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## Tributes to Professor Raul Hilberg

*This issue of the Bulletin contains the full texts of the tributes to Raul Hilberg during the special memorial service in the Ira Allen Chapel at the University of Vermont on 22 October 2007.*

**Christopher R. Browning,**  
**Frank Porter Graham Professor of History,**  
**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

It is now widely accepted that Raul Hilberg was one of the most remarkable and accomplished scholars of the last half century, a man who was responsible for founding and legitimizing the field of Holocaust Studies as a serious and vital topic in American academic life. That recognition came slowly, and as his memoirs testify, the slights and attacks he experienced early in his career were never entirely forgotten despite his ultimate vindication. Given the humility and limitation that he so clearly felt in the shadow of the enormity of the subject to which he devoted his scholarly life, he would not have been capable of writing the self-assessment of his own life achievement in a tone of self-congratulatory triumphalism in any case. Even in the midst of the sadness of his recent death, it is left to others who were inspired and helped by him to celebrate not just his obvious achievements but aspects of his life and character beneath his rather austere exterior which have not been fully appreciated.

Perhaps no one in the scholarly world has had a career more directly shaped and impacted by Raul Hilberg than I. It is no accident that in Europe, where it is not fully understood that Raul taught his entire life

at an institution that did not provide the opportunity to train doctoral students, it is often mistakenly assumed that I am a Hilberg Ph.D. This is a flattering error that I only reluctantly correct. Thus it is not yet another evaluation of Raul's scholarship that I wish to share with you today, but rather the story of an intellectual and personal relationship that has been central to my life and career.

In my first year of graduate study I wrote a master's thesis on a narrow and dreary topic in French diplomatic history of the interwar period. Taking up a temporary teaching position, I was asked to give a course in German history. When I asked former





professors for help, one suggested I consider assigning Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* because, as he put it, it was "good for discussion." A typical history student of the 1960s, I had never encountered what we now call the Holocaust in my courses. I was immediately fascinated. Given the difficult relationship between the two, it is no small irony that it was Arendt's book that led me to Hilberg, for upon reading the former, I immediately ordered *The Destruction of the European Jews*. When it arrived, all 790 pages of the old Quadrangle paperback in double columns of miniscule print, I was dashed. Preparing to teach my first college courses, I would never have time to read it, and I tossed it on the table by my bed. I then fell ill and was bedridden for a month. When I felt well enough to begin reading, it was the one book I could reach. Once started, I was mesmerized and read it cover to cover. Some people have religious conversion experiences; upon reading Hilberg I had a life-changing academic conversion experience. Here was an absolutely pivotal event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century virtually ignored in scholarship, now illuminated by a masterful model of how to approach such a topic with discipline and integrity rather than lurid sensationalism and uncontrolled emotion.

I resolved to return to graduate school and write my dissertation on one of the many bureaucratic components of Hilberg's "machinery of destruction," namely the "Jewish desk" of the German Foreign Office. My adviser's initial response was sobering. That was a good dissertation topic, he noted, but I should realize that it had "no professional future." Ten years after the publication of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, we still lived in world in which the study of the Holocaust had no academic standing: quite simply there were no courses to teach, no journals to publish in, no conferences at which to read papers, and no cohort of fellow scholars to offer informed reviews. Fortunately, my adviser then added that if that is what I wanted to do, I should do it anyway, since there was no fate worse than spending years writing a dissertation if one's heart was not in it.

Having completed the dissertation and obtained my first tenure-track position, I then faced the ticking tenure clock to get my revised dissertation published. The

first attempt ended in disaster. A prestigious university press returned the manuscript accompanied by a totally negative review that asserted it "made no contribution, however minor, to scholarship in the field." Facing potential academic oblivion, I was rescued once again by Raul Hilberg. The second publisher to whom I sent my manuscript asked him to review it, and Raul both read and commented upon it with extraordinary care, not only securing its publication, but also offering me invaluable suggestions for improvement as well.

It was at that point that I contacted Raul directly for the first time. I wrote a letter thanking him twofold, both for writing the book that had given me academic inspiration and for his help in securing publication of my own first book. He wrote back graciously that others had helped him in the early stages of his career, he was glad now to be able to do the same for other young scholars, and he hoped that I too one day would be able to do the same for yet others. Given the many years in which he had worked virtually alone and received so little help and encouragement from others, Raul was in fact consciously working to change the toxic atmosphere that threatened collegial relations in the field that was now at last beginning to take root and grow.

The outcome to which Raul Hilberg had contributed so much, namely the "coming of age" for Holocaust Studies as an accepted and legitimate academic field, occurred in the early 1980s, with a series of international conferences. At the first in this series of conferences, in Paris in July 1982, I experienced once again the generosity with which he supported others rather than jealously guarding his turf. During wrap-up discussion at that conference concerning the problem of dating the decision for the Final Solution, I noted that scholars would have to study the hitherto relatively unexamined court records of the Belzec and Chelmno trials at the Central Agency for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the small town of Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart, to ascertain when the transfer of personnel and construction of those first two prototype death camps occurred. Raul had had exactly the same idea and had in fact already ascertained the train schedule and made reservations at a Ludwigsburg hotel, information which he immediately shared with



me. We spent the next week together in Ludwigsburg, trading judicial documents by day and endlessly walking the streets of the town in the evening. I learned not only that Raul was a tireless walker but also yet another important lesson for longevity in the field, namely how not to take the work home from the archives. I saw yet another side of Raul, that of the story teller with a great sense of humor who regaled me with various anecdotes and tales from politics, academic and otherwise. It is sometimes easy to forget that he was not only a Holocaust scholar but also a political scientist with a deep interest in people as political animals.

Since then yet another generation of scholars of the Holocaust has emerged, and through his tireless support for institutions such as the visiting fellowship program at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Raul Hilberg continued to encourage and help others in the field. I may have been one of the very early recipients of his support but I was most certainly not the last. It was, therefore, not only through the brilliance of his scholarship that he founded and sustained the field of Holocaust studies but also through his immense generosity. We are all in his debt.

