

1 Introduction

The Holocaust is typically known as the attempt by the Nazis to degrade, humiliate, and eventually destroy European Jewry from 1933 to 1945. The extermination of Jews began in June 1941 in the Soviet Union while deportation to the death camps proceeded from October of that year until 1944. Jews were systematically starved, beaten, and worked to death in 1,600 labor camps or ghettos; 52 concentration camps and 1,202 satellite camps (*Aussenlager*) were created for the main purpose of instituting the Final Solution: making Europe *Judenrein* (free of Jews).¹ Other asocials that the Nazis deemed a threat to the Volk, including pacifists, people with mental health problems, Seventh Day Adventists, Gypsies (Sinti and Roma), criminals, political dissenters, and homosexuals, were also singled out for persecution. The original concentration camps found within Germany from 1933 to 1939 were designed to incarcerate political prisoners, religious opponents, and homosexuals. In 1939, Germany began its euthanasia program against people with mental health problems and physical disabilities, which soon led to their gassing. By 1942, the murder of Germans with disabilities led to the systematic gassing of Gypsies, Jews, and homosexuals in the extermination camps. The total death toll in the concentration and extermination camps was eleven million, approximately five to six million of whom were Jews; the total number of deaths of Gypsies and homosexuals is inconclusive, with the former ranging from 220,000 to 500,000 and the latter ranging from a low of 5,000 to a high of 220,000 (see chapter 10). Estimates of the total non-combatant deaths during the Nazi reign until the end of the Reich, including those murdered through starvation, disease, killing squads,

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massacres, bombings, and in *l'univers concentrationnaire*,² range as high as twenty million.³

Genocide, the intent to destroy a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, has existed since antiquity. The Holocaust, however, differs substantially from previous or recent genocide in the way the Jews were systematically degraded, forced to suffer, and then murdered in assembly-line fashion with technological ingenuity and fanaticism, as, not merely “undesirables,” but parasites, vermin, animals, or *Untermenschen* (subhumans).⁴ Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann argue that, above all, the Third Reich was intended to be a society based upon race rather than class, so World War II was fought primarily to create a new hierarchical racial order throughout Europe.⁵ Anti-Semitic propaganda in Germany during the 1930s blamed the Jews as the internal enemy that caused the German defeat during World War I (the “stab in the back”), the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, and the moral decline during the Weimar Republic; Jews also became linked with world Bolshevism, whose successful revolution in 1917 was a visible reminder of the threat to National Socialism. Inculcated with the Hegelian notion of faith in the state and loyalty to the Volk, the Germans of the Reich were easily persuaded by the Nazi propaganda machine that the Jews were the enemies of the fascist state. Leni Yahil notes that the dissemination of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1918, a fictional account of a Jewish attempt to rule the world, served as the source of inspiration for the notion that Jews interfered with the world economy.⁶ Jews were thus associated with capitalism and communism, the two alleged threats to the Nazi utopia. Jews were not treated as individuals but instead were seen as satanic members of a race that could not accommodate to fascist society; the Jews were compared to various types of bacillus, parasites, or diseases, with genocide encouraged as the panacea. The Nuremberg laws outlawed Jewish citizenship and began a de facto legally allowable consensus that the Jews were socially unacceptable human beings and could thus be legitimately persecuted and then murdered.

The Nuremberg laws led to decrees that applied to Gypsies as well since the Nazis believed that such asocials (*Gesindel*, or “riffraff”) carried alien blood and therefore could not marry with Aryans; the

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Nazis also argued that tainted blood led to criminal activity, parasitical behavior, laziness, and promiscuity. During the Nazis' mass roundups of potential threats to national morale in 1938, many Gypsies, viewed as nuisances and plagues to Germany, were sent to concentration camps. In 1940, Adolf Eichmann linked Sinti and Roma to Jews when he deported Gypsies and Jews to the *Generalgouvernement* in Poland. When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, persecution of the Gypsies in Russia, Poland, and the Balkans turned to the policy of extermination. On 16 December 1942, Himmler signed a decree relegating Germany's Sinti and Roma to Auschwitz, thus linking Gypsies to the racial ideology that instituted the Final Solution; ultimately, more than 20,000 Gypsies perished in that extermination camp.

