The Jewish Holocaust

INTRODUCTION

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

This impact is expressed in the diverse debates about the Holocaust. Among the questions asked are: How could the systematic murder of millions of helpless individuals have sprung from one of the most developed and “civilized” of Western states? What are the links to European anti-Semitism? How central a figure was Adolf Hitler in the genesis and unfolding of the slaughter? What part did “ordinary men” and “ordinary Germans” play in the extermination campaign?
How extensive was Jewish resistance? What was the role of the Allies (notably Britain, France, the USSR, and the United States), both before and during the Second World War, in abandoning Jews to destruction at Nazi hands? And what is the relationship between the Jewish Holocaust and the postwar state of Israel? This chapter addresses these issues in its later sections, while also alighting on the debate over the alleged “uniqueness” of the Shoah.

| ORIGINS |

Until the later nineteenth century, Jews were uniquely stigmatized within the European social hierarchy, often through stereotypical motifs that endure, in places, to the present. Medieval Christianity “held the Jews to violate the moral order of the world. By rejecting Jesus, by allegedly having killed him, the Jews stood in defiant opposition to the otherwise universally accepted conception of God and Man, denigrating and defiling, by their very existence, all that is sacred. As such, Jews came to represent symbolically and discursively much of the evil in the world.” Jews—especially male Jews—were reviled as “uprooted, troublesome, malevolent, shiftless.” The Catholic Church, and later the Protestant offshoot founded by the virulently anti-Semitic Martin Luther, assailed Jews as “thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom.” The most primitive and powerful myth was the so-called “blood libel”: the claim that Jews seized and murdered Gentile children in order to use their blood in the baking of ceremonial bread for the Passover celebration. Fueled by this and other fantasies, anti-Jewish pogroms—localized campaigns of violence, killing, and repression—scarred European Jewish history. The spread of the Black Death—bubonic plague—throughout Europe in the mid-14th century led to a hysterical scapegoating of Jews, accompanied by massacres “of a quite new extent and thoroughness”; rumors and accusations that the malady was caused by Jews poisoning water supplies “became a pretext for the systematic killing of entire Jewish communities.” At various points in late-medieval and early-modern Europe, Jews were liable to be rounded up and expelled, most notoriously from Spain and Portugal in 1492.

The rise of modernity and the nation-state recast traditional anti-semitism in new and contradictory guises. (The term “anti-semitism” is a product of this era, coined by the German Wilhelm Marr in 1879.) On one hand, Jews were viewed as enemies of modernity. Cloistered in the cultural isolation of the ghetto (to which previous generations had consigned them), they could never be truly part of the nation-state, which was rapidly emerging as the fulcrum of modern identity. On the other hand, for sectors suspicious of or threatened by change, Jews were seen as dangerous agents of modernity: as key players in oppressive economic institutions. They were also reviled as urbanite, cosmopolitan elements who threatened the unity and identity of the Volk (people). The Jews’ “general readiness to embrace multiple identities” and “their recognition of the multiplicity, complexity, and dynamism of identity formation” challenged “the
Figure 6.1 Jews were scapegoated and persecuted by many Christian regimes and populations in Europe. A woodcut from 1493 depicts a mass burning of Jews, who were often targeted en masse for supposedly bringing the plague and other disasters to European populations.


Figure 6.2 The Nazis revived and vigorously inculcated anti-Semitic stereotypes. This cartoon from the propaganda newspaper *Der Stürmer* (The Stormtrooper) depicts innocent Aryan womanhood about to be ensnared and drained of her blood by the monstrous Jewish spider. That the monster’s face is male is no accident; it is virtually never otherwise in Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda. Such masculinized and sexualized images were used to “prime” Nazibenchmen and killing squads—and the German population at large—for first rounding up Jewish men (November 1938), and later mass-murdering them (summer 1941). The genocidal massacres of the early phase of the “Holocaust by Bullets” was, in turn, the harbinger or “tripwire” for the onset of root-and-branch Holocaust. See “The Turn to Mass Murder,” below, and Chapter 13, pp. 325–332.

Source: The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies/Wikimedia Commons.
narrow nationalisms prevailing in Europe at the time... which sought to subordinate all such identifications to those of the organic Völker of a well-defined national territory.

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

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

The result was political extremism. Its prime architect and beneficiary was the NSDAP (the National Socialist or "Nazi" party), founded by Adolf Hitler and sundry alienated colleagues. Hitler, a decorated First World War veteran and failed artist from Vienna, assumed the task of resurrecting Germany and imposing its hegemony on all Europe. This vision would lead to the deaths of tens of millions of people. But it was underpinned in Hitler's mind by an epic hatred of Jews—"these black parasites of the nation," as he called them in Mein Kampf (My Struggle), the tirade he penned while in prison following an abortive coup attempt in 1923.

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

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

With the Nuremberg edicts, and the threat of worse measures looming, increasing numbers of Jews fled abroad. The abandonment of homes and capital in Germany meant penury abroad—the Nazis would allow only a fraction of one’s wealth to be exported. The unwillingness of the outside world to accept Jewish refugees meant that many more Jews longed to leave than actually could. Hundreds of those who remained committed suicide as Nazi rule imposed upon them a “social death.”
The synagogue in Baden-Baden, Germany, gutted by fire on Kristallnacht, November 9–10, 1938. While many Germans strongly supported the Nazis’ anti-Semitic policies, many also bristled at the violence of the “Night of Broken Glass,” and the “un-German” disorder it typified. The Nazis monitored public opinion carefully. Such sentiments prompted them, when the time came, to impose a “final solution of the Jewish problem,” to “outsource” the mass extermination to the occupied territories in Poland and the USSR.

Source: Yad Vashem, Jerusalem/Wikimedia Commons.

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

“ORDINARY GERMANS” AND THE NAZIS

In recent years, a great deal of scholarly energy has been devoted to Hitler’s and the Nazis’ evolving relationship with the German public. Two broad conclusions may be drawn from the work of Robert Gellately, Eric Johnson, and David Bankier—and also from one of the most revelatory personal documents of the Nazi era, the diaries of Victor Klemperer (1881–1960). (Klemperer was a Jew from the German city of Dresden who survived the Nazi period, albeit under conditions of privation and persecution, thanks to his marriage to an “Aryan” woman, Eva.)
The first insight is that Nazi rule, and the isolation of the Jews for eventual expulsion and extermination, counted on a broad wellspring of popular support. This was based on Hitler’s pledge to return Germany to social order, economic stability, and world-power status. The basic thesis of Gellately’s book, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, is that “Hitler was largely successful in getting the backing, one way or another, of the great majority of citizens.” Moreover, this was based on the anathematizing of whole classes of citizens: “the Germans generally turned out to be proud and pleased that Hitler and his henchmen were putting away certain kinds of people who did not fit in, or who were regarded as ‘outsiders,’ ‘asocials,’ ‘useless eaters,’ or ‘criminals.’”

Victor Klemperer’s diaries provide an “extraordinarily acute analysis of the day-to-day workings of German life under Hitler” and “a singular chronicle of German society’s progressive Nazification.” Klemperer oscillated between a conviction that German society had become thoroughly Nazified, and the ironic conviction (given his expulsion from the body politic) that the Germany he loved would triumph. “I certainly no longer believe that [the Nazi regime] has enemies inside Germany,” he wrote in May 1936. “The majority of the people is content, a small group accepts Hitler as the lesser evil, no one really wants to be rid of him. . . . And all are afraid for their livelihood, their life, all are such terrible cowards.” Yet as late as March 1940, with the Second World War well underway, “I often ask myself where all the wild anti-Semitism is. For my part I encounter much sympathy, people help me out, but fearfully of course.” He noted numerous examples of verbal contempt, but also a surprising number of cases where colleagues and acquaintances went out of their way to greet him warmly, and even police officers who accorded him treatment that was “very courteous, almost comically courteous.” “Every Jew has his Aryan angel,” one of his fellow inmates in an overcrowded communal house told him in 1941.

Nonetheless, there is a scholarly consensus that the German public was largely indifferent to the plight and persecution of the Jews, evincing discomfort and concern only when it (a) confronted them directly, and offended their sense of civic order, and (b) made them fearful of retribution by “the Jews,” an anxiety that reflected the anti-Semitic trope of an all-powerful global Jewry. By the time Klemperer and his wife had been consigned to communal housing, he had been stripped of his job, pension, house, and typewriter, with no apparent protest by the German population against these persecutory measures. He would shortly lose his right to indulge even in his cherished cigarettes. In September 1941, Klemperer was forced to put on a yellow Star of David identifying him as a Jew. It left him feeling “shattered”: nearly a year later, he would describe the star as “torture—I can resolve a hundred times to pay no attention, it remains torture.” Hundreds of miles to the east, the program of mass killing was gearing up, as Klemperer and other Jews—not to mention ordinary Germans—were increasingly aware.

If Jews came to be the prime targets of Nazi demonization and marginalization, they were not the only ones, and for some years they were not necessarily the main ones. Communists (depicted as closely linked to Jewry) and other political opponents, handicapped and senile Germans, homosexuals, Roma (Gypsies), Polish intellectuals, vagrants, and other “asocial” elements all occupied the attention
of the Nazi authorities during this period, and were the victims of “notorious achievements in human destruction” exceeding the persecution of the Jews until 1941. Of these groups, political opponents (especially communists) and the handicapped and senile were most at risk of extreme physical violence, torture, and murder. “The political and syndical [trade union] left,” wrote Arno Mayer, “remained the principal target of brutal repression well past the time of the definitive consolidation of the new regime in July–August 1934.” In the slaughter of the handicapped, meanwhile, the Nazis first “discovered that it was possible to murder multitudes,” and that “they could easily recruit men and women to do the killings.”

Box 6a explores the fate of political oppositionists and the handicapped under Nazi rule in greater detail.

THE TURN TO MASS MURDER

I also took part in the day before yesterday’s huge mass killing [of Jews in Belarus]... When the first truckload [of victims] arrived my hand was slightly trembling when shooting, but one gets used to this. When the tenth load arrived I was already aiming more calmly and shot securely at the many women, children and infants... Infants were flying in a wide circle through the air and we shot them still in flight, before they fell into the pit and into the water. Let’s get rid of this scum that tossed all of Europe into the war...

Walter Mattner, a Viennese clerk recruited for service in the Einsatzgruppen during the “Holocaust by Bullets”; letter to his wife (?), October 5, 1941

Between the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 and the onset of full-scale extermination in mid-1941, the Nazis were hard at work consolidating and confining the Jews under their control. The core policy in the occupied territories of the East was ghettoization: confinement of Jews in overcrowded neighborhoods of major cities. One could argue that with ghettoization came genocidal intent: “The Nazis sought to create inhuman conditions in the ghettos, where a combination of obscene overcrowding, deliberate starvation... and outbreaks of typhus and cholera would reduce Jewish numbers through ‘natural wastage.’”

Certainly, the hundreds of thousands of Jews who died in the ghettos are numbered among the victims of the Holocaust.

In the two years following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, some 1.8 million Jews were rounded up and murdered, mostly by point-blank rifle fire, in what the Catholic priest Patrick Desbois has dubbed “the Holocaust by Bullets.” The direct genocidal agents included the so-called Einsatzgruppen, four death-squad battalions—some 3,000 men in all—who followed behind the regular German army. They were accompanied by SS formations and police units filled out with middle-aged recruits plucked from civilian duty in Germany—such as the “ordinary men” of Reserve Police Battalion 101, studied by both historian Christopher Browning and political scientist Daniel Goldhagen (see Further Study; Figures 6.10–6.11). Most of the killings occurred before the machinery of industrial killing was erected in the death camps of Occupied Poland in spring 1942. They continued mercilessly thereafter, hunting down
the last Jews still in flight or hiding. Bruno Mayrhofer, a German gendarme in Ukraine, reported in chillingly clinical language:

On 7 May 1943, 21.00 hours, following a confidential report [n.b. probably by a Ukrainian collaborator], 8 Jews, that is 3 men, 2 women and 3 children were flushed out of a well-camouflaged hole in the ground in an open field not far from the post here, and all of them were [“]shot while trying to escape[“]. This case concerned Jews from Pohrebyshche who had lived in this hole in the ground for almost a year. The Jews did not have anything else in their possession except their tattered clothing. ... The burial was carried out immediately on the spot.31
BOX 6.1 THE “HOLOCAUST BY BULLETS” IN MICROCOSM: DUBNO, UKRAINE, OCTOBER 1942

One of the most dramatic pieces of evidence submitted at the Nuremberg trials of 1946–1947 was the affidavit of Hermann Gräbe, a German engineer who observed the mass slaughter of the Jewish population of Dubno, Ukraine. Gräbe’s testimony, which was also cited by the Nuremberg tribunal in passing its verdicts on Nazi génocidaires, provides an extraordinary eyewitness account of an ordinary massacre—one of hundreds of such slaughters that the Nazis perpetrated during the “Holocaust by Bullets” of 1941–1942.

On October 5, 1942, at the time of my visit to the construction offices in Dubno, my foreman, Hubert Moennikes, living at 21 Aussenmühlenweg, Hamburg—Haarburg, told me that some Dubno Jews had been shot near the building in three huge ditches about 30 meters long and 3 meters deep. The number of people killed daily was about 1,500. The 5,000 Jews who had lived in Dubno before the pogrom were all marked for liquidation. Since the executions took place in the presence of my employee, he was painfully impressed by them.

Accompanied by Moennikes, I then went to the work area. I saw great mounds of earth about 30 meters long and 2 high. Several trucks were parked nearby. Armed Ukrainian militia were making people get out, under the surveillance of SS soldiers. The same militiamen were responsible for guard duty and driving the trucks. The people in the trucks wore the regulation yellow pieces of cloth that identified them as Jews on the front and back of their clothing.

Figure 6.6 Hermann Gräbe, Holocaust witness.
Source: Courtesy Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.
Moennikes and I went straight toward the ditches without being stopped. When we neared the mound, I heard a series of rifle shots close by. The people from the trucks—men, women and children—were forced to undress under the supervision of an SS soldier with a whip in his hand. They were obliged to put their effects in certain spots: shoes, clothing, and underwear separately. I saw a pile of shoes, about 800–1,000 pairs, great heaps of underwear and clothing. Without weeping or crying out, these people undressed and stood together in family groups, embracing each other and saying goodbye while waiting for a sign from the SS soldier, who stood on the edge of the ditch, a whip in his hand, too. During the fifteen minutes I stayed there, I did not hear a single complaint, or plea for mercy. I watched a family of about eight: a man and woman about fifty years old, surrounded by their children of about one, eight, and ten, and two big girls about twenty and twenty-four. An old lady, her hair completely white, held the baby in her arms, rocking it, and singing it a song. The infant was crying aloud with delight. The parents watched the groups with tears in their eyes. The father held the ten-year-old boy by the hand, speaking softly to him: the child struggled to hold back his tears. Then the father pointed a finger to the sky, and, stroking the child’s head, seemed to be explaining something. At this moment, the SS near the ditch called

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Figure 6.7 Members of an Einsatzgruppe death squad execute Jewish children and women from the Mizocz ghetto in Wolyn, Ukraine, on October 14, 1942. Wolyn is only 29 km from Dubno, where Hermann Gräbe witnessed a similar genocidal massacre on October 5.