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**Peter Hayes,  
Professor of History,  
Northwestern University**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Peter Hayes. I'm a historian, and I hold a chair in Holocaust Studies at Northwestern University just outside of Chicago. I'm here today for a very humbling reason: Gwen Hilberg tells me that Raul thought highly of my scholarship. Wow. In my world, it may not get any better than that, and I probably would be well advised to retire now, move to Vermont (as I plan), and quit while I'm ahead.

By saying that, I'm not implying that Raul was an ungenerous judge. Time and again, as we served together on the Fellowships Committee of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, I saw him home in

on and speak up for the merit of proposals that other evaluators had passed over too hastily. But, Raul expected intelligence and independent thinking; he liked iconoclasts, he prized integrity, and he mistrusted the trendy. As many of us do, he especially appreciated in others what he had cultivated in himself, above all persistence and an extraordinary talent for recognizing specific facts or details, sometimes as small as the initials on a particular piece of paper or the choice of words in the middle of a sentence, that opened the way to seeing significant patterns. I have never known a scholar who blended exhaustive knowledge and intellectual creativity so seamlessly, in fact, one who better demonstrated the interdependence of these qualities. Raul wanted to know and notice everything relevant, and he thought doing so was a prerequisite to really advancing understanding. So, to be well thought of by Raul is grounds to count your winnings and perhaps to get up from the table.

What he may have seen in my work is that I share his fascination with organizations and the ways by which they channel the behavior of people. Indeed, I probably imbibed the theme from him, since I think of myself in many respects, as Chris Browning also does, as Raul's graduate student from afar. The organized dimension of the Holocaust was the central theme of his towering book, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, with its focus on German bureaucracy, and it has been at the heart of my studies of German business in the Third Reich. Our focus was on how the purposes of groups become the purposes of their members and on the perverted moral thinking that results when people let their professional identities determine their principles. By such quasi-mechanical processes, the complete murder of the European Jews became a collective German project and, thus, nearly achievable. Raul was a master analyst of dehumanization in its most modern forms, and he was, as a result, an unsentimental ironist about human beings and what they are capable of.

But he was also a man of profound moral passion. One saw this in his writings, but one experienced it most powerfully when he spoke in public. On a rostrum, he was both mesmerizing and a great musician. He could deploy his driving thesis or topic like a melodic line, modulate his voice and inflections





like chords, and arrange the rhythms of his sentences and paragraphs into movements. The impression did not suffer from the fact that he seldom had a text or even note cards in front of him. One knew that one was hearing a maestro of his subject, someone whose heart and soul were in the theme and who roused his listeners to feel the same. I once heard Raul asked if he envied any historical figure, and he replied instantly, “Mozart.” The response was revealing, but he needn’t have. Raul’s public lectures were intricate, majestic compositions that could stand comparison with the finest concertos. Of all the many losses that come with Raul’s passing, I sometimes think that the disappearance of the greatest rhetorician on the Holocaust may be the most irreplaceable.

Everyone knows that Raul was present at the creation of Holocaust Studies (he accomplished it almost single-handedly!), and that he had to wait a long time for his creation to become widely present. Almost twenty years elapsed between the first appearance of *The Destruction* and the great breakthrough into public consciousness that came in the late 1970s, at the popular level with the television drama “Holocaust,” and at a more sophisticated level with Claude Lanzmann’s monumental film “Shoah,” in which Raul, dare one say it, starred. Painful and frustrating as the wait was to Raul in many respects, when it was over, he had the satisfaction of seeing how far his reach extended. I witnessed this first hand one evening when I picked him up at O’Hare Field in Chicago the night before he was to give a lecture there. Because we weren’t sure we’d get to Evanston before the restaurants closed, we decided to eat in the airport’s main dining room. As we entered and I asked for a table for two, the maitre d’ looked right past me and said “Good evening, Dr. Hilberg, and welcome to Chicago.” He knew who Raul was, and that sort of recognition was not a rarity.

To scholars who will tread in Raul’s footsteps, his most demanding legacy lies in the model he set. It has two overarching elements. The first is his indefatigability. Raul found his subject early, and he stayed with it. He epitomized the wisdom of the poet Ruskin’s remark that “in all the arts and acts of life, the highest achievement comes, not from a fretful and

varied excellence, but from the quiet singleness of justly chosen aim.” In this respect, too, Chris Browning and I have respected his example. The second is his fearlessness. Raul never shied away from what needed to be said, even when speaking up broke taboos or violated the tenets of political correctness. He was the conscience as well as the creator of his subject and an embodiment of the honesty and courage that the pursuit of truth requires.

A few years ago, I was asked to make some remarks at a ceremony in Washington marking Raul’s retirement from the Academic Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Groping then, as I am now, for words adequate to his achievements and to what his departure would mean, I found help in the form of Raul’s first language, the one in which he relentlessly had to trace so much horror. In German, one doesn’t say, as in English, that one will “miss” someone. One says “er wird uns fehlen”, “he will be lacking to us” or “we will *lack* him.” There’s a subtle but eloquent difference between the two formulations. The English one is slightly more focused on our emotion of loss; the German one is shaded toward what we will now have to do without. Raul’s books will stand; his enormous contributions to learning will remain for all who want to benefit from them. But, his encouragement and inspiration, his prodding and his rectitude, these are the things that we will profoundly lack.

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**Douglas Kinnard,**  
**Emeritus Professor of Political Science,**  
**University of Vermont**

We are here today to celebrate the life of Raul Hilberg—great scholar, great teacher, and for many of us, great mentor.

I was one of the three new professors Chairman Hilberg brought into the Political Science Department at the University of Vermont in the fall of 1973. At that time I was not familiar with his classical work on the Holocaust. What I observed that fall was a chairman always ready to discuss and offer advice on questions



raised about one's own research.

