

The Jewish Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

The genocide of European Jews – which many scholars and others call simply “the Holocaust”¹ – “is perhaps the one genocide of which every educated person has heard.”² Between 1941 and 1945, five to six million Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazi regime, its allies, and its surrogates in the Nazi-occupied territories.³ Yet despite the extraordinary scale and intensity of the genocide, its prominence in recent decades was far from preordained. The Second World War killed upwards of fifty million people, and attitudes in the two decades following the Nazi defeat tended to mirror those of European countries and leaders during the war, who generally refused to ascribe special significance or urgency to the Jewish catastrophe. Only with the Israeli capture of Adolf Eichmann, the epitome of the “banality of evil” in Hannah Arendt’s famous phrase, and his trial in Jerusalem in 1961 did the Jewish catastrophe begin truly to entrench itself in the Western consciousness, and become the paradigmatic genocide of human history. Even today, in the evaluation of genocide scholar Yehuda Bauer, “the impact of the Holocaust is growing, not diminishing.”⁴

This impact is expressed in the diverse debates about the Holocaust. Among the searching questions asked are: How could the systematic murder of millions of helpless individuals have sprung from one of the most developed and “civilized” of Western states? What are the links to European anti-semitism? How central a figure was Hitler in the genesis and unfolding of the slaughter? What part did “ordinary men” and “ordinary Germans” play in the extermination campaign? How extensive was Jewish resistance? What was the role of the Allies (notably Britain, France, the

USSR, and the United States), both before and during the Second World War, in abandoning Jews to destruction at Nazi hands? And what is the relationship between the Jewish Holocaust and the postwar state of Israel? This chapter addresses these controversies in its latter sections, while also touching on the debate over the alleged “uniqueness” of the Jewish tragedy.

ORIGINS

Until the later nineteenth century, Jews were uniquely stigmatized within the European social hierarchy. Medieval Christianity “held the Jews to violate the moral order of the world. By rejecting Jesus, by allegedly having killed him, the Jews stood in defiant opposition to the otherwise universally accepted conception of God and Man, denigrating and defiling, by their very existence, all that is sacred. As such, Jews came to represent symbolically and discursively much of the evil in the world.”⁵ Jews – especially male Jews (see Chapter 13) – were reviled as “uprooted, troublesome, malevolent, shiftless.”⁶

The Catholic church, and later the Protestant offshoot founded by the virulently anti-semitic Martin Luther, assailed Jews as “thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom.”⁷ The most primitive and powerful myth was the so-called “blood libel”: the claim that Jews seized and murdered Gentile children in order to use their blood in the baking of ceremonial bread for the Passover celebration.⁸ Fueled by this and other fantasies, regular pogroms – localized campaigns of violence, killing, and repression – scarred European Jewish history. At various points, Jews who refused to convert to Christianity were also rounded up and expelled, most notoriously from Spain and Portugal in 1492.

The rise of modernity and the nation-state recast traditional anti-semitism in new and contradictory guises. (The term “anti-semitism” is a product of this era, coined by the German Wilhelm Marr in 1879.) On one hand, Jews were viewed as *enemies* of modernity. Cloistered in the cultural isolation of ghettos (to which previous generations had consigned them), they could never be truly part of the nation-state, which was rapidly emerging as the fulcrum of modern identity.⁹ On the other hand, for sectors suspicious of or threatened by modernity, Jews were seen as dangerous *agents* of modernity: as key players in oppressive economic institutions; as urban, cosmopolitan, transcultural elements who threatened the unity and identity of the *Völk* (people).

It would be erroneous, however, to present European history as one long campaign of discrimination and repression against Jews. For several centuries Jews in Eastern Europe “enjoyed a period of comparative peace, tranquillity and the flowering of Jewish religious life.”¹⁰ They were even more prominent, and valued, in Muslim Spain. Moreover, modern ideologies of nationalism sometimes followed the liberal “melting-pot” motif exemplified by the United States. Those Jews who sought integration with their wider societies could be accepted. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are seen as something of a golden age for Jews in France, Britain, and Germany, even while some two-and-a-half million Jews were fleeing tsarist Russia in the face of brutal pogroms.

Germany was widely viewed as one of the more tolerant European societies; Prussia, the first German state to grant citizenship to its Jews, had done so as early as 1812. How, then, could Germany turn first to persecuting, then to slaughtering, nearly two-thirds of the Jews of Europe? Part of the answer lies in the fact that, although German society was in many ways tolerant and progressive, German politics was never liberal or democratic, in the manner of both Britain and France.¹¹ Moreover, German society was deeply destabilized by defeat in the First World War, and by the imposition of a ruinous and humiliating peace settlement at Versailles in 1919. Germany was forced to shoulder full blame for the outbreak of the “Great War.” It lost its overseas colonies, along with some of its European territories; its armed forces were reduced to a fraction of their former size; and onerous reparations were demanded. “A tidal wave of shame and resentment, experienced even by younger men who had not seen military service, swept the nation,” writes Richard Plant. “Many people tried to digest the bitter defeat by searching furiously for scapegoats.”¹² Such dark currents ran beneath the political order, the Weimar Republic, that prevailed after the war. Democratic but fragile, it presided over economic chaos – first the hyperinflation of 1923, which saw the German mark slip to 4.2 trillion to the dollar, and then the widespread unemployment of the global Great Depression beginning in 1929.

The result was political extremism. Its prime architect and beneficiary was the NSDAP (abbreviated to “Nazi”) party, founded by Adolf Hitler and sundry alienated colleagues. Hitler, a highly decorated First World War veteran and failed artist from Vienna, assumed the task of resurrecting Germany and imposing its hegemony on all Europe. This vision would lead to the deaths of tens of millions of people. But it was underpinned in Hitler’s mind by an epic hatred of Jews – “these black parasites of the nation,” as he called them in his prison-penned tirade, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).¹³

Hitler’s path to power was far from direct. By 1932, Hitler seemed to many to have passed his peak. The Nazis won only a minority of parliamentary seats in that year’s elections; more Germans voted for parties of the Left than of the Right. But divisions between the Socialists and Communists made the Nazis the largest single party in the Reichstag, and allowed Hitler to become Chancellor in January 1933.

Once installed in power, the Nazis proved unstoppable. Within three months, they had seized “total control of [the] German state, abolishing its federalist structure, dismantling democratic government and outlawing political parties and trade unions.” The Enabling Act of March 23, 1933 gave Hitler “*carte blanche* to terrorize and neutralise all effective political opposition.”¹⁴ Immediately thereafter, the Nazis’ persecutory stance towards Jews became plain. Within a few months, Jews saw their businesses placed under Nazi boycott; their mass dismissal from hospitals, the schools, and the civil service, and public book-burnings of Jewish and other “degenerate” works. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 stripped Jews of citizenship and gave legal shape to the Nazis’ race-based theories: intermarriage or sexual intercourse between non-Jews and Jews was prohibited.

