily with the aspects of the perpetrators, or of the bystanders. I belong to those whose starting point is Jewish life before, the Jewish tragedy during, and Jewish life after the Holocaust. I do believe, in addition, that this is not a bad vantage point from which to view the event as a whole, and deal with perpetrator and bystander. The philosophy behind this is that the Holocaust happened to the Jews, and that it was unique. In my view the threat to the Jewish people that arose in Germany could have arisen elsewhere as well, and we are dealing with the whole of Western culture during the last hundred or so years when we discuss the perpetrators; it developed in Germany, which is a good reason to examine German society in particular. But without understanding Jewish history, all this remains very abstract. There is simply no way of comprehending the Holocaust unless one realizes who the Jews were and are, and why they became the chosen victim of an ideology that wanted to rebel against what we call "Western civilization," utilizing the most modern achievements of technology and science to do so. I think it is a good idea to start with the Jews. That

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will lead us to the universal implications, including of course the centrally important moral aspects of the Holocaust. I do not claim that this is the only way to approach the subject, but it is one of the more legitimate ones.

Let me now deal with another, methodological issue: there is a huge amount of documentation available on the perpetrator, and some people may conclude that the documentation is reliable—after all, Germans produced it, didn't they? But when we look closer, we find that quite a number of the decisions that really mattered were not even written down, because that was the way the Third Reich operated. Let me remind you of the discussion in Göring's office on November 12, 1938, after Kristallnacht. We are lucky to have a stenographic protocol, because otherwise we would have missed the crucial point: Göring mentions three direct interventions of Hitler, between November 9 and 11, to clarify to his loyal Hermann exactly what he wants done on the Jewish question—concentrate the whole thing under Göring, get the Jews out of the German economy, negotiate with the Western powers about deporting them to Madagascar. The decision was taken orally, in a face to face meeting, by phone, and by a directive from Bormann in Hitler's name, which Göring mentions but which has not survived. Hitler acted, personally and directly, to lay down the line on the Jewish question, and there is no document extant, except for Göring's account at that meeting. Things were handed down orally, and only by a lucky chance do we occasionally find echoes of that procedure in the form of documentation.

And the famous Wannsee protocol? We know today that it is a doctored protocol, that the discussion was much more explicit. Documents were often written to hide things, not to explicate them; not always, to be sure, but at several rather crucial points. We cannot rely solely, or even mainly, on German documentation as the oracle that will give us a true picture.

Jewish documentation, too, is not very impressive. Yes, there are some protocols of Judenräte, but these were also tailored for the Germans who would or might read them. There are diaries, not too many of them; there are German and Polish documents about Jews; there are the Ringelblum and Mersik archives. However, much of the Jewish documentation was destroyed, especially in Eastern Europe, together with the Jews. The Nazis tried to murder the murder. So the main source is oral testimonies. There are colleagues who argue that these are unreliable. But tell me please: when German criminals appear in postwar trials or write memoirs, are they reliable? When testimonies become published memoirs of statesmen and participants, are they universally to be disregarded? I would argue that when we have ten independently recorded, converging and comparable testimonies, they are more reliable than a document about the same situation written by some German or Jewish source, or by a Polish bystander. And for most Jewish communities destroyed by the Nazis there is very little or no written documentation. But there are converging testimonies.

The documentation of the victims and their communities is important not only for Jews but for everyone; it is of vital importance to know what happened to the victims, and how they reacted. How do people react when they are confronted with wholesale and near-inescapable murder? How do they behave? How do they see their

enemies? How do they view the bystanders? Were the Judenräte just tools in Nazi hands, or did many of them try, in a large number of different ways, to preserve and save what could be saved? We know the result, but that is only one part of the story. I want to know the life before the death—I know before I ever start to investigate that they were killed. Did the resisters offer a real alternative to the besieged communities in which they tried to operate? What were the real options of leadership groups? What was resistance like, unarmed and armed; what were the moral and physical conditions of armed resistance? Who helped, and who did not? What did the spiritual leadership of the victimized group have to say, and what does that say to us today?

The East European archives may have some answers we do not know. There is a distinct possibility that we may find out more about a large number of Jewish communities, their life and death, their lack of resistance or their resistance, and their relationship with their non-Jewish neighbors. I would suggest that this is one of the priorities, not necessarily the only one, but to me a very important one, indeed.

