



THE CENTER FOR
HOLOCAUST
STUDIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

Volume 2, Number 1

FALL 1997

SUMMER LECTURE SERIES

The University of Vermont Center for Holocaust Studies sponsored the fourth annual Summer Holocaust Lecture Series. Taking place over a period of four nights in conjunction with a course for educators and university students, this public lecture series by Holocaust survivors and scholars addressed the legacy of the Nazi Holocaust over five decades after the last concentration camps and extermination centers were liberated by Allied troops.

The first speaker of this series was Dr. Debórah Dwork, the Rose Professor of Holocaust History at Clark University. The acclaimed author of *Children With A Star*, Dwork, together with Robert Jan van Pelt, wrote *Auschwitz - 1270 to the Present*. In tracing the history of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dwork investigated the connection between a geographic site and the events that occurred there. She documented the evolution of a district from a border community, founded over seven hundred years ago as a German town that welcomed Jewish migrants for centuries, to a site of mass murder and terror intended as the final stop for Jews in forced transit. By presenting plans for gas chambers and crematoria, budgets, contractors' bids, labor requests, and minutes of meetings involving camp staff of the Building Office with the architects and upper echelon Nazi officials at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dwork offered evidence of a methodical program of killing designed and operated by ordinary men with extraordinary ambitions of personal advancement at the expense of over one million human lives. In doing so, Dwork also raised important questions about conservation and preservation of a death camp, and the legacy of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Holocaust in the present and future.

Dr. Francis Nicosia presented a lecture the second evening entitled: "The Useful Enemy: Zionism and Antisemitism in the Third Reich." A Professor of History at St. Michael's College in Colchester and the author of *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question*, Nicosia discussed the perception among many German antisemites in the 1930s that Zionism could be a useful tool in eliminating Jews from Germany. In addition, his comments prompted questions about the recent debate on whether Germans have an eliminationist antisemitism, and how this might be perceived today.

The third evening lecture was given by Emil Landau of Damariscotta, Maine entitled: "Surviving the

Third Reich." In the 1930s, Landau's German family was caught in the vice-grip of the Nazi dictatorship. As a teenager, Landau survived in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Tschowitz, and Buchenwald. He distinguished what he perceived to be the differences between victims and survivors while delivering a harrowing tale of his own experiences.

The final speaker of the week was Stephan Lewy presenting: "A Survivor Speaks on the Holocaust and Hatred Today." Lewy, of Manchester, NH, grew up within the confines of restrictive antisemitic legislation in Berlin of the 1930s. Sharing his story of flight, escape, and terror, Lewy commented on the ironies of returning to his homeland as an interpreter with U.S. General Patton's armored division after the Battle of the Bulge and seeing the extent of Hitler's 'Final Solution' from the position of victor.

For additional questions about these lectures or for videotape copies, please contact the Center for Holocaust Studies at 656-1492.

— Robert Bernheim

OUR NEW ADDRESS

Holocaust Studies now has an office of its own in the renovated Old Mill complex. **Our new address is:**

Center for Holocaust Studies

Old Mill, Room A301

P.O. Box 54055

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Our new telephone number is:

(802) 656-1492

Our new fax number is

(802) 656-1497

Although at the time of writing (August), we are still waiting for our new furniture, including a fax machine, everything should be in place by the time you read this.

Unfortunately, our administrative assistant, Kathy Johnson, has a part-time position (.25), and I, too, am part-time in Holocaust Studies. This therefore means that we must rely unduly on the answering machine and the fax machine. We do, however, constantly monitor incoming calls and try to respond quickly. We hope that service will improve during the new academic year. Meanwhile our apologies for any frustration due to this move.

FOURTH ANNUAL SUMMER SEMINAR ON THE HOLOCAUST

During the last week of June, ten participants engaged in an intensive seminar that examined historical, pedagogical, and moral issues related to the Holocaust. Academic scholars from UVM, St. Michael's, the University of Maine, and the United States Department of Justice, Office of Special Investigations, as well as seven eye-witnesses to the realities of Nazi terror were among the presenters throughout this fourth annual five-day course. University undergraduates, graduate students, and elementary, middle, and high school teachers from across Vermont were provided comprehensive insight into the people and forces that helped shape events before, during, and after the Holocaust. Combined with an evening lecture series over four nights by Holocaust survivors and scholars, the course provided a solid historical foundation for those seeking to teach the Holocaust, or issues related to the effects of prejudice, discrimination, and intolerance of others, to students young and old.

The first lecture of the seminar raised a number of historical questions related to the history of antisemitism that have been posed in recent months due to the publication of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Knopf, 1996). Frank Nicosia, Professor of History at St. Michael's, asked if the Holocaust was the natural result of antisemitism taken to its extreme, and if the study of the Holocaust was only about antisemitism. Nicosia continued by focusing on the roots of antisemitism in Germany before the Nazi period. Detailing the larger scope of European antisemitism that was not restricted to Germany, Nicosia placed the hatred of the Jews in the context of biological racism that flowed beneath the surface of nineteenth and early twentieth century thought rather than focusing on religious differences.

Robert Katz, Professor of Art at the University of Maine at Augusta, provided an "Interpretation of the Holocaust through Artistic Expression." Through his new computer-generated film, "You Ask About The Family", and a slide presentation, Katz presented compelling questions about remembrance. How should we remember the lives of those who perished in the Holocaust? What is to be done with the sites of terror and destruction? In what ways can art capture an aspect or fragment of a world consumed by the fires of Nazi hatred?

The second day of the seminar was devoted to Holocaust survivors providing eye-witness testimony to various stages of Nazi terror. Gabe Hartstein told how he and his closest family members were rescued from forced marches to transports bound for extermination centers by the Swede, Raoul Wallenberg, in Budapest, Hungary.

Simon Barenbaum, a retired French Professor from Middlebury College, chronicled his experiences in Paris during the occupation that included arrests, deportation orders, blackmarketeering, and relocation to southern France with forged identity papers. He concluded by discussing his work with the French underground in the liberation of France by Allied troops in the summer of 1944, and his work as an educator since he immigrated to the United States.

Yehudi Lindeman, a Professor of English at McGill and the director of Living Testimonies in Montreal, described the uncertainty and tumultuous process of being shuttled from one hiding place to another as a young boy in the Netherlands, and the challenges of wrestling with questions of iden-

tity and assimilation. He also discussed the arduous, but important, process of seeking out those who shielded him from the Nazis, as well as those with whom he was hidden.

Walter Rosley of Manchester recalled how the political, social, and economic impact of the rise of the Nazis to power transformed the Germany of his youth from a familiar, nurturing, and welcoming environment to a hostile and indifferent world his family abruptly left behind for the Netherlands. There, he and his family were swept up by the Nazi and Dutch collaborators and sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. As the war was coming to an end, Rosley was part of the "Lost Transport" sent east through the charred ruins of the Reich to be dumped and murdered in the Elbe River. He also commented on his dealings with non-Jewish Germans after the war.