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).
something to his comrade. The latter counted off some twenty people and ordered them behind the mound. The family of which I have just spoken was in the group.

I still remember the young girl, slender and dark, who, passing near me, pointed at herself, saying, “twenty-three [years old].” I walked around the mound and faced a frightful common grave. Tightly packed corpses were heaped so close together that only the heads showed. Most were wounded in the head and the blood flowed over their shoulders. Some still moved. Others raised their hands and turned their heads to show that they were still alive. The ditch was two-thirds full. I estimate that it held a thousand bodies. I turned my eyes toward the man who had carried out the execution. He was an SS man; he was seated, legs swinging, on the narrow edge of the ditch; an automatic rifle rested on his knees and he was smoking a cigarette. The people, completely naked, climbed down a few steps cut in the clay wall and stopped at the spot indicated by the SS man. Facing the dead and wounded, they spoke softly to them. Then I heard a series of rifle shots. I looked in the ditch and saw their bodies contorting, their heads, already inert, sinking on the corpses beneath. The blood flowed from the nape of their necks. I was astonished not to be ordered away, but I noticed two or three uniformed postmen nearby. A new batch of victims approached the place. They climbed down into the ditch, lined up in front of the previous victims, and were shot.

On the way back, while rounding the mound, I saw another full truck, which had just arrived. This truck contained only the sick and crippled. Women already naked were undressing an old woman with an emaciated body, her legs frightfully thin. She was held up by two people and seemed paralyzed. The naked people led her behind the mound. I left the place with Moennikes and went back to Dubno in a car.

The next morning, returning to the construction, I saw some thirty naked bodies lying thirty to fifty yards from the ditch. Some were still alive; they stared into space with a set look, seeming not to feel the coolness of the morning air; nor to see the workers standing around. A young girl of about twenty spoke to me, asking me to bring her clothes and to help her escape. At that moment we heard the sound of a car approaching at top speed; I saw that it was an SS detachment. I went back to my work. Ten minutes later rifle shots sounded from the ditch. The Jews who were still alive had been ordered to throw the bodies in the ditch; then they had to lie down themselves to receive a bullet in the back of the neck.

Gräbe’s witnessing of the Dubno massacre constituted a “transforming encounter” in psychological parlance, described by Eva Fogelman as “an incident of such jolting power that the person who experiences it is forever changed.” Thereafter, “while working on assignments for the German railroad, Gräbe deliberately recruited Jewish labor for his projects and, using all the authority of his position as chief construction engineer, fiercely protected them from Nazi murder squads. Thanks to his extraordinary effort, the lives of more than 300 Jews in the Ukraine, Poland, and Germany were protected. . . . The killing of 800 to 1,000 men, women, and children had so
revolted him, he wrote, that he vowed to do what he could to prevent further Jewish deaths.” Gräbe’s affidavit was also read into the record at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a key Holocaust perpetrator, in Jerusalem in 1961 (see Figure 15.6, p. 714).

"On any given day in the second half of 1941," writes Timothy Snyder, "the Germans shot more Jews than had been killed by pogroms in the entire history of the Russian Empire." The role of the regular German army, or Wehrmacht, in this eruption of full-scale genocide was noted at the Nuremberg trials of 1945–1946 (see Chapter 15). However, in part because the Western allies preferred to view the Wehrmacht as gentlemanly opponents, and subsequently because the German army was reconstructed as an ally by both superpowers in the Cold War, a myth was cultivated that the Wehrmacht had acted 'honorably' in the occupied territories. Scholarly inquiry has now demonstrated that this is "a wholly false picture of the historical reality." The mentality of Germany's military elite . . . hardly varied from that of the Führer," argues Stephen Fritz. "Both saw the world in social Darwinist terms, accepted the need for Lebensraum [imperial "living space"], regarded the Slavs as inferior and fitting subjects for German domination, and viewed communism as a malignancy that had to be eliminated. Crucially, both also accepted the need for a war of annihilation, within which the destruction of the Jews played a key role." Accordingly, and with the addition of a heavy dose of Nazi racist and strategic indoctrinations, the Wehrmacht proved key to engineering the mass murder of 3.3 million Soviets seized as prisoners-of-war (see Box 6a). The Wehrmacht was also central to the perpetration of the Jewish Holocaust. "'Suspect' civilians—mostly Jews—were routinely handed over" for inevitable execution, according to Peter Longerich; "the Wehrmacht delivered Jewish prisoners of war and others defined by racist or political criteria, to the SS, Einsatzkommandos and police units were requested by offices of the Wehrmacht for 'cleansing' or 'pacification operations', or for 'collective reprisal measures'; intelligence officers, the military police and the Secret Field Police made themselves available for 'operations'." The Einsatzgruppen in particular, only 3,000 strong, "needed and got the close cooperation of the Armed Forces," wrote Hannah Arendt, noting that "relations between them were usually 'excellent' and in some instances 'affectionate' (herzlich, literally 'heartfelt')." A great many soldiers "felt drawn to the killing operations . . . standing around as spectators, taking photographs, and volunteering to be shooters." As SS Lieutenant-Colonel Karl Kretschmer wrote home in September 1942: "Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is, no Jew remains."

This was true also of the Romanian soldiers accompanying German troops in occupied Transnistria, in southwestern Ukraine. Their atrocities against Jews aroused protest from no less than Einsatzgruppe D—for the killers’ deficient means of massacre:

The Romanians act against the Jews without any idea of a plan. No one would object to the numerous executions of Jews if the technical aspect of their preparation as well as the manner in which they are carried out were not wanting.
Figure 6.8 Sites of the “Holocaust by Bullets” (1). A commemorative stone with the Star of David in the Bikernieku forest outside Riga, Latvia, where an estimated 25–40,000 Jews from across Europe were massacred by Einsatzgruppen forces in summer–autumn 1941.

Source: Author’s photo, June 2011.

Figure 6.9 Sites of the “Holocaust by Bullets” (2). A mass grave of Jews in the nearby Rumbula forest, where some 25,000 Jews were murdered in November–December 1941.

Source: Author’s photo, June 2011.
The Romanians leave the executed where they fall, without burial. The Einsatzkommando [present] urged the Romanian police [soldiers] to proceed with more order from this point of view.43

Even such intensive slaughter, however, could not eliminate European Jewry in a "reasonable" time. Moreover, the intensely intimate character of murder by gunfire, with human tissue and brain matter spattering onto the clothes and faces of the German killers, began to take a psychological toll. The difficulty was especially pronounced in the case of murders of children and women. While it was relatively easy for executioners to persuade themselves that adult male victims, even unarmed civilians, were dangerous and deserved their cruel fate, the argument was harder to make for people traditionally viewed as passive, dependent, or helpless.44

"I simply couldn't [do it]," recalled one captured Wehrmacht soldier, in a conversation secretly taped by British intelligence. "I could kill fellows who [I believed] had committed crimes, but women and children—and tiny children! The children scream and everything."44

To reduce this stress on the killers, and to increase the logistical efficiency of the killing, the industrialized “death camp” with its gas chambers was moved to the fore. Both were refinements of existing institutions and technologies. The death camps grew out of the concentration—camp system the Nazis had established upon first taking power in 1933, while killings by gas were first employed in 1939 as part of the “euthanasia” campaign that was such a vital forerunner of the genocide of the Jews. (It was wound down, in fact, at the precise point that the campaign against European Jews turned to root-and-branch extermination.) Gas chambers allowed for the desired psychological distance between the killers and their victims: “It was the gas that acted, not the man who pulled the machine-gun trigger.”45

Principally by this means, nearly one million Jews were killed at Auschwitz—a complex of three camps and numerous satellites, of which Auschwitz II (Birkenau) operated as the main killing center. Zyklon B (cyanide gas in crystal form; see Figure 11.2) was overwhelmingly the means of murder at Auschwitz. Nearly two million more Jews died by gas, shootings, beatings, and starvation at the other “death camps” in occupied Poland, which were distinguished from the vastly larger Nazi network of concentration camps by their core function of extermination. These death camps were Chelmno (200,000 Jews slaughtered); Sobibor (260,000); Belzec (500,000); Treblinka (800,000, mostly from the Polish capital, Warsaw); and Majdanek (130,000).46

It would be misleading to distinguish too sharply between the “death camps,” where gas was the normal means of extermination, and the broader network of camps where “destruction through work” (the Nazis’ term) was the norm.47 Killings of Jews reached exterminatory levels in the latter institutions as well. As Daniel Goldhagen has argued, “after the beginning of 1942, the camp system in general was lethal for Jews,” and well over a million died outside the death camps, killed by starvation, disease, and slave labor.48 Perhaps 500,000 more, in Raul Hilberg’s estimate, succumbed in the Jewish ghettos, themselves a kind of concentration camp (see Figure 6.5). Finally, tens of thousands died on forced marches, often in the dead of winter, as Allied forces closed in.49
What did the German public know of this massive extermination campaign? Large numbers of “ordinary Germans” were certainly aware of widespread atrocities among Einsatzgruppen and Wehrmacht forces on the eastern front, including mass shootings of Jews. Photos and written reports of some of the grisly executions circulated on the home front. But they seem to have been subsumed in a war generally perceived as “total” and necessarily savage. The shift in 1942, from mass shootings of Jews close to their places of residence, to their transport over great distances to isolated, purpose-built death camps with gas chambers, sharply reduced the number of German forces in the field who had direct contact with the Holocaust. The camps were of course in occupied Poland, situating them “out of sight and out of mind” of the German woman or man in the street. Finally, precisely as the Holocaust was reaching its destructive apex, German civilians
Map 6.1 The Holocaust in Europe.

Source: Map by Dennis Nilson/Wikimedia Commons.
Figure 6.11 The haunting ruins of the Crematorium III death factory at Auschwitz-Birkenau outside Oświęcim, Poland, dynamited by the Nazis just before the camp was liberated by Soviet soldiers in January 1945. The view is looking down the steps which victims, mostly Jews transported from all over Europe, were forced to tread en route to the undressing room within. They were then murdered in an underground gas chamber (at top left, not clearly visible), and cremated in ovens under the (now collapsed) roof-and-chimney complex at the rear. More than one million children, women, and men—overwhelmingly Jews, but also Roma/Gypsies and Soviet prisoners-of-war—were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The site has become synonymous with the Jewish Holocaust and modern genocide.

Source: Author’s photo, November 2009.
Two indelible images of the Jewish Holocaust. Above: Near Novgorod, Russia, in 1942, a German soldier takes aim at civilian victims in the killing fields; the rifles of other members of the execution squad are partially visible at left (note also the victim—wounded? killed?—lying prone at the soldier’s right foot). Below: The notorious “selection” process underway on the railway ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The image is from “The Auschwitz Album,” “the only surviving visual evidence of the process leading to the mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is a unique document and was donated to Yad Vashem by Lilly Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier. The photos were taken at the end of May or beginning of June 1944, either by Ernst Hofmann or by Bernhard Walter, two SS men whose task was to take ID photos and fingerprints of the inmates [not of the Jews who were sent directly to the gas chambers]. The photos show the arrival of Hungarian Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia. Many of them came from the Berekovo Ghetto, which itself was a collecting point for Jews from several other small towns. Early summer 1944 was the apex of the deportation of Hungarian Jewry.”

Sources: Wikimedia Commons (6.12), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem (6.13).
increasingly were suffering under Allied aerial bombardment. This would be intensified through the final extermination spree in the camps (the slaughter of the Hungarian Jews in 1944), and it was supplemented, in 1944–1945 and into the postwar period, by the plight of millions of ethnic Germans uprooted from their ancestral homes in Central Europe and expelled to the war-shattered German heartland. None of this was likely to evoke much empathy for any of the Nazis’ victims. It was widely known that awful things were happening to the Jews in the east. But at least after the tide of war turned in 1942–1943, this provoked mostly self-centered preoccupations that “Jewish revenge” would now be visited upon Germany (indeed war being inflicted, via the devastating bombing of the German heartland; see Box 64). 59

Thus, in Ian Kershaw’s estimation:

Most ordinary citizens appear to have given no consideration to the actual fate of the Jews or to have pondered much about what might have happened to them. Relatively few people within Germany had first-hand, detailed knowledge of the murderous events that continued to unfold to the east; the ‘Final Solution’ was, of course, officially still preserved as a closely guarded state secret. But, in any case, overwhelmed by their own anxieties, few Germans were interested in what was happening, far away, to an unloved, where not thoroughly hated, minority. 51

None of this, of course, prevented Germans from profiting from the persecution, expulsion, and mass murder of their country’s Jewish population (see Chapter 10 for more on the role of greed in genocide). The mayor of Berlin, in a report issued in January 1939, called for “a certain order” in distributing the spoils of Jewish dispossession. The “Aryanization” campaign (see Figure 10.4) had left an “overall impression” that was “not pleasant,” producing “an extraordinary rush of applications,” even from “circles of whom it would not have been expected”—the middle and upper classes, presumably. 52

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**BOX 6.2 ONE WOMAN’S STORY: FRIEDA WULFOVNA**

Frieda Wulfovna was born in the city of Minsk—then in the Soviet republic of Belorussia, today the capital of the independent state of Belarus—and lived her entire life there before the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Her narrative of Holocaust suffering and survival allows a glimpse not only into the Nazis’ genocidal assault on European Jews, but of the desperate and sometimes successful means that Jews found to evade the execution squads and gas chambers.

“Before the war, the city was home to a large Jewish community,” Frieda related. “You could hear Yiddish spoken all over town. There were many Jewish schools and
synagogues, only one of which remains from that time. It was never given back to the community and now it's a theatre.”

When Nazi occupation forces arrived in Minsk—in the lightning early stages of the Blitzkrieg meant to shatter Hitler's main geopolitical and ideological adversary—they implemented a policy that was by then well-established in occupied Poland. Jews were moved into ghettos—in Frieda’s case, “on the very first day it was established” in Minsk. “I came with my mother, my father, and two older brothers aged 15 and 17. I was seven years old.”

Conditions in the ghetto were crowded and hopelessly unsanitary—exactly as the Nazis intended, to reduce Jews to the filthy and animal-like portrait they had constructed in their anti-Semitic imaginations. A hundred and fifty thousand Jews were crammed into single-story houses. “Every room in every house was filled with as
many sofas and beds as could be made to fit, with one family allocated to each. This was all the living space each family had . . .” Without running water or (when the furniture had been burned) fuel, and with permitted caloric consumptions set by the Nazis at below-survival levels, catastrophe descended on the Jews of Minsk and other ghettoized populations well before the first mass executions took place. “Many people starved to death, including children. Every morning, families would take their dead out into the streets for special teams to take the bodies to the pit. For three winters the frosts were very heavy and some people froze to death in their houses.”