As time went on I began to appreciate his brilliance as a teacher and scholar and I became aware, through students, that he presented perfectly organized lectures for an entire period without the use of notes. Peter Grabosky, who had arrived with me that fall, expressed my own feelings and his when he told me, "I have come to embrace Raul's standards of intellectual quality and rigor, even if I am not able to live up to them personally."

One thing that came to mind when I became more familiar with Raul's writing on the Holocaust, and in particular his discussion of the layers of conflicting interest within the Jewish community itself, was a sentence from the West Point cadet prayer:

"Make us to choose the harder right rather than the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half truth when the whole can be won."

Many experts on the Holocaust, some here today, have written and spoken of Raul's major contribution to the literature of that evil episode. I am not an expert on the Holocaust, but I would like to quote a portion of my commentary when I served as the moderator following Raul's presentation at the 1987 symposium "Facing Evil," attended by renowned scholars at Salado, Texas.

"My own direct experience with the events Professor Hilberg described today was as a lieutenant in World War II in the 71st Infantry Division, when we liberated a concentration camp at Gunskirchen. Inside the gates of the camp, two of us walked to one of the nearby buildings, which had dirt floors and triple-decker bunks. Living and dead were mingled in with each other, the living too weak to move. There were close to 18,000 Hungarian Jews in that camp, where the Nazis had reduced them to animals. I was unable to fathom what I was seeing—it was one thing to read about something like that, as we all had by now, but to see it—my God!

"Given the subject of this symposium, Professor Hilberg's theme was directed toward one central question: how was it possible for a modern state to carry out an act of evil involving the systematic murder of a whole people? After talking about the seminal role of Hitler, he made the point that a few top leaders

could not carry out genocide on this scale, that the process was in fact remarkably decentralized. Those who carried out the final solution were specialists in all parts of German life. The bureaucrats were not just cogs in the wheel—they turned the wheel themselves. Their evil was no less great because they were merely carrying out orders.

"Second and even more chilling were the professionals—lawyers, soldiers, doctors. It was a little more difficult to conceive that they did not know the evil of their deeds.

"A third group, which he did not discuss but had on previous occasions, was the group of individuals who for various reasons of rewards and personal psyche were part of the process. But the bottom line, which he brought out clearly, pertains to all groups—none considered themselves to be evil. But they were.

"There are two other areas into which Professor Hilberg's research has carried him that are worth mentioning: how was it possible for the world to stand by and let this evil happen without halting or retarding the destruction? Another area that he explored involved the layers of conflicting interest within the Jewish community itself. This approach took a great deal of intellectual courage and a high degree of personal resilience."

Let me close my commentary at this Tribute today by saying that Raul Hilberg did indeed, in his life and research, take "the harder right rather than the easier wrong."

Well done, old colleague—au revoir. (*Read by Mark Stoler*)

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**Robert V. Daniels,  
Emeritus Professor of History,  
University of Vermont**

I knew Raul from the time the two of us began teaching at the University of Vermont. That was in 1956, now over half a century ago. I was a visiting lecturer in history, and he was assistant professor of political science. We often shared our thoughts about





the state of the world and the university, sometimes as he was walking past my house on South Prospect St. on his way home from work and found me trimming my hedge or shoveling snow, depending on the season. On occasion we met over lunch with other friends, and having Raul there was always fascinating.

The remarkable thing is that Raul and I hit it off so well despite our totally different backgrounds, he a refugee from Hitler-occupied Austria, I a descendent of many generations of Vermonters. We did not even agree in politics—he always called himself a Republican (though less convincingly in recent years), while I was a Democratic worker and office-holder. But Raul was a coolly objective man who always appreciated the exchange of ideas between critical minds. He was a conservative in the better sense, not ideological but more broadly, in his understandably skeptical view of human nature and institutions.

In his official assignment in Political Science at UVM to teach United States foreign policy, Raul subscribed to the Realist school, dubious about moralistic crusades (present as well as historic). That approach squared with his own sardonic outlook that nothing is likely to work out for the better. I even coined an adjective for this mindset – “Hilbergian” – though I must say that Raul became much less “Hilbergian” after he married his wife Gwen.

I went through some of Raul’s tribulations with him in trying to get the original edition of his magnum opus published. In retrospect the reluctance that he ran into among publishers seems quite unbelievable. But that was before the term “holocaust” had ever been applied to the horror of Hitler’s war against the Jews of Europe. I have a private theory, having studied and written on the 1960s, that it was the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the 1968 student uprisings in Europe that finally blasted the way open for appreciating the history of all victimized minorities.

Raul never put on any airs to match his international renown. He was always intellectually demanding, on himself as much as on others. Neither fame nor retirement slowed him down. To the end, he was working on new editions and translations of his work, and traveled constantly. He had many opportunities to leave UVM for big-name institutions, but he always

chose to remain here. For all his criticisms and discontents, this was his home.

Professionally Raul and I overlapped a bit in the study of bureaucracy, his the Nazi, mine the Stalinist. We both came to see some similar points even in American university bureaucracies. At UVM, Raul was a perennial campus gadfly and a thorn in the side of many administrations. He was dubious, for instance, about affirmative action when it collided with his standards of academic excellence. In fact, this issue had much to do with his resignation from his brief chairmanship of the Political Science Department. Before that, I had been vice president of the UVM chapter of AAUP when Raul was president of it and he resigned in protest over some matter of the administration’s fairness to the faculty, I don’t remember exactly what. But by this time, Raul’s scholarly standing around the world made him untouchable on campus.

I never attempted to follow all of Raul’s intense scholarship, though when I taught contemporary Europe I used his book and had him speak to my class. He was an unparalleled resource and knew every detail of the history of World War II. While of course he always thought of himself as a political scientist, I always thought of him as a historian, and a historian of the first rank. In any case, in the social sciences area I don’t think many American educational institutions have ever had a more inspiring intellectual model.