Finally, UVM instructor of Hebrew and Yiddish, Henia Lewin, documented her return to Lithuania and the sites where she was kept hidden from the dragnet of the Nazi juggernaut that swept the Baltic states in the summer of 1941 and throughout 1942. She also spoke about her quest to find those who rescued and harbored her during the years of German occupation. She was joined in this poignant presentation by her cousin, Shoshana Sarid, who survived through the efforts of Henia's parents, and had come to Vermont from Israel for a family wedding.

The third day of the seminar began with another eye-witness perspective. Marion Pritchard began her session by showing the film "The Courage to Care", a documentary portraying the actions of some of those recognized as 'Righteous Gentiles' for saving the lives of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust. Pritchard, a psychoanalyst with a practice in Norwich and a position at Boston University, saved the lives of scores of Jews in her native Holland, and is prominently featured in the film. Commenting on the motivation behind her deeds and her continued commitment to the pursuit of respect for civil rights, Pritchard challenged course participants to recognize the power of education to influence stu-

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The following events are scheduled for the next few months:

Wednesday, 5 November 1997: The sixth annual Raul Hilberg Lecture. Allan Ryan, the former director of the US Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations, will speak about "Investigating and Prosecuting Nazi War Criminals." In: Carpenter Auditorium, Given Bldg., at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, 16 November 1997: "An Inter-Generational Dialogue among Members of Holocaust Survivor Families." In: Billings Campus Theater, at 2:00 p.m. (A joint venture of The Gathering and Holocaust Studies.)

Wednesday, 28 January 1998: "Voices from Theresienstadt, a monodrama by the acclaimed Norwegian actress/singer Bente Kahan. In: UVM Recital Hall at 8:00 p.m. (A Lane Series event, sponsored by the Center for Holocaust Studies.)

In addition, Professor Saul Friedländer, who gave the 1995 Raul Hilberg Lecture, will be a guest on the campus of UVM from 3-6 November 1997, and will give one public lecture. Details later.

dents for good as well as evil. Author-in-residence, Aranka Siegal, shared vignettes of her life before, during, and after the Holocaust. When she was a teenager, the fabric of Siegal's world was ripped asunder by the reality of Auschwitz, death marches, and Bergen-Belsen. Her presence throughout the week was a highlight for many participants as she shared her time and insights, and challenged those in the seminar to carry on her work when she and other survivors are no longer able to speak.

Artistic 'Second Generation' reflections were provided by two children of Holocaust survivors. Berta Frank and Judy Chalmer discussed the joy and pain of growing up with parents who were diligently attempting to rebuild shattered lives in a new world, and used the artistic mediums of music and poetry, respectively, to capture snapshots of their experiences and reactions. Frank, joined by her student Eva Schul, performed a series of compositions for flute that addressed questions of identity, change, and the essence of a world that was lost. Chalmer encouraged the participants to use poetry with students, not necessarily as a method to convey historical information, but rather as a way to make meaning, and raise questions about what they are studying by using a tool that each of us possesses - language. Their presentations illustrated the challenges facing survivors and their families living with the specter of the Holocaust in their daily lives.

The fourth day of the seminar was constructed around interpretations of the Holocaust through art, literature, language, and music. David Scrase, Professor of German and Director of the University of Vermont Center for Holocaust Studies, presented a variety of artistic, literary, and musical examples illustrating how the particular artist, writer, or musician confronted the legacy of the Holocaust in his/her own life. Using slides, recordings, video excerpts, and numerous source references, Scrase offered participants examples of materials they can use in their own classrooms. He also raised important questions about both the strengths and short comings of any artistic or literary expression in conveying the stark horrors of the Holocaust in a manner others can understand and imagine.

Concluding the fourth day, Professor Wolfgang Mieder, Chairperson of the German and Russian Department at UVM, presented a lecture on Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the use of language. Beginning with his own background as a German born at the end of the war who has wrestled with questions about what older generations of Germans did during the years of the Nazi dictatorship, Mieder continued with an insightful analysis of how Hitler used language to bring about the Holocaust. Providing examples of proverbs and an emphasis on the speech of the common people, Mieder documented how Hitler and the Nazis promoted anti-intellectualism and the dehumanization and demonization of Jews and other so-called enemies of the state in order to capture the hearts and minds of the country.

The final day of the seminar was created to make connections and bring the focus back on those taking the course. Steve Rogers, a chief historian with the US Justice Department Office of Special Investigations, discussed the role he and his colleagues play in tracking down Nazi war criminals in the United States, or attempting to enter this country, and prosecuting them for covering up their Nazi past. Making sure to point out that US law does not allow Nazi war criminals to be tried in this country for their crimes committed in Europe, Rogers meticulously demonstrated how the government goes about the Herculean task of generating reams of evidence to strip these criminals of

their US citizenship and have them deported or kept out entirely if they seek to vacation in the United States. He also addressed the topic of the role of Switzerland and the transfer of Nazi gold through Swiss banks.

Kathy Blume of Charlotte presented her one-woman show, "Through the Eyes of a Friend," about Anne Frank. She assisted participants in thinking about ways of engaging students through drama in a study of the Holocaust or any topic where prejudice and discrimination are central themes.

The session concluded with a presentation by Bob Schermer, a teacher of German at South Burlington H.S. who took the class last summer. Schermer shared the methods and ideas that have worked in his classroom as well as those that did not in teaching the Holocaust to students. He also discussed the successes and pitfalls of helping to organize a school-wide program where the Holocaust was a central theme.

A final discussion that addressed how the participants could use and integrate the information from the entire seminar ended with a commitment on the part of those taking the course to meet again in the upcoming academic year to share and discuss the success of their classroom, campus, and community connections.

Throughout the week, the participants were treated to a wide variety of bagels from Myer's Montreal Bagels in Burlington, accompanied by a fresh blend of coffee from the Uncommon Grounds Coffee Shop on Church Street. The Center for Holocaust Studies would like to thank these local businesses for their contributions as well as Trinity College for providing accommodations for speakers during the seminar. Plans are already underway for next summer's session, which is tentatively scheduled for the last week of June 1998.

—Robert Bernheim

A Memorable First

The third Annual Gathering of Holocaust Survivor Families ended with a closing candlelight ritual. Emotion was on every face and in every voice. The above event took place less than 24 hours ago, and here I am now, back in my Montreal home, still on a high. I have the urge to write about my experience in order to encourage any hesitant newcomer to join us by attending the next event and to share what no words can describe.

Two days prior to my trip to Burlington, I started getting cold feet. I wanted to withdraw my name from the trip, sensing that I would not be able to handle it. I needed a push and got it from my daughter. Bless her for it!

The first contact with the organizers and the facilitators at the cocktail reception gave me the warm feeling that I was welcome, that my presence was appreciated, and that I belonged. We had a wonderful time introducing ourselves; the contact was immediate despite the different backgrounds that we all came from. The general feeling was that a certain link was binding us; there was a definite bond.

Suddenly I felt a new torment building up inside of me: the workshops! Anxiety was creeping up my spine: Would I be able to express myself in public? And suppose I bore everyone?... I was in for a surprise. The first meeting went very well: I was able to relate to others. The second workshop was my miracle. It was beyond description. The group felt tightly-knit; we felt like one body with different voices narrating personal experiences. The group leader, Ruth Chevion, was like a virtuoso with a guitar; we were the chords. Whenever she touched a chord, a whole melancholy would spring out. I never felt better. I opened up and poured out what all those years had compressed deep into my soul. That afternoon we spoke, we smiled, we murmured, and we cried.