Finally, some basic considerations. We want to document every Jewish community, because the Jews today are the heirs of those who were killed, and we have to know who these people were, how they lived, and how they died. This is not just a matter of filial piety or ethnic patriotism. An attempt was made to extinguish a small people with a very central place in Western civilization. It was done by a regime that drew its inspiration from Western civilization against which it rebelled and which it wanted to replace, globally, by a hierarchically ordered, racist society. The central, main victims were the Jews, for historical reasons. The rediscovery of as many communities as possible is, in a way, a victory over the Nazi project of cultural, as well as physical, annihilation. That victory, if it is achieved, is universalistic, not sectarian Jewish, because what was lost there was a peculiar Jewish variant of universal civilization. In the final analysis, the Holocaust is a combination of the unique and the universal; it is the uniqueness, and the fact that it happened to a certain people, at a certain time, for distinct reasons, that makes it so real, so threatening, so universal. Hence the fact that the Holocaust has become a cultural code; hence the fascination with the Holocaust; hence its universal aspects.

#### NOTE

1. National Archives T-175/432; quoted in Heinze Hoehne, *Der Krieg im Dunkeln* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1988), p. 283.

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EBERHARD JÄCKEL

## The Holocaust

WHERE WE ARE, WHERE WE NEED TO GO

The contemporaries of the murder of the European Jews, now known as the Holocaust, are often divided into three categories: the perpetrators, the victims, and the bystanders. These three categories can also be applied to subsequent reactions to the Holocaust. Reactions in Germany, the country of the perpetrators, were bound to be different from those of the Jews in Israel and elsewhere, and from those in the rest of the world, which differed according to whether the countries in question were or were not affected by the Holocaust.

While such a division is appropriate for political, social, and cultural reactions, that is, for lawmaking, public debates, and education, it seems surprisingly less appropriate for scholarship and historiography, and it is totally inappropriate when applied to research. In the field of Holocaust research, there were and are no national schools of thought, not even, as may be expected, in Germany.

Research on the Holocaust began strikingly late everywhere; even more astonishing, it began internationally almost at the same time. It seems that the first results of serious research did not begin to appear until 1953. In that year the first comprehensive study, by Gerald Reitlinger, was published in England.<sup>1</sup> In the same year the Knesset in Israel passed the law establishing Yad Vashem as a memorial and a research institute. And in that year in Germany the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* were inaugurated with the first volume containing Kurt Gerstein's report on the mass gassings. It was also in 1953 that Hermann Graml's book on the November 1938 pogrom saw publication for the first time.

There had not been much scholarly historiography before 1953. Looking at Reitlinger's bibliography one is surprised to see how short the list is. Apart from Léon Poliakov's *Bréviaire de la haine*, which had been published in 1951,<sup>2</sup> and a larger number of what he called "survivor narratives," there had been almost no historical work on the Holocaust in the eight years that had elapsed between 1945 and 1953, and of course even the term Holocaust was not yet applied to the event.

Let me recall another coincidence. Whereas in 1961 Raul Hilberg's monumental study was finally published in the United States,<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Scheffler's comprehensive introductions, admittedly much less monumental, had already come out in Germany the previous year and were widely distributed by a government agency for political education.

It is true, of course, that while Reitlinger's book had been translated into German in 1956, Hilberg's book was not translated until 1982. But it seems once more that this was not a special case of German reluctance to face the enormous crime committed, as it used to be said, in the German name. For it is equally true that Hilberg's book was not translated into any other language until 1988, when it was published in French.

While in the 1960s and 1970s the stream of historical publications grew steadily, there was still almost no scholarly debate on the Holocaust. Hilberg certainly had sparked a stormy controversy, which was particularly vehement in Israel, but his interpretation, derived from Franz Neumann, was not discussed profoundly by his fellow historians.

The absence of scholarly debate on the Holocaust appears even more surprising when compared to other historical events of central importance. The origins, for example, of the French Revolution or the First World War were already being discussed heatedly while these events were in progress, and mountains of controversial works appeared immediately after their termination.

As to the origins of the murder of the European Jews, the only explanation invariably given over the years was antisemitism. It was taken for granted that it had produced the Holocaust and that it must have been particularly violent in Germany. Consequently, research was focused mainly on antisemitism.