With the Nuremberg edicts, and the threat of worse measures looming, increasing numbers of Jews fled abroad. The abandonment of homes and capital in Germany meant penury abroad – the Nazis would allow only a fraction of one’s wealth to be

exported. The general unwillingness of the outside world to accept Jewish refugees meant that many more Jews longed to leave than actually could. Hundreds of those who remained behind committed suicide as the humiliation of Nazi rule imposed upon them a “social death.”¹⁵

The persecution mounted further with the *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) on November 9–10, 1938, “a proto-genocidal assault”¹⁶ that targeted Jewish properties, residences, and persons. Several dozen Jews were killed outright, billions of deutschmarks in damage was inflicted, and some 30,000 male Jews were rounded up and imprisoned in concentration camps.¹⁷ Now applications to flee increased dramatically, but this occurred just as Hitler was driving Europe towards crisis and world war, and as Western countries all but closed their frontiers to Jewish would-be emigrants.

“Ordinary Germans” and the Nazis

In recent years a great deal of scholarly energy has been devoted to Hitler’s and the Nazis’ evolving relationship with the German public. Two broad conclusions may be drawn from the work of Robert Gellately and David Bankier – and also from one of the most revelatory personal documents of the Nazi era, the diaries of Victor Klemperer (1881–1960). (Klemperer was a Jew from the German city of Dresden who survived the entire Nazi era, albeit under conditions of privation and persecution, thanks to his marriage to an “Aryan” woman.)

The first insight is that Nazi rule, and the isolation of the Jews for eventual expulsion and extermination, counted on a broad well-spring of popular support. This was based on Hitler’s pledge to return Germany to social order, economic stability, and world-power status. The basic thesis of Gellately’s book, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, is that “Hitler was largely successful in getting the backing, one way or another, of the great majority of citizens.” Moreover, this was based on the anathematizing of whole classes of citizens: “the Germans generally turned out to be proud and pleased that Hitler and his henchmen were putting away certain kinds of people who did not fit in, or who were regarded as ‘outsiders,’ ‘asocials,’ ‘useless eaters,’ or ‘criminals.’”¹⁸

Victor Klemperer’s diaries provide an “extraordinarily acute analysis of the day-to-day workings of German life under Hitler” and “a singular chronicle of German society’s progressive Nazification.”¹⁹ Klemperer oscillated between a conviction that German society had become thoroughly Nazified, and the ironic conviction (given his expulsion from the body politic) that the soul of the Germany he loved would triumph. “I certainly no longer believe that [the Nazi regime] has enemies inside Germany,” he wrote in May 1936. “The majority of the people is content, a small group accepts Hitler as the lesser evil, no one really wants to be rid of him. . . . And all are afraid for their livelihood, their life, all are such terrible cowards.” But as late as March 1940, with the Second World War well underway, “I often ask myself where all the wild anti-Semitism is. For my part I encounter much sympathy, people help me out, but fearfully of course.” He noted numerous examples of verbal contempt, but also a surprising number of cases where colleagues and acquaintances went out

of their way to greet him warmly, and even police officers who accorded him treatment that was “very courteous, almost comically courteous.” “Every Jew has his Aryan angel,” one of his fellow inmates in an overcrowded communal house told him in 1941. But by then Klemperer had been stripped of his job, pension, house, and typewriter; he would shortly lose his right to indulge even in his cherished cigarettes. In September 1941, he was forced to put on a yellow Star of David identifying him as a Jew. It left him feeling “shattered”: nearly a year later, he would describe the star as “torture – I can resolve a hundred times to pay no attention, it remains torture.”²⁰ Hundreds of miles to the East, the program of mass killing was gearing up, as Klemperer was increasingly aware.

If Klemperer and other Jews were the prime target of this demonization and marginalization of social groups, they were not the *only* focus, and for some years they were not necessarily the principal one. Communists (depicted as closely linked to Jewry) and other political opponents, handicapped and senile Germans, homosexuals, Roma (Gypsies), Polish intellectuals, vagrants, and other “asocial” elements all occupied the attention of the Nazi authorities during this period, and were often the victims of “notorious achievements in human destruction” that exceeded the persecution of the Jews until 1941.²¹ Of these groups, political opponents (especially communists) and the handicapped and senile were most at risk of extreme physical violence, torture, and murder. “The political and syndical [trade union] left,” wrote Arno Mayer, “remained the principal target of brutal repression well past the time of the definitive consolidation of the new regime in July–August 1934.”²² In the slaughter of the handicapped, meanwhile, the Nazis first “discovered that it was possible to murder multitudes,” and that “they could easily recruit men and women to do the killings.”²³ (See Box 6a for more on the fate of political oppositionists and the handicapped under Nazi rule.)

THE TURN TO MASS MURDER

Here I am, then, on the bottom. One learns quickly enough to wipe out the past and the future when one is forced to. A fortnight after my arrival [at Auschwitz] I already had the prescribed hunger, that chronic hunger unknown to free men, which makes one dream at night, and settles in all the limbs of one’s body. . . . I push wagons, I work with a shovel, I turn rotten in the rain, I shiver in the wind; already my own body is no longer mine: my belly is swollen, my limbs emaciated, my face is thick in the morning, hollow in the evening; some of us have yellow skin, others grey. When we do not meet for a few days we hardly recognize each other.

Primo Levi, Auschwitz survivor

Between the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 and the onset of full-scale extermination in mid-1941, the Nazis were busy consolidating and confining the Jews under their control. The core policy in the occupied territories of the East was *ghettoization*: confinement of Jews in festering, overcrowded zones of major cities. One can make a solid argument that with ghettoization came clear genocidal intent: “The Nazis sought to create inhuman conditions in the ghettos,

where a combination of obscene overcrowding, deliberate starvation . . . and outbreaks of typhus and cholera would reduce Jewish numbers through 'natural wastage.'²⁴ Certainly, the hundreds of thousands of Jews who died in the ghettos are counted as victims of the Holocaust.

In the months following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, some *1.2 million* Jews were rounded up and murdered, mostly by point-blank rifle fire. The direct genocidal agents were the so-called *Einsatzgruppen*, four death-squad battalions – some 3,000 men in all – who followed behind the regular German army.²⁵ They were joined by other formations, such as the notorious Reserve Police Battalion 101 studied by historian Christopher Browning and political scientist Daniel Goldhagen.