At the end of the session, I felt I could fly! And here I am now, still on a high.

Thank you all. I have no words to express my gratitude.

Claire Oechslein

BOOK REVIEW

Benjamin Wilkomirski. *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*

Trans. from the German by Carol Brown Janeway.
New York: Schocken Books, 1996.
155 pp. Cloth \$20.00 ISBN 0-8052-4139-6

A million and a half Jewish children died in the Holocaust—or approximately one in four Holocaust victims was a child. Of the roughly 15,000 children sent to Theresienstadt, only about 100 survived. Anne Frank. Mengele. "Medical experiments." "Research" on twins. "Euthanasia." A "special children's camp" for a transport of children and their mothers from Holland proved to be the death camp Sobibor. Babies flung live into the ditches of corpses and blazing fat. Izieu, whose 44 hidden Jewish children were sent to Auschwitz by Klaus Barbie. The list could go on....

Children suffer inordinately in war. They suffered incredible hardships in the Holocaust. Deportation virtually always meant immediate death, since children could not work. Strikingly, children had fewer illusions about their fate: in Theresienstadt a recently arrived transport of children on their way to *real* showers cried out "No gas!" and even three-year-olds were known to plead for their lives by saying they could work.

Occasionally child victims stand out from the anonymity of mass death through surviving creative testimony—Anne Frank's diary is the most famous, ... *I never saw another butterfly*, drawings and poems by children in Theresienstadt, is one of the most moving records. The accounts of child survivors are some of the most remarkable and riveting of all survivor narratives. Aranka Siegal's *Upon the Head of the Goat*, Nelly Toll's *Behind the Secret Window*, Nechama Tec's *Dry Tears*, and Inge Auerbacher's *I am a Star* are all outstanding. In many instances such accounts were written only after a lapse of many years. In 1995 Benjamin Wilkomirski published in German his account of what he remembered of his childhood in the Holocaust. This has now appeared in English translation under the title *Fragments*, which effectively sums up the "Memories of a Wartime Childhood" of this child who might have been born in 1941 (no one knows) but who was certainly so young that only isolated memories of that time persist.

By the time of his liberation Benjamin Wilkomirski's traumatic experiences in Majdanek and other camps are for him the familiar, the norm. Life in a Swiss orphanage, on the other hand, is suspect, threatening, unpredictable, his instinct to "steal" and hoard left-over cheese rinds or other food scraps is not only incomprehensible to the staff but also reprehensible. A heating furnace in the basement is clearly intended to cremate children. A ski lift, which takes skiers up the mountain but returns empty, is certainly a diabolical apparatus of annihilation. Boots that disappear overnight must obviously have been stolen and he is obliged to search frantically for rags with which to bind his feet—in fact the staff have merely put his wet boots somewhere to dry. Wherever he turns Wilkomirski meets a total lack of understanding for what he went through and for the difficulties of adjustment.

What he went through is horrible, if not always unfamiliar to us who read of the Holocaust. Rescue attempts all fail. He sees his father killed, loses his mother and all his brothers, is left without his vital helper and rescuer, the twelve-year-old Jankl, when he is killed, probably for "organizing" food. He is whipped, beaten, starved, abandoned, survives transports and searches, witnesses rapes and killings, sees how two babies chew their fingers to the bone before dying of

starvation. And against all odds, little Benjamin (perhaps four years old in 1945) survives.

His fragmentary memories are recorded in a sober and lapidary way. The incomprehensible brutality, so soon the norm, the familiar, the acceptable even, is set down in cool, impersonal phrases. Guards are described as "uniforms," women as "aprons" or "fat calves." The child's view comes out constantly in the *pars pro toto* choice of the salient characteristic of the individual described—very often the legs or boots, or that which a three- or four-year-old sees.

The twenty short "chapters" or fragments are, in fact, masterfully constructed descriptions of events during the Holocaust and after, which convey in a uniquely effective manner the unspeakably cruel treatment of a child and its difficulties in dealing with the aftermath. I cannot recommend this memoir too highly. It is a masterpiece.

— David Scrase
University of Vermont

Antisemitism in Contemporary Germany.

by Frank Nicosia

Department of History, St. Michael's College, Vermont

Several factors provide an essential context for understanding antisemitism in post-Holocaust Europe. Certainly the most important is that Nazi Germany succeeded in destroying about two-thirds of the Jews who lived in Europe before 1939. Another factor is the enormous migration of peoples to as well as within Europe, including the movement of masses of eastern European refugees to the west in the immediate post-war years, and millions of immigrants and workers from southern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia to western Europe since the 1950s and 1960s. Of course, the Cold War and the effective partition of Europe between 1945 and 1990 into an American-dominated West and a Soviet-dominated East is also an important consideration. The West effectively neutralized the Right and organized antisemitism with the defining and unifying forces of democracy and capitalism, while in eastern Europe, the imposition of Marxism and Russian domination had a similar effect.

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the end of the Cold War and the consequent withdrawal from Europe of American and Soviet power, there has been a renewed wave of migration to as well as within Europe. This has been accompanied by a resurgence of right-wing and neo-Nazi ideas and political movements. It has resulted in the dramatic increase in the level of hatred and violence toward foreigners, ethnic minorities and, of course, the Jews. Severe economic and social dislocations throughout Europe have also been a consequence of these dramatic changes. The collapse of Marxist planned economies, which began before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the brutal shocks inherent in attempts to create new free market economies since then, coupled with the deepest recessions and highest levels of unemployment in western Europe since World War II, have also contributed to this changing and increasingly volatile political environment.

The combination of these factors in post-Holocaust Europe has produced a reality unique in the long history of

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Judeophobia in Europe, namely antisemitism without Jews. This is particularly so in central and eastern Europe where the Nazis destroyed most of the Jewish population during World War II. Antisemitic rhetoric, symbols and political action have reemerged in Germany, Austria, Poland, Russia and elsewhere, despite the absence of Jews in significant numbers. Moreover, antisemitism persists in Europe today not only despite Auschwitz, but also because of it. Motivated by guilt and shame, or by racism and xenophobia, some find it comforting to trivialize or deny the Holocaust. Germans, seeking to forge a new national identity in a reunited Germany, may see the Third Reich and the Holocaust as barriers to the acquisition of an essential element of nationhood: pride in and a positive identification with the nation's past. For others, their own traditions of antisemitism as well as their complicity in Nazi crimes during World War II produce a similar sense of guilt and shame, and/or resentment and hostility, a need to some how avoid the topic of the Holocaust.

The resurgence of right-wing extremism and antisemitism in Europe in the late 1980s was accompanied by a natural focus on Germany. Since 1945, the Third Reich and the Holocaust have been the period in German history against which everything before 1933 and since 1945 has been compared, interpreted and ultimately judged. This has presented psychological problems for many Germans, particularly since German reunification in 1990. In the two post-war successor states, Germans generally tended to ignore the recent past, and to simply live for the present and the future. The citizens of the reunited Federal Republic, however, cannot escape a confrontation with - and the need for a link to - Germany's past. This is especially true for the very young, the post-post-war generation, which possesses little if any conscious connection to the Cold War era and the two post-war German states between 1949 and 1990.