*Rehearsal for Destruction*, the title of P. W. Massing's famous book, became the catchword.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1977 that historians finally began to discuss the origins proper, not in terms of antisemitism but in terms of decision making. Strangely enough, the discussion was provoked by David Irving who, in his book *Hitler's War*, had denied that Hitler had ordered the extermination of the Jews and maintained that it had been carried out by some of his subordinates behind his back, without his knowledge, until 1943. Even stranger, Irving's book had been published first in Germany in 1975, but the outrageous passages had been suppressed by his German publisher so that the shocking thesis became known only when the English version appeared in the United States in 1977.<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, provoked Martin Broszat's famous article on "Hitler and the Genesis of the 'Final Solution.'"<sup>6</sup> While refuting Irving's assertions, he admitted that historical research had so far indeed neglected the question of when, how, and by whom the murder of the Jews had been initiated.

I shall not reproduce in detail the arguments exchanged in the course of the debate. I shall, however, venture to make two more general statements in this respect. Broszat's article marked a turning point. It opened the first scholarly debate on the origins of the Holocaust, and it incorporated no national undertones whatsoever. On the contrary, the debate was international from its very outset.

Provoked by an English writer, the debate was launched by a German historian. It became a real dispute when Christopher Browning, an American historian, responded to Broszat in 1981. The topic was discussed by Saul Friedlander, Yehuda Bauer, and many others at an international conference held in Stuttgart in 1984. A further contribution to it was made by the Swiss historian Philippe Burrin in 1989.<sup>7</sup>

The opposing parties in the debate about the origins of the Holocaust have become known as the "intentionalists" and the "functionalists." The terms, which initially did not refer to the origins of the Holocaust but to the nature of the Nazi regime in general, were coined by the English historian Tim Mason at a conference

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organized by the German Historical Institute at Cumberland Lodge outside London in 1979.<sup>8</sup> Briefly summarized, the intentionalist position is—or was—that it had been Hitler's premeditated intention to kill as many Jews as possible ever since the 1920s and that he implemented his plans when the opportunity arose during the war. The functionalists, on the other hand, were unwilling to attribute such a decisive influence to a single person. They argued that the anti-Jewish measures taken by the Nazis were steadily intensified until they finally and almost automatically culminated in the mass killings.

Christopher Browning took a middle position, which he summarized in a review of Burrin's book as follows: "Hitler played a key role in the decision-making process but not out of premeditation. Frustrated by the failure of previous solutions (emigration and expulsion), he opted for the Final Solution in the 'euphoria of victory' of midsummer 1941."<sup>9</sup>

What Philippe Burrin offered modifies this position. He agrees with Browning that Hitler made the final decision out of frustration. But that frustration was not, he suggests, determined by the failure of previous solutions but by the imminent failure of the war. In his famous threat, pronounced in the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, Hitler announced that, if international Jewry succeeded in provoking another world war, its result would be the "destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." According to Burrin, this meant that if the world were to accept Germany's territorial expansion without seriously resisting, he (Hitler) would be satisfied with the expulsion of the Jews.

Indeed, when in 1939 and 1940 he was winning easy victories, Hitler talked a great deal about resettling the Jews either in the East of Poland or in Madagascar. But when in August 1941 the Soviets prevented him from marching easily into Moscow and when the United States began giving the Soviets aid, he opted for mass killings. The murder of the European Jews was, then, at the same time an act of expiating the spilt German blood and above all an act of revenge, taken in advance, for defeat. Once more I shall not discuss these arguments in detail. Suffice it to say that I agree with Browning's reply that he remains "respectfully unconvinced." This is not the place for continuing the debate. Instead I want to draw some more general conclusions as to where we are and where we need to go in future research.

The first merit of the debate is that it has finally disconnected research on antisemitism from research on the Holocaust. Research on antisemitism will continue to be very useful in that antisemitism certainly was a fundamental precondition since it created the atmosphere that made the crime possible. Or, in rather simpler terms, without antisemitism Hitler could not have become an antisemite, and without being an antisemite he would not have decided on the Final Solution.

But the really pertinent question is not why the Nazis were antisemites but why they committed murder. There is no direct line from antisemitism to the Holocaust for the very simple reason that antisemitism had existed for centuries and yet had never before led to such murderous destruction.

Traditional antisemites had at most strived to remove the Jews from their country. Never before had they invaded foreign and remote countries and either killed the Jews there or deported them for the sole purpose of killing them. The Nazis had certainly started by persecuting the Jews in Germany. But the Holocaust was a

fundamentally different affair. Its real meaning and its uniqueness cannot be grasped fully unless it is taken into account that, in the end, of all the Jews murdered, approximately 98 percent were not German Jews. That is what was unprecedented, what requires an explanation.

