# General Editor's Introduction

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Few events, if any, in the modern era have been more disturbing than the Holocaust. This four-volume Cambridge History, with over 100 contributions from leading scholars in the field, represents the most wide-ranging effort in decades to grapple with the catastrophe. The present moment seems an ideal time to offer such an extensive review. Since the end of the Cold War there has been an explosion of scholarship on every aspect of the Holocaust, from origins and participation to memory and memorialization, from top-level decision-making to everyday responses and experiences across all the regions involved. As part of this wave of new work there has been an integration into English-language scholarship of historiographies too long segregated into separate enclaves, not least the extraordinarily rich Yiddish-language and other Jewish research of the early postwar period (in whose recovery several authors in this collection have played a pivotal role). All this cries out for a synthesis. The *Cambridge History of the Holocaust* has set itself the task of offering both an authoritative review of what has been achieved and new interpretations based on original research.

The task is daunting partly for the same reasons that faced observers as the Holocaust was unfolding, namely, the challenge of making sense of such an inhuman and seemingly irrational project, and of grasping the predicament of its victims. Adding to the Holocaust's impenetrability is the fact that it was so complex. Even when compared with other genocides, it remains distinctive in the degree to which it unfolded across an extended and diverse empire, drawing on multiple institutions and a huge array of regional elites and local players, and deploying different forms of violence. Its violence caught up victims from extraordinarily varied backgrounds, with little in common beyond the fact that the Nazis had declared them to be an enemy. But, beyond the challenges inherent in understanding the event itself, the Holocaust has had an unprecedented afterlife, its legacies felt in every corner of the world, and in every aspect of human endeavor. It thus confronts us not only with a deeply disturbing and multilayered historical phenomenon or set of phenomena, but also with an all-encompassing set of responses that

inform, color, and at times impede our ability to engage with the events themselves. If proof of that "coloration" were needed, we need only remember that even the language we use bears the marks of the Holocaust – Raphael Lemkin invented the term "genocide" in 1943, influenced not least by what he saw unfolding in Europe, just one of the myriad ways in which responses to the Holocaust have come to influence what we see.

The scope and organization of this Cambridge History reflect both the event's complexity and its impact. The first volume is devoted to the Holocaust's longer-term origins and immediate preconditions. Here we intentionally cast our net wide, with chapters on antisemitism, nationalism, racism, eugenics, fascism, violence in the Weimar Republic, modernity, and more, and thus devoted more space in the collection to origins than might an analogous volume on, say, the Second World War (and indeed a glance at the *Cambridge History of the Second World War* confirms this.) The point is not that the Holocaust was the result of a uniquely multifaceted or deep-seated set of causes, but what *is* distinctive is the degree to which it has given rise to profound soul-searching about how the disaster might have happened. It is this extended reflection that Volume I seeks to acknowledge. As well as tracing the roots of the Holocaust back well before 1933, for similar reasons we also move well beyond Hitler's defeat in 1945. The legacies of the catastrophe included fundamental reappraisals both in Christian and in Jewish theology (and the relationship between the faiths), philosophy, psychology and the study of trauma, medical ethics, literary analysis, and theories of representation, among many other disciplines and fields of intellectual endeavor. The Holocaust's reverberations have shaped the character of US and world Jewry, and the political culture of Germany, Israel, and several eastern European countries, and have had a powerful impact on international law. The Holocaust has also fostered an astonishing international wave of memorialization, with museums and memorials to be found in almost forty countries, over fifty in the USA alone. It has been the subject of countless works of literature, poetry, painting, film, and music, some of them among the great works of the last three-quarters of a century. This is the terrain of Volume IV. Framed by these two volumes on origins and aftermath are the two that focus squarely on the core events of the Holocaust, Volume II, with its focus on the perpetrators, and Volume III, which turns towards the victims.