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**Garrison Nelson,  
Professor of Political Science,  
University of Vermont**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, and Gwen. My name is Garrison Nelson and I have been teaching political science at the University of Vermont since 1968. I am speaking today because Raul Hilberg requested that I be here. Raul Hilberg was tough, tenacious and a truth teller. He was my colleague for 23 years and my friend for 39. And in many ways he was my hero.



It was in Washington in 1968 that I first met Raul. I had been hired as a 25 year-old instructor in political science earlier that spring while Raul was on research leave in Europe and he did not hear my presentation. He wanted to check me out and took me to dinner one evening. We hit it off and it was then I learned that the two things that he disdained most were empty praise and feigned interest. One of the many Raul legends involves the wife of a short term UVM president who solicitously asked what he wrote about. “Dead Jews,” was the response. He had a mordant sense of humor.

I already knew of him. As I was preparing for my job interview in 1968 and living in New Hampshire, a librarian showed me an article indicating that Raul had just won the Anisfeld-Wolf Prize for the best book on inter-group relations. The award was for the revised paperback edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*. She pointed out that Raul was identified as being “at the University of Vermont,” not “of the University of Vermont.” She was puzzled by the preposition but Lyman Jay Gould, Raul’s colleague and the formidable chair who had hired me that spring, explained that Raul was engaged in ongoing battles with the long-time Dean of the Arts College and felt that “at” sent a message across the bow of that dean. The dean was George Kidder for whom the University’s most distinguished faculty award is named. In his last year on campus, he was given the Kidder Award and since I had also been nominated for it that year, I congratulated him on winning it. He and Kidder had fought often and Raul asked me what he should do. I said, “Take it. It will piss George off.” That made sense.

Much of his life was devoted to proving people wrong and it cost him greatly. He told me of his service as an 18 year-old in the U.S. Army in the closing days of World War II. As a native German speaker, he was made a scout and in the advance party entering German towns. He told me that he would stand in the town squares and declaim, “Deutsche ’raus” – ordering Germans out of their homes and into the squares much as the Nazis had done a few short years earlier in the Jewish neighborhoods, yelling “Juden ’raus.” Raul Hilberg was not a victim and he never fully appreciated or seemed to respect the nobility of victimhood that seemed to color most of the reminiscences of surviving

Jews after the war.

His father was a soldier and a hero who fought for Austria in the Great War. In 1938, Hitler engineered the *Anschluss* – the union of Austria with Germany. Because of Raul’s father’s war-time heroism, his comrades warned him that this was a different set of Germans and he was to get his wife and only child out of Austria as soon as possible. This was the time of “the territorial solution” and the family relocated to Cuba where Raul picked up a second language, Spanish. Then the family moved to Brooklyn where he attended high school and then Brooklyn College.

From Brooklyn College, he went on to graduate study at Columbia and became a student of the great Franz Neumann whose book *Behemoth* was the first academic masterpiece documenting the nature of the Nazi movement. Raul had worked in the War Documentation Department in Munich and buried himself in the captured archives when they had been brought to the states to complete his dissertation. However, Neumann’s death in 1954 led Raul to the office of William T.R. Fox, a professor of diplomacy. It was Fox who recommended that Raul’s dissertation be put up for a departmental award and publication by the Columbia University Press. He turned it down, contending that the dissertation was but “a fragment” of the whole story. When the book was finally completed, he submitted it to Princeton University Press, but with Hannah Arendt dismissing the book as “a simple report” it was rejected. Finally, after six years of rejection slips, it was accepted by Quadrangle Books in Chicago, a publisher no longer in existence, and it appeared in 1961. At the time, it was only the third book in any language to document this horrific event.

No longer a fragment, it was more than 700 double-columned pages long with an index prepared by Ann Gould, UVM’s Government Documents librarian and the wife of Jay Gould. It was not well-received. Two major sources of hostility greeted it. With the Cold War at its peak – 1961 was the year of the Bay of Pigs and the building of the Berlin Wall – Cold War academics were fearful that Hilberg’s book would make Americans less sympathetic to the plight of Germans who were the eastern buffer to the Soviet Union. To the Cold Warriors, the Nazis



had emerged mysteriously in 1933, took command of the German government for a dozen years, and in 1945 had quickly and completely disappeared into the mist, leaving a benign Germany as our newfound ally. Somehow, in that mindset, Adolf Hitler was a monstrous historic aberration and the mid-level bureaucrats and functionaries who had carried out the plans had only done so “under orders.” The fact that many of those same functionaries on whom our post-war government now relied had linked their careers in the Third Reich to the extermination of fellow human beings was an unnerving truth. Hilberg’s truth telling made them uncomfortable.

Raul’s lack of victimhood also brought hostility to the book from the survivors of the death camps and their relatives. He was not a victim and he was not writing a story about whom the Nazis killed but how they did it and why they did it. He was an analyst, not an advocate. He challenged the popularly accepted number of six million Jews lost in the death camps; he resisted for years using the term “holocaust” to describe what happened; he found more evidence of Jewish complicity and less evidence of resistance to the forced relocations; and he saw little nobility in the silent suffering.

He chose a very difficult path, one that often placed him at odds with most of the leading Jewish organizations in this country and in Europe; but his book was so magisterial that it could not be ignored even when a number of lesser scholars chose to leave him out of their bibliographies or reprinted his careful translations of documents without attribution.

Raul did not suffer fools gladly and unfortunately labeled some as fools when they could not easily come up with a title for a book or an article that he needed. He terrorized librarians and battled book editors. None of his books was published by a top-flight trade press and it was only in 2003 that a prestigious university press – Yale – brought out a three-volume edition of the book, 42 years after it first appeared in print. Even then there were issues. We met in the library as we often did and he said that the young (and exasperated) publicist for Yale said, “Professor Hilberg, you have been speaking to me for fifteen minutes. That is enough.” And she terminated the call. As he told me

that story, I thought to myself: déjà vu.