The Nazis had been exterminating Jews by rifle fire in the “Holocaust by Bullets” since the very first days of the invasion of the USSR. In early 1942, they installed the machinery of the death factories, and over the following two years launched systematic Aktion to “reduce” the Jewish ghettos and deport the inhabitants in waves for extermination—those, anyway, who were not murdered in the Aktion themselves. Frieda survived six Aktion, “with thousands dying in each. Over time the population of the Ghetto grew smaller and smaller. Many children were orphaned”—and then the Nazis massacred the helpless population of the orphanage itself. “It was a terrible sight. All of the children had been murdered in their beds, even toddlers and babies. There was blood everywhere.”

It was Frieda’s mother who kept the family alive, “always trying to barter for food, exchanging items of clothing or possessions.” Her father, a respected shoemaker, himself an orphan with a seemingly independent and self-reliant mindset, moved to join partisan forces waging a guerrilla war against the German occupiers. “His task was to bring arms into the Ghetto and to save as many lives as he could. I remember sleeping on my mattress with guns and grenades hidden underneath.”

Nazi troops soon came looking for her father. The family evaded them and scattered to four different refuges around the ghetto. Frieda was reunited with her mother, and taken by resistance soldiers to a safe house outside the ghetto walls. Later her father and elder brother rejoined them, all confined to a small room. “That was the beginning of my survival. My mother managed to get a job working in government buildings, and we changed our names. I was blond and blue-eyed. I didn’t look like a Jew.”

The war had turned against the Nazis by the time Frieda escaped the ghetto, and German armies were retreating in the face of gargantuan Soviet offensives and constant partisan attacks. Her father joined her brother with the partisans. When her brother won a medal for heroism in late 1943, he saw that a fellow soldier was eyeing it covetously. He offered a trade—the medal for Frieda and her mother’s safety. The two of them were evacuated from Minsk, finally arriving in a “very poor” village where “the people . . . had nothing, but they were so kind to us. They were not Jews, but they hid us and gave us their last piece of bread. We stayed there until the Red Army liberated us.” Only much later was she able to discover the
fate of her other brother. “. . . He had been murdered in the Ghetto and his body taken to Maly Trostenets extermination camp to be burned.”

Nigel Roberts recounts Frieda’s experiences in his Belarus guidebook for Bradt Publications. “For years,” he writes, “she couldn’t talk about the things she had seen as a young girl. She didn’t think people would believe her. Then one day, whilst visiting the Jewish Centre in Minsk that had been established to record all that happened here between 1941 and 1944, she opened a book written by a fellow survivor and began to read about all the terrible things she had witnessed for herself as a young child. Screams, executions, rivers of blood. From that moment she knew that people would believe her own story, and she began to find the words to articulate her memories.”53 At the time of writing, Frieda Wulfvna was Chairwoman of the Minsk Jewish Ghetto Survivors Association.

DEBATING THE HOLOCAUST

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

Intentionalists vs. functionalists

The core of the debate over the past two decades has revolved around a scholarly tendency generally termed “intentionalist,” and a contrasting “functionalist” interpretation. Intentionalists, as the word suggests, place primary emphasis on the intention of the Nazis, from the outset, to eliminate European Jews by means that eventually included mass slaughter. Such an approach emphasizes the figure of Adolf Hitler and his monomaniacal zeal to eliminate the Jewish “cancer” from Germany and Europe. (“Once I really am in power,” Hitler allegedly told a journalist as early as 1922, “my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews.”)54 Necessary as well was the anti-Semitic dimension of both Nazi ideology and European history. This fueled the Nazis’ animus against the Jews, and also ensured there would be no shortage of “willing executioners” to do the dirty work.

The functionalist critique, on the other hand, downplays the significance of Hitler as an individual. It “depicts the fragmentation of decision-making and the blurring of political responsibility,” and emphasizes “the disintegration of traditional bureaucracy into a crooked maze of ill-conceived and uncoordinated task forces,” in Colin Tatz’s summary.55 Also stressed is the evolutionary and contingent character of the campaign against the Jews: from legal discrimination, to concentration, to
mass murder. In this view, “what happened in Nazi Germany [was] an unplanned ‘cumulative radicalization’ produced by the chaotic decision-making process of a polycratic regime and the ‘negative selection’ of destructive elements from the Nazis’ ideological arsenal as the only ones that could perpetually mobilize the disparate and otherwise incompatible elements of the Nazi coalition.”

This sometimes acrimonious debate gave way, in the 1990s, to a recognition that the intentionalist and functionalist strands were not irreconcilable—were perhaps complementary. Peter Longerich reflects the shift toward “intentional functionalism,” or “integrationism,” in evaluating the interaction between center and periphery during the Holocaust:

... It would seem pointless to try to debate whether the policies of the centre and the initiatives of the periphery were crucial for the unleashing of the Holocaust. It would be more true to say that they stood in a dialectical relationship to one another, that is, that the centre could only act because it knew that its impulses would fall on fertile ground at the periphery, and the decision makers at the periphery based their own actions on the assumption that they were in harmony with the policy pursued by the centre.

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**BOX 6.3 POLAND TODAY: “ANTI-SEMITISM WITHOUT JEWS”**

The destruction of Polish Jewry was the cornerstone of the Nazis’ genocidal enterprise. Fully half of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust—some three million people—were Polish. But Poland’s Jews were also afflicted by the long tradition of European anti-semitism. Perhaps nowhere was it more virulent than in the “Rimlands” and “Bloodlands” of eastern Poland, the Baltic states, and the western Soviet Union (including Ukraine), as these territories stood in 1939 (see Box 2.3). Traditionally, whenever restraining authority collapsed, or authorities actively encouraged the violence, Jews were liable to be viciously targeted as “retribution” for imagined crimes and conspiracies.

In July 1941, in Jedwabne and nearby communities, Polish thugs exploited the arrival of Nazi invaders to organize a pogrom against the region’s Jews. Several thousand defenseless Jewish villagers were killed, with over a thousand locked in a village barn on the outskirts of Jedwabne and burned to death. Local residents joined in the carnage and, especially, in the free-for-all looting afterward. The massacre, first explored by Jan Gross in his 2001 work Neighbors, was plumbed far more deeply and resonantly in Anna Bikont’s extraordinary book The Crime and the Silence: Confronting the Massacre of Jews in Wartime Jedwabne, published in Polish in 2004 and in English in 2015 (see Further Study, this chapter). Bikont’s intimate, almost anthropological investigation turned up jaw-dropping examples of the classical anti-semitic tropes that still pervade
everyday discourse in Poland. The country is not alone in Europe in this respect, but it is unusual in its combination of a pervasive anti-semitism with a near-total absence of Jews—only about 1,100 reside in Poland today, according to Bikont. Perhaps most disturbing is the fury directed at those, in Jedwabne and beyond, who seek to memorialize the massacre. A sampling of Bikont’s gathered testimonies attests to the enduring power of “Judeophobia” in European society and politics.

High school teacher, Jedwabne: The only accepted life model here is to put money in the tray on Sunday and then drink all week, beat your wife, and moan about the Jews. You should hear the things that are said in the teachers’ lounge. The atmosphere is so tense that arguments don’t get through to people. And the kids at school are constantly telling Jewish jokes. They even get up in class and ask why there are so many Jews in Poland [n.b. there are approximately 1,100 in the entire country]. . . . One pupil got up and said, “Why should I study if the Jews are in charge anyway.”
Halina Zalewska, retired seamstress, Warsaw: Holy Scripture tells us the Jews are a tribe of vipers, perverts, they’re untrustworthy and faithless. They played tricks on the Lord himself, and He had to send down plagues on them. He made them wander in the wilderness for thirty years. It’s no accident He punished them the way He did. I’ve known about that from before the war, from religious studies. I remember everything. I’m seventy-three and . . . I don’t eat margarine, only butter, because it’s Jewish companies that make margarine.

Kazimierz Laudanski, villager, Jedwabne: “There was a lot of revenge [when the Soviets left in 1941]. But who did they kill? It was the Communists and snitches who were tried by mobs and lynched. They were the ones who got it. The Jewish community is one thing, Communist gangs another. Our guys acted in self-defense, just like in all the other uprisings, which we’re not ashamed of. But when you make an omelette you’ve got to break some eggs. And since there were some uneducated people there, they might have caused the deaths of a lot of innocent people. . . . Traitors get their throats cut.

A Jedwabne man known for giving rides to the massacre memorial: My wife is unemployed, I’m unemployed, but around here they say we get paid well for lighting a candle from time to time, that we’re living on Jewish money. People call my aunt to say they’re going to burn her. Now, would it be so hard to pour gasoline in the window at night, and who would ever trace the person who did it?

Ewa, married to Leszek, whose father rescued Jews: I have no friends anymore. I lost them all. If my husband weren’t a hunter who keeps a gun in the house, I wouldn’t get a single night’s sleep. I wake up at night and cry. The priest slanders us, saying Leszek isn’t a Catholic anymore since he says the things he does [about the massacre of Jedwabne’s Jews]. People call us: “Hello, is that Israel?”; “Hello, is that the rabbi?” It’s awful to walk down the street and hear “Jewish lackeys.” And in shops my neighbors turn away from me as if I were a leper.

Anna Bikont: In the Gazeta editorial offices I read letters sent to me after my piece today on Jedwabne: “Woman, what’s keeping you in Poland? May you be consumed by hellfire for your perversity and lies. Poland for the Poles”; “Miss Bikont, Jewess possessed by crazy anti-Polonism, we’ll be meeting soon. A kamikaze has already been assigned to you”; “You’ve managed to ignite a Polish-Jewish war in your newspaper. A few more such stories in your pages, and I’ll become an anti-Semite, I already associate Jews with lying and swindling.”

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Jewish resistance

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

While it may be true that a “salient characteristic of the Jewish community in Europe during 1933–1945 was its step-by-step adjustment to step-by-step destruction,” this is only part of the picture. Scholars have described how, under
horrific circumstances, Jews found ways to resist: going into hiding; struggling to preserve Jewish culture and creativity; and even launching armed uprisings. (The Warsaw ghetto uprising which peaked in April-May 1943, and the mass escape from the Sobibor death camp in October 1943, are the most famous of these rebellions against the Nazis.) Large numbers of Jews also joined the armed forces of the Allies, or fought as partisans behind German lines.

On balance, “it is pure myth that the Jews were merely ‘passive,’” wrote Alexander Donat in his memoir The Holocaust Kingdom:

The Jews fought back against their enemies to a degree no other community anywhere in the world would have been capable of were it to find itself similarly beleaguered. They fought against hunger and starvation, against disease, against a deadly Nazi economic blockade. They fought against murderers and against traitors within their own ranks, and they were utterly alone in their fight. They were forsaken by God and by man, surrounded by hatred or indifference. Ours was not a romantic war. Although there was much heroism, there was little beauty—much toil and suffering, but no glamour. We fought back on every front where the enemy attacked—the biological front, the economic front, the propaganda front, the cultural front—with every weapon we possessed.65

Moreover, to the extent that Jews did not mount an effective resistance to their extermination, it is worth noting—as Daniel Goldhagen does—that “millions of Soviet POWs, young military men with organization, and leadership, and initial vigor, died passively in German camps [see Box 6a]. If these men, whose families were not with them, could not muster themselves against the Germans, how could the Jews be expected to have done more?”66

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

By my death, I wish to make my final protest against the passivity with which the world is looking on and permitting the extermination of the Jewish people.

Smul Zygielbojm, Jewish exile in London; suicide note, May 12, 1943

The genocide against European Jews could have been avoided, argues the historian Yehuda Bauer, just as the Second World War itself might never have occurred—“had the Great Powers stopped Nazi Germany when it was still weak.” But at this point, “nobody knew that a Holocaust was even possible, because nobody knew what a Holocaust was; the Germans had not decided on anything like it in the 1930s.”67 The Allies, haunted by the carnage of the First World War, sought accommodation (“ appeasement”) rather than confrontation.

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

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

It may be argued that the inclusion of targets such as Auschwitz’s gas chambers and crematoria in the Allied bombing campaign, along with key transport points for Jews, could have disrupted the Nazi killing machine. The case is especially cogent for the later stages of the war, as with the genocide of the Hungarian Jews in 1944–1945 (when the USSR might also have been able to intervene). But on prewar evidence, it is hard to believe that, if more effective military measures could have been found, the Allies would have placed saving Jews higher on the list of military priorities—or that doing so would have made much difference.

The role of the Christian churches has also been scrutinized and criticized. Pope Pius XII’s placating of the Nazi regime in Germany, and his silence on the persecution of the Jews, are notorious. While “the Holy See [Vatican] addressed numerous protests, demands, and inquiries in diplomatic channels both regarding the situation of Catholics in Poland and about the killing of the mentally ill . . . Not one such diplomatic intervention dealt with the overall fate of the Jews.” Regarding the fate of “non-Aryans in the territories under German authority,” Pius wrote to a German bishop who had protested deportations of Jews: “Unhappily, in the present circumstances, We cannot offer them effective help other than through Our prayers.”

Within Germany, the churches did virtually nothing to impede the genocide and indeed strove not to notice it, thereby facilitating it. The Nazis at numerous points demonstrated a keen sensitivity to public opinion, including religious opinion—protests from German churches were partly responsible for driving the “euthanasia” campaign underground after 1941. But such protests were not forthcoming from more than a handful of principled religious voices. When it came to defending co-parishioners whom the Nazis deemed of Jewish origin, “both Church and Church members drove away from their community, from their churches, people with whom they were united in worship, as one drives away mangy dogs from one’s door.”

The most successful examples of resistance to Hitler’s genocidal designs for European Jewry came from a handful of western and northern European countries that were either neutral or under relatively less oppressive occupation regimes. Here, sometimes, extension of the killing campaign could impose political costs that the Nazis were not willing to pay. The most vivid display of public opposition swept up virtually the entire adult population of Denmark, led by the royal family. When the Nazis decreed the imposition of the Jewish yellow star, non-Jewish Danes adopted it in droves as well, as a powerful gesture of solidarity. The
regulation was rescinded. Subsequently, Danes arranged for the evacuation of the majority of the country’s Jews to neutral Sweden, where they lived through the rest of the war (see Chapter 10). Sweden, meanwhile, saved “about half of Norwegian Jewry and almost all of the Danish Jews,” and in 1944 involved herself more heavily in the heart of Europe, particularly in Budapest, where, along with Switzerland, Portugal, and the Vatican, the Swedish legation issued “protective passports,” established safe houses, and generally attempted to restrain the German occupants and their Hungarian puppets from killing more Jews on Hungarian soil in the final hours of the war. Upon the liberation of Jews in concentration camps in the spring of 1945, Sweden accepted thousands of victims for medical treatment and rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{73}

Willing executioners?