These opening remarks imply that we are in agreement about what the Holocaust was. In some ways we are. "Holocaust denial" is clearly a political–psychological phenomenon, a desperate desire not to accept the reality of

something that should not have happened, but sadly did – or to inflict further hurt on those who identify with its victims. Yet, if the reality of the gas chambers is not in doubt, what exactly constitutes the Holocaust, what it includes and what it excludes, is less clear. The term "Holocaust" was not coined at the time, or rather at the time it was a word in widespread use, applied to all sorts of different kinds of disaster. For an official contemporary term, we might turn to the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," which the National Socialists used as a heading for their plans for the Jews. But, as initially formulated, the "Final Solution" did not yet connote genocide, and thus corresponded more to what we might now understand as the Holocaust's pre-history. We also refrain from using the Nazis' own euphemism to capture the horrors to which it led, even if on another level their euphemistic, technical language is itself revealing. The high-level German planning towards a "solution" was in any case only part of the much larger, more diffuse, and much less linear set of forces and phenomena explored in these volumes.

A hint of the multiple possible ways of defining and delimiting what we mean by the Holocaust can be seen in the various terms used to describe it. The Yiddish "Khurbn," for example, evident in some of the first Jewish writing during and after the war, evoked the destruction of the Temple, and placed the Holocaust in a sequence of catastrophes visited on the Jews, though whether it was by divine fiat or revealed the death of God was unclear. Like the contemporaneously emerging Hebrew term "Shoah," the Khurbn described a specifically Jewish catastrophe. Around the same time, however, the Allies responsible for dealing with defeated Germany saw the Jewish fate as just one among many "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity." To the extent that the Holocaust was on trial at Nuremberg, it was only as part of a larger body of wrongdoing, in which the conspiracy to wage aggressive war was the central offense from which the others followed. While we might argue that the trials failed to capture the distinctive place and character of the assault on the Jews, they did correctly recognize that there was a larger body of violence and racial persecution with which the war against the Jews intersected. Yet another way of dividing up the terrain emerged in the 1960s, when western historical scholarship, particularly German scholarship, began slowly to engage with Jewish persecution. The "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" (often in inverted commas), was now the term of art. This scholarship recognized the distinctive weight of anti-Jewish measures, but the historical debates about policy were framed very much in terms of larger disagreements about the nature of the Nazi regime

(notably between those who emphasized Hitler's centrality and intentionality in setting the regime's goals, and those who saw him licensing a struggle for power that encouraged ever more radical measures, not least in antisemitic policy). Whereas the language of Khurbn and the Shoah had placed the destruction of Jewish communities and Jewish life and Jewish suffering in the spotlight, the "Final Solution" focused attention, often quite narrowly, on high-level policy, and on questions about the nature of the Nazi regime that had little to do with Jews. And it almost completely ignored what in recent years has become a central element of scholarly interest, namely the role of collaboration in enabling and shaping the Holocaust.

The rise to dominance from the 1970s of the term "Holocaust" has allowed for more capacious approaches to these phenomena. Particularly since the end of the Cold War, with renewed access to, and engagement with, eastern Europe, and the rediscovery of early postwar studies, what had once been almost entirely separate historiographies have flowed together. The story of the emergence, mutation, and intertwining of international scholarship on the Holocaust is explored in many parts of this collection. But the use of the term Holocaust did not in itself resolve the question of whether the Nazi war against the Jews should be seen as something separate from the regime's other murderous violence. The paradigm of the Third Reich as a "racial state" which gained traction in the 1990s in parallel to the explosion of Holocaust research, as well as work taking off around the same time on the imperial character of Nazi war-making in the East, both offered a vision of Nazi violence in which anti-Jewish measures were merely part of a larger scheme. While some scholars sought to restrict the "Holocaust" to the genocide of the Jews, others widened its remit to include the murder of Roma and Sinti and disabled people, the mass murder of Soviet POWs, and more. As our volumes were in preparation, a new debate blew up in Germany, the so-called "Second Historikerstreit," among other things about the relationship between the Holocaust and colonial violence. Many of the exchanges were not about the current state of historical scholarship and related rather to German media and institutional embargoes on what kinds of connections and comparisons to the Holocaust were allowable. But they did serve as a reminder of the contested status of the Holocaust's boundaries and of its place in history.