The second merit of the debate is that it has finally drawn the attention of researchers to the central point. We need to know how the murder was initiated and implemented. Several answers have been supplied over the years, some, of course, long before the debate on decision making started.

The present state of research permits us to discard all answers denying that a relevant decision was made and that it was made by Hitler. That is not to say, of course, that he was the only person responsible. It is evident beyond doubt that he could not have implemented the murder without the help of many others, individuals and governments alike. This, of course, also remains a vast field of research.

It seems equally evident that Hitler took the initiative. Both Browning and Burrin have asked why. The answer has been: out of frustration, although for different reasons. However, the arguments put forward so penetratingly have demonstrated that this particular question cannot be answered with certainty. I think that in the end it is impossible to discern Hitler's most intimate reasoning. We may establish what his intentions were—what his planning was, when and how he made a decision, and when and how and by whom it was executed. But we cannot establish why, at a given moment, he made one decision instead of another. In the Nazi state, decisions were not arrived at in conferences or cabinet meetings where the arguments for and against would be put on the table, discussed, balanced, and registered in a protocol. Hitler never disclosed his real motives. Everything he said (and in this instance we don't even know what he said) was meant only to motivate his subordinates.

I think, therefore, that it is impossible to know why he made a certain decision. The answer can only be conjectural. We should limit our efforts to finding out when and how a decision was made.

Hitler had, of course, to offer reasons for something which in itself was totally unreasonable. He had to justify what was totally unjustifiable. What should he say to Himmler when the latter once more intimated what he had given Hitler in writing in 1940, namely, that the physical extermination of a people was both "un-Germanic and impossible"? Or to Göring when he said it was more important that "we win the war"? That was irrefutable. It forced Hitler to invent pretexts. But it is very unlikely that they were his real reasons. It even seems likely that he had no reasons at all but merely instinctive hatred. All we may be able to establish is when and how the decision was made. These are the questions on which we should concentrate, even though Browning has admittedly already offered some very good answers to them.

Once more, we would have to take our point of departure from the structure of the Nazi state. How were decisions made in other fields where the documentation is better? It becomes increasingly evident, for example, that Hitler already wanted to unleash the war in 1938 even if it meant war with Britain and France. He was opposed by all his advisors because they were convinced that such a war was unwinnable. He was prevented from starting the war in 1938 and again in March 1939, but he succeeded in September. He succeeded because he kept his advisors apart, playing one off against the other. He alone had a complete picture of the situation.

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This model could and should be applied to the Final Solution. There is some evidence that Hitler wanted to initiate it as early as September 1939 but failed. He tried again early in 1941 and succeeded when Heydrich's Einsatzgruppen started the killings in June. It seems to me that he succeeded because he played off Heydrich against Himmler. It was their rivalry that enabled Hitler to do what he had wanted to do for a long time.

When Heydrich had become Chief of the Security Police he had reached a rank second only to Himmler. There was no further promotion possible except to Himmler's place. Certainly Heydrich was very ambitious. He was young, thirty-seven in 1941, but Himmler was his senior by barely three and a half years. He was forty-one in 1941 and thus could go on to be Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German police for another twenty-five years or so, until a time when Heydrich would also reach the age of retirement.

It seems likely to me that Heydrich was striving for a supreme authority independent of Himmler's, and that he did so by fulfilling Hitler's anti-Jewish desires better than Himmler. My argument is that in the Jewish question Himmler was less determined than Hitler, that Heydrich sensed this difference in determination and decided to outdo Himmler in this area, not because he was more anti-Jewish but because he recognized that outdoing Himmler was an effective means of winning Hitler's favor and getting a promotion.

There is much evidence for my argument. I shall limit myself to demonstrating one instance only. It is a particularly crucial one: the decision to deport the Jews in Germany.

In August 1941 Hitler was still hesitating. When Heydrich had proposed to evacuate the Jews from the Altreich, Hitler had refused for the time "during the war." Göring also refused when Heydrich repeatedly proposed to mark the German Jews. But Heydrich kept insisting. He joined hands with Goebbels in order to exert influence on Hitler.