Just as scholars have demonstrated increased interest in “micro-histories” of public opinion under the Nazis, and the role of ordinary German citizens in accepting and sustaining the regime, so have questions been raised about the role of different sectors of the German population in the genocide. After decades of research by Raul Hilberg and many others, it is a truism that not only German social and economic elites, but all the professions (up to and including the clergy, as we have seen), were corrupted or compromised by the Nazi state. In Michael Burleigh’s words, an “understanding of the process of persecution [on racial grounds] now includes greater awareness of the culpable involvement of various sections of the professional intelligentsia, such as anthropologists, doctors, economists, historians, lawyers and psychiatrists, in the formation and implementation of Nazi policies.”\textsuperscript{74} For such figures, “the advent of the Nazi regime was coterminal with the onset of ‘boom’ conditions. No one asked or compelled these academics and scientists actively to work on the regime’s behalf. Most of them could have said no. In fact, the files of the regime’s many agencies bulge with their unsolicited recommendations.”\textsuperscript{75}

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

At the heart of the controversy was the publication, in 1992 and 1996 respectively, of Christopher Browning’s \textit{Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland}, and Daniel Goldhagen’s \textit{Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust}. Both scholars examined the same archives on Reserve Police Battalion 101, which consisted overwhelmingly of Germans drafted from civilian police units (often too old for regular military service). The records described in detail the battalion’s killings of helpless, naked Jewish civilians in occupied Poland during 1941–1942, and the range of reactions among group members.

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

Goldhagen, dismissing Browning’s work, advanced instead an essentially mono-
causal thesis. The Jewish Holocaust was the direct outgrowth of “eliminationist”
anti-semitism, which by the twentieth century had become “common sense” for
Germans. By 1941, “ordinary Germans easily became genocidal killers... [and]
did so even though they did not have to.” They “kill[ed] Jews willingly and often
eagerly,” though Goldhagen did recognize the importance of Nazi leaders in
activating and channeling the anti-semitic impulse.

With the controversy now cooled, it is easier to appreciate the significance
of “the Goldhagen debate.” Goldhagen did counter a trend toward bloodless
analysis and abstract theorizing in studies of the Jewish catastrophe. In addition,
by achieving mass popularity, Goldhagen’s book, like Samantha Power’s “A
Problem from Hell” (2002), broke down the usual wall between scholarship and pub-
lic debate. However, the core elements of Goldhagen’s thesis—that there was
something unique about German anti-semitism that spawned the Holocaust;
that Germans were only too ready to leap to bloodthirsty murder of Jews—have
been decisively countered. Not only was anti-semitism historically stronger in

Figures 6.17 and 6.18 The exchange between Christopher Browning (left), author of Ordinary Men (1992), and Daniel Jonah
Goldhagen, author of Hitler’s Willing Executioners (1996), centered on the motivations of “ordinary” German killers of Jews
during the Holocaust. Was “eliminationist anti-semitism” the central factor, as Goldhagen argued? Or was it secondary to
peer pressure and masculine bonding in wartime, as Browning suggested? The result was a defining—and continuing—
debate in Holocaust and genocide studies.

Source: The Gazette, University of North Carolina (Browning); JIT Productions (Goldhagen).
countries other than Germany, but the virulence of its expression during the Second World War in (for example) Lithuania and Romania exceeded that of Germany. The Nazis, as noted above, were reluctant to confront “ordinary Germans” with bloody atrocity, though according to Saul Friedländer, “recent historical research increasingly turns German ignorance of the fate of the Jews into a mythical postwar construct.”79 Nor could they rely on a widespread popular desire to inflict cruelty on Jews as the foundational strategy for implementing their genocide.

Israel, the Palestinians, and the Holocaust

Occasionally an experience of great suffering has been recognized as warranting creation or recognition of a homeland for the targeted group. Such was the case with East Timor (Box 7a), born from Indonesian occupation and genocide. The Kurdish protected zone and de facto state in northern Iraq may also qualify (Box 4.2), together with the widespread recognition of Kosovo’s declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008 (Chapter 8). But no case is as dramatic as that of Israel in the wake of the Second World War. The dream of the Zionist movement founded in the nineteenth century, to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine through mobilization and mass immigration, became a reality in the postwar period, as Britain abandoned its territorial mandate over Palestine, and Arabs and Jews fought over the territory. “Anti-Zionism in the Jewish community collapsed, and a consensus that Jewry, abandoned during the war, had to have a home of its own crystallized overnight.”80 Jewish survivors of Nazi genocide provided Palestine with a critical mass of Jewish immigrants and, in the decades following the declaration of the Israeli state on May 15, 1948, Israel received tens of billions of dollars from the Federal Republic of Germany as reparations for the Holocaust of the Jews.

To a significant degree, successive Israeli governments have relied on the Holocaust as a touchstone of Jewish experience and national identity, and have used the threat of another genocide of the Jews to justify military and security policies.81 Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, commemorated the country’s Holocaust Remembrance Day on April 21, 2009, by declaring that “Holocaust deniers cannot commit another Holocaust against the Jewish people. This is the state of Israel’s supreme obligation.”82

In October 2015, Netanyahu attracted unexpected attention and near-universal scorn when his comments surfaced accusing Amin al-Husseini, the Palestinian Mufti (Muslim religious leader) of Jerusalem, of having played the key role in persuading Hitler and the Nazis to pursue a policy of mass extermination against the Jews of Europe, rather than the forced-emigration policy they allegedly still favored. Unmentioned by Netanyahu was that by the time the Mufti met Hitler on November 28, 1941, many hundreds of thousands of Jews—perhaps over one million—had already been murdered in the “Holocaust by Bullets” and Nazi-established ghettos (see Box 6.4).
BOX 6.4: NETANYAHU, THE MUFTI, AND THE POLITICS OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY

In a speech to the 37th Zionist Congress on October 20, 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu digressed to advance an extraordinary interpretation of the Holocaust of the Jews, centered on the figure of Haj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti—Muslim leader—of Jerusalem “and the Zionist movement’s key enemy” during the formative years of its expansion in Palestine. The Mufti, said Netanyahu, “had a central role in fomenting the final solution. He flew to Berlin,” where he held a meeting with Adolf Hitler on November 28. “Hitler didn’t want to exterminate the Jews at the time, he wanted to expel the Jews,” Netanyahu asserted. “And Haj Amin al-Husseini went to Hitler and said, ‘If you expel them, they’ll all come here.’ ‘So what should I do with them?’ he asked. [Al-Husseini] said, ‘Burn them.’”

Christopher Browning, probably the senior scholar of the Holocaust in the English-speaking world (see pp. 347–348), published a devastating rebuttal of Netanyahu’s account in the journal Foreign Policy, describing the prime minister’s claims as “an historical fabrication, or more simply a lie.” In no minutes or other account of the November 28 meeting did the exchange quoted by Netanyahu appear, Browning pointed out that by the time Hitler met with the mufti, the exterminatory phase of the Nazi persecution of the Jews was already well advanced. Many hundreds of thousands of Jews had been murdered in the “Holocaust by Bullets” beginning in June 1941 (see, e.g., Box 6.1). The early infrastructure of the death factories, purpose-built in Nazi-occupied Poland for the mass murder of Europe’s Jewish population, was already in place:

Hitler had opted for the total and systematic killing of Jews on Soviet territory in mid-July 1941, and German killing units on the eastern front began targeting the entire Jewish population—including women, children, and the elderly—beginning in late July and early August. The two-day massacre of over 33,000 Jews at Babi Yar outside Kiev took place in late September. Hitler approved the extension of the mass murder program to Jews west of Soviet territory in late October, and two death camps using poison gas were under construction at Belzec and Chelmno [in occupied Poland] by early November. When Hitler met with Husseini [on November 28], the fateful shift in Nazi Jewish policy from expulsion and decimation to systematic and total mass murder had already occurred.

Browning extended his critique beyond Netanyahu’s historical misreading to the repressive political purpose it was intended to serve:

There were many thousands of Holocaust perpetrators more historically significant than the grand mufti of Jerusalem, but for Netanyahu they have no useful
Figure 6.19 Adolf Hitler meets with Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Muslim mufti (religious leader) of Jerusalem, Berlin, November 28, 1941.

Source: Courtesy WGBH News. Original source unknown.

Figure 6.20 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a March 2011 press conference.

Source: US Department of Defense/Wikimedia Commons.
political significance—which is to say they were not Palestinian. His extraordinary exaggeration of Husseini’s complicity, and by implication that of the entire Palestinian people, is a blatant attempt to stigmatize and delegitimize any sympathy or concern for Palestinian rights and statehood. Netanyahu’s shameful and indecent speech is a disservice to anyone—Jew and non-Jew—for whom research, teaching, and preservation of the historical truth of the Holocaust has value, meaning, and purpose.84

With Israeli public opinion scarcely less withering in its condemnation, Netanyahu was forced to backpedal. A little over a week after his speech, he retracted his allegation: “The decision to move from a policy of deporting Jews to the Final Solution was made by the Nazis and was not dependent on outside influence. The Nazis saw in the Mufti a collaborator, but they did not need him to decide on the systematic destruction of European Jewry, which began in June 1941.” He ended on an accusatory and equally political note, however, accusing al-Husseini of inciting violence against Jews by claiming they sought to destroy Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque. “Incitement,” specifically rumor-mongering over al-Aqsa, was at the heart of Netanyahu’s accusations against Palestinian leaders and public figures, as a fresh Palestinian intifada (uprising) against Israeli occupation appeared to be looming. Hence, for Netanyahu, the mufti’s “lie lives on and continues to exact a price in [Jewish] blood. . . . That the mufti remains an iconic figure among the Palestinian leadership today speaks volumes about that leadership’s real attitude towards Israel.” The controversy, fleeting though it was,85 served as a reminder of the continuing centrality of the Holocaust in Israeli and Diaspora politics, and the attractiveness of manipulating this most traumatic incarnation of Jewish suffering for contemporary political and personal advantage.86

Palestinians and their supporters, for their part, have tended to adopt the genocide framework as well—but to attract attention to the Palestinian cause. The choice of the term Nakba (catastrophe) to describe the Palestinian experience of mass expulsion and dispossession at Israeli hands was clearly meant to echo the Jewish adoption of the Hebrew word Shoah, with its parallel meaning, to reference the Jewish Holocaust.87 Palestinian advocates have sought to draw parallels between Israel’s repressive policies and those of the Nazis against Jews. Often such comparisons have seemed hysterical and/or counterproductive,88 but sometimes they have resonated. Notable was Israeli general (later prime minister) Ariel Sharon’s dispatching of Christian Phalangist militia to the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, during the Israelis’ 1982 invasion of Lebanon. This led predictably to the Einsatzgruppen-style massacre of thousands of Palestinian civilians, as Israeli troops stood by. Renewed denunciations, employing the language of genocide and crimes against humanity, were issued after Israel imposed a ruinous blockade on the Gaza Strip, still largely in place. The blockade was described as a “genocidal policy” by Israeli historian
Ilan Pappé. It prompted Richard Falk, subsequently the UN Human Rights Council’s monitor for Israel-Palestine, to write in 2007 that Israeli strategies toward Gaza were reminiscent of Nazi ghettoization policies toward Jews, displaying “a deliberate intention . . . to subject an entire human community to life-endangering conditions of utmost cruelty.” In December 2008, and again in July–August 2014, Israel launched a massive assault on the Gaza Strip, killing many hundreds of Palestinian civilians on each occasion, and laying waste to the already battered territory. In the estimation of UN investigator Judge Richard Goldstone, the 2008 attack was “deliberately disproportionate,” “. . . designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population, radically diminish its local economic capacity both to work and to provide for itself, and to force upon it an ever-increasing sense of dependency and vulnerability.” The same verdict can be rendered on the 2014 assault—the kind of violent and disproportionate atrocity that is carefully calibrated to fall short of indiscriminate massacre and (by my favored definition) genocide.

Is the Jewish Holocaust “uniquely unique”?

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

In genocide studies, a well-known exponent of the uniqueness thesis is Steven Katz, who devoted his immense tome *The Holocaust in Historical Context, Vol. 1* to arguing that the Jewish Holocaust was “phenomenologically unique by virtue of the fact that never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate physically every man, woman, and child belonging to a specific people.” The Nazi campaign against the Jews was the only true genocide, as Katz defined the term (see p. 26; recall that my own preferred definition of genocide reworks Katz’s).

Other scholars have argued against the uniqueness hypothesis. Historian Mark Levene has pointed to an “obvious contradiction”: “while, on the one hand, the Holocaust has come to be commonly treated as the yardstick for all that might be described as ‘evil’ in our world, on the other, it is . . . a subject notably cordoned off and policed against those who might seek to make connections [with other genocides].” Writer and poet Phillip Lopate has likewise argued that claims of uniqueness tend to bestow “a sort of privileged nation status in the moral honor roll.” This claim of privilege then carries over to “the Jewish state,” Israel, helping to blunt criticism of its treatment of the Palestinians.

My own view should be clearly stated: the Jewish Holocaust was not “uniquely unique.” On no major analytical dimension—speed, scale, scope, intensity, efficiency, cruelty, ideology—does it stand alone and apart. If it is unique in its mix of these ingredients, so too are most of the other major instances of mass killing in their own way. I also believe that uniqueness proponents, like the
rest of us, were severely shaken by the holocaust in Rwanda in 1994 (see Chapter 9). The killing there proceeded much faster than the slaughter of the Jews; destroyed a higher proportion of the designated victim group (some 80 percent of Rwandan Tutsis versus two-thirds of European Jews); was carried out by “a chillingly effective organizational structure that would implement the political plan of genocide more efficiently than was achieved by the industrialized death camps in Nazi Germany”; and—unlike the Jewish catastrophe—featured active participation by a substantial portion of the general population. Was Rwanda, then, “uniquely unique”? The claim seems as tenable as in the case of the Jewish Holocaust—but in both cases, a nuanced comparative framework is preferable.100

The uniqueness of the Jews as a target of the Nazis at first sight seems self-evident. “In the end,” for Raul Hilberg, “. . . the Jews retained their special place.”101 Even the leading scholar of Romani/“Gypsy” genocide—the Nazi murder campaign that most closely parallels the Jewish Shoah—acknowledges that while both groups were considered racial threats, “Romanies were only ever a ‘racial’ threat,” while “Jews were considered a threat on a number of other grounds as well, political, philosophical and economic . . .”102 According to Omer Bartov,

> It was only in the case of the Jews that there was a determination to seek out every baby hidden in a haystack, every family living in a bunker in the forest, every woman trying to pass herself off as a Gentile. It was only in the case of the Jews that vast factories were constructed and managed with the sole purpose of killing trainload after trainload of people. It was only in the case of the Jews that huge, open-air, public massacres of tens of thousands of people were conducted on a daily basis throughout Eastern Europe.103

However, as Christian Gerlach notes, other groups sometimes suffered before, or worse than, Jews under Nazi terror:

> The first to be systematically murdered by gas were disabled people. The first to be made [to] wear a mark in public in Nazi Germany were Polish forced workers. The first to be gassed in Auschwitz, and the first to get their prisoner numbers tattooed there, were (for the most part) Soviet prisoners of war. Other prisoners, including Jews, noticed that these POWs received considerably less food even than themselves, and in vain tried to help them.104

The Holocaust certainly holds a unique place in genocide studies. Among all the world’s genocides, it alone produced a scholarly literature that spawned, in turn, a comparative discipline. Specialists on the subject played a central role in constituting the field and its institutions, such as the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) and the Journal of Genocide Research: “Genocide studies is really the outgrowth of the study of the Holocaust,” as sociologist Thomas Cushman has noted; according to historian Dan Stone, “for good or ill,” the Holocaust “has provided many of the theoretical frameworks and research strategies for analyzing other genocides.”105
Still, there is no denying that the Holocaust has been significantly de-centered from comparative genocide studies since the emergence of the post-Lemkin research agenda in the 1970s and 1980s. In introducing the third edition of his edited collection Is the Holocaust Unique? (2009), Alan S. Rosenbaum acknowledged that since [my] initial conception of this project some fifteen years ago, the center of gravity for the once-intense debate about the overall arguable claim for the significant uniqueness of the Holocaust may gradually but perceptibly be shifting. . . . It is not that the Holocaust is considered by most responsible or fair-minded scholars as any less paradigmatic, but rather [that] as the Holocaust recedes into history and other genocidal events occur, its scope and dimensions may naturally be better understood in the context of a broader genocide studies investigation. 106

FURTHER STUDY

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

Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933–1948. Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books, 2002. Canada’s shameful treatment of Jewish would-be refugees from Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe; one facet of the West’s abandonment of the Jews.