How do we assess the dangers of right-wing extremism and antisemitism in the Federal Republic of Germany today? What are the indicators used by social scientists and other scholars and observers to determine the relative health of German democracy almost 50 years since its re-birth in the three western Allied occupation zones? First, there are studies of the multiplicity of right-wing movements, organizations and political parties that have existed in Germany since the end of the war. Their membership, programs, policies, political activities and publications have been the objects of analysis by social scientists, historians and journalists. Secondly, the inevitable and more problematic question arises about how the masses of ordinary Germans "feel" about Jews, foreigners and Germany's past. Here, public opinion surveys and election results are the objects of scrutiny and conjecture. Finally, Germany's political culture, its political, economic, social and cultural institutions and elites, warrant our attention. Will the Right remain isolated and peripheral in Germany, or are links being forged between it and the general populace that will undermine and eventually destroy popular support for the democratic system?

The multiplicity of expressions and terms used to explain right-wing extremism in Germany has created confusion as well as misplaced concerns and fears. The general phenomenon of right-wing extremism (*Rechtsextremismus*) in Germany actually consists of two distinct kinds of organizations and activities that differ in means rather than ends. The right-wing conservatives (*Rechtsskonservative*) are the existing, legal right-wing political parties that have operated openly in the country's democratic process. Parties such as the

Republicans (*Republikaner*), the German People's Union (*Deutsche Volks-Union* or *D.V.U.*), and the National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* or *N.P.D.*), campaign in local, state and national elections, seeking power by at least paying lip service to democratic principles. The right-wing radicals (*Rechtsradikale*), on the other hand, are the countless small, illegal, openly violent neo-Nazi and skinhead groups that have come and gone since the 1950s, but which became more prominent in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They have used violence against foreign immigrants and refugees, against Jews, synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and memorials to the Jewish victims of National Socialism, and seek the destruction of German democracy and the creation of a new, Nazi-style dictatorship. The radicals draw much of the attention of the media, although the conservatives, using methods that seek to convey an image of respectability and legitimacy, are more dangerous. Both tendencies share common values and goals. They reject the idea of the equality of peoples and Germany as a pluralistic society. They represent the old nationalist (*völkisch*) principles, reject German guilt for World War II, and trivialize or deny the Holocaust. They oppose European integration.

A pattern of political consciousness and behavior was established in Germany during the period of occupation from 1945 to 1949. Although remnants of Nazi and antisemitic opinion and feeling persisted in the western and the Soviet occupation zones, military occupation, war crimes trials and intensive de-nazification processes left little room for political activity on the Right. Most Germans turned away from politics and from confronting their recent past, and focused instead on survival and on re-building economic and political security within a capitalist western or a socialist Soviet context. Nor was the environment in Germany conducive to right-wing extremism in the two successor states between 1949 and 1990. The Cold War, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the huge presence of foreign armies on German soil, meant that neither of the German states was fully sovereign. The primacy of economic and social stability and security, whether it was the unprecedented levels of material prosperity and social welfare in the capitalist west, or the drive to create the economic and social utopia promised by Marxism, precluded any mass appeal of the Right. In West Germany, the constitution with its strict anti-Nazi provisions, anti-Nazi legislation and a stable democratic system were more than enough to contain the activities of the Right. In the communist German Democratic Republic, Marxist ideology and a Soviet-style police state precluded neo-Nazi activity. Moreover, the post-war generation, the youth of the two successor states upon which any successful neo-Nazi movement would have had to depend, was predominantly and naturally left of center, in contrast to their parents, who came of age during the Weimar and Nazi periods. Finally, the period between 1949 and 1990 witnessed West Germany's political and economic integration into a larger democratic and economically interdependent western European community. Thus, between 1949 and 1990, the democratic system in western Germany, and the socialist system in the East were never seriously threatened by the Right.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, German reunification, and the withdrawal of the World War II Allies from central and eastern Europe were accompanied by a significant increase in the activities of the radical Right in Germany and elsewhere. These included violence against Jews, Jewish institutions and memorials, as well as against

foreigners, refugees and asylum seekers. Questions have been raised in Germany, Europe and throughout the world about the durability of German democracy. Freed from the artificial divisions and restraints imposed on Germany and Europe by the Cold War, would German democracy be able to withstand a resurgent Right a half century after the collapse of the Third Reich?

Unquestionably, right-wing political parties have enjoyed sporadic success in local and state elections in the Federal Republic since the late 1980s, particularly in the old West Germany. The severe economic dislocations that accompanied reunification were a major cause of this. Germans in the former German Democratic Republic were abruptly detached from the economic, social and psychological security provided by Marxism and the communist state. They were thrust into the alien world of private initiative, competition, and free enterprise. West Germans, on the other hand, long accustomed to economic prosperity, near full employment, and low inflation, suddenly faced the worst recession and highest levels of unemployment and inflation since the "economic miracle" of the 1950s and 1960s, brought on by the enormous costs of reunification and the process of integrating eastern Germany into the Federal Republic.

There are about 64,000 members of right-wing organizations of all kinds in the Federal Republic today, which indicates that the modest electoral successes of the Right do not necessarily reflect mass defections to the political philosophy and agenda of the parties of the Right. Support has come from all segments of German society, but especially from industrial workers and the disadvantaged. In Germany's manufacturing sector, high labor costs, foreign competition, modernization, and the costs of reunification have all combined to produce the loss of more than a million manufacturing jobs between 1990 and 1993 alone. Despite a very generous social support system, the recession has produced great fear and anxiety over the loss of economic security and status. This has been exacerbated by the need for the state to trim welfare benefits in the face of burgeoning deficits brought on by the spiraling costs of reunification.

As in the past, support for the Right has been overwhelmingly male and has come mainly from the young. There are relatively few old Nazis left from their grandparents' generation, while their parents' post-war generation has tended to the left of center in the political spectrum. The young possess little if any psychological connection to the histories and political cultures of the two Germanies and the Cold War. They often tend to identify the loss of economic opportunity and security with the influx of foreign refugees and asylum seekers who are considered competitors for dwindling jobs, housing, and Germany's generous social welfare support. They are susceptible to the traditional political strategy of the Right which fuses economic and social anxiety with the fears and anxiety that are at the root of xenophobia, ethnic and racial hatred.

The main themes and issues pursued by the parties of the Right since 1990 have included immigration and Germany's liberal asylum laws, crime, social and economic security, housing, and jobs. The parties of the Right also oppose European integration and unity, including the Maastricht Treaty which, they contend, will create open borders, and a Deutschmark that will be devalued or disappear altogether. They also promote the more traditional right-wing demands such as Germany's innocence in the war and the Holocaust, and Germany's right to its pre-World War II

borders. As in the past, the Right sees German democracy and the Jews as the agents of foreign domination, this time through the influx of large numbers of refugees into the country.