Raul was multi-lingual and woe be unto the departmental candidate whose dissertation was in comparative politics who could not speak or write in the languages of the nations that were studied. Raul could and did swear in at least three languages. He and Jay Gould would swear at each other in Spanish and he and Stan Staron, his co-editor on *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow*, swore at each other in German. It was a very lively department.

For those who only saw him at lunch in the Waterman Building or at Arts College meetings, he always seemed to be unhappy and kvetching about something that day or as our most beloved department colleague, Dick Warner, once remarked, “For you Raul, every day is Yom Kippur.”

Because Raul and I were often the only people in the Old Mill late afternoons and Saturdays, I had the privilege of spending a lot of time with him. I got to see a fuller Raul than most, and understood how that forbidding mien and sardonic sense of his covered the pain of a lifetime of struggle for himself and for his people whether he chose to acknowledge it or not.

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**Dr. Wolfgang Vorwerk,  
Consul-General,  
Federal Republic of Germany,  
Boston**

President Fogel,  
Mrs. Kahn-Fogel,  
Speakers,  
Guests,  
Mrs. Hilberg,

It was one year ago, on October 10, 2006, when I had the distinct and very special honor of presenting the *Grosse Verdienstkreuz mit Stern*, one of the highest levels of the Order of Merit of my country, to your husband. With this order of merit, Raul Hilberg was honoured by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German head of state, Horst Koehler,





for his invaluable contribution to the research and teaching on the Holocaust.

Mrs. Hilberg, I still remember every single moment of that day in October 2006: the ceremony in honor of your husband at Englesby House, the words of your husband on this occasion, his modesty, our talks with him afterwards, his walk with me through his beloved library and theater on the campus, the warm words he had for everybody we met at both locations. I could feel he was at home at this university.

Mrs. Hilberg, I am speaking only about one single day where I was side by side with your husband. What a tremendous loss his death must have been for you, Mrs. Hilberg, who shared an entire life with such a great man, such a great scholar and certainly a great father.

In his moving accounts, this great scholar, Raul Hilberg, described sufferings of European Jews which we cannot even begin to imagine, but it all happened. Raul Hilberg helped us Germans understand and explain for ourselves: once the Nazis had seized power, the failure took many forms in Germany. He helped us to understand and explain that the Holocaust cannot simply be blamed on “a demonic Hitler.” Raul Hilberg showed, more than anyone else, that all German state organizations and ministries, the military elite, business, banks, academia and the medical professions – that they all were directly involved in the Holocaust, in a crime against humanity, the Shoah, only a few years in our history, but unparalleled, without comparison, without precedent.

Unforgettable, Raul Hilberg’s chilling description: “As the Nazi regime developed over the years, the whole structure of decision making was changed: first laws, then decrees implementing laws, then quiet orders within the bureaucracy, finally no orders at all. Everybody knew what he was supposed to do.”

And in reading Raul Hilberg’s work, there is no escaping from the question: where would I have stood? One is tempted to say: of course, on the side of the victims, on the side of my Jewish neighbors, on the side of brave men like German consul Ferdinand Duckwitz and Helmuth Graf von Moltke, whose 96 year old widow, Freya von Moltke, still lives in Norwich, Vermont. They both, Ferdinand Duckwitz and Helmuth Graf von Moltke, contributed to the

rescue of thousands of Danish Jews in 1943.

But the only answer to the question of where would I have stood is: there can be no answer. Because no one is entitled in retrospect to see himself or herself on the side of the victims, on the side of the righteous, on the side of the heroes, on the side of the resistance fighters. I cannot even say as my grandparents could:

- yes of course, I would have extended a hand of help and hope to my Jewish neighbors,
- I would have supplied them with food,
- I would have brought my friend, a Jewish lawyer, into safety in the turmoil of the *Reichskristallnacht*,

I cannot say as my mother could, of course, I would have kept on playing with the Jewish children in my neighborhood. There can be no such answer because as a German – no matter if born before or after 1945 - I just cannot opt out of Germany’s past by assuming a stance of moral superiority, as Federal President Herzog rightly said in a speech in the Plenary Chamber of the German Bundestag on January 27, 1999. Not to opt out of German history - this is an issue of personal morality and honesty.

As Germans we owe this honesty to the victims of the Holocaust and to the survivors. We owe this honesty to people like Raul Hilberg and his parents who had to flee Austria, their fatherland, their Heimat, in 1938, in order to survive; we owe it to Raul Hilberg, the scholar, to his legacy, because we Germans can only fully take the responsibility for the consequences of the past if we face, each for himself, this past with honesty.

That is my tribute to Raul Hilberg, to a man I met only one day in my life, a day which made a difference. Thank you.





**Daniel Mark Fogel,  
President of the University of Vermont**

I am humbled to share this podium with such a distinguished array of speakers and honored to share this afternoon with so many who knew Professor Raul Hilberg well as a colleague, a teacher, and a friend.

I would like to take a few moments to consider what Professor Hilberg meant - and continues to mean - to the University of Vermont. We were very fortunate to have a scholar of Raul Hilberg's stature at our university. In 1956, at the outset of his career, this young man with the freshly minted doctorate was truly an academic pioneer. And when he first journeyed to Burlington more than fifty years ago to accept an interim teaching appointment, this place must have felt something like a remote northern outpost.

Raul's thesis advisor at Columbia University had counseled him that studying the Holocaust amounted to taboo and said the nation's very top tier of research universities would shun him. He was largely correct. It was the very courageousness of Raul Hilberg's research that narrowed this brilliant young scholar's options and brought him to us. We are grateful for that and grateful that the professor and the university would prove a good match. Years later, at the time of his retirement in 1991, Raul looked back upon his career and reflected that there were times after his published work brought validation and renown when he could have elected to move on. "But by then I was not about to leave the University of Vermont, which had provided me with a very good home," Professor Hilberg said. "It had taken me about eight years to find a congenial and happy situation here. But I did find it."