Although mass murder is not unique, the systematic and mechanistic efficiency of the Nazis distinguishes the Holocaust from other forms of genocide. Perhaps it was its sustained barbarity or the unimaginable enormity of the slaughter that has led historians and philosophers to describe the Holocaust as the seminal event of the twentieth century. While genocide obviously involves widespread killing, the Holocaust seems to be unique in the way that a race was degraded, forced to suffer, and dehumanized (in order for the murderer to be less burdened with guilt when exterminating "vermin"); thus, Jews were not allowed just to die, for they must also die in agony. Robert Skloot has aptly noted that the Holocaust has forced individuals to reassess their notions of humankind: "More than any other event of our time, the Holocaust has caused entire nations and peoples to revise understandings of themselves by provoking disquieting and continuous inquiries of the most moral kind."⁷ Unlike any other historical experience, the Holocaust has altered our notions of human dignity, our conventional concepts of God and humanity, and the humanistic idea of civilization aspiring to the norms of cultural existence. As Elie Wiesel has inferred, "At Auschwitz, not only man died, but also the idea of man."⁸ The annihilation, personal violation, and dehumanization of Jews preceded their deaths, which were now often carried out in mass graves without any of the ritualistic customs associated with mourning and the rites of dying. Alvin H. Rosenfeld observes that this rendering of a brutally imposed death made dying void of all personal

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characteristics,⁹ further separating the Holocaust from other forms of genocide. Giorgio Agamben reiterates that it is indeed this “degradation of death” that constitutes the specific offense of the Holocaust.¹⁰

Although the Holocaust is a unique historical event, the term was previously used to designate generic, systematic murder of any ethnic group. In 1959, Ya’d Vashem, the Israeli Martyrs’ and Remembrance Authority, began to use the Hebrew term *Shoah* as synonymous with the destruction of European Jewry. However, the term did not gain widespread acceptance until after Claude Lanzmann released his 1985 documentary with that title. In the late 1950s, Elie Wiesel was the first to coin the term “Holocaust” to represent the Jewish genocide of World War II and first used the word in print in a book review of Josef Bor’s *The Terezin Requiem*, published in the *New York Times* on 27 October 1963.¹¹ The term caught on in the 1960s, particularly after the Eichmann trial, to the extent that, in 1968, the Library of Congress created a subject heading for the topic.

The term “Holocaust” is now widely accepted but may be inappropriate to represent the destruction of European Jewry during World War II. The “Holocaust” derives from “*holokaustos*” in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Bible, which referred to the term as a burnt sacrificial offering to God in the Temple of Solomon. The Latin term “*holocaustum*” was transmitted from the Vulgate to the Latin Fathers to indicate the sacrifices of the Hebrews, as well as the martyrdom of Christians.¹² Milton used “holocaust” to describe chaos and destruction in his 1671 play *Samson Agonistes*. Wiesel’s use of “holocaust” refers to the *Akedah*, the tale in Genesis in which God orders Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, who goes to the slaughter sans complaint or resistance. This archetypal vision of the Jews as God’s “chosen ones” who must concomitantly suffer because of their burden most likely appealed to Wiesel; in other words, Isaac is forced to suffer because of circumstances beyond his control. This scenario has the Nazis in a quasi-priestly role as sacrificers to a God accepting the destruction of European Jewry as his sacrificial offering. The Jews, like Jesus, turn the other cheek and go silently to their deaths; the ultimate reward for their martyrdom, supposedly, is the creation of the state of Israel.