The radical neo-Nazis and Skinheads (*Rechtsradikale*) constituted about 10% of the Right in the Federal Republic by 1994. The approximately 6,400 militant neo-Nazis tend to be young, violent, and responsible for the attacks on refugees, foreigners, and Jews in the early 1990s. In 1992, for example, they committed over 2,200 acts of violence, resulting in the deaths of 17 people (7 foreigners) and injuries to hundreds more. In 1993, there were about 2,000 attacks against foreigners, Jews, the handicapped, and the homeless. Since the 1950s, Radical neo-Nazi groups have been numerous, very small, and short-lived, unable to survive the strict anti-Nazi laws of the Federal Republic, their own ineffective or non-existent leadership, and anarchy in their ranks. As a result, it is difficult to talk of a specific program or agenda that these groups pursue. They identify more openly and directly with the Third Reich, and with the symbols, policies and objectives of Hitler's Nazi state. On their own, however, these groups never constituted a threat to German democracy.

What is the extent of popular antisemitism in Germany today? Are Germans still largely indifferent at best, or hostile at worst, to Jews in Germany and elsewhere? We have only the imperfect instrument of public opinion surveys conducted in western Germany since the end of World War II, and in the former German Democratic Republic since 1990. Allied surveys in the western occupation zones taken immediately after the war indicated lingering antisemitic feelings among the generation that came of age during the Weimar and Nazi years. However, polls also have shown a very sharp decline in those attitudes since the end of the war, as the older generation has passed away and the post-war generation has come of age in a democratic environment in Germany and western Europe. Polls taken since 1990 in the former German Democratic Republic have indicated that East Germans were far less likely than West Germans to harbor antisemitic feelings, a result no doubt of the ideology and politics of the Marxist state. The only troubling trends in both parts of Germany concern the very young, those under the age of about 25, who have come of age largely since the dramatic changes in Germany and Europe that began in the late 1980s. They represent the most fertile ground for the agenda of the Right, of which antisemitism remains a central element.

There is much in the post-war/post-Holocaust history of Germany, and in the realities of contemporary German society, that would seem to preclude any threat to German democracy. Germany today has virtually nothing in common with the Weimar Republic, that period of German history between 1918 and 1933 which many observers have used as the historical model and ultimate comparison for the Federal Republic. It is a democracy with a deeply rooted democratic culture, something that Weimar democracy lacked. Unlike Weimar, the judicial and educational systems, and the civil service have been democratized since the birth of the Federal Republic in 1949. German democracy boasts a record of almost half a century of stability and success. The constitution of the Federal Republic eliminated the flaws in the Weimar constitution that resulted in the political paralysis of the early 1930s and led to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor on 30 January, 1933. Moreover, the laws of the Federal Republic have been formulated specifically to contain right-wing, neo-Nazi, and racist movements and activities.

Today's Germany remains an extraordinarily wealthy and prosperous society, despite recession and the enormous costs of reunification. Weimar Germany, on the other hand, never recovered from the economic catastrophe of World War I. Its economic history included a thoroughly bankrupt economy, crippling inflation, loss of overseas markets, crippling reparations imposed by the victorious Allies, and the Depression of the early 1930s. Moreover, the unprecedented prosperity and economic security of post-World War II Germany has been at least in part the result of the ever-deepening political, economic, and social integration of the Federal Republic with the rest of western Europe. Unlike its isolated and often shunned Weimar predecessor, contemporary Germany has been a fully integrated partner in a shared political, economic, and social system and culture. The vast majority of Germans know this because they have experienced its mostly positive consequences. Born after 1945, they know no other way, and appear unlikely to succumb to xenophobic notions of going it alone.

Finally, the institutions and elites of today's Federal Republic bear little resemblance to their Weimar predecessors who more or less embraced Hitler more than sixty years ago. Big business, the major political parties, the educational system and academia, the media and the arts, the churches, etc. have all combined to demonstrate their support for Germany's democracy, and to actively oppose the message and activities of the Right. The political action undertaken by these institutions in the defense of democracy did not occur during the turbulent years of the Weimar Republic.

Right-wing extremism and neo-Nazism have never posed a serious threat to German democracy since 1949. It is utterly facile to conclude, as many do, that the Federal Republic is another version of the Weimar Republic, and that its fate is likely to be the same. It is wrong to assume that history will always repeat itself, as if this were a law of nature. Inevitably, the reunified Federal Republic of Germany will be somewhat different from the old West Germany given the dramatic changes in the larger, post-Cold War European environment of which Germany is a part. Moreover, the level of ethnic hatred and violence, xenophobia, racism, and anti-semitism has been higher in western countries such as France and Austria, as well as in the states of the former Soviet bloc where democracy and democratic values are new, fragile, without deep roots, and the economies are struggling. Germany's democracy has remained strong and stable amid the dramatic changes in Germany and Europe over the past ten years. It remains a model for emerging European democracies, which the founders of the Federal Republic could only dream about fifty years ago.



BOOK REVIEW

Saul Friedländer. *Nazi Germany and the Jews. Volume One: The Years of Persecution*

New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

418 pp. Cloth \$30.00. ISBN 0-06-019942-6.

Saul Friedländer's new book is both a departure from and a culmination of his earlier works. Unlike *Pius XII and the Third Reich* (1960), *Nazi Germany and the Jews* does not focus on religious institutions or specific personalities, although both figure prominently in its pages. Nor is it a personal account like *When Memory Comes* (1979). Still, it is unmistakably marked by Friedländer's experiences as a Jewish child in World War II Europe. Finally, it is not an explicitly theoretical work, as are *History and Psychoanalysis* (1978), *Reflections of Nazism* (1982), and *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews* (1979). Nevertheless, Friedländer's new volume is informed by theoretical considerations—about psychology, memory, individual and collective behavior, the body, and above all, the nature and meaning of history. In short, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* is a wonderful book that echoes the broad interests and profound insights typical of Friedländer's earlier work. At the same time, its combination of traditional political narrative and anecdotal "everyday history" brings Friedländer into territories quite new to that important scholar of the Holocaust.

Nazi Germany and the Jews is a work of synthesis. It relies less on archival research—although Friedländer uses sources from the Munich Institute for Contemporary History—than on an impressive range of published material, both classic and brand new. Friedländer's topical interests represent a synthesis too; his account of Jewish life in Nazi Germany pays attention to art, literature, and music as well as politics, economics, and law. Friedländer's eclectic approach reminds us that the people who lived the history he writes experienced no clear divisions between those intertwined elements of their lives. At the same time, Friedländer's rich variety of sources underscores one of the book's central messages: Jews were part of every facet of German society.

Throughout the book, Friedländer integrates levels of historical experience that are rarely discussed together: the perspective of the individual and the "big picture" survey of world historical events. For example, in the space of less than a page, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* moves from a discussion of the brutal interrogation in Dachau in 1935 of the Würzburg wine merchant Leopold Obermayer—a Swiss, a Jew, and a homosexual—to the establishment of the Wehrmacht that same year. Friedländer's shifts from the micro to the macro are unsettling and even jarring. But those jagged edges serve a purpose. They force readers to acknowledge that Friedländer's history is a story of real people, of how Nazi persecution transformed their ordinary lives—and all too often caused their deaths—in vicious ways. Every legalistic, bureaucratic measure that Hitler and his cronies introduced, whether it restricted Jewish economic activity or banned Jews' use of public swimming pools, had its hundreds and thousands of Leopold Obermayers, Victor Klemperers, and Gretel Bergmanns, who wound up in Dachau, lost their jobs, or were excluded from competition at the 1936 Olympic Games.