Waitman Wade Beorn, Marching Into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belorus. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Groundbreaking study of war and Holocaust in then-Belorussia. Beorn, a student of Christopher Browning (see below), produces a work every bit the equal of his mentor’s.


Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Perennial, 1993. Based on some of the same archival sources as Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (see below), but emphasizes group dynamics in addition to anti-Semitism. See also *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942*.


Peter Fritzschke, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Up-close, galvanizing account of daily life in Germany as the Nazi Holocaust was unleashed on Central and Eastern Europe.


### NOTES


8 The most infamous anti-semitic tract of modern times is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), a pamphlet that is now generally held to have been devised by the
Tsar’s secret police in pre-revolutionary Russia, but which purported to represent the ambitions and deliberations of a global Jewish conspiracy against Christian civilization. For the complete text of the Protocols, and a point-by-point refutation, see Steven Leonard Jacobs and Mark Weitzman, Dismantling the Big Lie: the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2003)—n.b. the centenary of the Protocols. For a consideration of its bizarrely enduring influence, see Iwan Derkacz, “Again With the ‘Jewish Conspiracy,’” AlterNet.org, April 11, 2006. www.alternet.org/story/34812.


10 In addition, for exponents of biological anti-semitism (a nineteenth-century invention), Jews came to be viewed as inimically at odds with Western-Christian civilization. Religious conversion could no longer expunge their Jewishness—which helps to explain why this option was denied to Jews under Nazi rule. My thanks to Benjamin Madley for this point.


13 On the pogroms against Russian Jews between 1881 and 1921 (extending throughout the territories of the “Bloodlands” or the “Lands Between,” that is, present-day Belarus, western Ukraine, and eastern Poland [see ch. 2]), see John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambrozio, ed., Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Recall that these were also the pogroms that reached the ears and influenced the thinking of the young Raphael Lemkin (ch. 1).

14 In the case of France, strong arguments have been made that anti-semitism was far more widespread and virulent, in elite and popular opinion, than was true in Germany. But “in France—unlike Germany—whatever the strength of anti-semitic feeling on the streets, in the bars and in the universities, political power always remained in the hands of the liberal republicans, a government which never endorsed political antisemitism” (Landau, The Nazi Holocaust, p. 63). However, when dictatorial government and “eliminational anti-semitism” (Daniel Goldhagen’s term) were imposed in France from 1940 to 1944—under direct Nazi occupation and under the Vichy puppet regime—the authorities and a key section of the population cooperated enthusiastically in the transport for mass execution of the Jews.


18 See Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), and the discussion in Goldhagen, Hitler’s Willing Executioners, pp. 168–170.


20 For accounts of the fate of the male “November Jews” rounded up in the wake of the countrywide Nazi pogrom, see Alan E. Steinweis, Kristallnacht 1938 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2009), pp. 91–98; and Kim Wünschmann, Before Auschwitz: Jewish Prisoners in the Prewar Concentration Camps (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 196–210. The largest group of prisoners was incarcerated at Buchenwald. Wünschmann describes the “constant violent excesses” there, especially during the
"’murder week’ of November 10–14, when SS guards, mostly during the night, raided the barracks and beat up the helpless and terrified inmates." Buchenwald also witnessed "the first epidemic in the history of the Nazi concentration camps," a typhoid outbreak in December. Most of the imprisoned Jews were released upon signing promises to emigrate, but an estimated one thousand men were killed in the camps, or "died, after release, from the consequences of their imprisonment" (Wünschmann, pp. 203–204).


23 Ian Kershaw noted that while criticisms of "anti-semitic thuggery" were aired as of 1935, "not much of the criticism was on humanitarian grounds. Economic self-interest played a large part," as when "people ignored exhortations to boycott Jewish shops and stores" in order to continue benefiting from superior goods, prices, and services there. German Christians worried, too, that the thugs and persecutors might turn on them next. "The methods rather than the aims were attacked. There were few principled objections to discrimination against Jews. What concerned people above all were the hooliganism, mob violence, distasteful scenes, and disturbances of order." Kershaw, _Hitler 1889–1936: Study_ (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 594.

24 Victor Klemperer, _I Will Bear Witness_ 1933–1941 (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), pp. 165, 320–330, 393, 422, 429; Klemperer, _I Will Bear Witness_ 1942–1945 (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), pp. 66, 71. Elisabeth Freund, a Jewish Berliner, also described the mixed but frequently sympathetic reaction that German Jews received from "Aryans" when forced to don the yellow star in September 1941: "I am greeted on the street with special politeness by complete strangers, and in the street car ostentatiously a seat is freed for me, although those wearing a star are allowed to sit only if no Aryan is still standing. But sometimes guttersnipes call out abusive words after me. And occasionally Jews are said to have been beaten up. Someone tells me of an experience in the city train. A mother saw that her little girl was sitting beside a Jew: 'Lieschen, sit down on the other bench, you don't need to sit beside a Jew.' At that an Aryan worker stood up, saying: 'And I don't need to sit next to Lieschen.'" Quoted in Friedländer, _The Years of Extermination_, p. 253.

The important study by Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, _What We Know: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany: An Oral History_ (New York: Basic Books, 2005), further buttresses Klemperer's impression that anti-Semitism was not widespread in Germany before 1933. Most German Jewish Holocaust survivors interviewed for the volume "stated that they and their families had felt well accepted and integrated in German society. Only a few believed that anti-Semitism was especially prevalent in Germany before the Nazi takeover in January 1933." However, and again meshing with Klemperer's documentation of a swiftly darkening situation, "the figures show that after Hitler took power in 1933, the once positive relations between Jews and non-Jews deteriorated. Whereas over two-thirds of the survivors' families before 1933 had friendly relations with non-Jews in their communities, after 1933 nearly two-thirds had relations that the survivors described as clearly worse or even hostile... Very few Jewish families in any German communities after 1933 maintained friendly associations with non-Jews... Even more disturbing, 22 percent of the survivors... suffered physical beatings from German civilians, and this was nearly three times the percentage of those who suffered beatings from Nazi policemen or other officials..." (pp. 269, 273, 279). While one-third of survivors "received significant help and support from non-Jewish German civilians during the Third Reich," it was also the case that "about two-thirds could not find a single German willing to help them, and one can only wonder about the Jews who did not survive" (p. 283).

37 A key “tipping point” for the Wehrmacht’s “indiscriminate, systematic and wholesale resort to carnage” was the Commissar Order issued on June 6, 1941, which called for “Communist Party functionaries . . . to be identified . . . and murdered by the army either on the spot or in rear areas.” “Effectively,” notes Michael Burleigh, “the army was assuming the functions hitherto performed by the Einsatzgruppen, namely the killing of an entire group of people solely by virtue of their membership of that group and without formal process.” Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 67.
41 Kretschmer quoted in Shemmer and Grobman, *Denying History*, p. 185.
43 This gendered element of the slaughter is discussed further in Chapter 13.
intelligence transcripts reveals “that many soldiers were astonishingly well aware of the specific details of the extermination of European Jews. ... The soldiers’ conversations make it clear that practically all German soldiers knew or suspected that Jews were being murdered en masse. ... It was clear to the soldiers that the extermination was happening, and the extermination was integrated into their frame of reference. But it remained quite marginal in terms of what commanded their attention” (pp. 99, 101, 111).


46 The statistics are drawn from Landau, The Nazi Holocaust.

47 Fritzische, Life and Death in the Third Reich, p. 215.

48 “Whether the Germans were killing Jews immediately and directly in the gas chambers of an extermination camp or working and starving them to death in camps that they had not constructed for the express purpose of extermination (namely in concentration or ‘work’ camps), the mortality rates of Jews in camps was at exterminatory, genocidal levels and typically far exceeded the mortality rates of other groups living side by side with them. ... The monthly death rate for Jews in Mauthausen [camp] was from the end of 1942 to 1943, 100 percent. Mauthausen was not formally an extermination camp and, indeed, it was not for non-Jews, who at the end of 1943 all had a mortality rate below 2 percent.” Goldhagen, Hitler’s Willing Executioners, p. 173. For more on the Nazi system of forced and slave labor, see Wolf Gruner, Jewish Forced Labor Under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938–1944, trans. Kathleen M. Dell’Orto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).


50 As David Bankier summarizes: “There is no indication that the Nazi policy against Poles, Serbs or Russians ever troubled the ordinary Germans. ... From 1943 onwards only the murder of Jews (not of Gypsies, Slavs, mentally ill, or other crimes) raises among the public fears of divine or human retribution.” Bankier, personal communication, December 17, 2009.


52 Quoted in Longricher, Holocaust, p. 119.


55 Tatz, With Intent to Destroy, p. 22.

56 Browning, The Path to Genocide, p. 86.

57 For a brief overview, see Richard Bessel, “Functionalists vs. Intentionalists: The Debate Twenty Years On or Whatever Happened to Functionalis and Intentionalism?,” German Studies Review, 26:1 (February 2003), pp. 15–20.


59 Longricher, Holocaust, p. 304. “The crucial point,” he writes at p. 426, “is that there was from the outset a consensus among the decision makers that the persecution of the Jews should be further and further radicalized in the further course of the war. On the basis of this consensus, general instructions in line with the intuition of the
subordinates were issued in certain situations; in this way wider scope was given to independent initiatives. In the end the entire process was coordinated and standardized at the top. The leadership at the centre and the executive organizations on the periphery radicalized one another through a reciprocal process.” Ian Kershaw has captured something of this dynamic in his heuristic of “working towards the Führer,” in which he uses a Nazi subordinate’s words to describe how peripheral actors sought to harmonize their actions with their understanding of regime policies and Hitler’s personal desires and ambitions. See Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer’: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” in Christian Leitz, ed., The Third Reich: The Essential Readings (London: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 231–252.


62 Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, pp. 117–118, 125. See also the discussion in Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, Vol. 1, pp. 218–222. “With the growth of the destructive function of the Judenrat, many Jewish leaders felt an almost irresistible urge to look like their German masters” (p. 219).


65 Donat, The Holocaust Kingdom, p. 7.


67 Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust, p. 213.

68 Browning, The Path to Genocide, p. ix.


70 Friedlander, The Years of Extermination, pp. 568, 572.

71 Reginald H. Phelps, quoted in Goldhagen, Hitler’s Willing Executioners, p. 443.

72 In the case of Denmark, Saul Friedländer wrote: “The Germans had allowed a semi-autonomous Danish government to stay in place, and their own presence as occupiers was hardly felt. Hitler had decided on this peculiar course to avoid unnecessary difficulties in a country [that was] strategically important . . . ‘racially related’ to the community of Nordic peoples, and mainly an essential supplier of agricultural products . . .” Friedländer, The Years of Extermination, p. 545.

73 Hilberg, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders, p. 258.

74 Burleigh, Ethics and Extermination, pp. 155, 164.

75 Burleigh and Wippermann, The Racial State, p. 51.
77 Goldhagen, Hitler’s Willing Executioners, pp. 277, 446.
79 Friedländer, The Years of Extermination, p. 511. See Chapter 14 for further discussion of history and memory in Germany after the Second World War.
82 “Israel Pledges to Protect Itself from ‘New Holocaust’ Threat Posed by Iran’s Nuclear Programme,” Daily Telegraph, April 21, 2009. Ahmadinejad’s comments, made at a “World Without Zionism” conference in Tehran on October 26, 2005, were translated in many media as “Israel must be wiped off the map,” suggesting the country and its population should be physically destroyed. However, this is disputed by, among others, Juan Cole, who claims a more accurate translation is: “This regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time.” In this reading, asserts Cole, “Ahmadinejad was not making a threat, he was quoting a saying of [Ayatollah] Khomeini and urging that pro-Palestinian activists in Iran not give up hope—that the occupation of Jerusalem was no more a continued inevitability than had been the hegemony of the Shah’s government,” overthrown in Iran in 1979. See Cole, “Informed Comment,” May 3, 2006, www.juancole.com/2006/05/hitchens-hacker-and-hitchens.html.
83 See the official transcript of Netanyahu’s speech to the 37th Zionist Congress, www.pno.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Speeches/Pages/speechcongress201015.aspx.
84 Christopher Browning, “A Lesson for Netanyahu From a Real Holocaust Historian,” Foreign Policy (online), October 22, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/22/a-lesson-for-netanyahu-from-a-real-holocaust-historian/. Israeli critics were no less scathing. Roy Isacowitz wrote in Haaretz: “Himself the son of a crackpot historian, Bibi has adopted a fringe and discredited theory with no historical basis and made it the cornerstone of his understanding of the most traumatic and decisive event in Jewish history. . . . To put anyone on a par with Hitler as regards the Holocaust is a form of Holocaust denial. It pervets the historical truth of the Holocaust and opens the door to all sorts of other lunatic and dangerous theories. It is something that no intelligent and aware person should do, let alone the prime minister of Israel.” Roy Isacowitz, “In Mufi Speech, Netanyahu Showed His Obsessive Hatred of the Palestinians,” Haaretz, October 22, 2015, www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.681790 (requires registration). See also Rabbi Eliyahu Fink’s hilarious and cutting reworking of a Hitler rant from the 2004 German film Downfall (Der Untergang) at www.facebook.com/rabbieliyahu/fink/videos/788769714567405/.