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The previous discussion leads us to believe that the term “Holocaust” is inappropriate to describe the destruction of European Jewry during World War II. Most Holocaust scholars would challenge the notion of Nazis in the role of pious, god-fearing Abraham and would argue that the creation of the state of Israel as some sort of reward for the deaths of millions of innocent people is ludicrous. Moreover, Nazi crematoria cannot be equated with the burnt altar of Isaac’s sacrifice; in short, it hardly appears that God and the Nazis make for good partners in the “sacrifice” of Jews. Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman add, “It is a fundamental disservice to those who died to transform them all into images of Isaac or Jesus. Their deaths should not be elevated to grand, even cosmic tragedy, but kept grounded on earth.”¹³ Finally, survivors would agree that martyrdom is not an appropriate term for the senseless murder of millions but instead serves as a means of falsifying their fates. The Hebrew term *shoah*, meaning “destruction” or “catastrophe,” is a much more effective attempt to reflect the horror of *l’univers concentrationnaire* without referring to any type of ritual sacrifice. In this book, Shoah will be used interchangeably with “the Holocaust,” and even though the former is more acceptable to religious scholars, the latter, through Wiesel’s terminology and through the widely disseminated television miniseries *Holocaust*, has become a term culturally etched in our consciousness, for better or for worse.

Contrary to what one may think, the Nuremberg trials (there were a total of thirteen) did little to boost Holocaust studies. The Nuremberg Trial of Major German War Criminals began with much rhetoric on 20 November 1945 and ended on 1 October 1946 with the sentencing of twenty-two Nazi defendants accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, the effect of the trial on German citizens was minimal because the tribunal was international, consisting of the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union without much input from German authorities. Moreover, the only defendant to be condemned to death on charges of crimes against humanity was Julius Streicher, thus blunting any widespread focus on the Holocaust itself. After World War II, the West German administration of Konrad Adenauer, who was chancellor of the Federal Republic from 1949 to 1963, seemed to suffer from historical amnesia, focusing on the Cold

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War and reinforcing the national myth that the German people never condoned National Socialism, knew very little about the actual genocide and certainly did not participate in it, and that it was controlled by only a few perpetrators; they tried to bury Germany's sordid recent past—a silence that was not broken until the student protests in 1968. In her study of postwar reactions to the Holocaust, Mary Fulbrook writes that in East Germany (the German Democratic Republic), a “state-sanctioned amnesia” downplayed the persecution of Jews and focused instead on the country's own exoneration of collective guilt through an attack on “the imperialist monopoly capitalist fascists” who caused the war.¹⁴ Although West German courts continued to prosecute former Nazi war criminals during the 1940s and 1950s, the sentences were relatively lenient for even major offenses against Jews.¹⁵ Postwar trials in Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece, France, and Russia, while providing the requisite catharsis for each country, also localized the criminal offenses, which thus went relatively unnoticed in the international community.

In 1947, a Dutch edition of Anne Frank's diary, kept as her record of hiding from the Nazis in an Amsterdam annex from 12 June 1942 until 1 August 1944, was published, followed by French and West German versions printed three years later. In 1952, Doubleday published *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, marking the debut of recognizable Holocaust literature in the United States;¹⁶ the book sold nearly twenty-six million copies and was subsequently translated into fifty-eight languages. On 5 October 1955, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, adapted for the stage by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, opened at the Cort Theater on Broadway. The play turned out to be an enormous success with the public (more than one thousand performances) and with the critics, who honored it in 1956 with the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Best Play. However, much of this success can be attributed to the fact that the play, on the one hand, is essentially a coming-of-age tale that appeals to adolescents, while, on the other, it simultaneously homogenizes the fight against evil through Anne's universally contagious youthful vigor and sanguine demeanor. The Goodrich and Hackett adaptation toned down both Anne's dark,