Though Professor Hilberg would publish his seminal scholarly work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, in 1961, many years would pass until the study of the Holocaust became standard subject matter in classrooms at the University of Vermont and throughout the nation. Those fortunate to study the Holocaust under the guidance of Professor Hilberg received a rare opportunity; all who took any of his classes were touched by the power of an exceptional teacher. University of Vermont alumni honored him

with the Kidder Outstanding Faculty Award in 1988, recognition of the fact that words, moments, lessons from Professor Raul Hilberg tended to stay with a student for a lifetime. This man who would prove himself as one of the world's great scholars was originally hired to teach at the University of Vermont. He never lost sight of that, never saw teaching as a conflict, but as a complement to his scholarship.

Professor Hilberg's words: "I really believe that in a college what is central is to awaken something in a student, to make the subject *alive*. The student and the professor need to find common ground." And that they did. Consider the memories of some of those who studied with him: "More than thirty years after sitting in Professor Hilberg's class, I still quote him. 'Know what you're looking at. Study it. Never take anything at face value.'" Another student remembered: "Hilberg's classes were extremely challenging, but I and my fellow classmates hung on every word he said. With him, we explored the whole reason for the existence of government. He taught us to piece together the reasons why government fails and look for the warning signs." And one colleague's words give a sense of the respect he drew from his fellow faculty: "His words came out in perfectly structured paragraphs, eloquent with a quiet gravity, so compelling that every student in the class was transfixed from the moment Raul began speaking until the bell rang for the end of class."

While his teaching shaped generations of students, Professor Hilberg's publications, his knowledge, and his analysis reached throughout the world. Fellow scholars would build upon his work; artists found both inspiration and grounding in his exhaustive, unblinking documentation of the Holocaust. Author Herman Wouk, who, with deep regret, was unable to attend today's tribute, cited Professor Hilberg as a prime resource upon which he would form two of his novels, *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*. Wouk fondly recalled his best memory of Raul, their "long walks on the grounds of the University of Vermont, talking out the global aspects of the story I was trying to create." Claude Lanzmann, the documentary filmmaker behind *Shoah*, called Professor Hilberg's landmark book "formidable, magnificent, monstrous." Said Lanzmann: "Hilberg was a man of details and that





is what I especially liked.”

A man of details. Indeed. Imagine the young scholar sitting down with the documentation from the Nuremberg trials —40,000 documents for the prosecution; 100,000 for the defense. Picture him poring over Nazi papers seized by the U.S. Army, taking careful notes on index cards, then sitting at a small table in his parents’ apartment beginning to write the thesis that would be the kernel of the great works to come. With his dry wit, Raul was known to refer to himself as a “writer of footnotes.” Such self-effacement cloaked the passion for knowledge of a true scholar, the immersion in detail, the thrill in discovery, the deeply rooted drive to know.

Professor Hilberg once acknowledged that he initially thought his study of the Holocaust would be a five-year commitment, not a lifetime’s work. To understand Raul’s doggedness, his sheer endurance, one need look no further than that passion for the advancement of knowledge. “You get a partial picture of what happened,” he once said, “and you want to know the rest.”

Our university and our community were graced by Raul Hilberg’s presence for more than fifty years. Spurred by the Hilberg legacy, the Carolyn & Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies maintains the University of Vermont’s position as a leader in the field he essentially created, and soon the center will take another step forward with the renovation of historic Billings Hall, its new permanent home. In September, UVM’s Board of Trustees approved the Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professorship in the College of Arts and Sciences.

We can honor Professor Hilberg’s legacy in no better ways than these, through teaching and scholarship that deepens our knowledge of the Holocaust and inspires the next generation with the courage to study its terrible reality. Michael Berenbaum, who worked closely with Raul on the creation of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., once noted that Professor Hilberg “was unique among senior scholars because he has so much faith in the young.” Perhaps that is because Raul Hilberg never lost the courage and the faith of that young man who sat down at the table with a staggering assembly of facts and a

thesis that few wanted to read.

Upon his retirement, someone asked Professor Hilberg the inevitable question one is asked at such a milestone. Ever honest, a bit ornery, his humble response suggests the measure of the man and his greatness: “If I had known in the beginning what this would entail, would I have done it? I can’t give an answer to that. It might be necessary to be young and to be able to fool yourself to take on serious work.”

Gwen, on behalf of the entire University of Vermont community, Rachel and I extend our heartfelt condolences to you and to Raul’s children Deborah and David. Your loving and enduring support coupled with your steadfast belief in Raul contributed to his remarkable accomplishments.

Thank you for being with us today to honor the life of Professor Raul Hilberg. I hope you will all join us for a reception in Billings Hall immediately following the ceremony.

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**Paul A. Shapiro,**  
**Director, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies,**  
**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

Authoritative, passionate, magisterial, distinguished, dispassionate, monumental, brilliant, powerful, definitive. People have used these words to describe Raul Hilberg and his work for more than 50 years. All are appropriate, and will remain so for as long as human beings seek to fathom what we today call the Holocaust.