The final decision must have occurred in mid-September 1941. Let me just enumerate the elements of what we know and postpone the interpretation for the time being. On September 18 Himmler wrote to Arthur Greiser, Reichsstatthalter in the Warthegau in the incorporated Polish territories: "The Führer wishes that the Altreich and the Protectorate should be emptied and liberated of the Jews, proceeding from West to East, as soon as possible." On September 22, 23, and 24 Himmler and Heydrich were with Hitler at his headquarters. After this it was announced that Heydrich, in addition to his previous duties, was to carry out the duties of the Reichsprotector in Bohemia and Moravia and that he was promoted to the rank of SS-Obergruppenführer. It was his first promotion since June 1934. He now had a rank that corresponded to that of general in the army and state secretary in the government administration. And he had a territory such as only Reichsministers or Gauleiters had hitherto received.

On September 23 Goebbels, who was also at the Führer's headquarters during these days—but not present at the talks with Himmler and Heydrich—learned from Heydrich what he noted in his diary: "The Führer is of the opinion that the Jews must gradually be taken out of the whole of Germany. The first cities to be made free of Jews now are Berlin, Vienna, and Prague."

On September 30 Heydrich's representative in Vienna informed the leader of the Israelite Religious Community there that the first transport would leave on October 15. It did indeed leave Vienna on that day, followed by the first transport from Berlin on October 18. The deportations from Germany had begun.

If we try now to connect these pieces of information we can state the following series of decisions. On or shortly before September 18: evacuation "as soon as possible." On or shortly before September 23: evacuation "now." This is confirmed by the fact that the evacuations were implemented immediately afterwards.

In this context Heydrich was promoted both to acting Reichsprotektor and Obergruppenführer. We have a photocopy of the latter appointment. It was typewritten on Hitler's letterhead and signed by him in handwriting. The line "Berlin, den" was crossed out and replaced in Himmler's handwriting by "Führer-Hauptquartier, 24.IX.41."

Why had Himmler personally, and not some secretary, added the modification? My tentative answer is: Because nobody else was present. Why was nobody else present? Because the matter discussed at that particular meeting was top secret. Thus, it could not have been the meeting regarding the situation in the Protectorate (when Karl Hermann Frank was also present) but a meeting specifically about the Final Solution.

It is, of course, possible that Heydrich was made acting Reichsprotektor because the situation in the Protectorate required it and that he was promoted to Obergruppenführer because he was to have that rank in his new capacity. But it is also possible (and that is my tentative interpretation) that he received the double appointment as a reward for his position on the Final Solution at the very moment when its implementation had finally been decided.

What was the military situation during these days? Was it marked by frustration or by the euphoria of victory? I quote from Franz Halder's diary. September 18: "satisfactory progress east of Kiev." September 19: "Operations in the South are progressing with delightful speed." On that day indeed Kiev was taken. September 20: "The crisis of encirclement begins." September 21: The enemy is apparently withdrawing. September 22: Preparations for attack on the Crimea. September 23: Nothing new in the South. September 25: Local progress on the Crimea. I would deduce that the situation was tense but not frustrating. It seems to me that Hitler, after much hesitation, had finally crossed the threshold to the Final Solution during these days and that he had conferred the task upon Heydrich, who shortly after proclaimed himself to be Judenkommissar for Europe. Of course, I cannot prove that my interpretation is correct nor can I develop my whole argument here. Many more elements of information would have to be taken into account.

But I am quite confident that this is the direction in which we need to go. We need to assemble meticulously all the elements at our disposal, including those which at first sight are not directly relevant to the Final Solution. Then a mosaic may become visible, perhaps a panorama, from which we can deduce more general and more convincing conclusions.

We have reached a point at which we can look back to quite some progress in research. The purely functionalist approach has been more or less invalidated. The

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## NOTES

1. Gerald L. Neuman, *The Holocaust: A History* (London, 1933-45) (London, 1951).
2. Leon Kuperman, *The Holocaust: A History* (London, 1951).
3. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York, 1961).
4. Paul V. Lawrence, *The Holocaust: A History* (New York, 1961).
5. David Irving, *The Holocaust: A History* (London, 1961).
6. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History* (London, 1961).
7. Philip E. Bourke, *The Holocaust: A History* (London, 1961).
8. Tim M. S. Williams, *The Holocaust: A History* (London, 1961).
9. See the *Journal of the American Historical Association*, 1961, p. 1226.