The role of the regular German army, or *Wehrmacht*, in this eruption of full-scale genocide received attention at the Nuremberg trials of 1945–46 (see Chapter 15). However, in part because the Western allies preferred to see the *Wehrmacht* as gentlemanly opponents, and subsequently because the German army was being reconstructed as an ally by both sides in the Cold War, a myth was cultivated that the *Wehrmacht* had acted "honorably" in the occupied territories. Scholarly inquiry has now demonstrated that this is "a wholly false picture of the historical reality."²⁶ Permeated to the core by the Nazis' racist ideology, the *Wehrmacht* was key to engineering the mass murder of 3.3 million Soviets seized as prisoners-of-war (see Box 6a).²⁷ The *Wehrmacht* was also central to the perpetration of the Jewish Holocaust. The *Einsatzgruppen*, writes Hannah Arendt, "needed and got the close cooperation of the Armed Forces; indeed, relations between them were usually 'excellent' and in some instances 'affectionate' (*herzlich*, literally 'heartfelt'). The generals . . . often lent their own men, ordinary soldiers, to assist in the massacres."²⁸ A great many ordinary soldiers "delighted in death as spectators or as perpetrators."²⁹ As SS Lieutenant-Colonel Karl Kretschmer wrote home in September 1942: "Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is, no Jew remains."³⁰

Even such massive slaughter could not hope to eliminate European Jewry in a "reasonable" time. Moreover, the intensely intimate character of murder by gunfire, with human tissue and brain matter spattering onto the clothes and faces of the German killers, began to take a psychological toll. The difficulty was especially pronounced in the case of mass murders of children and women. While it was relatively easy for the executioners to persuade themselves that adult male victims, even unarmed civilians, were dangerous and deserved their cruel fate, the argument was harder to make for people traditionally viewed as passive, dependent, or helpless.³¹

To reduce this stress, and to increase the logistical efficiency of the killing, the industrialized "death camp" with its gas chambers came to the fore. Both were refinements of existing institutions and technologies. The death camps grew out of the concentration-camp system the Nazis had established upon first taking power in 1933, while killings by gas had first been employed in 1939 as part of the "euthanasia" campaign that was such a vital forerunner of genocide against the Jews. (It was wound down, in fact, at the precise point that the campaign against European Jews turned to root-and-branch extermination.) Gas chambers allowed for the desired psychological distance between the killers and their victims.

Principally by this means, one-and-a-quarter million Jews were killed at Auschwitz – actually a complex of three camps, of which Auschwitz II (Birkenau) operated as the killing center. Zyklon B (cyanide gas in crystal form) was overwhelmingly the means of murder at Auschwitz. Nearly two million more Jews died by varied means including gas, shootings, beatings, and starvation at the other “death camps” in occupied Poland, distinguished from the vastly larger Nazi network of concentration camps by their core function of extermination. These were Chelmno (where 200,000 Jews were slaughtered); Sobibor (260,000); Belzec (500,000); Treblinka (800,000, mostly from the Polish capital Warsaw); and Majdanek (130,000).³²



Figure 6.1 The ruins of the undressing room adjacent to the gas chamber and crematorium complex known as Krema II, at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in western Poland, dynamited by the Nazis in the closing stages of the Second World War. Jews and other victims were told they would be taking showers; instead, they were asphyxiated with cyanide gas, and their bodies incinerated in the crematorium complex at the rear of the photo.

Source: Courtesy Dr. Michael Shermer.

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Figure 6.2 Mass burial of prisoners' corpses in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp following liberation, May 1945.

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

It would be misleading to distinguish too sharply between the “death camps” where gas was the normal means of extermination, and the broader network of camps in which killings of Jews also reached exterminatory levels. As Daniel Goldhagen has argued, “after the beginning of 1942, the camp system in general was lethal for Jews,” and well over a million died outside the death camps, killed by starvation, disease, and overwork.³³ Perhaps 500,000 more, in Raul Hilberg’s estimate, succumbed in the Jewish ghettos, themselves a kind of concentration camp. Finally, tens of thousands died on the brutal and nonsensical forced marches of camp inmates as Allied forces closed in.³⁴

Notoriously, the extermination system continued to function even when it impeded the war effort. In March 1944, the Nazis intervened to occupy Hungary as a bulwark against advancing Soviet forces. Adolf Eichmann promptly arrived to supervise the rounding up for slaughter of the country’s Jews. Thousands were saved by the imaginative intervention of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg (see Chapter 10). But some 400,000 were packed off to be gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau and other death camps – despite the enormous strain this imposed on the rail system and the Nazis’ dwindling human and material resources. It often seemed that the single-minded devotion to genocidal destruction outweighed even the Nazis’ desire for self-preservation.

BOX 6.1 ONE WOMAN'S STORY: NECHAMA EPSTEIN

Nechama Epstein was a Polish Jew from Warsaw who was just 18 years old when she "and her family were herded into the city's ghetto together with 350,000 other Jews."³⁵ One of the few survivors of the Auschwitz death camp, she was interviewed after the war by David P. Boder, an American psychologist who published a book titled *I Did Not Interview the Dead*. However, Boder chose not to include his conversation with Epstein; her testimony did not see the light of day until it was excerpted in Donald Niewyk's chapter for the powerful anthology, *Century of Genocide*. Her account, Niewyk noted, "reveals a remarkable breadth of experiences, including survival in ghettos, slave labor camps, and extermination centers."³⁶

Epstein described the grim privations of life in the Warsaw ghetto – the very ghetto that would rise up so heroically against the Germans in mid-1944, and be crushed. "It was very bad," she remembered. "We had nothing to sell any more. Eight people were living on a kilo of beets a day. . . . We did not have any more strength to walk. . . . Every day there were other dead, small children, bigger children, older people. All died of a hunger death."

Epstein was caught up in the mass round-up of Jews to be shipped to the extermination center at Treblinka in September 1942. Packed into a single cattle-car with 200 other Jews, she passed an entire night before the train began to move: "We lay one on top of the other. . . . One lay suffocating on top of another. . . . We could do nothing to help ourselves. And then real death began." Tormented by thirst and near-asphyxiation, Jews struggled with each other for a snatch of air or any moisture. "Mothers were giving the children urine to drink."

Some enterprising prisoners managed to saw a hole in the cattle-car, and Epstein, among others, leapt out. With the help of a Polish militia member, she found her way to the Miedzyrzec ghetto, where she passed the next eight months. "Every four weeks there were new deportations." The first of these she survived by hiding in an attic and eating raw beets. "I did not have anything to drink. The first snow fell then, so I made a hole in the roof and pulled in the hand a little snow. And this I licked. And this I lived on."