On these matters, the volumes have tried to take a balanced course. There is little debate in the scholarship that Jews held a place in Hitler's and the Nazi imagination unmatched by any other internal or external enemy (and indeed that the Jewish enemy was, even more than Communism, conceptualized as

both an internal and an external threat) or that the war against the Jews was accorded a preeminence in Nazi policy unmatched by any other racial campaign. It is equally clear that the Holocaust's very distinctive postwar impact and resonance was not a simple function of its centrality for the Nazis themselves. It reflected also the historical place of Jews and Judaism in Christian Europe, which made murderous antisemitism something every Christian society now had to ponder. In addition, over time the intellectual impact of Jews in postwar western European and US society gave their story a voice which many other victims lacked. These postwar factors have at times given the Holocaust a prominence that in turn makes it harder to understand events and forces that were more entangled and less distinctively focused on Jews. As a result, the volumes seek to focus squarely on the war against the Jews, but also look beyond it – to more general preconditions in terms of politics, violence, and racism in Volume I, to other critical aspects of policy and perpetration in Volume II, and to other victims of Nazi policy in Volume III. It is of course inevitable that a great many subjects have had to be left out, and we are aware that other scholars might draw the balance of inclusion and exclusion differently.

As noted above, the course of the genocide itself is dealt with in Volumes II and III, with perpetrators and bystanders the subject of the former, and victims and rescuers dealt with in the latter. This may seem at odds with aspirations for what Saul Friedländer has dubbed "integrated history," by which he means that perpetrator perspectives should be complemented by those of the victims. Since the completion of Friedländer's two-volume account of the Holocaust in 2007, integrated history has met widespread endorsement as a way of approaching the Holocaust, and the present collection certainly aspires to it. A quick glance at the essays in Volume II will show that victims' voices are a key source, while the essays in Volume III are ever mindful of the policy context and the perpetrators' behavior. But, like many historiographical innovations, "integration" as watchword has its own historical moment. Its vital function was to overcome the long-lasting separation between victim accounts and a western academic historiography that was long very perpetrator-orientated. But the limits of its utility are also clear. The Holocaust could be said to be one of the most "unintegrated" human events in history, in the sense that the perpetrators' world was utterly detached from that of their victims. The perpetrators invented an enemy that did not exist, while the victims confronted an enemy that they could barely see as human, and certainly could not make sense of at the time (though many were able to leave us insightful, contemporaneous accounts of

their tormentors, notwithstanding.) The volumes' organizing principle of first reflecting on the policy-makers, their contexts, intensions, and policies, and then moving on to the victims thus makes sense. Moreover, if "integration" is to have continuing meaning, then it cannot be restricted to juxtaposing perpetrators and victims. Instead, as the historian Donald Bloxham has argued, integration can and should be pursued along multiple axes of comparison and juxtaposition. Like the first and last volumes, Volumes II and III are thus deliberately multi-perspectival. Some chapters focus on particular times and places, some on given institutions or sites, and some on social groups, types of actors, or particular forms or forums of action.

The introductions to each of the volumes explore their rationales in more detail, but in relation to Volumes II and III it is worthwhile noting here how far scholarship has come since the 1960s and 1970s, when such western academic studies on the "Final Solution" as existed focused almost exclusively on the high-level decisions leading to genocide. Particularly, from the 1990s, scholars widened their gaze, turning initially to the mid-level protagonists who played such an important part in enabling and promoting mass murder, and then to ever widening circles of participation and ever broader and more diverse groups of participants. This brought military and civilian institutions beyond the Nazi Party and SS into the spotlight, as well as actions of mass murder away from the camps, the essential role of non-German collaborators and communal violence in occupied Europe, and the enabling function of the bystander. Hand in hand with this more comprehensive understanding of participation came the discovery that even at the grassroots level perpetrators enjoyed considerable scope for individual decision-making.