Nazi Germany and the Jews is organized chronologically to cover the period 1933 to 1939. The first chapters introduce key arguments that recur throughout the book. Chapter 1, "Into

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Nazi Germany and the Jews, continued from page 7

the Third Reich," addresses the first stage of Hitler's regime and its impact on German Jews. It was in the cultural domain, Friedländer points out, that Jews first felt the brunt of Nazi power. The subsequent chapters illustrate the importance of culture both as a sphere of Jewish activity and as a focal point of Nazi antisemitism. The rest of the book also echoes a second theme introduced here: the impossibility that Jews could know what to expect. A third theme—the absence of any countervailing force from the so-called Aryan elites—emerges in the opening sections as well. Even Thomas Mann, Friedländer tells us, with his Jewish wife and subsequent anti-fascist credentials, experienced "ambivalence (or worse)" in 1933 as the new regime stripped German Jews of their positions. (15)

Uncertainty and confusion on the part of Jews, silence, weakness, and in some cases open hostility from influential "Aryans"—these themes are developed further in Chapter 2 on "Consenting Elites, Troubled Elites." Friedländer focuses on the church leadership, Protestant and Catholic, and on university professors. Those readers who attended the 1995 Hilberg lecture will recognize the depressing story of how gentile academics in Nazi Germany failed to show solidarity for their Jewish (ex)colleagues.

Chapter 3 introduces a central concept that Friedländer calls "redemptive antisemitism." Redemptive antisemitism, as Friedländer depicts it, held Jews responsible for all of Germany's woes and by extension believed that expulsion—and eradication—of Jews from German life would cure all its ills. For believers in redemptive antisemitism, elements of Christian anti-Jewishness, racial antisemitism, and conspiracy theories merged with political, economic, and cultural anxieties to make the struggle against Jews into the "dominant aspect" of a worldview in which even "other racist themes were but secondary appendages." (89) Antisemites of the redemptive variety, Friedländer maintains, endorsed Hitler's "statement of faith" in *Mein Kampf*: "Today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." (100)

Friedländer's concept of redemptive antisemitism sets him apart from some other well-known scholars of the Holocaust. Hitler and his circle of "true believers," Friedländer argues, were not mere mouthpieces of a uniquely German, widespread, indeed endemic "eliminationist antisemitism," as Daniel Goldhagen would have us believe (*Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 1996). But neither were they indifferent to antisemitism, as others like Henry Friedlander have suggested (*Origins of Nazi Genocide*, 1995). Instead, Friedländer insists, those top Nazis were carriers of a specific variety of Jew-hatred, bred in the overheated fantasies of the Bayreuth circle around Richard Wagner and fed on the lies and illusions of post-World War I Germany. According to Friedländer, it was not "ordinary Germans" or Germany culture as a whole that produced the Holocaust, although both were implicated. It was rather a strand of particularly vehement, metaphysical antisemitism whose proponents gained power in the Nazi era, and whose murderous fantasies were tolerated and even supported by those German elites who could and should have acted as a check. In contrast to Goldhagen too, Friedländer turns our attention back to the leading figures of the Third Reich—Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Bormann, Streicher—as the visionary proponents of redemptive antisemitism.

Unlike Goldhagen, Friedländer wrestles with the issues around what are often labeled the "other victims." What is

the relationship between the murder of European Jews and the Nazis' genocidal assaults on Gypsies and people deemed handicapped? Friedländer suggests that in many ways those hatreds reflected and reinforced one another as related schemes for "racial cleansing." But only in the case of the Jews did Nazis regard their plans for murder as a cosmic battle against evil. That insight in turn allows Friedländer to acknowledge the suffering of the many targets of Nazi brutality even as he recognizes what is unique about the Shoah.

In *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Friedländer took on a difficult task: integrating a traditional historical narrative with what has become known in Germany as "everyday history." He has succeeded in producing both a nuanced overview of National Socialist policies and measures against the Jews between 1933 and 1939, and a sensitive, human account of the lives of Jews in Nazi Germany. Although he shows awareness of issues of gender, Friedländer might have further enriched the texture of his book by paying more attention to the lives of Jewish women. Perhaps the next volume will expand in this regard. Given Friedländer's achievements, both in this book and in his previous work, that next volume is bound to be a vital contribution to the field of Holocaust studies. But perhaps one can begin to imagine the challenges Friedländer will face as he begins work on a sequel to *Nazi Germany and the Jews*. What does one say after a book that ends with the word "doomed?"

— Doris L. Bergen
University of Notre Dame

BOOK REVIEW

Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*.

Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.

208 pp. Cloth \$22.50 ISBN 1-56663-116-5.

If Theodor Adorno overstated the case when he declared that it was barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz, it may indeed be barbaric to offer an answer to the overarching question: "Why did it happen?" Elie Wiesel is said to have reproved someone who asked this question by replying: "How dare you ask such a question! If I gave you an answer, would you then be able to sleep nights?"

In the years immediately following the Holocaust, scholars, like the rest of the world, confronted the event with a numbness of spirit that excluded attempts to "explain" it. With time, some scholars now feel empowered to explain the inexplicable. In the face of popular, reductionist explanations of the Holocaust, the work of Raul Hilberg stands as a rebuke.¹ Hilberg's magisterial *œuvre*, whose centerpiece *The Destruction of the European Jews* is in its second edition,² made no attempt to answer the question, "How could it have happened?," preferring the more modest question "How in fact did it happen?" The question was modest, but the task it generated was staggering. Poring over numberless archival documents in the days before copiers, scanners, and OCR software; laboriously hand-copying documents, Hilberg attacked the source material with a single minded passion for historical truth. For Hilberg, the truth about the Holocaust was best revealed by the painstaking examination of the documents in its wake. Bureaucracy generates paper, and the German bureaucracy which implemented the *Endlösung*, (the Final Solution)—the bureaucracy Hilberg calls "the machinery of destruction"—produced paper in Wagnerian measure as it took on a life of its own, independent of the political, philo-

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sophical, and polemical impulses that shaped the Nazi determination to extinguish the Jewish people. As Hilberg has written, "A bureaucracy at rest tends to remain at rest; a bureaucracy in motion tends to continue in motion."³ Revealing the anatomy and physiology of this bureaucracy, both at home and in the occupied countries, is the heart of Hilberg's work.

Corresponding to the German bureaucracy in the occupied countries, the Jewish bureaucracy embodied chiefly in the *Judenräte* (the Jewish Councils), was forced to administer details of the Nazi program of identification, sequestration, and deportation of the indigenous Jewish populations. Hilberg followed where the facts led, uninfluenced by, though surely not unconscious of, the incidental ideological shocks they were likely to engender. Exposure of the enforced collaboration of the *Judenräte* by Hilberg in *The Destruction of the European Jews* prompted attacks, often bitter, by those who saw his work as an indictment of the victims. Professor Oscar Handlin of Harvard, writing in *Commentary*, branded Hilberg's revelations an "impiety" tantamount to "defaming the dead."