Her luck ran out at the time of the last deportation. She was led away, to a transport and apparently her doom, on "a beautiful summer day" in 1943. This time the destination was Majdanek, another of the extermination centers in occupied Poland. There, "We were all lined up. There were many who were shot [outright]. . . . The mothers were put separately, the children separately, the men separately, the women separately. . . . The children and the mothers were led to the crematory. All were burned. . . . We never laid eyes on them again."

continued

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She spent two months at Majdanek. "I lived through many terrible things. We had nothing to eat. We were so starved. . . . The food consisted of two hundred grams of bread a day, and a little soup of water with nettles." A German SS woman entered the barracks every day "at six in the morning . . . beating everybody."

In July 1943, Epstein was shipped off to Auschwitz. By good fortune, she was consigned to a work camp rather than to immediate extermination in the Birkenau gas chambers. "We worked carrying stones on barrows, large stones. To eat they did not give us. We were beaten terribly" by German women guards: "They said that every day they must kill three, four Jews." She fell sick, and survived her time in the hospital only by hiding from the regular round-ups that carted off ill inmates to the crematoria. "Christian women were lying there, so I climbed over to the Christians, into their beds, and there I always had the good fortune to hide."

In October, the entire sick-ward was emptied. "There was a girl eighteen years old, and she was crying terribly. She said that she is still so young, she wants to live. . . . [But] nothing helped. They were all taken away." When she emerged from the ward, she saw the Auschwitz crematory burning in the night: "We saw the entire sky red [from] the glow of the fire. Blood was pouring on the sky." But Epstein again survived the selection for the Birkenau extermination center. She was sent back to Majdanek, where she witnessed SS and Gestapo killers forcing male inmates to dig mass graves, then lining up hundreds of female inmates to be shot. Over the course of a further eight months at Majdanek, she remained among the handful of inmates – several hundred only – who were spared gassing and cremation.

Epstein was eventually sent to a forced-labor center: Plaszow, near Krakow (the same camp featured in Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*). By late 1944, the Soviets were approaching Plaszow. "We were again dragged away. I was the second time taken to Auschwitz." After that, she was dispatched to Bergen-Belsen; then to Aschersleben in Germany proper, where she labored alongside Dutch, Yugoslav, and French prisoners-of-war.

American forces were now closing in from the West. Epstein was conscripted into a death march alongside 500 other inmates. "Only women. Two hundred fell en route." At last, after a march of more than 250 kilometres, she reached Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. This had long served as a "model" detention facility for the Nazis – the only one to which Red Cross representatives were admitted. "We were completely in tatters. . . . We were very dirty. . . . We were badly treated. We were beaten. They screamed at us. 'Accursed swine! You are filthy. What sort of people are you?'" Epstein and her fellow inmates now looked like the "subhumans" the Germans had been indoctrinated to expect.

On the very last day of the European war, May 8, 1945, Theresienstadt was liberated by Russian forces. "We didn't believe it. . . . We went out, whoever was able. . . . We went out with great joy, with much crying. . . ."

"But now there began a real death. People who had been starved for so many years. . . . The Russians had opened all the German storehouses, all the German stores, and they said, 'Take whatever you want.' People who had been badly starved, they shouldn't have eaten. . . . And the people began to eat, to eat too much, greedily. . . . Hundreds of people fell a day. . . . People crawled over the dead." Typhus broke out. But Epstein survived. She returned to Warsaw, married, and emigrated to Palestine.

DEBATING THE HOLOCAUST

Many of the central themes of the Nazis' attempted destruction of European Jews have served as touchstones for the broader field of comparative genocide studies. No other genocide has generated remotely as much literature as the Jewish Holocaust, including thousands of books and essays. It is important, therefore, to explore some major points of debate, not only for the insights they give into the events described in this chapter, but for their relevance to genocide studies as a whole.

Intentionalists vs. functionalists

The core of the debate over the past two decades has revolved around a scholarly tendency generally termed "intentionalist," and a contrasting "functionalist" interpretation. Intentionalists, as the tag suggests, place primary emphasis on the *intention* of the Nazis, from the outset, to eliminate European Jews by means that eventually included mass slaughter. Such an approach tends to emphasize the figure of Adolf Hitler and his monomaniacal zeal to eliminate the Jewish "cancer" from Germany and Europe. ("Once I really am in power," Hitler had told a journalist as far back as 1922, "my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews.")³⁷ Necessary as well was the anti-semitic dimension of both Nazi ideology and European history. This fueled the Nazis' animus against the Jews, and also ensured there would be no shortage of "willing executioners" to do the dirty work.

The functionalist critique, on the other hand, downplays the significance of Hitler as an individual. It "depicts the fragmentation of decision-making and the blurring of political responsibility," and emphasizes "the disintegration of traditional bureaucracy into a crooked maze of ill-conceived and uncoordinated task forces," in Colin Tatz's summary.³⁸ Also stressed is the evolutionary and contingent character of the campaign against the Jews: from legal discrimination, to concentration, to mass murder. In this view, "what happened in Nazi Germany [was] an unplanned 'cumulative radicalization' produced by the chaotic decision-making process of a polycratic regime and the 'negative selection' of destructive elements from the Nazis' ideological arsenal as the only ones that could perpetually mobilize the disparate and otherwise incompatible elements of the Nazi coalition."³⁹

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This sometimes acrimonious debate gave way, in the 1990s, to a growing recognition that the intentionalist and functionalist strands are not irreconcilable. “Both positions in the debate have a number of merits and demerits; both ultimately reflect different forms of historical explanation; and the ground between them is steadily narrowing in favour of a consensus which borrows elements from both lines of argument.”⁴⁰ The raw material for Nazi genocide was present from the start, but required a host of historically contingent features to actualize and maximize it. Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman propose the term “intentional functionalism” to capture this interplay of actors and variables.⁴¹

Jewish resistance

The depiction of Jews as having gone meekly to their deaths was first advanced by Raul Hilberg in his massive 1961 treatise *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and then enshrined by Hannah Arendt in her controversial account of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Both Hilberg and Arendt noted the close pre-war coordination between the Jewish Agency (which sought to promote Jewish immigration to Palestine) and the Nazi authorities.⁴² They also stressed the role of the Jewish councils (*Judenräte*), bodies of Jews delegated by the Nazis to oversee the ghettos, and the round-ups for “transport” of Jewish civilians. “The whole truth,” as Arendt summarized it, was that without Jewish leadership and organization, the Jewish people would have suffered “chaos and plenty of misery” at Nazi hands, “but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.”⁴³