The transformation of scholarship on victims, the subject of Volume III, has been even more marked over the same period. It is true that the Holocaust victim has long been a key figure in western culture. According to Annette Wieviorka, we have been living in the "Era of the Witness" ever since the Eichmann trial in 1961. The first video archives of Holocaust testimony emerged already in the 1970s. During the 1990s, a number of cultural and literary specialists and philosophers engaged closely with the victim's predicament, reflecting, for example, on the challenge of communicating and representing trauma or the meaning of "bare life." With a few notable exceptions, however, it is only since the millennium that the historical profession has devoted its energies to understanding how victims responded to the Holocaust. Here, too, as in relation to the perpetrators, there has been a striking recovery of individual and group agency, and of the

manifold ways in which, right up the last minute, victims sought individually and collectively to evade and alleviate, sometimes even to combat, the threat they faced. Confronted with the sheer diversity of victim responses, historians have explored the role of class, gender, age, familial status, denomination, ideology, relations with the local community, and other regional characteristics in shaping the ways victims behaved. Taboo subjects, not least sexual behavior and sexual exploitation, have at last found their chroniclers. In short, the *Cambridge History of the Holocaust* seeks to offer a multiperspectival, all-too-human history of massive inhumanity.

A project of this scale depends on the commitment of a great many people, and I would like to thank all of the more than 100 authors who brought their expertise – and their willingness to be concise! – to the four volumes of this Cambridge History. Their perseverance is the more notable given that, shortly after work on these volumes commenced, Covid-19 hit, with all its personal consequences. For some of our original contributors, this made it impossible to continue. It left us with gaps in some places for which we could not find substitutes, and in places affected the gender balance of authors too. I very much regret the circumstances that forced those contributors to withdraw, but I am all the more grateful to those who were able to stay the course, or who joined at a later stage as a substitute. Working with my seven fellow editors Natalia Aleksiun, Mary Fulbrook, Laura Jockusch, Marion Kaplan, Jürgen Matthäus, Devin O. Pendas, and Dan Stone has been a pleasure from start to finish. I am so grateful for their insights, their skill, their humanity – and their patience! – without which this History would not have been possible. All of the editors and authors are deeply indebted to Cambridge University Press, particularly our wonderful partners – our editor Liz Friend Smith, whose project this was, our indefatigable content manager, Natasha Whelan, our outstanding and so knowledgeable copy-editor, Steven Holt, and our indexer Dino Costi. Finally, let me thank the many more in the Press and beyond, too numerous to be named here, who had a hand in the making of this collection.

# Introduction to Volume IV

LAURA JOCKUSCH AND DEVIN O. PENDAS

Zalman Gradowski, a member of the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz–Birkenau, noted in one of his secret notebooks that, when he was still surrounded by his loved ones, moonlight had been a "source of love and joy" for him.[1] Now, temporarily left alive but forced to burn bodies of Jewish men, women, and children, Gradowski experienced moonlight as a painful reminder of all that had been destroyed:

> Why do you let your light shine on this accursed hellish world, here where the night is lit by gigantic flames – by the fire of the burning victims, innocents who are murdered here? Why do you shine on this tragic plot of ground where every step, every tree, every blade of grass is soaked through with the blood of millions, millions of human lives? Why do you show yourself here where the air is full of death and extermination, where to the heavens rise the heartrending cries and screams of women and children, fathers and mothers, young and old, innocents driven to a bestial death? Here you ought not to shine!!! Here in this horrible corner of the earth, where people are tortured with savage atrocity, constantly sinking in a sea of blood and affliction and wait in fear of inescapable death, here, here you ought not to shine!!![2]

Angered that nature stayed its course unaffected by the human world that had been collapsing for him, Gradowski ultimately reconciled with the moon by assigning it a new purpose. From now on and for all time, Gradowski imagined, the moon would shine as the memorial light on the "grave of my people," to remind humanity of its genocidal capacities.[3] Gradowski stored his notes in an aluminum bottle and buried them in the ground at Birkenau, shortly before he was murdered in the prisoner uprising on 7 October 1944.