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foreboding vision and many of the Jewish references of her diary, optimistically stressing the fight against global oppression and evil rather than Nazi anti-Semitism. The play thus presented an acceptable sugar-coated view of the Holocaust for box-office appeal and mass consumption. With regard to the Broadway production, noted Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer wrote, “An audience coming to this play in 1955, only a decade after the event, would find little to threaten their psychological or emotional security. No one dies, and the inhabitants of the annex endure minimal suffering.”¹⁷ Moreover, Anne’s universal appeal for the goodness of humanity cheaply sentimentalizes the Holocaust as a ready-made tale of forgiveness, at times making her sound like a martyr who delivers a message of Christian love for all who suffer from oppression. The Americanization of Anne Frank was seen as the perfect iconography to represent a nation that had not fully associated World War II with the horrors of the Holocaust. Although *The Diary of Anne Frank* became required reading in many junior high schools and began to enter the American consciousness as part of the popular culture, including being made into a film in 1959, Holocaust survivors regarded the play as sentimental claptrap. Bruno Bettelheim seems to sum up their reservations about the adapted drama: “If all men are good at heart, there never really was an Auschwitz; nor is there any possibility that it may recur.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, the Israelis during the late 1940s and 1950s were also attempting to understand the Holocaust that the East and West Germans were attempting to mold to their own respective interests and the Americans were trying to sugar-coat. Israel was striving to cope with the Diaspora, which now divided the country into two distinct groups. One segment of the population represented the Old-World European Jews who were displaced after World War II and whose mother tongue was typically Yiddish, Russian, or Polish; they came from a vastly different geographical region (unlike a Mediterranean climate) and did not easily fit into Israeli culture. The other group consisted of Jews native to Palestine, whose language was Hebrew and who were looking to the future of self-sufficient Israel rather than to the shame of the Holocaust as a model for behavior. The friction was palpable between the Diaspora Jews who represented the old culture,

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the world of the fathers, versus the new generation of sons, who were looking for positive role models while denying a passive Old World culture that seemed to go to the slaughter like sheep; the modern Israeli appeared to be the antithesis of the downtrodden Polish Jew, who was physically and psychically maimed. Haim Shoham characterizes this clash between the generations as a dialectic of action versus reflection, deeds instead of work, the world of the body as opposed to the spirit, and Israeli life contrasted with Jewish existence.¹⁹ This friction played out in the Israeli courts during the 1950s, where Jews were put on trial for collaboration with the Nazis. The result was plays that reflected the tension between the Holocaust survivors and the Jews from Palestine, most notably represented in Nathan Shacham's *New Reckoning* (1954), Leah Goldberg's *Lady of the Castle* (1955), Aharon Megged's *Hanna Senesh* (1958), and Ben-Zion Tomer's *Children of the Shadows* (1962). Unfortunately, these plays were not translated until years later and thus had little widespread appeal outside Israel.

The single most important event to spawn the growth of Holocaust literature was undoubtedly the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who was captured by Israeli agents in Buenos Aires on 11 May 1960. The trial ran from 11 April to 15 December 1961 and became a national catharsis for Israel, which had not had the opportunity after the war to exert justice on Nazi perpetrators, as other countries were able to do. Unlike the Nuremberg trials, which focused primarily on crimes against peace and humanity, the Eichmann trial made the Holocaust specific to the annihilation of European Jewry, as dozens of witnesses testified about the devastation of the Shoah. Commenting on the Eichmann trial, Anat Feinberg perceptively reveals, "The Holocaust lost for a while its abstract quality, for here were creatures flesh and blood, no faceless mass of victims but individual human beings, who recounted and reenacted in their imagination all the horrors of Nazi atrocity."²⁰ For the first time, television was able to bring the Holocaust into myriad households, many North American viewers admitting that they had never before seen a Nazi. Hannah Arendt's account of the trial, initially serialized in the *New Yorker* and then published in 1963 as *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, raised diverse moral questions about how a seemingly typical, hard-working bourgeois citizen with strong family

