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NAZI POLICY, JEWISH WORKERS, GERMAN KILLERS

Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers focuses on controversial issues in current Holocaust scholarship. How did Nazi Jewish policy evolve during the first years of the war? When did the Nazi regime cross the historic watershed from population expulsion and decimation (“ethnic cleansing”) to total and systematic extermination? How did Nazi authorities attempt to reconcile policies of expulsion and extermination with the wartime urge to exploit Jewish labor? How were Jewish workers impacted? What role did local authorities play in shaping Nazi policy? What more can we learn about the mind-set and behavior of the local perpetrators? Using new evidence, this book attempts to shed light on these important questions.

Christopher Browning is Frank Porter Graham Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is the author of four previous books: *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (1978); *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (1985); *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992); and *The Path to Genocide* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

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In memory of
George L. Mosse
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INTRODUCTION

In November 1995 I received the singular honor of being invited to deliver the George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge University in the Lent Term of 1999. I deeply appreciated the opportunity given me by the Electors to present the twentieth set of biennial lectures in this very distinguished series that began in 1959. But I must admit to some initial trepidation, for the letter of invitation indicated that the lectures were intended to commemorate Trevelyan by attending to aspects of history that interested him. Trevelyan was at home in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. He wrote broad synthetic national histories that focused on the emergence of a distinct English political culture marked by liberty, civility, decency, and moderation on the one hand and heroic biographies of figures he deemed exemplary and inspirational on the other. In contrast, he wrote of the twentieth century: “I don’t understand the age we live in and what I do understand I don’t like.”¹ That was in 1926, and the following decades were even more disagreeable. Moreover, my own subject was to be the most tragic and terrifying event of those terrible decades. But Trevelyan also believed that history had a public function – to instruct about the frailty of the human condition and the necessity for civic virtue. In this regard, at least, I hope that he would not consider lectures addressing the topic of the Holocaust an inappropriate commemoration of his legacy.

I am also acutely aware that this was the first occasion on which a relatively new field of historical study, the Holocaust – the Nazi attempt to destroy the Jews of Europe – was the topic of these lectures. As an academic field characterized by university courses, scholarly conferences and journals, and a growing body of literature based on archival research, the field of Holocaust studies began to

¹ David Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London, 1992), p. 153.

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emerge only some twenty-five years ago. It is useful in this regard to remind ourselves, for example, that in the 1950s and 1960s, the pioneering scholar in the field, Raul Hilberg, could find no university press to publish and no academic journal to review his now classic work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*.² Such academic marginalization of the Holocaust is no more, and it is increasingly recognized as an event central to our understanding of western civilization, the nation-state, and modern bureaucratic society, as well as human nature.

However, it was not my intention in these lectures to deal with this wider issue of the general importance of the Holocaust as a topic of historical study. That is, I believe, a battle that has already been fought and won. Rather, in three pairs of lectures I examine three issues at the forefront of current Holocaust scholarship: (1) decision and policy making at the heart of the Nazi regime, out of which emerged the so-called Final Solution – the systematic attempt to murder every last Jew, man, woman, and child, within the German grasp; (2) the pragmatic and temporary use of Jewish labor, which was potentially in conflict with but also clearly subordinate to the regime's ideological commitment to total destruction, and the resulting impact on the victims whose lives were thus briefly spared; and (3) the attitudes, motivations, and adaptations of the “ordinary” Germans who implemented Nazi policy at the local level.

In addition to this thematic division of lecture topics, there is a methodological division as well. The first three lectures deal with what is often termed “history from above.” The focus is on the decisions and policies of the Nazi leadership, though not to the exclusion of the initiatives and actions of local and regional authorities that affected and interacted with the central authorities. The last three lectures deal with “history from below.” Here the focus shifts to the activities, experiences, and memories of both victims and perpetrators on the local level. The source materials include both postwar testimonies and rare contemporary letters and document files that speak less to the issue of decision and policy making and more to those elusive issues of individual attitudes and behavior.

² For his own reflections on this matter, see: Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996).

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As with any other work of history, these lectures could not have been written without the indispensable aid and support from the staffs of numerous archives and libraries. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (where I had the opportunity to serve as the J. B. and Maurice Shapiro Senior Visiting Scholar), Yad Vashem, the Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen in Ludwigsburg, the National Archives, the Bundesarchiv, the Fortunoff Archive in Sterling Library at Yale University, and the interlibrary loan services at Pacific Lutheran University Library deserve particular mention. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Ella Waşowska–Benson and Sylvia Noll, who translated key survivor testimonies given in Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew.

President Loren Anderson, Provost Paul Menzel, and the board of regents of Pacific Lutheran University – my academic home for the past 25 years – provided unstinting support and release time from my teaching obligations, without which the lectures could not have been written. Jonathan Steinberg of Cambridge University and Trinity Hall College was an exemplary host and, along with many of his colleagues, helped make my stay in Cambridge a truly joyous occasion.

Just weeks before I departed for Cambridge, historians were deeply saddened by the death of George L. Mosse, a man who had been for me a very special scholar, mentor, and friend. This book is dedicated to his memory.

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