And then there are Raul’s own words—less grandiose, uttered or penned with humility before his subject, and emanating from his conviction that the Holocaust is not past history, but a warning about today and all future history. This was the warning he posited, too subtly for some to grasp, in his *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders* (1992). There was as well his concern with people who “are ignored because they are powerless,” which led him at the conclusion of a symposium on the fate of the Roma (Gypsies) during the Holocaust that took place at our Museum to call



for a world of “justice for all.” Raul’s “self-imposed responsibility for the truth,” even if directed painfully inward, rang out clearly from his memoir, *The Politics of Memory* (1996). We witnessed his self-effacing written acknowledgements in 1967 in the second edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, that “We shall never know the whole story”; and over 30 years later in his *Sources of Holocaust Research* (2001), even in the face of the universal praise heaped on his extraordinary body of work, “...there is no finality. Findings are always subject to correction and reformulation” (p. 204). Finally, remember his commitment, expressed so eloquently in his 1967 postscript to the second edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, through which as a student I was introduced to Raul Hilberg’s work, to “reduce our ignorance as relentlessly as once these events were pressed.” (1967 Quadrangle Edition, p.771)

And “reduce our ignorance” he did! Raul Hilberg is recognized the world over as the founder of the scholarly field of Holocaust Studies. His *The Destruction of the European Jews*, first published in 1961 and painstakingly updated in the decades that followed, remains even after 46 years the most comprehensive, most influential and most broadly consulted single historical work in the field. This masterwork and Raul Hilberg’s later works established the parameters within which we continue to expand our understanding of the Holocaust.

Raul’s family fled Vienna following the *Anschluss* in 1939 and arrived in the United States via Cuba. By war’s end the teenage Hilberg had returned to Europe in a U.S. Army infantry uniform. Raul was proud of his service. Listening to him tell stories of his infantry tour in Germany over dinner at Fort McNair, and hearing him describe his revulsion at the whites only/coloreds only park benches that leaped out at him as déjà vu on his return from Europe to the United States was an experience I shall never forget!

Raul was part of the microfilming operation at the “Torpedo Factory” in Alexandria, Virginia, that preserved copies of the millions of pages of Nazi documentation that had been seized by U.S. forces. Those microfilms became the basis of most Holocaust research for the next generation and a model for the

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s effort to “rescue the evidence” of the Holocaust through archival microfilming. Lest anyone have any doubt, that effort, which has thus far taken the Museum to over 40 countries and brought together in the Museum’s archives some 60 million pages of Holocaust-era documentation, was inspired at the outset, and encouraged from then until now, by Raul Hilberg. His interest was typically intense. Raul never visited the Museum without spending hours examining the latest new microfilm collections.

Raul was an original member of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust appointed in 1978, and served on the United States Holocaust Memorial Council from 1980 through 1988. He served on the Museum’s Academic Committee, which guides our scholarly efforts and our archival acquisition program, from its inception until 2005. He was a stalwart of the Fellowships and Academic Publications Subcommittees of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies as well. He gave unstintingly of his time. Dedicated to good teaching, in 1999 he led the Museum’s first summer seminar for college and university faculty planning to teach about the Holocaust—a program that has become one of our most important annual activities. Later he led a seminar for visiting scholars and Museum staff on the sources of Holocaust research. He spoke frequently at Museum symposia and conferences, and was always “passionate,” “authoritative,” “majesterial.” And just two years ago Raul delivered to a packed auditorium the Museum’s 11<sup>th</sup> Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Annual Lecture. His topic? “Auschwitz through the Lens of Its Builders.” As always, Raul was focused on the heart of the matter. As always, he spoke in perfect paragraphs, for the requested 50 minutes to the minute, with no notes. “Brilliant”? Yes indeed.

In short, Raul Hilberg, Professor of Political Science at this University, from his home base here played a unique and exceptional role in the study and teaching of the Holocaust around the world and in the life of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in his adopted nation’s capital, some 400 miles to the south.

When I became Director of the Museum’s Center





for Advanced Holocaust Studies, I asked Raul Hilberg what he thought were the most urgent things I should do. “My God,” said the editor of *Documents of Destruction* (1971), and I know you can all hear his intonation, “collect documents...and bring young scholars here to study them. There is so much we don’t know!”

Raul’s input was worth taking seriously. The visiting scholars program of the Museum now brings some 25 dissertation-writing, post-doctoral, and even senior scholars to the Museum each year on fellowship, and they are producing a steady stream of new publications and new insights. They are carrying on Raul’s life mission to “reduce our ignorance.” It is for us to acknowledge that he knew that would be the case.

In recognition of the unique contribution Raul Hilberg made to the field of Holocaust Studies and to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Museum has established and will award each year the Raul Hilberg Fellowship in his honor and memory, intended to foster the development of new generations of Holocaust scholars. His legacy endures through the Museum and through the countless scholars whose lives he touched and whose work he inspired. Our institution would be a shadow of itself if not for his inspiration, his involvement and his commitment to it.

Thank you.

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*This tribute to Professor Hilberg was delivered by Jerold D. Jacobson ('62) on the occasion of the annual Hilberg lecture at the University of Vermont on 12 November 2007. Mr. Jacobson is a long-time supporter of the Carolyn and Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies and the sponsor the Hilberg lecture at UVM each year.*

**Jerold D. Jacobson '62, Attorney,  
Remarks at the annual Hilberg Lecture,  
12 November 2007**

Professor Emeritus Raul Hilberg died on August 4, 2007 at the age of 81. Until his final illness, he was actively engaged in his research, writing and teaching about the Holocaust.

Despite determined opposition from most quarters,

he almost single-handedly established and legitimized the study of the Holocaust in the United States and worldwide beginning in 1961 with the publication of his major work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. This comprehensive work, which in its second iteration in 1985 was referred to by his publisher, over his strong objection I might add, as the “Revised and Definitive” book about the Holocaust, described in painstaking and excruciating detail the Nazi process of the destruction of over five million European Jews. Professor Hilberg repeatedly made it clear that the characterization “definitive” was an impossibility. The study of the Holocaust and, therefore, his book, was forever evolving. This comprehensive and complex book, in subsequent years and then decades, *ironically* was simply referred to as “The Destruction.”