Holocaust was initiated—initiated by Hitler. There were, of course, conditions under which it was implemented. We are far from having explored all of these, even further from having assembled them into a coherent picture. But we have reached a point where we have found the way that we need to go.

#### NOTES

1. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1933–45* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co.; New York: Beechhurst Press, 1953).
2. Leon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine: Le IIIe Reich et les Juifs* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1951).
3. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961).
4. Paul W. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction: A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949).
5. David Irving, *Hitler's War* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), pp. 12–15.
6. Martin Broszat, "Hitler und die Genesis der 'Endlösung': Aus Anlass der Thesen von David Irving," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 25/4 (October 1977): 739–75.
7. Philippe Burrin, *Hitler et les juifs: genèse d'un génocide* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989); Burrin's study has been translated into English as *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust*, trans. Patsy Southgate (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), pp. 23–24.
8. Tim Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), pp. 21–40.
9. See the review by Christopher R. Browning in *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1226.

## 4.

MICHAEL R. MARRUS

# The Holocaust

WHERE WE ARE, WHERE WE NEED TO GO—A COMMENT

Let me invite you to imagine circumstances different than they are. Suppose that we are in Paris, France. We are not in the 1990s, but at some time in the mid-nineteenth century. As scholars, our minds are focused not on the destruction of European Jews but rather on the French Revolution, which, like the Holocaust now, was then being assessed from the vantage point of half a century.

A conference of distinguished scholars has been assembled, and the first panel sets out to chart "Where we are, where we need to go." To the assembled company this evening in Paris, papers are presented by three eminent historians. They are: Jules Michelet, head of the historical section of the National Archives and professor at the Collège de France; the Count Alexis de Tocqueville, writer, traveler and soon-to-be government minister; and François Guizot, one-time professor, historian, and statesman, and head of the French government during most of the 1840s.

These three historians are called upon to assess the state of research on the French Revolution and to suggest future directions. In response, each of these dwells upon themes with which he has been preoccupied: the "interdisciplinary" Tocqueville focuses on origins, the perils of over-centralization, and the link between economic trends and the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy's reform program; the patriot Michelet, renowned for glorious abstractions, reminds his audience of the volcanic upsurge of the French people after 1789 and the importance of collections at the National Archives; and the liberal monarchist Guizot, a great admirer of the British experience, suggests that his audience consider comparative history in order to understand more fully the progress of liberty through political change.

The evening is a *chef d'oeuvre* of historical recapitulation and a splendid occasion for all the invited professionals to remember. Still, a few graduate students, gathered at the back of the splendid hall are heard to grumble as they go out into the night: "*Eh bien*, the *patron* really let them have it *ce soir*. He really told us where we should go from here, what themes we should pursue. Nevertheless, I think I'll work on something a little bit different." And so, indeed, they do. Four generations later the students of students of these students have reached the age of retirement, and how different is their work from that of their progenitors of the mid-nineteenth century! The study of origins now links regional studies with machine-assisted investigations of the tax system; gender and family studies now dominate much of social history;

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and devotees of comparative history construct models of political development and challenge the notion of revolution itself.

Tocqueville, Michelet, and Guizot are respected for their inspiration, their erudition, and their remarkable original contributions. However, these historians are now read, more often than not, to discover how the historiography got to its present point and to puzzle over the preoccupations people had in the mid-nineteenth century as they contemplated their momentous past.

What is the point of this imaginative exercise? There are several. Most obviously, my reference to the three illustrious Frenchmen is a way of acknowledging the esteem with which we view the work of the distinguished senior colleagues whose writings appear here. No one can tell whether their advice on new directions will be taken, or what will last or not last among the historical paradigms for which they have been responsible over the years. But whatever current or future criticism holds, professors Bauer, Jäckel, and Hilberg will remain foundation stones for my own and so many others' thinking about the Holocaust. Even if we agree or disagree with their opinions, we refer regularly to their work when we develop our own hypotheses.

Second, my reference to the rich historiography of the French Revolution is a way of underscoring a point that is implicit in all three papers: the Holocaust, like the French Revolution, has become historicized. It has entered into the mainstream of historical understanding and is subject to the same rules of evidence, interpretation, and exposition as the other great issues historians examine. Some consider it painful to hear historians demystify the Holocaust. They do not like to see historians resist the notion—as Yehuda Bauer does, for example—that the victims were *kedoshim*, or holy persons, rather than ordinary people. This type of historical analysis, however, is a normal and healthy development, just as it was when our three French historians fashioned their arguments in a way that spoke to the historical culture of their era.