90 Richard Falk, “Slouching toward a Palestinian Holocaust,” The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, June 29, 2007, www.oldsite.transnational.org/Area_MiddleEast/2007/Falk_PalestineGenocide.html. A Red Cross report leaked in 2008 described a “progressive deterioration in food security for up to 70 per cent of Gaza’s population” as a result of the Israeli siege, adding that “chronic malnutrition is a steadily rising trend and micronutrient deficiencies are of great concern.” Quoted in Donald Macintyre, “Chronic Malnutrition in Gaza Blamed on Israel,” The Independent, November 15, 2008. Former US president Jimmy Carter stated in 2008 that the Palestinian population of Gaza was being “starved to death,” with caloric intakes lower than in the poorest African countries: “It’s an atrocity what is being perpetrated as punishment on the people in Gaza. I think it is an abomination that this continues to go on.” Jonathan Wright, “Carter Calls Gaza Blockade a Crime and Atrocity,” Reuters dispatch on Yahoo! News, April 18, 2008.

91 Goldstone report cited in Rory McCarthy, “UN Investigation Finds Evidence of War Crimes in Gaza Campaign,” The Guardian, October 25, 2009. On the two most recent assaults on Gaza (at the time of writing—mother is quite predictable during the life of this edition), see Norman G. Finkelstein, “This Time We Went Too Far”: Truth & Consequences of the Gaza Invasion (New York: OR Books, 2010), and Max Blumenthal’s The 51 Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza (New York: Nation Books, 2015). Blumenthal’s Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel (New York: Nation Books, 2013) is the most hard-hitting survey of contemporary Israeli atrocity in the occupied Palestinian territories and within Israel proper, including regular outbreaks of genocidal discourse at high levels of the political and religious establishment. In July 2014, for example, Ayelet Shaked of the far-right Jewish Home Party approvingly posted the 2002 comments of an Israeli settler: “Behind every terrorist stand dozens of men and women, without whom he could not engage in terrorism. They are all enemy combatants, and their blood shall be on all their heads. Now this also includes the mothers of the martyrs, who send them to hell with flowers and kisses. They should follow their sons, nothing would be more just. They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there.” Following national elections in March 2015, Shaked was appointed to the Israeli cabinet—as Justice Minister. See Robert Tait, “New Israeli Justice Minister Notorious for Anti-Palestinian Rhetoric: Given Bodyguard after ‘Nazi’ Death Threats,” The Telegraph, May 12, 2015, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/11599932/New-Israeli-justice-minister-notorious-for-anti-Palestinian-rhetoric—given-bodyguard-after-Nazi-death-threats.html.

92 See Adam Jones, “Genocide in Gaza? Notes toward an Answer,” post to the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) mailing list, January 26, 2009, www.genocidetext.net/israel_palestine01.htm; Jones, “Israel and Genocide,” presentation to the IAGS conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 16, 2014 (notes available from the author). For a critique of the inattention to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in genocide studies, see Haifa Rashed, Damien Short, and John Docker, “Nakba Memoricide:


95 Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p. 28.


98 As David Moshman put it: “True, the Holocaust is phenomenologically distinct from every other genocide, but so is every other genocide distinct from every other. Every genocide is unique, and the Holocaust is no exception.” Moshman, “Conceptions of Genocide and Perceptions of History,” in Stone, ed., *The Historiography of Genocide*, p. 72.


100 Interestingly, volume 2 of Steven Katz’s *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, which was supposed to apply his uniqueness thesis to twentieth-century cases of mass killing, was scheduled for publication many years ago, but has yet to appear. I have often wondered whether Katz hit an insuperable roadblock in applying his uniqueness thesis to the Rwandan genocide, which occurred the same year his first volume was published.


104 Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 236–237. Ian Hancock points out that “the first mass genocidal action of the Holocaust,” in January 1940, “took place when 250 Romani [‘Gypsy’] children from Brno [Czechoslovakia] were murdered in Buchenwald, where they were used as guinea-pigs to test the efficacy of the Zyklon B cyanide gas crystals that were later used in the gas chambers” (see Figure 11.2). Hancock, “Romanies and the Holocaust,” p. 389.

was never exclusively or primarily an anti-Jewish campaign; that was not the standard against which other Nazi persecutions were measured. On the contrary, his book aimed to demonstrate (by placing on record translations of Nazi laws in the occupied countries) how comprehensively, against a range of subject peoples, the Nazis had attempted to destroy the existence of nations, their well-being, institutions and ways of life.” Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 20–21.

106 Alan S. Rosenbaum, “Introduction to the Third Edition,” in Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), p. 21. Martin Shaw goes further: “In order to understand other genocides … the imperative is not to compare them with the Holocaust—which as a specific episode was necessarily unique in many respects—but to interpret them in terms of a coherent general conception. We don’t need a standard that steers all discussion towards a maximal concept of industrial extermination, a standard that distorts even the Nazi genocide against the Jews. We do need a coherent, generic, sociological concept of genocide that can make sense of a range of historical experiences.” Shaw, *What is Genocide?,* p. 45.
BOX 6A THE NAZIS’ OTHER VICTIMS

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

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

“Ever since,” wrote Browning, the Jewish Holocaust “has overshadowed National Socialism’s other all-too-numerous atrocities.” It does so in this book as well. Yet it is important to devote attention, however inadequate, to the Nazis’ other victims.

PRE-WAR PERSECUTIONS AND THE “EUTHANASIA” CAMPAIGN

Communists and socialists

The first Nazi concentration camp was located at Dachau, near Munich. Opened in March 1933—two months after the Nazis seized power—it stated purpose was “to concentrate, in one place, not only all Communist officials but also, if necessary, the officials of . . . other Marxist formations who threaten the security of the state.” Bolshevism was as central to Hitler’s Weltanschauung (worldview) as anti-semitism, embodying the decadent modernist tendencies that he loathed. In fact, Hitler’s ideology and geopolitical strategy are best seen as motivated by a hatred of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” and a conviction that the Nazis’ territorial ambitions in Central and Eastern Europe could be realized only through victory over “the Marxist-cum-Bolshevik ‘octopus’ and the Jewish world conspiracy.”

One can distinguish between prewar and wartime phases of the campaign against communists and socialists. In the prewar stage, these sectors dominated the security policies of the Reich. They were the major targets of state violence and incarceration in camps; Jews—as Jews were not targeted for substantial physical violence or imprisonment until Kristallnacht in 1938.
by which time the German Left had been crushed. Communists, socialists, and other Left-oppositionists were also purged from public institutions in a manner very similar to Jews. Historian Arnold Sywoltek estimates that the Gestapo murdered in excess of 100,000 communists during the twelve years of the Third Reich.

After the occupation of western Poland in September–October 1939, and especially with the invasion of eastern Poland and the Soviet Union in June 1941, the struggle against Bolshevism became bound up with the Nazis’ ambition to enslave and exterminate the Slavic “subhuman.” “What the Bolsheviks are must be clear to anybody who ever set sight upon the face of a Red Commissar,” declared an article in the Nazi military paper, Mitteilungen für die Truppe (Information for the Troops), as the invasion of the Soviet Union was launched in June 1941. “Here no theoretical explanations are necessary anymore. To call beastly the traits of these people, a high percentage of whom are Jews, would be an insult to animals. . . . In these Commissars we see the uprising of subhumans against noble blood.” As this quotation suggests, the Nazis’ ideological struggle against communists and socialists became intertwined with the national and military struggle with the USSR; the threat of ethnic swamping by “barbarians from the East”; and the assault on European Jewry.

“Asocials” and other undesirables

The Nazis’ quest for racial purity and social homogeneity meant that “asocial” elements were to be annihilated or, in some cases, reformed. An effective study of this phenomenon is Robert Gellately’s book on Nazism and German public opinion, Backing Hitler. Considered asocial was “anyone who did not participate as a good citizen and accept their social responsibilities.” Among the groups harassed and punished were men seen as “shirking” paid work, or otherwise congenitally prone to unemployment or vagabondage. Gellately describes a “special action” organized by Nazi police chief Heinrich Himmler in March 1937 “to arrest 2,000 people out of work”:

The instruction was to send to concentration camps, those who “in the opinion of the Criminal Police” were professional criminals, repeat offenders, or habitual sex offenders. The enthusiasm of the police was such that they arrested not 2,000, but 2,752 people, only 171 of whom had broken their probation. Police used the event as a pretext to get rid of “problem cases.” Those arrested were described as break-in specialists (938), thieves (741), sex offenders (495), swindlers (436), robbers (56), and dealers in stolen goods (86). Only 85 of them [3 percent] were women.
According to Gellately, “A recurrent theme in Hitler’s thinking was that in the event of war, the home front would not fall prey to saboteurs, that is, anyone vaguely considered to be ‘criminals,’ ‘pimps,’ or ‘deserers.’” The result was that “asocial” men, along with some women accused of involvement in the sex trade or common crimes, were confined in “camps [that] were presented as educative institutions . . . places for ‘race defilers, rapists, sexual degenerates and habitual criminals’” (quoting an article in Das Schwarze Korps newspaper). Although “these camps were nothing like the death camps in the eastern occupied territories, the suffering, death, and outright murder in them was staggering.” Just as Jews and Bolshevism blurred in the Nazis’ ideology, it is important to recognize the overlap among asocials, Jews, and Roma (Gypsies). It was a cornerstone of the Nazi demonization of Jews that they were essentially a parasitic class, incapable of “honest” work and thus driven to usury, lazy cosmopolitanism, and criminality. Likewise, perhaps the core of the Nazi racial hatred of Roma lay in their stereotypical depiction as shiftless and inclined to criminal behavior. The genocidal consequences of these stereotypes are examined in the “Other Holocausta” section, below.

**Homosexual men**

For all the promiscuous hatreds of Adolf Hitler, “homophobia was not one of his major obsessions,”10 and Hitler does not seem to have been the moving force behind the Nazi campaign against gay men. (Lesbian women were never systematically outlawed or arrested.)11 Rather, that dubious honor goes to the owlish Heinrich Himmler, supreme commander of the SS paramilitary force, “whose loathing of homosexuals knew no bounds.”12 As early as 1937, in a speech to the SS academy at Bad Tölz, Himmler pledged: “Like stinging nettles we will rip them [homosexuals] out, throw them on a heap, and burn them. Otherwise . . . we’ll see the end of Germany, the end of the Germanic world.” Later he would proclaim to his Finnish physiotherapist, Dr. Felix Kersten:

> We must exterminate these people root and branch. Just think how many children will never be born because of this, and how a people can be broken in nerve and spirit when such a plague gets hold of it. . . . The homosexual is a traitor to his own people and must be rooted out.13

As these comments suggest, the reviling of gays was linked to Nazi beliefs surrounding asocial and “useless” groups, who not only contributed nothing productive to the body politic, but actively subverted it. Gay males—because they chose to have sex with men—“were self-evidently failing in their duty to contribute to the demographic expansion of the ‘Aryan-Germanic race,’ at a time when millions of young men had perished in the First World
War.” Just as Roma and (especially) Jews were deemed parasites on German society and the national economy, so were gays labeled “as useless as hens which don’t lay eggs” and “sociosexual propagation misfits.” (They did, however, have their uses: among some conquered peoples, homosexuality was to be encouraged, since it “would hasten their degeneracy, and thus their demise.”)  

Richard Plant’s study of the Nazi persecution of gays, *The Pink Triangle*, estimated the number of men convicted for homosexual “crimes” from 1933 to 1944 to be “between 50,000 and 63,000, of which nearly 4,000 were juveniles.” In the concentration camps that were the destiny of thousands of them, their “fate . . . can only be described as ghastly.” Like the Jews, they were forced to wear a special badge (the pink triangle of Plant’s title), were referred to contemptuously as *Mannweiber* (“manwives”), and were segregated from their fellow prisoners, who often joined in the derision and brutalization. An inmate at Dachau reported that “the prisoners with the pink triangle did not live very long; they were quickly and systematically exterminated by the SS.” According to Konnilyn Feig, they found themselves “tormented from all sides as they struggle[d] to avoid being assaulted, raped, worked, and beaten to death.” Gay men were also among the likeliest candidates for medical experiments. At no point was support and solace likely from relatives or friends, because of the shame and stigma attaching to their “crimes.” Plant estimates that the large majority of homosexuals consigned to concentration camps perished there—some 5,000 to 15,000 men.

### Jehovah’s Witnesses and religious dissidents

If gays were dragged into the Nazi holocaust by their “traitorous” reluctance to contribute to Germany’s demographic revival, Jehovah’s Witnesses—already anathematized as a religious cult by the dominant Protestant and Catholic religious communities—were condemned for refusing to swear loyalty to the Nazi regime and to serve in the German military. In April 1935 the faith was formally outlawed, and later that year the first four hundred Jehovah’s Witnesses were consigned to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. By 1939 the number incarcerated there and in other prisons and camps had ballooned to 6,000.

When war broke out in September 1939, the Witnesses’ rejection of military service aroused still greater malevolence. Only a few days after the German invasion of Poland, a believer who refused to swear loyalty to the regime, August Dickmann, was executed by the Gestapo “in order to set an example.” In all, “Over the course of the dictatorship, as many as 10,000 members of the community were arrested, with 2,000 sent to concentration camps, where they were treated dreadfully and as many as 1,200 died or were murdered.”
In a curious twist, however, a positive stereotype also arose around the Witnesses. They came to be viewed in the camps as “industrious, neat, and tidy, and uncompromising in [their] religious principles.” Accordingly, the SS ultimately switched to a policy of trying to exploit [the Witnesses’] devotion to duty and their reliability. . . . They were used as general servants in SS households or put to work in small Kommandos [work teams] when there was a threat that prisoners might escape. In Ravensbrück [women’s concentration camp], they were showcased as “exemplary prisoners,” while in Niederhagen, the only camp where they constituted the core population, they were put to work on renovations.24

As for mainstream religion, in general the Nazis distrusted it, preferring their own brand of mysticism and Volk-worship. Their desire not to provoke unrest among the general population, or (before the war) international opposition, limited their campaign against the main Protestant dominations and the large Catholic minority in Germany. No such restraint obtained in occupied Poland, however, where leading Catholic figures were swept up in the campaign of eugenicist against the Polish intelligentsia. At home, as the war turned against Germany, religious dissidents of all stripes came to be hounded, imprisoned, and killed. The best-known case is that of the Protestant pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who declined against the Nazi regime from his pulpit, and was hanged in Flossenbürg concentration camp shortly before the war ended. His Letters and Papers from Prison has become a classic of devotional literature.25

The handicapped and infirm

As with every other group the Nazis targeted, the campaign against the handicapped and infirm exploited a popular receptiveness based on longstanding patterns of discrimination and anathematization in European and Western culture. An offshoot of the Western drive for modernity was the development of a science of eugenics, taking both positive and negative forms: “Positive eugenics was the attempt to encourage increased breeding by those who were considered particularly fit; negative eugenics aimed at eliminating the unfit.”26 The foci of this international movement were Germany, Great Britain, and the United States (the US pioneered the use of forced sterilization against those considered “abnormal”).27 In Germany in the 1920s, treaties by noted legal and medical authorities railed against those “unworthy of life” and demanded the “destruction” of disabled persons in institutions. This was not murder but “mercy death.”28 Such views initially received strong public backing, even among many relatives of institutionalized patients.29
Once in power, the Nazis intensified the trend. Within a few months, they had promulgated the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Progeny, beginning a policy that by 1945 had led to the forced sterilization of some 300,000 people. The Marriage Health Law followed in 1935, under which Germans seeking to wed were forced to provide medical documentation proving that they did not carry hereditary conditions or afflictions. If they could not so demonstrate, the application was rejected.30