While it may be true that “the salient characteristic of the Jewish community in Europe during 1933–1945 was its step-by-step adjustment to step-by-step destruction,”⁴⁴ research has starkly undermined this depiction of Jewish passivity and complicity. Scholars have described how, under horrific circumstances, Jews found ways to resist: going into hiding; struggling to preserve Jewish culture and creativity; and even launching armed uprisings. (The mass escape from the Sobibor death camp in October 1943, and the Warsaw ghetto uprising of April 1944, are the most famous of these rebellions against the Nazis.)⁴⁵ Large numbers of Jews also joined the armed forces of the Allies, or fought as partisans behind German lines. On balance, “it is pure myth that the Jews were merely ‘passive,’” writes Alexander Donat in his memoir *The Holocaust Kingdom*:

The Jews fought back against their enemies to a degree no other community anywhere in the world would have been capable of were it to find itself similarly beleaguered. They fought against hunger and starvation, against disease, against a deadly Nazi economic blockade. They fought against murderers and against traitors within their own ranks, and they were utterly alone in their fight. They were forsaken by God and by man, surrounded by hatred or indifference. Ours was not a romantic war. Although there was much heroism, there was little beauty – much toil and suffering, but no glamour. We fought back on every front where the enemy attacked – the biological front, the economic front, the propaganda front, the cultural front – with every weapon we possessed.⁴⁶

The Allies and the churches: Could the Jews have been saved?

The genocide against European Jews *could* have been avoided, argues the historian Yehuda Bauer, just as the Second World War itself might never have occurred – “had the Great Powers stopped Nazi Germany when it was still weak.” But at this point, “nobody knew that a Holocaust was even possible, because nobody knew what a Holocaust was; the Germans had not decided on anything like it in the 1930s.”⁴⁷ The Allies, haunted by the carnage of the First World War, sought accommodation (“appeasement”) rather than confrontation.

The Evian Conference of July 1938, held in a French town on Lake Geneva, brought together representatives of Western countries to address the Jewish plight. In retrospect, and even at the time, it offered the best chance to alleviate the plight of German Jews, through the simple expedient of opening up Western borders to Jewish refugees. But instead, the West ducked its responsibility. In Germany, Hitler could barely conceal his delight. The rejection of the Jews not only further humiliated Jews themselves, but pointed out the hypocrisy of the outside world’s humanitarian rhetoric.

Turning to the period of full-scale genocide against the Jews, it seems clear that details of the killing operations were known to the Allies early on. For example, radio communications of the Nazi Order Police, alluding to mass murder, were intercepted. But the Allies were observing from an insuperable distance, with Germany at the height of its powers on the European continent. The sheer speed of the slaughter also militated against meaningful intervention. “From mid-March 1942 to mid-February 1943,” that is, in less than a year, “over one-half the victims of the Jewish Holocaust . . . lost their lives at the hands of Nazi killers.”⁴⁸

It may be argued that the inclusion of targets such as Auschwitz’s gas chambers and crematoria in the Allied bombing campaign, along with key transport points for Jews, could have disrupted the smooth functioning of the Nazi killing machine. The case is especially cogent for the latter stages of the war, as with the genocide of the Hungarian Jews in 1944–45 (when the USSR might also have been able to intervene). But on pre-war evidence, it is hard to believe that, if more effective military measures could have been found, the Allies would have placed saving Jews higher on the list of military priorities – or that doing so would have made much of a difference.

The role of the Christian churches has also been scrutinized and criticized. Pope Pius XII’s placating of the Nazi regime in Germany, and his silence on the persecution of the Jews – which included the rounding up and deportation of Roman Jews under his very nose – are notorious.⁴⁹ Within Germany, the churches did virtually nothing to impede the genocide and a great deal to overlook it, effectively facilitating it. The Nazis demonstrated at numerous points their keen sensitivity to public opinion, including religious opinion – protests from German churches were partly responsible for driving the “euthanasia” campaign underground after 1941 – but these were not forthcoming from more than a handful of principled religious voices. When it came to defending co-parishioners whom the Nazis deemed of Jewish origin, “both Church and Church members drove away from their community, from their churches, people with whom they were united in worship, as one drives away mangy dogs from one’s door.”⁵⁰

THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST

The most successful examples of resistance to Hitler's genocidal designs for European Jewry came from a handful of Western and Northern European countries that were either neutral or under relatively less oppressive occupation regimes. Here, sometimes, extension of the killing campaign could impose political costs that the Nazis were not willing to pay. The most vivid display of public opposition swept up virtually the entire adult population of Denmark, led by the royal family. When the Nazis decreed the imposition of the Jewish yellow star, *everyone* adopted it, and the regulation was rescinded. Subsequently, Danes arranged for the evacuation of the majority of the country's Jews to neutral Sweden, where they lived through the rest of the war (see Chapter 10). Sweden, meanwhile, saved "about half of Norwegian Jewry and almost all of the Danish Jews," and in 1944:

involved herself more heavily in the heart of Europe, particularly in Budapest, where, along with Switzerland, Portugal, and the Vatican, the Swedish legation issued "protective passports," established safe houses, and generally attempted to restrain the German occupants and their Hungarian puppets from killing more Jews on Hungarian soil in the final hours of the war. Upon the liberation of Jews in concentration camps in the spring of 1945, Sweden accepted thousands of victims for medical treatment and rehabilitation.⁵¹

Willing executioners?

Just as scholars have demonstrated increased interest in "micro-histories" of public opinion under the Nazis, and the role of ordinary German citizens in accepting and sustaining the regime, so have searching questions been asked about the role of different sectors of the German population in the genocide. As a result of decades of research by Raul Hilberg and many others, it is now a truism that not only German social and economic elites, but all the professions (up to and including the clergy, as we have seen), were deeply corrupted or compromised by the Nazi state. In Michael Burleigh's words, an "understanding of the process of persecution [on racial grounds] now includes greater awareness of the culpable involvement of various sections of the professional intelligentsia, such as anthropologists, doctors, economists, historians, lawyers and psychiatrists, in the formation and implementation of Nazi policies."⁵² For such figures, "the advent of the Nazi regime was coterminous with the onset of 'boom' conditions. No one asked or compelled these academics and scientists actively to work on the regime's behalf. Most of them could have said no. In fact, the files of the regime's many agencies bulge with their unsolicited recommendations."⁵³

What of the genocidal participation of ordinary Germans? This subject has spawned the most vigorous debate in Holocaust studies over the past decade, though illumination has not always matched the heat generated.