The other side of the coin is that the history of the Holocaust has finally "arrived"; it has been incorporated into the history of our time in the way that the French Revolution was considered by the mid-nineteenth century as a major reference point for the understanding of that era. Each of our essayists has been prominently involved in professional discourse on this subject. The result of their labors, together with those of so many others, is that the Holocaust has come out of the dark shadows and, to paraphrase Raul Hilberg, into the limelight. Our collective responsibility is to avoid the distortions of inaccuracy, vulgarization, and banalization that can easily result.

My third point concerning my French Revolution analogy considers how literally our younger colleagues will take directives from these three distinguished scholars about what postures to adopt on some current controversies and "where we go from here." I have a distinct feeling that the best graduate students will go their own ways, and will surprise us with what they unfold. "History," said the celebrated Dutch historian Pieter Geyl, "is an argument without end." The last thing we would want for Holocaust history is its becoming a broken record, repeating the same agendas over and over again. Accordingly, we must expect that theses will generate antitheses, that one way of looking at matters will be challenged by a new approach. Nothing could be worse for Holocaust history than stalling argument and producing

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an official orthodoxy. Tocqueville, Guizot, and Michelet would never have tolerated it; nor, I am sure, would Bauer, Hilberg, and Jäckel.

In studying the Holocaust, historians have been challenging theories for decades, far longer than Eberhard Jäckel suggests when he refers to Martin Broszat's famous 1977 attack on David Irving. For example, a firestorm of criticism on the subject of Jewish reactions to Nazi persecution greeted Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*. The debate on the Judenräte, focused by Hannah Arendt's reporting for the *New Yorker* in 1961 and carried to a new level by Isaiah Trunk's *Judenrat* in 1972, is another important milestone. Reference to these contests serves to recall as well the name of Philip Friedman, both a survivor and a historian of the Holocaust. He insisted that historians examine not only the perpetrators but also the Jews as "the bearer(s) of a communal existence."<sup>1</sup>

Historians are known for challenging established theories and creating their own. More than forty years ago, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* pointed out a path on which research on antisemitism can become, as Jäckel terms it, "disconnected" from research on the Holocaust. While not ignoring antisemitism, Arendt pondered the way in which modern industrial society developed terrible new means of domination, drove entire peoples outside the framework of humanity, routinized terror, and conducted massive assaults on human individuality. For Arendt, what was remarkable about Nazism was not its antisemitism but the machinelike processes of persecution and murder it created, inspired not only by the project of robbing Jews of their lives but of stripping them of their human individuality as well.

Since Arendt's work was published, many others have pondered the Nazis' murder of European Jewry from this vantage point. Karl Dietrich Bracher, for example, studied the way in which Nazism perpetrated the "impersonal, bureaucratic 'extermination' of a people classified as a species of inferior subhumans, as 'vermin,' a problem which the farmer Himmler handled as though it were a biological disease."<sup>2</sup> Raul Hilberg's own work on the Holocaust may be understood as part of the wider discourse on totalitarianism in our time. For Hilberg, the central image of the Nazi apparatus is also a machine—the European-wide "machinery of destruction" which treads upon its victims, following its own logic of expropriation, concentration, deportation, and, finally, mass murder. Antisemitism plays a role in the process but does not serve as a full explanation for the events which unfolded. Study of the Holocaust demands a sense of balance, proportion, and due weight to the various factors involved.

This is the vantage point from which I assess Yehuda Bauer's compromise. He attempts to steer a path between those who "universalize the Holocaust" to the point of denying "the specificity of the Jewish fate," and those, on the other hand, who turn all their interpretative tools inward, rejecting all possibility of comparison with other genocides or persecutions. In the effort to strike this balance, Yehuda Bauer has an important role to play in Holocaust history. Indeed, his 1978 essay "Against Mystification: The Holocaust as a Historical Phenomenon" is one of the milestones in this effort. However, among his arguments that I do not find persuasive are allusions to the motivations of researchers: Jews seeking to deny their Jewishness because of

fundamental insvalidation of the picture of the Holocaust. In any case, there are reasons for specificity to psychologists and historians alike.