[1] Z. Gradowski, *The Last Consolation Vanished: The Testimony of a Sonderkommando in Auschwitz* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2022), p. 60.
[2] Ibid., p. 62. [3] Ibid., p. 67.

Other Jews trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe shared Gradowski's agonizing awareness that they were suffering an unprecedented event: the mass murder of Jews from across the European continent irrespective of gender, age, or physical strength for the sole purpose of wiping them from the face of the globe by mass shootings, starvation, disease, and "industrialized" forms of destruction. Jewish actors understood that, although a crime like this had once been unimaginable and was met with disbelief as it was unfolding, its occurrence would henceforth shape the human imagination. It was so destructive, so seismic in its wider implications for the human condition, that it would have repercussions for decades, even generations to come.

Indeed, Nazi Germany's attempt to eliminate the Jews of Europe (and perhaps eventually the entire world) had a profound and lasting impact on Europe, shaping everything from demographics to politics to culture. What is perhaps more surprising are the ways in which the Holocaust has become a truly global event in the years since 1945, shaping public discourse, historical pedagogy, and the political cultures of countries well beyond Europe and as diverse as Israel, the USA, Canada, and Australia.[4] Of course, it took time for the Holocaust to move from the periphery of culture and politics to the center, as criminal trials, scholarly research, commemorative rituals, political activism, public debates, and popular culture increasingly thematized the extermination of European Jewry. The Holocaust became, and remains, a "touchstone" in European culture, with states voicing their belonging to the European community of states through Holocaust memorial days and an allegiance to human rights.[5] However, this commitment to Holocaust memory is at times devoid of any Jewish content and often denies the fact that the victims of the Holocaust had been persecuted and murdered for their Jewish identity, not for being French people, Italians, Hungarians, or Poles. It also conveniently glosses over the inconvenient truths of local collaboration with Nazism in the mass murder of the Jews.

But the Holocaust has also come to symbolize a civilizational rupture (*Zivilisationsbruch*) throughout much of the world, a reference point for political evil and human catastrophe.[6] It has been used and abused by victims of mass violence and by political activists as a framing device for their own

[4] D. Levy and N. Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006).
[5] T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, Penguin, 2005), pp. 803–31.
[6] D. Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000).

suffering.[7] At the same time, the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust has likewise become something of a truism in some circles, one that can and has been mobilized for contemporary political purposes.[8] But what both sides share is a sense that "the Holocaust" is a totemic term with deep cultural and political power. While the Holocaust has become a master metaphor for all evil, sometimes used responsibly but often used irresponsibly for the sake of distortion and political agitation, the event has also become detached from its proper historical context. This is possible because, despite the mounting public presence of the Holocaust, historical knowledge about the event and the context in which it occurred is in decline.

Over the past two decades, Holocaust studies shifted attention to the postwar period, which has become a field of study in its own right. It has branched out into sub-fields, among them legal studies, reparations and restitution, representation, literature, and the arts. These fields not only seem disconnected from one another, but have also sometimes lost touch with the historical event of the Holocaust itself. Scholars tend to study either the historical event or its repercussions and representations over the seven decades after the war, a period six times as long as the Nazi regime itself. This volume is, as part of the four-volume series, an attempt to integrate wartime and postwar periods and to put the vast array of different disciplinary approaches to the aftermath and the aftereffects of the Holocaust in conversation with one another. This volume pursues three axes of analysis: geography, typology, and temporality.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE AFTERMATH

The Holocaust was, first and foremost, a *European* event. To be sure, Jews outside of Europe were affected as well, especially those in North Africa.[9] The victims were *Jews* – by Nazi racial categorizations. In tandem with the mass murder of Jews, the Nazi regime pursued other exterminatory projects –

[7] R. Jinks, *Representing Genocide: The Holocaust as Paradigm?* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
[8] S. Katz, 'The issue of the uniqueness of the Holocaust: After forty years of study', *Modern Judaism* 40:1 (2020), 48–70.
[9] See A. Boum and S. A. Stein (eds.), *The Holocaust and North Africa* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019).