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ties could be such a purveyor of evil. When Arendt coined Eichmann's role in the Final Solution as "the banality of evil," it seemed to hit a nerve that began to haunt the consciences of those who had previously ignored, or were unfamiliar with, the horrors of the Holocaust.²¹ Coinciding with the Eichmann capture and trial was the appearance of important literary works about the Holocaust: Elie Wiesel's first novel *Night* (1960), Millard Lampell's adaptation of Hersey's *The Wall* for Broadway (1960), Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* (1961), Viktor Frankl's survivor testimony *Man's Search for Meaning* (1962), and the Berlin premiere of Rolf Hochhuth's controversial *Der Stellvertreter* (1963, *The Deputy*) under direction by Erwin Piscator. The Eichmann trial eventually spawned documentary drama, a genre largely based on witness reports, court records, and historical data, and became an art form unique to modern German theater; the most notable Holocaust documentary plays were Heinar Kipphardt's *Joel Brand* (1965), Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (1965, *The Investigation*), and later Kipphardt's *Bruder Eichmann* (1983, *Brother Eichmann*).

The Eichmann trial also precipitated a new West German interest in bringing Nazi war criminals to judgment, many of whom held important civil and political positions during the Adenauer administration. The most notorious of these court cases was the "Stafsache gegen Mulka und andere," better known as the Auschwitz trials, conducted in Frankfurt from 20 December 1963 until 19 August 1965. The Auschwitz trials of twenty-two defendants differed substantially from the Nuremberg trials, at least in the eyes of German citizens, because rather than being judged by an international tribunal, these former Nazis were now facing a German judicial system. Bernd Naumann's extensive coverage of the trial for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* made the court testimonies accessible to many German citizens. The results of the convictions of thirteen of the defendants (three were acquitted) invoked renewed interest in the Holocaust among a new generation of West German youths who were now questioning the roles of their fathers and grandfathers during the war. Attending the trial were two distinguished playwrights: Arthur Miller, who admitted to never having seen a Nazi before he had gone to Frankfurt, and Peter Weiss, exiled from his native Germany during World War II.

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The results of their impressions of the trial were two of the most important Holocaust dramas written in the twentieth century: Miller's *Incident at Vichy* (1964) and Weiss's *The Investigation* (1965).

Two films broke new ground in Holocaust studies: *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) ran during the Eichmann trial while *The Pawnbroker* (1964) premiered at the height of the Auschwitz hearings. *Judgment at Nuremberg*, a docu-drama directed by Stanley Kramer, was based on the third Nuremberg trial (1948) of four Nazi judges standing accused before three American magistrates. The film was significant for its archival footage from Nazi concentration camps. With its international cast of well-known actors and actresses, including Spencer Tracy, Burt Lancaster, Maximilian Schell, Richard Widmark, Marlene Dietrich (Hitler's favorite actress), Montgomery Clift, and Judy Garland, *Judgment at Nuremberg's* widespread viewing increased public consciousness about the Holocaust. Critics also lauded the film, which was nominated in 1961 for Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director but ultimately won for Abby Mann's adapted screenplay. *The Pawnbroker*, directed by Sidney Lumet, was notable as the first Holocaust film to portray the effects of the concentration camp experience on survivors rather than examining the Holocaust through its political or legalistic repercussions. Rod Steiger starred as Sol Nazerman, haunted in flashbacks of Auschwitz, where he lost his wife and family. The film shocked a public unaccustomed to grasping the personal implications of concentration camp internment on European Jews. The New York Film Critics Circle nominated Lumet for Best Director and Steiger for Best Actor in 1965, while the latter also received a nomination for an Academy Award.

On 16 April 1978, NBC premiered its four two-hour miniseries *Holocaust*, which portrayed the fictional lives of two families—one Jewish, one German—during the Shoah. Eventually, the miniseries was shown in more than fifty countries, including its airing in late January 1979 in West Germany and in March 1979 in Austria, the site of some of the filming (at the former concentration camp of Mauthausen). *Holocaust* was also widely released on videocassette; approximately fifty million people have seen the film.²² When the miniseries aired in West Germany, it was widely excoriated by Elie Wiesel and West