Professor Hilberg taught at UVM for 35 years until his retirement at age 65 in 1991. On that occasion, UVM hosted an International Symposium in his honor. Leading scholars, as well as an author of historical fiction and a documentary film maker, both of great renown, all made illuminating presentations. Among them were Professors Yehuda Bauer, Christopher Browning, Herman Wouk and Claude Landsman. Professor Hilberg responded by giving a spellbinding lecture about the central role of Adolph Hitler in the Holocaust. The Symposium was one of the greatest events in the 200+ year history of the University of Vermont. Likewise, Professor Hilberg was, without a doubt, one of the greatest UVM scholars and teachers. His efforts and accomplishments brought great honor to UVM, its faculty and students.

Professor Hilberg came to UVM in 1956 because his subject, which was being consciously avoided worldwide, made other colleges and universities uninterested in him. However, within 3 or 4 years of his arrival, he was considered one of the great teachers in UVM’s College of Arts and Sciences. By 1958, which is the year I arrived on campus, he was so skilled and respected a lecturer it seemed that he had been teaching for twenty years. Amazingly, he didn’t teach his first Holocaust course until, I believe, the 1980’s because there was little interest in the subject nationwide.

Many of us who knew Raul viewed him as refracted through our own personal prisms. For me, he was a





life-long role model; and in that very personal sense he was a mentor. Why was that? Raul, as I perceived him, displayed the following outstanding characteristics that I sought, consciously or unconsciously, to emulate, including courage and integrity. Professor Hilberg, who became a leading figure on the UVM faculty and attained an important role in faculty governance, resigned from these positions when, in his view, affirmative action initiatives trumped academic qualifications in the granting of tenure. He refused entreaties from the Government of Austria, including its Prime Minister, to serve on a Holocaust Commission because he did not believe that Austria, even after thirty to forty years, was willing to face up to its true role in the Holocaust. In the 1990's, when it was in vogue to attack Switzerland about its response to the Holocaust, Professor Hilberg refused to pile-on. Similarly, he rejected sensational allegations about the conduct of IBM and the Ford Motor Company during this dark period.

Moreover, his qualities of discipline and determination are evident in his having toiled with the same "study of evil" for 60 years. During the 1950s and

1960s, he was isolated and lonely in Burlington which was not the city it has now become. But he persevered. Oftentimes, as we passed under his lighted window at the Old Mill late at night, he was still in his office working. His solitary figure was occasionally observed walking up the Main Street hill after a movie let out at the Flynn Theatre. I regret that we didn't have enough self-assurance to walk alongside him and strike up a conversation. His father said to him "Burlington must be a disaster for you" - and he apparently was right on the mark - but Professor Hilberg relentlessly continued his pursuit.

Professor Hilberg was a rigorous teacher. To succeed in a Hilberg course was an accomplishment, even a badge of honor. You were entitled to be taken seriously by your friends, peers and faculty. I once received a 62 on one of his mid-term exams in Geopolitics. Why you may ask were fifteen or so students taking a Geopolitics course? Because Professor Hilberg was teaching it, no other reason!. Well, my devastation over the grade quickly turned to elation when he told the class, both mournfully and with resignation, that sixty-two (62) was the highest

### **Upcoming Events:**

*The Maiden and the Tree:  
Anne Frank and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

**David Barnouw**  
Netherlands Institute for War Documentation

**Thursday, 3 April 2008**

**3:00 p.m.**

**Billings North Lounge**

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*Remembering Raul Hilberg:  
A Conversation with Christopher Browning  
and Saul Friedländer*

**Professor Christopher Browning**  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Professor Saul Friedländer**  
University of California at Los Angeles

**Sunday, April 13, 2008**

**2:00 p.m.**

**Davis Auditorium  
Fletcher Allen Health Care, UVM**





grade on the exam.

His lectures have accurately been described as spellbinding, riveting, symphonic, precise, and the like – and it was true. My only regret is that as young, fun-seeking students, we didn't fully appreciate his talents and offerings at the time. His influence on his students and campus-wide was enormous and can be related by the following episode: During the Cuban missile crisis, students at UVM carried on as much as before. That unjustified normalcy only lasted until word was filtered down the corridors of Lafayette Hall that Professor Hilberg had observed in class that the world was on a brink of a nuclear war. Only then did we gasp and take heed of the true import of those events.

In closing, I would like to refer to the last pages of Professor Hilberg's brief auto-biography, *The Politics of Memory*. In it, he quotes a letter written in 1962 by the German Historian/Survivor H.F. Adler, which was brought to his attention by an interviewer in 1992. Adler said the following about Raul Hilberg:

To be noted is Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Surely you have heard of this work. It is until now the most significant

accomplishment in this topic area and it is not likely to be surpassed very soon, even though it is by far not yet the final portrayal. No one, until now, has seen and formulated the total horrible process so clearly. The number of small errors and omissions do not matter seriously, and so far as I can see, they can be extinguished in a new edition. What moves me in this book is the hopelessness of the author, who was born in 1926, and who came to the United States before the war, surely from Germany to which he returned at the end of the war with the U.S. Army. In 1948, Hilberg began his work. Therefore, he already has the viewpoint of a generation, which does not feel itself affected directly, but which looked at these events from afar, bewildered, bitter and embittered, accusing and critical, not only vis-à-vis the Germans (how else), but also the Jews and all the nations which looked on. At the end nothing remains but despair and doubt about everything, because for Hilberg there is only recognition, perhaps also a grasp, but certainly no understanding . . .

***Publications to Look For:***

Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia (eds.), *The Arts in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006) [NOW IN PAPERBACK]

Francis R. Nicosia, *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) [APRIL 2008]

Susanne J. Learmonth, "*Dear Otto*": *Lifelines Across the Atlantic During the Holocaust* (Carolyn and Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies, 2008) [JUNE 2008]

Robert Bernheim and David Scrase (eds.), *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008) [LATE 2008]





# The Bulletin of the Carolyn & Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies At the University of Vermont

## Volume 12, Number 2

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