Are there some events which the historian is bound to see through an evaluative prism? Is it in fact an "impiety" to do otherwise? If pressed, none of those who castigated Hilberg for his findings would contend that some historical events permit, even mandate, an abandonment of objectivity. But they might argue, and with some force, that the historian is not exempt from value judgments when the subject is acts and events freighted with moral implications. So challenged, Hilberg might reply that we are quite at ease with an objective rendering of horrendous acts, so long as they are suitably removed from us by chronology and culture. Jews were mercilessly slaughtered during the Crusades. Hutus and Tutsis are dispatching each other with abandon today. We can relate those events, disassociated from us either by time or culture, with a certain objectivity. The Holocaust, on the other hand, is close both chronologically and culturally. The cultural nexus is especially pointed, because European-Americans are kin by blood and/or education to both the perpetrators and the victims.

None of Hilberg's antagonists appear to have challenged his accuracy, only its consequences. As a matter of principle, it is a truism that historians must be objective. But is it possible? Was it totally possible with Hilberg?

The emotional distancing the historical craft demands cannot be complete. No historian, however objective, can be immune to the emotional resonances of events, especially those with the compass and reach of the Holocaust. Which is a verbose way of saying that no historian, like no man, is an island. A promontory, perhaps, but not an island. Was Hilberg an insular, bloodless, archival bean-counter? At times one suspects that he consciously chooses to portray himself that way. But there is strong internal evidence to the contrary in certain seemingly-trivial events he elects to tell us about. His teacher, Fritz Neumann, offered him the chance to escort a delegation of Germans in Washington. Although in need of money, Hilberg declined. As a member of the War Documentation Project near Washington, Hilberg refused to return a greeting from a co-employee, a German ex-colonel who had been involved in the transport of Jews to a slaughter site: "I stared at him, not answering." When the Project director told Hilberg of a plan to present an address by a former official of the German Foreign Office who had processed reports of Security Police killings for Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, Hilberg replied

that, "in that case, I would walk out." None of these events is of defining importance. In fact, none is, by itself, of even trifling importance. They are included, one suspects, to reassure us obliquely that Hilberg is a promontory, but no island.

Whatever emotional response Hilberg has to the events he chronicles never gets in the way of raw truth. He is willfully dry as he describes the murder of relatives:

Since he was already forty-eight years old,
he must have been gassed immediately.
(His father's brother Josef)

Apparently that is where the German
raiders found her and where they shot
her on the spot. (His paternal grandmother)

The German occupants of Poland . . .
thanked him for his help by killing him and
his family. (His father's brother Jakob, a
veteran of the World War I German artillery).

He can be equally detached when his own ego is at risk. "Always in my life I had wanted the truth about myself," Hilberg writes as he explains why he declined to reply to an unflattering assessment of *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*, perceiving some justice in the reviewer's appraisal. In another connection, unswerving honesty leads him to describe in detail a major misunderstanding of two documents, including a key communication between Göring and Heydrich. Hilberg's passion for truth is genuine and deep. He abhors political correctness as gatekeeper to history, even if that means an open forum for the grotesque. In an interview with Christopher Hitchens touching on revisionist historians like David Irving and deniers of the Holocaust, Hilberg is quoted as saying:

If these people want to speak, let them.
It only leads those of us who do research to
re-examine what we might have considered
as obvious. And that's useful for us. I have
quoted Eichmann references that come from
a neo-Nazi publishing house. I am not for
taboos and I am not for repression.⁴

Hilberg's defense of an open forum for cranks is a necessary corollary to the freedom he demands for himself, and likely stems from his own experience with taboos and restrictions. Reading of what he calls the "Thirty Year War" that followed publication of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, we learn how reluctant the scholarly community was to accept facts that didn't buttress ideological presuppositions, particularly proof that the Jewish community, in the re-enactment of centuries-old survival strategies developed in the face of hostile and often deadly neighbors, unintentionally and unwillingly assisted the Nazi bureaucracy in the enterprise of its own destruction. As late as 1993, German-Jewish businessman Arno Lustiger, writing in *Der Spiegel*, accuses Hilberg of having waged a thirty-year war against the Jewish resistance. Hilberg's refusal to sensationalize or romanticize the most chilling agenda of barbarism in modern history seemed pitiless and even denigrative of the slaughtered. In the thirty years between Handlin's article and Lustiger's, Hilberg was, as he says, "almost buried under an avalanche of condemnation." This included the iconic Hannah Arendt's

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reference to him as “stupid and crazy” in a letter to Karl Jaspers, dismissing *Destruction* as “really excellent, but only because it is a simple report.” “A simple report” being, of course, “only” what Hilberg was attempting, in the guileless belief that facts precede analysis.

The Politics of Memory takes us from Hilberg’s Vienna childhood to his detested Abraham Lincoln High School in New York, thence to Brooklyn College, a tour of duty in the wartime army, and his return to Brooklyn College where he met historian Hans Rosenberg. Rosenberg not only excited young Hilberg’s admiration by speaking “in complete sentences and paragraphs”; he introduced him to the notion that the German bureaucracy was the true engine of German government:

... a hidden world . . . and once I was conscious of it I would not be deterred from prying open its shuttered windows and bolted doors.

As a graduate student at Columbia, Hilberg came under the influence of historian Salo Baron and political scientist Fritz Neumann. Neumann was to be the godfather to Hilberg’s monumental exploration of the “machinery of destruction” by sponsoring his doctoral thesis, and by virtue of his own work *Behemoth*, which showed that Nazi Germany was governed not by political theory, but by four independent agents — the civil service, the army, industry, and the party — that coordinated their actions by virtue of what Neumann called “social contracts.” The irony in Neumann’s surreptitious reference to Rousseau to describe the workings of the paradigmatic totalitarian state cannot have been lost on Hilberg, whose own frequent resort to irony in this book and elsewhere may furnish the only overt expression of the human revulsion that Hilberg allowed himself as he mentally palpated the life-and-death events underlying the documents he lived with for a half century.⁵

What began as a doctoral dissertation grew into the *massif central* of Holocaust studies, but the road to publication was strewn with potholes. The winner of a prize entitling him to publication of the dissertation by Columbia University Press, Hilberg was forced to find a “subvention,” i.e., a subsidy, to publish the entire work, of which the dissertation was less than a quarter. After Columbia University Press declined to publish more than the dissertation itself, Hilberg looked elsewhere. In his quest for a publisher, Hilberg approached Yad Vashem, Israel’s governmental Holocaust remembrance authority, but met with rejection because he relied almost totally on German-language sources, apparently ignoring those in Yiddish and Hebrew and in the languages of occupied countries.⁶ Yad Vashem also named what was surely its dominant grievance, an ideological one: historians had “reservations” about his “appraisal of the Jewish resistance (active and passive) during the Nazi occupation.” Ultimately, the generous subvention of a Holocaust survivor induced the small Quadrangle Press in Chicago to publish *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961. (Ivan Dee, formerly an editor with Quadrangle, published *The Politics of Memory* under the auspices of Ivan R. Dee, Inc.)