At the heart of the controversy was the publication, in 1992 and 1996 respectively, of Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, and Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. Both of these scholars examined the same archives on

Reserve Police Battalion 101, which consisted overwhelmingly of Germans drafted from civilian police units (often too old for regular military service). The archival records described in detail the battalion's killings of helpless, naked Jewish civilians in occupied Poland during 1941–42, and the range of reactions among group members.

In interpreting the archival record, Browning acknowledged the importance of “the incessant proclamation of German superiority and incitement of contempt and hatred for the Jewish enemy.” But he also stressed other factors: “conformity to the group,” that is, peer pressure; the desire for praise, prestige, and advancement; and the threat of marginalization and anathematization in highly dangerous wartime circumstances. He referred to “the mutually intensifying effects of war and racism. . . . Nothing helped the Nazis to wage a race war so much as the war itself.”⁵⁴

Goldhagen, dismissing Browning's work, advanced instead a monocausal thesis. The Jewish Holocaust was the direct outgrowth of “eliminationist” anti-semitism, which by the twentieth century had become “common sense” for Germans. By 1941, “ordinary Germans easily became genocidal killers . . . [and] did so even though they did not have to.” They “kill[ed] Jews willingly and often eagerly.”⁵⁵

With the controversy now cooled, it is easier to appreciate the significance of “the Goldhagen debate.” Goldhagen did counter a trend towards bloodless analysis and abstract theorizing in studies of the Jewish catastrophe. In addition, by achieving mass popularity, Goldhagen's book, like Samantha Power's *A Problem From Hell* (2001), broke down the usual wall between scholarship and public discussion. However, the core elements of Goldhagen's thesis – that there was something unique about German anti-semitism that spawned the Holocaust; that Germans were only too ready to leap to bloodthirsty murder of Jews – have been undermined. Not only was anti-semitism historically stronger in countries other than Germany, but the virulence of its expression during the Second World War in countries such as Lithuania and Romania exceeded that of Germany. The Nazis, as noted above, were reluctant to confront “ordinary Germans” with bloody atrocity. Nor could they rely on a widespread popular desire to inflict cruelty on Jews as the foundational strategy for implementing their genocide.

Israel and the Jewish Holocaust

It has occasionally happened that an experience of great suffering warrants the creation or validation of a homeland for the afflicted group, in the form of a nation-state or quasi-state. Such was the case with East Timor (Box 7a), the world's newest nation, born from Indonesian occupation and genocide. The Kurdish protected zone and *de facto* state in northern Iraq may also qualify (see Box 4a); but no case is as dramatic as that of Israel in the wake of the Second World War. The dream of the decades-old Zionist movement, namely to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine through political mobilization and mass immigration, became a reality with extraordinary rapidity in the postwar period, as Britain abandoned its territorial mandate over Palestine, and Arabs and Jews fought over the territory. “Anti-Zionism in the Jewish community collapsed, and a consensus that Jewry, abandoned during the war,

had to have a home of its own crystallized overnight.”⁵⁶ Jewish survivors of Nazi genocide provided Palestine with a critical mass of Jewish immigrants and, in the decades following the declaration of the Israeli state on May 15, 1948, Israel received tens of billions of dollars from the Federal Republic of Germany as reparations for the mass murder and expropriation inflicted on the Jews.

To a significant degree, successive Israeli governments have relied on the Holocaust as a touchstone of Jewish experience and national identity. Palestinians and their supporters, for their part, have tended to adopt the genocide framework as well, but in order to draw attention to the Palestinian plight at Israeli hands. They have sought to draw parallels between Israeli repressive policies and those of their Nazi forebears. Often such comparisons seem hysterical and/or counterproductive; but sometimes they have resonated. Notable was the free passage granted by Israeli forces to Christian Phalangist militia in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, during the Israelis’ 1982 invasion of Lebanon. This led predictably to the genocidal massacre of thousands of defenseless Palestinians, as Israeli troops stood passively by.

Is the Jewish Holocaust “uniquely unique”?

Few historical and philosophical questions have generated such intense scholarly debate in genocide studies as this one. On one level, it is clearly facile. As Alex Alvarez puts it: “All genocides are simultaneously unique and analogous.”⁵⁷ The question is whether the Jewish Holocaust is *sui generis* – that is, “uniquely unique.”⁵⁸

In genocide studies, a well-known exponent of the uniqueness thesis is Steven Katz, who devoted his immense tome *The Holocaust in Historical Context, Vol. 1* to arguing that the Jewish Holocaust was “phenomenologically unique by virtue of the fact that never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate physically every man, woman, and child belonging to a specific people.”⁵⁹ The Nazi campaign against the Jews was the only true genocide, as Katz defined the term (see p. 18; recall that my own preferred definition of genocide reworks Katz’s).

Many other scholars have argued against the uniqueness hypothesis. “I object very strongly,” wrote Israel Charny, “to the efforts to name the genocide of any one people as the single, ultimate event, or as the most important event against which all other tragedies of genocidal mass death are to be tested and found wanting.”⁶⁰ Phillip Lopate has likewise argued that claims of uniqueness tend to bestow “a sort of privileged nation status in the moral honor roll.”⁶¹ This claim of privilege then carries over to “the Jewish state,” Israel, helping to blunt criticism of its treatment of the Palestinians.⁶²

My own view should be clearly stated: the Jewish Holocaust was *not* “uniquely unique.” On no analytical dimension – speed, scale, scope, intensity, efficiency, cruelty, ideology – does it stand alone and apart. If it is unique in its mix of these ingredients, so too are most of the other major instances of mass killing in their own way. I also believe that uniqueness proponents, like the rest of us, were severely shaken by the holocaust in Rwanda in 1994 (see Chapter 9). The killing there proceeded much faster than the slaughter of the Jews; killed a higher proportion of the

designated victim group (some 80 percent of Rwandan Tutsis versus two-thirds of European Jews); was carried out by “a chillingly effective organizational structure that would implement the political plan of genocide more efficiently than was achieved by the industrialized death camps in Nazi Germany”;⁶³ and – unlike the Jewish catastrophe – featured intensive participation in killing duties by the mass of the general population. Was Rwanda, then, “uniquely unique”? The claim seems at least as tenable as in the case of the Jewish Holocaust – but in both cases, a nuanced comparative framework is preferable.⁶⁴

The Jews *were* unique as a target of the Nazis. “In the end,” writes Raul Hilberg, “. . . the Jews retained their special place.”⁶⁵ According to Omer Bartov,

It was *only* in the case of the Jews that there was a determination to seek out every baby hidden in a haystack, every family living in a bunker in the forest, every woman trying to pass herself off as a Gentile. It was only in the case of the Jews that vast factories were constructed and managed with the sole purpose of killing trainload after trainload of people. It was only in the case of the Jews that huge, open-air, public massacres of tens of thousands of people were conducted on a daily basis throughout Eastern Europe.⁶⁶

Lastly, the Jewish Holocaust holds a unique place in genocide studies. Among all the world’s genocides, it alone produced a scholarly literature that spawned, in turn, a comparative discipline. Specialists on the subject were also central in constituting the field and its core institutions, such as the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) and the *Journal of Genocide Research*. “Genocide studies is really the outgrowth of the study of the Holocaust,” as Thomas Cushman has noted.⁶⁷

FURTHER STUDY

Note: No genocide has generated remotely as much scholarly attention as the Nazis’ against the Jews. The following is a bare sampling of core works in English; others are cited in subsequent chapters.