In the two years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Hitler and other Nazi planners began paving the way for the collective killing of disabled infants and children, then of adults. Hitler used the “fog of war” to cover the implementation of the campaign (the authorization, personally signed by Hitler on September 8, 1939, was symbolically backdated to September 1 to coincide with the invasion of Poland). “An elaborate covert bureaucracy”31 was established in a confiscated Jewish property at Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin, and “Aktion T-4”—as the extermination program was dubbed—moved into high gear. The program’s task was to organise the registration, selection, transfer and murder of a previously calculated target group of 70,000 people, including chronic schizophrenics, epileptics and long-stay patients.”32 All were deemed unnutzter Esser, “useless eaters”—surely one of the most macabre phrases in the Nazi vocabulary. In the end, the human destruction exceeded the original ambitions. Among the victims were an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 children, who were starved to death or administered fatal medication. Many adults were dispatched to a prototype gas chamber.33

At every point in the chain of death, the complicity of nurses, doctors, and professionals of all stripes was enthusiastic. Yet as the scope of the killing widened, the general population (and Germany’s churches) proved more ambivalent, eventually leading to open protest. In August 1941, “Aktion T-4” was closed down in Germany. But a decentralized version continued in operation until the last days of the war, and even beyond (the last victim died on May 29, 1945, under the noses of Allied occupiers). Meanwhile, the heart of the program—its eager supervisors and technicians—was bundled east, to manage the extermination of Jews and others in the death camps of Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor in Poland. Thus, “the euthanasia program was the direct precursor of the death factories—ideologically, organizationally, and in terms of personnel.”34

Predictably, then, mass murder in the eastern occupied territories also targeted the handicapped. “In Poland the Germans killed almost all disabled Poles . . . The same applied in the occupied Soviet Union.”35 With the assistance of the same Einsatzgruppen death squads who murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews in the first year of the war, some 100,000 people deemed “unworthy of life” were murdered at a single institution, the Kiev Pathological Institute in Ukraine.36 In all, perhaps a quarter of a million handicapped and disabled individuals died to further the Nazis’ fanatical
social-engineering scheme. “With the ‘euthanasia’ programmes,” asserts Peter Longerich, “the National Socialist regime had crossed the threshold to a systematic, racially motivated policy of annihilation a little under two years before the mass murder of the Jews began.”

OTHER HOLOCAUSTS

The Slavs

The ethnic designation “Slav” derives from the same root as “slave,” and that is the destiny to which Nazi policies sought to consign Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, White Russians (Belorussians), and other Slavic peoples. “The Slavs are a mass of born slaves, who feel the need of a master,” Hitler declared, making clear his basically colonialist fantasies for the east: “We’ll supply the Ukrainians with scarves, glass beads and everything that colonial peoples like.”
But if they were primitive and contemptible, the Slavic “hordes” were also dangerous and expansionist—at least when dominated and directed by Jews (i.e., “Judeo-Bolsheviks”; see Figure 1.7, p. 47). It may be argued that the confrontation with the Slavs was inseparable from, and as central as, the campaign against the Jews. Consider the words of Colonel-General Hoepner, commander of Panzer Group 4 in the invasion of the Soviet Union, on sending his troops into battle:

The war against the Soviet Union is an essential component of the German people’s struggle for existence. It is the old struggle of the Germans against the Slavs, the defense of European culture against the Muscovite-Asiatic flood, the warding off of Jewish Bolshevism. This struggle must have as its aim the demolition of present Russia and must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Both the planning and the execution of every battle must be dictated by an iron will to bring about a merciless, total annihilation of the enemy.”

The first victims of the anti-Slav genocide were, however, Polish. Hitler’s famous comment, “Who, after all, talks nowadays of the annihilation of the Armenians?” (see Chapter 4), is often mistaken as referring to the impending fate of Jews in Nazi-occupied territories. In fact, Hitler was speaking just before the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, referring to commands he had issued to “kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish descent or language. Only in this way can we obtain the living space we need.” Richard Lukas is left in little doubt of Nazi plans:

While the Germans intended to eliminate the Jews before the end of the war, most Poles would work as helots until they too shared the fate of the Jews. . . . The conclusion is inescapable that had the war continued, the Poles would have been ultimately obliterated either by outright slaughter in gas chambers, as most Jews had perished, or by a continuation of the policies the Nazis had inaugurated in occupied Poland during the war—genocide by execution, forced labor, starvation, reduction of biological propagation, and Germanization.

Others dispute the claim that non-Jewish Poles were destined for annihilation. Nonetheless, as Lukas notes, “during almost six years of war, Poland lost 6,028,000 of its citizens, or 22 percent of its total population, the highest ratio of losses to population of any country in Europe.” Nearly three million of the murdered Poles were Jews, but “over 50 percent . . . were Polish Christians, victims of prison, death camps, raids, executions, epidemics, starvation, excessive work, and ill treatment.” The Germans massacred tens of thousands of Polish males from the prewar political elite and professions in
one of the classic eliticides, and genocides, in modern history. “. . . Only a nation whose upper levels are destroyed can be pushed into the ranks of slavery,” Hitler declared. The Soviet Union, too, had done its part during the two years that it dismembered and occupied Poland in league with the Nazis: “Together, between September 1939 and June 1941, in their time as allies, the Soviet and German states . . . killed perhaps two hundred thousand Polish citizens, and deported about a million more.” The Nazis also dispatched fully six million Poles to Germany as slave laborers. The Soviets’ depredations during their relatively brief occupation of eastern Poland (September 1939 to June 1941), and again after 1944, also contributed significantly to the death toll (see Chapter 5).

As for the Slavs of Ukraine, Russia, and other parts of the Soviet Union, their suffering is legendary. A commonly-cited estimate is that about twenty-seven million Soviet citizens died. The disproportionate number of militarized male victims would have “catastrophic . . . demographic consequences” for decades after, with women of the relevant age groups outnumbering men by two or even three to one. But two-thirds of the victims—about eighteen million people—were civilians. Exploitation of Slavs as slave laborers was merciless and genocidal. According to historian Catherine Merridale, “At least three million [Soviet] men and women (one famous Russian source gives a figure of over five million) were shipped off to the Reich to work as slaves. Many of these—probably more than two million—were worked so hard that they joined Europe’s Jews in the death camps, discarded by the Reich for disposal like worn-out nags sent to the abattoir.”

Soviet Slavs were the primary intended victims of the Nazis’ infamous “hunger policy” (Hungerpolitik) codified in a series of dictates in the months prior to the launching of Operation Barbarossa. The strategy of requiring German troops to “live off the land” meant a radical planned reduction in the nutritional resources available to the civilian population of both the occupied and unoccupied Soviet territories. It was anticipated that mass death would result: “The purpose of the Russian campaign is to decimate the Slavic population by thirty millions,” announced Heinrich Himmler, Hitler’s leading genocidal henchman, at a dinner party shortly before the invasion. With Operation Barbarossa well underway, an Einsatzgruppe chief, Franz Alfred Six, declared coolly on a visit to Army Group Center headquarters:

Hitler intends to extend the eastern border of the Reich as far as the line Baku-Stalingrad-Moscow-Leningrad. Eastward of this line as far as the Urals, a “blazing strip” will emerge in which all life is to be erased. It is intended to decimate [i.e., exterminate] the around thirty million Russians living in this strip through starvation, by removing all food-stuffs from this enormous territory. All those involved in this operation
are to be forbidden on pain of death to give a Russian even a piece of bread. The large cities from Leningrad to Moscow are to be razed to the ground.\textsuperscript{48}

As historian Alex Kay notes, when German troops crossed the border into the Soviet-occupied regions of eastern Poland in June 1941, “Germany’s leading military and political institutions had all contributed to formulating the starvation policy or signaled their explicit endorsement of it. It had become state policy.”\textsuperscript{49} But with the German setbacks after December 1941, the principal victims of the starvation policy—millions of them—were the Soviet prisoners-of-war captured in the great encirclement campaigns of the invasion’s early stages (see following section).

Andrew Roberts pointed out in his history of the Second World War that “in a conflict that claimed the lives of fifty million people . . . the USSR lost more than the whole of the rest of the world put together.”\textsuperscript{50} Titanic Soviet sacrifices, and crushing military force, proved key to Nazi Germany’s defeat, with the other Allies playing important supporting roles. “. . . The Red Army, at the cost of perhaps 12 million dead (or approximately thirty times the number of the Anglo-Americans), broke the back of the Wehrmacht,”\textsuperscript{51} most spectacularly in Operation Bagration in mid-1944, an offensive against the Germans’ Army Group Center that inflicted a defeat “as decisive as anything seen in the history of warfare,” on a scale that “utterly dwarfed the contemporaneous Operation Overlord” in western France.\textsuperscript{52}

Between the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941 and the D-Day invasion of France in June 1944, some 80 percent of German forces were deployed in the East, and the overwhelming majority of German military casualties occurred there.\textsuperscript{53} As Yugoslav partisan leader Arso Jovanovic put it at the time: “Over there on the Eastern front—that’s the real war, where whole divisions burn up like matches”—and millions of civilians along with them.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{“A genocidal captivity”}.\textsuperscript{55} Soviet prisoners-of-war

“Next to the Jews in Europe,” wrote Alexander Werth, “the biggest single German crime was undoubtedly the extermination by hunger, exposure and in other ways of . . . Russian [sic: Soviet] war prisoners.”\textsuperscript{56} Donald Bloxham noted that the toll of at least 3.3 million murdered POWs “add[s] up to approximately the same number as the combined total of Armenians, Cambodians and Rwandans killed in genocides in the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{57} Yet the murder of at least 3.3 million Soviet POWs is one of the least-known of modern genocides; there is still no full-length book on the subject in English.\textsuperscript{58} It also stands as one of the most intensive genocides of all time: “a holocaust that devoured millions,” as Catherine Merridale acknowledges.\textsuperscript{59}
The large majority of POWs, some 2.8 million, were killed in just eight months of 1941–1942, a rate of slaughter matched (to my knowledge) only by the 1994 Rwanda genocide.60

The Soviet men were captured in massive encirclement operations in the early months of the German invasion, and in gender-selective round-ups that occurred in the newly-occupied territories. “It was clear to the Wehrmacht on exactly what scale they could expect to capture Soviet troops,” wrote Alex Kay, “and yet they neglected to make the requisite preparations for feeding and sheltering the captured soldiers, who were viewed by the economic planners and the military leadership alike as the German troops’ direct competitors when it came to food.”61 Nor was military service a strict requirement for this atrocious treatment. All males between the ages of 15 and 65 were deemed to be prisoners-of-war, and liable to be “sent to the rear,” a phrase that was merely a euphemism for mass murder.

The POW camps, in Timothy Snyder’s estimation, “were designed to end life.”62 According to Alexander Dallin, “Testimony is eloquent and prolific on the abandonment of entire divisions under the open sky”:

Epidemics . . . decimated the camps. Beatings and abuse by the guards were commonplace. Millions spent weeks without food or shelter. Casualties varied considerably but almost nowhere amounted to less than 30 percent in the winter of 1941–42, and sometimes went as high as 95 percent.63

A Hungarian tank officer who visited one POW enclosure described “tens of thousands of Russian prisoners. Many were on the point of expiring. Few could stand on their feet. Their faces were dried up and their eyes sunk deep into their sockets. Hundreds were dying every day, and those who had any strength left dumped them in a vast pit.”64 German guards took their amusement by “throwing a dead dog into the prisoners’ compound,” citing an eyewitness account: “Yelling like mad, the Russians would fall on the animal and tear it to pieces with their bare hands. . . . The intestines they’d stuff in their pockets—a sort of iron ration.”65 Cannibalism was rife. Nazi leader Hermann Göring joked that “in the camps for Russian prisoners of war, after having eaten everything possible, including the soles of their boots, they have begun to eat each other, and what is more serious, have also eaten a German sentry.”66

“On any given day in the autumn of 1941,” noted Anne Applebaum, “as many Soviet POWs died as did British and American POWs during the entire war.”67 Hundreds of thousands of Soviet prisoners were sent to Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, which was originally built to house and exploit them. Thousands died in the first tests of the gas chamber complex at Birkenau. Like the handicapped and Roma, then, Soviet POWs
Figure 6a.2 Summer 1942: an emaciated Soviet prisoner-of-war in the Zeltind camp in Saxony, Germany, is selected for slave labor in Nazi-occupied Belgium. Over three million Soviet prisoners died in Nazi captivity, mostly through starvation, exposure, and disease in 1941–1942, before the policy shifted from extermination to enslavement and hyper-exploitation. Had the Nazis’ imperial enterprise (see Chapter 2) collapsed around the time this image was captured by an unknown photographer—with the machinery of the death camps still in its early stages—the mass murder of Soviet POWs would have stood as the regime’s greatest atrocity.

Source: Wikimedia Commons.
were guinea-pigs and stepping-stones in the evolution of genocide against the Jews. The overall estimate for POW fatalities—3.3 million—is probably low. An important additional group of victims consists of Soviet soldiers, probably hundreds of thousands, who were killed shortly after surrendering.

In one of the twentieth century’s most tragic ironies, the two million or so POWs who survived German incarceration were arrested upon forced repatriation to the USSR, on suspicion of collaboration with the Germans. Most were sentenced to long terms in the Soviet concentration camps, where tens of thousands died in the final years of the Gulag (see Chapter 5).

The Romani genocide (Porrajmos)

Perhaps more than any other group, the Nazi genocide against Romani (Gypsy) peoples parallels the attempted extermination of European Jews. Roma were subjected to virulent racism in the centuries prior to the Holocaust—denounced as dirty, alien, and outside the bonds of social obligation. As the legal scholar David Crowe summarizes:

Though there were only 20,000–26,000 Roma in Germany when Hitler came to power, they were universally despised for what most Germans believed were their lazy, criminal ways. By 1933, there was already a mature body of restrictive anti-Roma laws throughout Germany that placed severe restrictions on their movements under the watchful eye of the police. These laws were such that the Nazis felt all they needed to do was enforce them more rigorously as part of their efforts to deal with what they called the Gypsy plague (Zigeunerplage).

The Nazis targeted the Roma as racial enemies alongside the Jew, and more or less simultaneously with the evolution of anti-Jewish policy from persecution and legal restriction to genocidal extermination. The grim phrase “lives undeserving of life,” which most people associate with Nazi policy toward Jews and the handicapped, was coined with reference to the Roma in a law passed only a few months after Hitler’s seizure of power. Mixed marriages between Germans and Roma, as between “Aryan” Germans and Jews, were outlawed in 1935. The 1935 legislation against “hereditarily diseased progeny,” the cornerstone of the campaign against the handicapped, specifically included Roma among its targets.