In this regard, Tom Segev, in his book *The Seventh Million*, [as] unfit to guide us to achieve a Jewish future. It may be that I am not. The latter has, to be sure, during the Holocaust, to Haifa to see on the map of Palestine, a young man, deeply disturbed. 'I am here, I am here,' he wrote a letter, 'I suffered and, said to me, helpless, he wrote a letter, the suffering of his people is rising in all directions. The portrait overall, 'the people' is an overstatement. Ben-Gurion, more than his Zionist leadership, essentially the same disaster . . . into :

One suspects that the Holocaust is a story of the Holocaust. The dangers of the Holocaust are building blocks of the Holocaust. Hilberg rightly draws on Soviet-bloc countries. Holocaust historians for Holocaust studies. Study of Allied powers.

I resist, however, new sources, rather. The Revolution has been recently been a victory. What keeps us from understanding is a narrow and open, so long as it rains down on the Holocaust.

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fundamental insecurities (in the case of universalizers), or angry Christians seeking validation of their traditional identities through a morbid, exploitative or distorted picture of the Holocaust. These assessments may be right or they may be wrong. In any case, there are enough balanced, well-grounded cases for "universalization" and for specificity to command the attention of all of us. Let us leave motivations to the psychologists and biographers; we have enough to do trying to get the history itself correct.

In this regard I have to wonder about Bauer's sweeping dismissal of journalist Tom Segev, in which the author is taxed with seeing "Ben-Gurion and his colleagues [as] unfit to guide the Jewish people . . . puny, narrow-minded individuals, only out to achieve a Jewish independence in Palestine which would enhance their power." It may be that I missed this emphasis in the English edition of *The Seventh Million*. The latter has, to be sure, some hard things to say about the leadership of the Yishuv during the Holocaust. But Segev also recounts how, early in 1943, Ben-Gurion went to Haifa to see one of the refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe who managed to reach Palestine, a young woman who was a witness of the Holocaust in Poland: "He was deeply disturbed, to the point of tears," Segev writes. "I can't escape from the nightmare," he wrote afterwards. For three hours the girl told him of the horrors she had suffered and, said Ben-Gurion, 'no Dante or Poe' could imagine such things. He felt helpless, he wrote. It was a rare outburst of emotion on his part—he seldom spoke of the suffering of individuals—and even here he quickly regained his composure: 'The sun is rising in all its might and one must go on with one's work.'<sup>3</sup> An imbalanced portrait overall, perhaps; but "puny, narrow-minded . . . unfit to lead the Jewish people" is an overly harsh assessment. I simply don't see it. While no doubt kinder to Ben-Gurion, more finely grained in his assessment and certainly more appreciative of his Zionist leadership and political genius, his biographer Shabtai Tevet makes essentially the same point when he refers to his subject's determination to "turn a disaster . . . into a productive force."<sup>4</sup>

One suspects that part of the problem here is a reflection of the historicization of the Holocaust and thus the encounter between scholarship and popular history. The dangers professional historians see in a popularization is the neglect of the basic building blocks of historical inquiry, namely recollections or documents. Raul Hilberg rightly draws our attention to the avalanche of documentation from former Soviet-bloc countries that is about to come crashing down around the heads of Holocaust historians. This extraordinary hoard of material will be at least as significant for Holocaust studies as was the opening of the ULTRA and MAGIC archives for the study of Allied policy during the Second World War.

I resist, however, the notion that future studies of the Holocaust will be driven by new sources, rather than by new questions. The documentation on the French Revolution has been freely available for generations. Yet despite this, there has recently been a veritable flood of new books on the French Revolution. Fundamentally, what keeps the subject alive as an intellectual discourse is that the itch to understand is a never-ending process. So long as our historical culture is pluralistic and open, so long as our intellectual life is free and challenging, new questions will rain down on Holocaust history. Count on the next generation to frame different

problems even for the sources we have already examined. We can be certain that the researchers of the forthcoming decades will not embroil themselves, as many of us have done, in disputes about the Robert Prochniks, the Judenräte, Rabbi Leo Baeck, and others. They will have their own historiographical controversies, their own perplexities, and the day may even come when they will wonder why we even bothered with our own quarrels of any given moment.

#### NOTES

1. Quoted in Geoff Eley, "Holocaust History," *London Review of Books*, March 3–17, 1986, pp. 7–8.

2. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, trans. Jean Steinberg (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 431.

3. Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 97.

4. Shabtai Teveth, *Ben Gurion: The Burning Ground 1886–1948* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 850.

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