Götz Aly, *“Final Solution”: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*. London: Arnold, 1999. Aly’s “functionalist” argument emphasizes the role of Nazi bureaucrats confronted with problems of population management in the occupied territories.

Omer Bartov, ed., *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath: Rewriting Histories*. London: Routledge, 2000. Excellent anthology of writings by many leading scholars.

Omer Bartov, *Germany’s War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003. Powerful essays by the principal scholar of the *Wehrmacht*’s war on the eastern front; see also *Hitler’s Army*.

Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Perennial, 1993. Based on some of the same archival sources as Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (see below), but emphasizes group dynamics in addition to anti-semitism.

- Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. How Nazi racial ideology inspired genocidal policy.
- Alexander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom*. New York: Holocaust Library, 1978. Classic memoir of ghetto and death camp, sensitively told and translated.
- Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. Traces the evolution of the Nazi killing machine from the initial targeting of disabled and handicapped Germans to the mass slaughter of Jews and Roma.
- Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume I: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997. Innovative, highly readable account of the years preceding the onset of full fledged genocide.
- Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Argues that ordinary Germans generally supported Nazi policies, often exhibiting enthusiasm beyond the call of duty.
- Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York: Vintage, 1997. Controversial book ascribing a monocausal explanation for the genocide, rooted in Germans' visceral hatred of the Jews.
- Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*. London: Penguin, 1974. Encyclopedic overview of Nazism's social impact.
- Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (3rd edn), 3 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003. Massive, meticulous study of the bureaucracy of death.
- Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), trans. Ralph Mannheim. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1943. First published in 1925–26; lays out Hitler's vision of German destiny, as well as his virulent hatred of the Jews.
- Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (4th edn). London: Arnold, 2000. Classic overview of, and contribution to, scholarly debates about the nature of the Nazi regime.
- Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, 2 vols. New York: Modern Library, 1999, 2001. One of the essential documents of the twentieth century: the testimony of a German Jew who lived through the entire Nazi era.
- Ronnie S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1994. A good overview of the origins and course of the Jewish catastrophe.
- Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Touchstone, 1996. Haunting account of a year and a half in the Nazi death camp; see also *The Drowned and the Saved*.
- Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (2nd edn). Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000. Wide-ranging and controversial examination of the "uniqueness" thesis.
- Ron Rosenbaum, *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil*. New York: Perennial, 1999. Quest for the essence of the malignancy that was Hitler.
- John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany*. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1996. Why did only Germany, among anti-semitic European societies, produce a full-scale genocide against the Jews?

NOTES

- 1 In religious usage, a “holocaust” is “a sacrificial offering wholly consumed by fire in exaltation of God” (Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The “Final Solution” in History* [New York: Pantheon, 1988], p. 16). However, in the twentieth century, this was supplanted by a secular usage, in which “holocaust” designates “a wide variety of conflagrations, massacres, wars, and disasters.” See Jon Petrie’s fascinating etymological study, “The Secular Word HOLOCAUST: Scholarly Myths, History, and 20th Century Meanings,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2: 1 (2000), pp. 31–64.
- 2 Donald L. Niewyk, “Holocaust: The Jews,” in Samuel L. Totten *et al.*, eds, *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), p. 136. The figure of 5.1 to 5.4 million killed is used by the US Holocaust Museum; see Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 195.
- 3 Statistics cited in Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 174.
- 4 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. xi.
- 5 Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage, 1997), pp. 37–38. For a detailed study of the progressive demonization of the Jews, see Steven T. Katz, “Medieval Antisemitism: The Process of Mythification,” ch. 6 in Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context, Vol. 1: The Holocaust and Mass Death before the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 225–316. However, as Mark Levene has pointed out to me, there was also a sense in which medieval Christianity *needed* the Jews – “for its own Christological endtime” and teleological myth. It may thus have been constrained from launching a full-scale genocidal assault on them. Levene, personal communication, August 26, 2005.
- 6 Colin Tatz, *With Intent to Destroy: Reflecting on Genocide* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 44.
- 7 Luther quoted in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (3rd edn), Vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 13.
- 8 The most infamous anti-semitic tract of modern times is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), a pamphlet that is now generally held to have been devised by the Tsar’s secret police in pre-revolutionary Russia, but which purported to represent the ambitions and deliberations of a global Jewish conspiracy against Christian civilization. For the complete text of the *Protocols*, and a point-by-point refutation, see Steven Leonard Jacobs and Mark Weitzman, *Dismantling the Big Lie: the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Jersey City, NJ: Krav Publishing House, 2003 – nb: the centenary of the *Protocols*).
- 9 In addition, for exponents of biological anti-semitism (a nineteenth-century invention), Jews came to be viewed as *innately* at odds with Western-Christian civilization. Religious conversion could no longer expunge their Jewishness – which helps explain why this option was denied to Jews under Nazi rule. My thanks to Benjamin Madley for this point.
- 10 Ronnie S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), p. 44.
- 11 In the case of France, strong arguments have been made that anti-semitism was far more widespread and virulent, in elite and popular opinion, than was true in Germany. But “in France – unlike Germany – whatever the strength of antisemitic feeling on the streets, in the bars and in the universities, political power always remained in the hands of the liberal republicans, a government which never endorsed political antisemitism” (Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*, p. 63). However, when dictatorial government and “eliminationist anti-semitism” (Goldhagen’s term) *were* imposed in France from 1940 to 1944 – under direct Nazi occupation and under the Vichy puppet regime – the authorities and a key section of the population cooperated enthusiastically in the transport for mass execution of the Jews.