In July 1936, more than two years prior to the first mass round-up of Jewish men, Romani men were dispatched in their hundreds to the Dachau concentration camp outside Munich. (The measures were popular: Michael Burleigh noted “the obvious glee with which unwilling neighbours and local authorities regarded the removal of Sinti and Roma from their streets and neighbourhoods.”) While Hitler decreed a brief moratorium on
anti-Jewish measures prior to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, raids were conducted in the vicinity of Berlin to capture and incarcerate Roma.

“On Combating the Gypsy Plague” was the title of a 1937 polemic by Heinrich Himmler, taking a break from his fulminations on homosexuals and Jews. It “marked the definitive transition from a Gypsy policy that was understood as a component of the extirpation of ‘aliens to the community’ . . . to a persecution sui generis.”73 The following year, the first reference to an endgültige Lösung der Zigeunerfrage, a “total solution” to the Romani “question,” appeared in a Nazi pronouncement.74 A thousand more Roma were condemned to concentration camps in 1938.

A few months after the outbreak of the Second World War, some 250 Romani children at Buchenwald became test subjects for the Zyklon B cyanide crystals later used to exterminate Jews. In late 1941 and early 1942, about 4,400 Roma were deported from Austria to the death camp at Chelmno, where they were murdered in the mobile gas vans then being deployed against Jews in eastern Poland and the Soviet Union.75

* The term “Gypsy” has derogatory connotations for some, and is now often substituted by Roma/Romani, a practice I follow here.
Up to a quarter of a million more Roma perished in German Einsatzgruppen and Order Police Battalion executions, “legitimised with the old prejudice that the victims were ‘spies’.” These produced micro-level scenes of mass killing every bit as appalling and gut-wrenching as the Jewish murder sites of the “Holocaust by Bullets.” An eyewitness, Lidia Krylova, described to a postwar commission a typical cold-blooded massacre of Roma in April 1942 in the Russian village of Aleksandrovka, home to a large Roma community:

Each family was led separately to the pit, and if someone did not move to it, they lugged him [or her]. The shooting was carried out by a soldier with a pistol. First the ten- to twelve-year-old children were shot in front of their mothers’ eyes, then the babies were torn out of the mothers’ arms and thrown alive into the pit. Only after all this was the mother shot. Some of the mothers could not stand the torture and jumped alive after their babies... But not only children were thrown alive into the pit. With my own eyes I saw how they threw [in] the old woman Leonovich, who could not move and was put into a blanket by her daughters and carried by hand. 

In December 1942, Himmler decreed that Roma be deported to the most notorious of the death camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau. There they lived in a “family camp” (so named because Romani families, unlike Jewish ones, were not broken up), while the Nazi authorities decided what to do with them. A camp doctor who spoke with psychologist Robert Jay Lifton described conditions in the Romani barracks as “extraordinarily filthy and unhygienic even for Auschwitz, a place of starving babies, children and adults.” Those who did not die from privation, disease, or horrific medical experiments were finally consigned to the gas chambers in August 1944. In all, “about 20,000 of the 23,000 German and Austrian Roma and Sinti deported to Auschwitz were killed there.”

When the toll of the death factories is combined with that of the mass executions by gunfire, the outcome in terms of Romani mortality rates was not very different from the Jewish Holocaust. From a much smaller population, the Roma lost between 500,000 and 1.5 million of their members in the catastrophe that they call the Porrajmos (“Devouring”). While the lower figure is standard, Romani scholar Ian Hancock argues that it is “grossly underestimated,” failing to recognize the extent to which Romani victims of (for example) the Einsatzgruppen death squads were designated as “partisans” or “asocials,” or assigned other labels that tended to obscure ethnic identity. When to the camp victims are added the huge numbers of Roma—perhaps more than perished in the camps—who “were murdered in the fields and forests where they lived,” the death toll may well match that of the Armenian genocide.
Until recent years, however, the *Porrajmos* has been little more than a footnote in histories of Nazi mass violence. In part, this reflects the fact that Roma constituted a much smaller proportion of the German and European population than did Jews—about 0.05 percent. In addition, most Roma before and after the Second World War were illiterate, and thus unable to match the outpouring of victims’ testimonies and academic analyses by Jewish survivors and scholars. Finally, and relatedly, while anti-Semitism subsided dramatically after the war, Roma continued to be marginalized and stigmatized by European societies, as they remain today.

The result, in historian Sybil Milton’s words, was “a tacit conspiracy of silence about the isolation, exclusion, and systematic killing of the Roma, rendering much of current Holocaust scholarship deficient and obsolete.” Even in contemporary Europe, Roma are the subject of violence and persecution; in a 2009 essay, Hancock declared that “anti-Gypsyism is at an all-time high.” Only since the late 1970s has a civil-rights movement, along with a body of scholarly literature, arisen to confront discrimination and to memorialize Romani suffering during the Nazi era.

**Germans as victims**

For decades after the end of the Second World War, it was difficult to give voice to German suffering in the war. Sixty years after the war’s end, it is easier to accept claims that the Germans, too, should be numbered among the victims of Nazism—and victims of Nazism’s victims.

Predictably, the debate is sharpest in Germany itself (see further discussion in Chapter 14). Two books published in 2003 symbolized the new visibility of the issue. A novel by Nobel Prize-winning author Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang (Crabwalk)*, centers on the twentieth century’s worst maritime disaster: the torpedoing of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* by a Soviet submarine, as the converted liner attempted to carry refugees (and some soldiers) from East Prussia to the German heartland, ahead of advancing Soviet armies. Nine thousand people died. In addition, a revisionist historian, Jörg Friedrich, published *Brandstätten (Fire Sites)*, a compendium of grisly, never-before-seen archival photographs of German victims of Allied fire-bombing (see Chapter 14).

Estimates of the death toll in the area bombing of German cities “range from about 300,000 to 600,000, and of injuries from 600,000 to over a million.” The most destructive raids were those on Hamburg (July 27–28, 1943) and Dresden, “the German Hiroshima” (February 13, 1945). Both strikes resulted in raging fire-storms that suffocated or incinerated almost all life within their radius. As discussed in Chapter 1, various genocide scholars have described these and other aerial bombardments as genocidal.
Among the estimated four million German soldiers killed on all fronts during the war were those who died as prisoners-of-war in the Soviet Union. Many German POWs were executed; most were sent to concentration camps where, like their Soviet counterparts, they died of exposure, starvation, and additionally overwork. "In all, at least one million German prisoners died out of the 3,150,000 [captured] by the Red Army," and this does not reflect those summarily shot before they could be taken prisoner.  

"An even greater percentage of German prisoners died in two years of Russian captivity before the end of the war than Russians died in four years of German captivity." In one of the most egregious cases, of 91,000 Sixth Army POWs seized following the German surrender at Stalingrad in 1943, only 6,000 survived to be repatriated to Germany in the 1950s. 

Approximately 6.5 million German nationals—soldiers and civilians—were killed in the Second World War, including the hundreds of thousands of

Figure 63.4 Margot R., an ethnic-German refugee from Poland. Her medical condition was catalogued as part of the British-supervised “Operation Swallow” of 1946–1947, in which millions of Germans from the former Nazi-occupied territories of central and eastern Europe were evacuated—or “cleansed.” Hundreds of thousands of Germans died in this series of mass expulsions by vengeful governments and populations. It may have been the largest such uprooting in history (see also Figure 14.3, p. 669).

Source: Hoover Institution Archives/Christopher Emmet Papers.
German victims of the Nazi regime. A final horror was the reprisal killing and mass expulsion of ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, often from territories their forebears had inhabited for centuries. As early as September 1939, in the opening weeks of the Nazi invasion of Poland, an estimated 60,000 ethnic Germans were allegedly murdered by Poles. With the German army in retreat across the eastern front in 1944–1945, large numbers of Germans fell prey to the vengeful atrocities of Soviet troops (notably in East Prussia) and local populations (especially in Poland and Czechoslovakia). Some twelve to fourteen million ethnic Germans were uprooted in what the historian R.M. Douglas has called “not merely the largest forced migration but probably the largest single movement of population in human history,” implemented “largely by state-sponsored violence and terror.” Approximately 1.71 million perished or were murdered en route. Much of this occurred after the war had ended, sometimes well after; and it took place under the aegis of Allied occupation authorities, as the philosopher Bertrand Russell noted in an October 1945 protest letter:

In Eastern Europe now mass deportations are being carried out by our allies on an unprecedented scale, and an apparently deliberate attempt is being made to exterminate millions of Germans, not by gas, but by depriving them of their homes and of food, leaving them to die by slow and agonizing starvation. This is not done as an act of war, but as part of a deliberate policy of “peace.”

Moreover, an agreement reached among the Allies at the Yalta Conference (February 1945) “granted war reparations to the Soviet Union in the form of labor services. According to German Red Cross documents, it is estimated that 874,000 German civilians were abducted to the Soviet Union.” They suffered a higher casualty rate even than German prisoners-of-war, with some 45 percent dying in captivity.

FURTHER STUDY


Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 2010. Focuses on the killing fields of Central and Eastern Europe (present-day eastern Poland, Belarus, and western Ukraine) as the heartland of both Nazi and Stalinist genocide. Perhaps the most widely-read book in Holocaust and genocide studies since Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (see Further Study, Chapter 6). See also Box 2.3.


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**NOTES**


4 According to Dominique Vidal, approximately 150,000 communists and left-leaning social democrats were incarcerated in concentration camps between
7 “The ‘work-shy’ were [defined as] males medically fit to work, but who (without good reason) refused jobs on two occasions, or quit after a short time.” Robert Gellately, Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 98.
8 Ibid., p. 96.
9 Ibid., pp. 60, 63, 68, 70.
11 “Lesbians were not subjected to formal persecution in the Third Reich, despite the fact that some zealous legal experts demanded this. . . . In a state which exalted manly, martial roughness, lesbians were less of a threat to the regime than men who subverted its crude stereotypes of ‘normal’ male behaviour.” Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 268.
13 Himmler quoted in ibid., pp. 89, 99.
15 Quoted in Plant, The Pink Triangle, p. 102.
16 Ibid., p. 99.
17 Ibid., p. 149.
18 Quoted in ibid., p. 166.
22 Gellately, Backing Hitler, p. 75.
27 “Between 1907 and 1939, more than 30,000 people in twenty-nine [US] states were sterilized, many of them unknowingly or against their will, while they were incarcerated in prisons or institutions for the mentally ill.” See “Handicapped:
29 An opponent of such views, Ewald Meltzer, the director of Katherinemhof juvenile asylum in Saxony, decided in 1925 “to carry out a poll of the views on ‘euthanasia’ held by the parents of his charges. To his obvious surprise, some 73 per cent of the 162 respondents said that they would approve ‘the painless curtailment of the life of [their] child if experts had established that it is suffering from incurable idiocy.’ Many of the ‘yes’ respondents said that they wished to unload the burden represented by an ‘idiotic’ child, with some of them expressing the wish that this be done surreptitiously, in a manner which anticipated later National Socialist practice.” Burleigh, Ethics and Extermination, p. 121.
30 Recall that under the UN Convention definition of genocide, preventing births within a group may be considered genocidal.
31 Burleigh, Ethics and Extermination, p. 123.
32 Ibid.
34 Soskice, The Order of Terror, p. 243. Peter Fritzsche also points to the connections between the “euthanasia” campaign and the Holocaust that would erupt shortly after: “Figuring out by trial and error the various stages of the killing process, from the identification of patients to the arrangement of special transports to the murder sites to the killings by gas in special chambers to the disposal of the bodies, and mobilizing medical experts who worked in secret with a variety of misleading euphemisms to conceal their work . . . the Nazis built important bureaucratic bridges that would lead to the extermination of Jews and Gypsies.” Fritzsche, Life and Death in the Third Reich (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008), p. 118.
36 Friedlander, The Origins of Nazi Genocide, p. 142.
40 Heinrich Himmler, tasked with engineering the destruction of the Polish people, parroted Hitler in proclaiming that “all Poles will disappear from the world. . . . It is essential that the great German people should consider it as its major task to destroy all Poles.” Himmler quoted in Richard C. Lukas, “The Polish Experience during the Holocaust,” in Berenbaum, ed., A Mosaic of Victims, p. 89.
41 Lukas, “The Polish Experience,” p. 90. Timothy Snyder rejects Lukas’s calculation of the death toll, suggesting that the “six million” figure was “generated . . . for the domestic Polish political purpose of creating an apparent balance between the Polish and Jewish dead” of the Second World War. He argues that a total Polish mortality of 4.8 million during the war “is probably closer to the truth,” of whom “about three million were Jews.” Snyder, Bloodlands, p. 406. For detailed studies of the Nazi occupation of Poland, see Richard C. Lukas, Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939–1944, rev. edn (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1997), and Alexander B. Rossino, Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

42 Hitler quoted in Snyder, Bloodlands, p. 126.


50 Roberts, The Storm of War, p. 557.


52 Roberts, The Storm of War, p. 605.

53 “. . . It cannot be reiterated enough that out of every five Germans killed in combat—that is, on the battlefield rather than in aerial bombing or through other means—four died on the Eastern Front. It is the central statistic of the Second World War.” Ibid., p. 603.

54 Quoted in Milovan Djilas, Warime (New York: Harvest, 1980), p. 73. Omer Bartov has written: “It was in the Soviet Union that the Wehrmacht’s back was broken long before the Western Allies landed in France, and even after June 1944 it was in the East that the Germans continued to commit and lose far more men. . . . By the end of March 1945 the Ostheer’s [German eastern front] casualties mounted to 6,172,373 men, or double its original manpower on 22 June 1941, a figure which constituted fully four-fifths of the [Germans] total losses . . . on all fronts since the invasion of the Soviet Union.” Bartov, Hitler’s Army, pp. 29, 45. Alec Nove points out that more Russians died in the German siege of Leningrad alone (1941–1943) “than the total of British and Americans killed from all causes throughout the war.” Nove, Stalinism and After (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 93. See further discussion in Chapter 2, pp. 124–126 and note 125.
59 Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, p. 149.
64 Quoted in Werth, *Russia at War*, pp. 635–636.
66 Göring quoted in Dallin, *German Rule in Russia*, p. 415.
70 Ironically, the Roma “were originally from North India and belonged to the Indo–Germanic speaking, or as Nazi racial anthropologists would have it, ‘Aryan’ people.” Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, p. 116.
Returning to the town of Smolensk, the Germans took with them the valuables and some clothes of the murdered victims. The exhumation of the dead bodies revealed that 176 persons were shot on April 24, 1942. One hundred forty-three of them—62 women, 29 men, 52 children—were identified. Among the adult victims were kolchoz [collective farm] workers, educators, and three teachers."

82 Ibid., p. 92.
83 Hancock, “Responses to the Porrajmos.”
87 Roberts, The Storm of War, p. 343.
88 Beevor, Stalingrad, p. 430.
94 De Zayas, A Terrible Revenge, p. 116.