Shoah film maker Claude Lanzmann once told Hilberg that to portray the Holocaust one must create a work of art. The historian has a special responsibility, because, as Hilberg says, echoing Wallace Stevens: “The artist usurps the actuality, substituting a text for a reality that is fast fading.”

Hilberg as artist describes his design of *Destruction* in musical terms. No Mozart, whose genius generated an effortless flow of masterpieces, Hilberg saw himself as Beethoven, for whom creation was a struggle. Drawing on musicologist Lewis Lockwood’s description of Beethoven’s assembly of the *Eroica* Symphony, in which Beethoven allegedly paired what he placed first with what was last, and followed with a pairing of what preceded the last, Hilberg chose to model his work on the same plan. He thematically related the first chapter of *Destruction* to the last, the second chapter to the next-to-last, and so on.

The longest of my chapters was the one on deportations. It was the *andante* of my composition, with a theme and multiple variations . . .

His artistic analogies extend to painting as well. “Cognoscenti” (Hilberg’s term) who had praised *Destruction* largely bypassed *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*, he tells us. During a visit to the Louvre, an emblem for this neglect appears to have struck him with the force of a Joycean epiphany: he noticed a striking painting by Leonardo da Vinci, ignored by a throng, which crowded around the Mona Lisa.

The Politics of Memory does not purport to be an autobiography in the conventional sense. As such, it would be wanting. We learn next to nothing about Hilberg’s life outside his work, except in an introductory chapter that sketches his childhood and portrays his parents, particularly his father, in some detail, and his early Jewish education. We learn that his study of Hebrew, a concise language, which he forgot long ago, taught him to write short sentences. Of his religion or philosophy we learn only that in his youth he dismissed religion and any ultimate meaning of life:

At that point I settled for continuity in lieu of eternity, allowing only a purpose in life, as distinct from a purpose of life, to serve as my last bastion.

Beyond that, the reader must draw inferences interstitially; Hilberg does not articulate a coherent *Weltanschauung*. He offers no Olympian motives for his life work, no doubt assuming that he needs none: that there was a Holocaust is sufficient reason to study it. He tells us nothing of his life as father and husband beyond a few passing references to his son and daughter and a single reference to his divorce. Hilberg does dwell at length on his academic clashes, but the memoir surely does not warrant the mean-spirited strictures of Michael André Bernstein, who dismissed what he called “this strange volume” in which, he says,

Hilberg seems to remember every slight, every negative review, theoretical dispute, or contrary perspective he has confronted over the years, and his thoroughness of recall is matched by an inability to drop any quarrel in which he was ever involved, no matter how much time has intervened.⁷

Acknowledging as he must Hilberg’s “exemplary courage” in pursuing a subject that his mentor Fritz Neumann called his “funeral,” plus the centrality of *Destruction* in Holocaust stud-

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ies, Bernstein penetrates Hilberg the man no deeper than the epidermis. While even the careful reader will not penetrate to the heart, there is terrain awaiting discovery beneath the epidermis.

Although Hilberg's principal focus was on the "how" of the Holocaust rather than the "why," he could not entirely ignore the "why" and sought answers in a study of people extraordinary and ordinary in his *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*, published in 1992. The heart of his search was the ordinary:

Most often novelists, journalists, and even historians look for an unusual or bizarre occurrence in a mundane setting, but I was doing the opposite. For me the destruction of the Jews already was the setting, the irremovable reality, and within this extraordinary outburst I looked for all that was ordinary.

Hilberg had and has no simple answers. I met him by chance several months ago in a setting that permitted a brief conversation. He described his recent work about German railroads and Jewish deportee transports. As the brief meeting ended, I asked the obligatory question: "Why did it happen?" Hilberg gave the only reply that a half century of profound scholarship and fierce moral decency allowed: "I don't know." In the final sentence of *The Politics of Memory* Hilberg quotes H.G. Adler, a survivor of the Terezin concentration camp:

... for Hilberg there is only recognition, perhaps also a grasp, but certainly no understanding.

Why would Hilberg cap his memoir with an admired historian's assertion of Hilberg's failure to understand the key question that haunts his life's work? Is it a declaration by the world's greatest Holocaust scholar that after the painstaking collection, copying, study, and analysis of myriad documents; a lifetime of pondering and contemplation; and interaction with the most prominent colleagues who have labored in the same vineyard; there can be no answer to the "why" at all? Ultimately, all we can do is strive to learn *what* happened and how. Simplistic or monocausal explanations of the Holocaust diminish the unscalable magnitude of *what* happened, since, in the end, we find no explanation in human terms that leaves human decency intact.

Short on the anecdotal, "human interest" grist of the popular memoir, *The Politics of Memory* encourages the aspiring researcher to avoid the easy path and labor in the hot sun, alone if necessary, even with no assurance that the toil will be rewarded. The book cautions the aspirant that the uncompromising pursuit of truth may undermine cherished beliefs about the past and that the wages of such scrupulous impudence can be bitter. It may also increase our index of suspicion as we encounter popular works of slapdash scholarship which trade historical accuracy for a mass market and quick notoriety. Hilberg's path was an arduous one beset with scorpions, but was the only path worthy of the man of whom former University of Vermont president Thomas P. Salmon said "may be the premier scholar UVM has produced in this century."⁸

As for the legacy of the Holocaust itself, Theodor Adorno has probably said all that can be said:

Hitler hat den Menschen im Stande ihrer Unfreiheit einen neuen kategorischen Imperativ aufgezwungen: ihr Denken und Handeln so einzurichten, daß Auschwitz nicht sich wiederhole, nichts ähnliches geschehe.⁹

- 1 See Raul Hilberg, *The Goldhagen Phenomenon*, *Critical Inquiry*, v. 23, no. 4, summer 1997, pp. 721-728.
- 2 It would be more accurate to say that the work has gone through multiple editions, because Hilberg has included newly-discovered material in each translation of the work.
- 3 *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Harper & Row (paper backed.), 1961, p. 18.
- 4 Christopher Hitchens, "Hitler's Ghost," *Vanity Fair*, June 1996, p. 74.
- 5 His irony had other targets as well. Hilberg arrived in Burlington for his interview to fill a temporary slot in the University of Vermont Political Science Department, well aware of the widespread academic discrimination against Jews.

When I arrived in Burlington, Vermont, I learned that I was safe. The discrimination was directed at Catholics.
- 6 The author acknowledges with apparent remorse his ignorance of certain "important" languages. He mentions Polish. Characteristically, he also mentions Norwegian.
- 7 Michael André Bernstein, review of *The Politics of Memory* and two other books, *Times Literary Supplement*, March 7, 1997, p4.
- 8 Letter from Thomas P. Salmon to me, March 20, 1997.
- 9 *Negative Dialektik*, p. 358:

Hitler has forced a new categorical imperative on humanity: so think and act that there can never again be an Auschwitz, or anything like it.

-Robert D. Rachlin
Chair, Holocaust Studies Advisory Board