- 12 Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York: Owl Books, 1988), p. 23.
- 13 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), trans. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), p. 562.
- 14 Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*, pp. 317, 122.
- 15 See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), and the discussion in Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, pp. 168–70.
- 16 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, p. 141.
- 17 For an excellent short analysis of the *Kristallnacht*, see Leonidas E. Hill, “The Pogrom of November 9–10, 1938 in Germany,” in Paul R. Brass, ed., *Riots and Pogroms* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 89–113.
- 18 Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. vii.
- 19 Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 197.
- 20 Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness 1933–1941* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), pp. 165, 329–30, 393, 422, 429; Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness 1942–1945* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), pp. 66, 71.
- 21 Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. ix.
- 22 Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, pp. 114, 116–17.
- 23 Michael Burleigh, “Psychiatry, German Society and the Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ Programme,” in Omer Bartov, ed., *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 70.
- 24 Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*, pp. 154–55. In his memoir of the Warsaw ghetto, Alexander Donat gives a figure for half a million ghetto internees as “27,000 apartments in an area of 750 acres, with six or seven persons to a room” (Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom* [Washington, DC: Holocaust Library, 1999], p. 24). A famous portrait of life in the Warsaw ghetto in 1941, conveying the hardship and horror of ghetto life, is provided by the photographs taken by a German army officer, Heinrich Jost. See Gunther Schwarberg, *In the Ghetto of Warsaw: Photographs by Heinrich Jost* (Göttingen: Steidl Publishing, 2001).
- 25 See Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
- 26 Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust*, p. 14. See also the excellent two-part essay by Wolfgang Weber, “The Debate in Germany over the Crimes of Hitler's *Wehrmacht*,” World Socialist Web Site, September 19–20, 2001, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/sep2001/wehr-s19.shtml> and <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/sep2001/wehr-s20.shtml>.
- 27 A key “tipping point” for the *Wehrmacht*'s “indiscriminate, systematic and wholesale resort to carnage” was the Commissar Order issued on June 6, 1941, which called for “Communist Party functionaries . . . to be identified . . . and murdered by the army either on the spot or in rear areas.” “Effectively,” notes Michael Burleigh, “the army was assuming the functions hitherto performed by the *Einsatzgruppen*, namely the killing of an entire group of people solely by virtue of their membership of that group and without formal process.” Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 67.
- 28 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 107.
- 29 Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, (3rd edn), Vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 337.
- 30 Kretschmer quoted in Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 185.

- 31 This gendered element of the slaughter is discussed further in Chapter 13.
- 32 The statistics are drawn from Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust*.
- 33 “Whether the Germans were killing [Jews] immediately and directly in the gas chambers of an extermination camp or working and starving them to death in camps that they had not constructed for the express purpose of extermination (namely in concentration or ‘work’ camps), the mortality rates of Jews in camps was at exterminatory, genocidal levels and typically far exceeded the mortality rates of other groups living side by side with them. . . . The monthly death rate for Jews in Mauthausen [camp] was, from the end of 1942 to 1943, 100 percent. Mauthausen was not formally an extermination camp and, indeed, it was not for non-Jews, who at the end of 1943 all had a mortality rate below 2 percent.” Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, p. 173.
- 34 On the forced marches of Jews and other camp inmates, see ch. 14, “Marching to What End?,” in Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, pp. 355–71.
- 35 Niewyk, “Holocaust: The Jews,” p. 150.
- 36 Ibid; for Epstein’s testimony, see pp. 150–70.
- 37 Hitler quoted in Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 17.
- 38 Tatz, *With Intent to Destroy*, p. 22.
- 39 Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, p. 86.
- 40 Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 96.
- 41 Shermer and Grobman, *Denying History*, p. 213.
- 42 Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. 1, pp. 139–40; Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 59–60.
- 43 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 117–18, 125. See also the discussion in Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. 1, pp. 218–22. “With the growth of the destructive function of the Judenräte, many Jewish leaders felt an almost irresistible urge to look like their German masters” (p. 219).
- 44 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Perennial, 1993), p. 170. In *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Vol. 2, p. 901), Hilberg refers to “masses of Jewish deportees, numb, fantasy-ridden, and filled with illusions, [who] reacted with mechanical cooperation to every German command” (the specific reference is to the Hungarian deportations of 1944).
- 45 See Richard Rashke, *Escape from Sobibor* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).
- 46 Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom*, p. 7.
- 47 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, p. 213.
- 48 Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, p. ix.
- 49 See Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
- 50 Reginald H. Phelps, quoted in Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, p. 443.
- 51 Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, p. 258.
- 52 Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination*, pp. 155, 164.
- 53 Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, p. 51.
- 54 Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), pp. 184, 186.
- 55 Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, pp. 277, 446.
- 56 Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, p. 191. As Martha Minow comments, “The creation of Israel could be viewed as a kind of international reparation effort.” Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), p. 133.
- 57 Alex Alvarez, *Governments, Citizens, and Genocide: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approach* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 14.
- 58 The phrase “uniquely unique” was first used by Alice L. Eckhardt and Roy Eckhardt; see

- Gunnar Heinsohn, "What Makes the Holocaust A Uniquely Unique Genocide?", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2: 3 (2000), p. 430 (n. 95).
- 59 Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p. 28.
- 60 Charny quoted in David Stannard, "Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship," in Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 198.
- 61 Lopate cited in Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 52.
- 62 A recent polemic charges that a "Holocaust industry" has been created to win financial concessions from banks, industrial enterprises, and others who profited from the Jewish catastrophe. See Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (new edn) (New York: Verso, 2003).
- 63 Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 212.
- 64 Interestingly, Vol. 2 of Steven Katz's *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, which was supposed to apply his uniqueness thesis to twentieth-century cases of mass killing, was scheduled for publication some years ago, but has yet to appear. I have often wondered whether Katz hit an insuperable roadblock in applying his thesis to the Rwandan genocide.
- 65 Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Vol. 3, p. 1075.
- 66 Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust*, p. 106.
- 67 Thomas Cushman, "Is Genocide Preventable? Some Theoretical Considerations," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5: 4 (2003), p. 528.

BOX 6A THE NAZIS' OTHER VICTIMS

While most people associate Nazi genocide with the Jewish Holocaust, a plethora of other victim groups actually accounted for the majority of those killed by the Nazis. Only in 1942 did the mass murder of Jews come to predominate, as historian Christopher Browning points out:

If the Nazi regime had suddenly ceased to exist in the first half of 1941, its most notorious achievements in human destruction would have been the so-called euthanasia killing of seventy to eighty thousand German mentally ill and the systematic murder of the Polish intelligentsia. If the regime had disappeared in the spring of 1942, its historical infamy would have rested on the "war of destruction" against the Soviet Union. The mass death of some two million prisoners of war in the first nine months of that conflict would have stood out even more prominently than the killing of approximately one-half million Jews in that same period.

"Ever since," writes Browning, the Jewish Holocaust "has overshadowed National Socialism's other all-too-numerous atrocities."¹ It does so in this book as well. However, it is important to devote attention, however inadequate, to Nazism's other victims.