6-1-1972

The Holocaust in American Historical Writing

Gerd Korman
Cornell University ILR School, agk1@cornell.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles
Part of the European History Commons, Labor Relations Commons, and the United States History Commons

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.
Support this valuable resource today!

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ILR Collection at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact hlmdigital@cornell.edu.
The Holocaust in American Historical Writing

Abstract
[Excerpt] Within ten years after the public discussion of the destruction of European Jewry began in the United States, the Holocaust became a complex problem of contemporary history. So many dogmatic judgments were being made about the people in the disaster that Clio's most devoted disciples were bound to find it difficult to retain their position of detached fair-mindedness. Yet, where historians working in the United States would place the Holocaust in their writings was not quite clear.

Keywords
Holocaust, World War II, history, historians, America

Disciplines
European History | Labor Relations | United States History

Comments
Suggested Citation

Required Publisher Statement
Copyright by Societas, Inc.
PERMIT me, an ordinary historian and teacher, presumptuously poking around in other scholars’ domains, to clarify some of my passions and fundamental convictions by using for a moment the works of Vladimir Jabotinsky, Alfred Kazin, Albert Speer, and Moses Herzog. In 1940, Jabotinsky, leader of militant revisionist Zionism, told the world that Hitler’s war against all of Europe’s Jews would end in their annihilation if the Allies failed to respond constructively to recent events in Europe. As early as 1943, Kazin, subway rider out of Brooklyn’s Brownsville Ghetto, literary historian, and writer put it, the pieces of his world, all together: Shmuel Zygelbojm, Warsaw Ghetto, annihilation of European Jewry, and the silence of the many: “all our silent complicity in the massacre of Jews...[whose] deaths were so peculiarly hopeless...means that men are not ashamed of what they have been in this time, and are therefore not prepared for the further outbreaks of fascism which are so deep in all of us.” After the war, Speer, Hitler’s genius of industrial organization, claimed to have learned in defeat and the distance of time that he could not absolve himself from crimes of omission and acquiescence even though he had understood then that “will alone” could not halt “the automatism of progress” which may well “depersonalize man further and withdraw more and more of his self-responsibility.” In the “final analysis I myself determined the degree of my isolation, the extremity of my evasions, and the extent of my ignorance...” For “one who wanted to listen,” he wrote years later, Hitler never “concealed his intention to exterminate the Jewish people.” Saul Bellow’s American Jew was a survivor, shocked and on the verge of tears at “the realization of such election. ... As the dead go their way, you want to call to them but they depart in a black cloud of faces, souls. They flew out in smoke from the extermination chimneys, and leave you in the clear light of historical success—the technical success of the West. Then you know with a crash of the blood that mankind is making it—making it in glory though deafened by the explosions of blood.” And so, in Poland, where
he visited, the stones still smelled of war-time murders. "He thought he scented blood."

At bottom, these thoughts making a place for the disaster of European Jewry are not different from the counterrevolutionary interpretive frameworks suggested by some historians in America conscious of the fascism of the mind, and of the impact of a seemingly self-driven accelerating technology. Within these kinds of frameworks the historian considers himself free to do what he will with the Jew. Usually he does it this way, without explicitly involving the Jewish component. "The Dreyfus affair might have awakened in [Marc] Bloch awareness and concern for a problem which at this time some of the greatest of his contemporaries . . . began to investigate and which has remained in the center of the study of the social sciences: the limitation of reason and rationality, the strength of the unconscious, the irrational basis of our structured world." Or this way: "Counterrevolutions should be taken in the broadest sense to mean those movements that arose to oppose, divest, absorb, or check the familiar 'isms' that have molded the progressive conception of history. Obviously, what we have here is the obverse side of concern for lost progressive causes."

I am trying to say something else as well. In Herzog and Speer the destruction of Jews is not consuming; it had consumed Zygelbojm and Jabotinsky. In Herzog and Inside the Third Reich it appears as an explicit subject five to ten times. Both men lived in mental and physical worlds where the Jew in disaster emerged but occasionally: in Herzog's case barely long enough for expressing a fleeting, seering thought. Like Speer, Herzog had many, many other things on his mind.

Historians make explicit and conscious decisions in deciding the importance of Jews in the subject they explore. So did Speer. Thus he writes that in the summer of 1944, his friend Karl Hanke "advised me never to accept an invitation to inspect a concentration camp in Upper Silesia. Never, under any circumstances . . . I did not query him. I did not investigate—for I i

II

Within ten years after the public European Jewry began in the United complex problem of contemporary hist were being made about the people in voted disciples were bound to find it detached fair-mindedness. Yet, where States would place the Holocaust in th

William Shirer, of Berlin Diary fame many of the cross-currents that woul graphical status of the Holocaust. Fro

1 Vladimir Jabotinsky, The Jewish War Front (London, 1940), passim, but see pp-9, 15, 19, 22, for comparison with the Armenian disaster and for passages demanding recognition of the war being waged against the Jewish people: Alfred Kazin, "In Every Voice, in Every Ban," The New Republic, CX (January 10, 1944), 46; Albert Speer, Inside the Third Reich (London, 1971), pp. 697-698, 171; Saul Bellow, Herzog (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 81, 31-32.


3 Bellow, Herzog, pp. 31-32, 60, 80-81, 297. For Speer it is easy enough to consult his index although the one in my paperback edition is inaccurate.
friends. I did not investigate—for I did not want to know what was happening there.”

II

Within ten years after the public discussion of the destruction of European Jewry began in the United States, the Holocaust became a complex problem of contemporary history. So many dogmatic judgments were being made about the people in the disaster that Clio's most devoted disciples were bound to find it difficult to retain their position of detached fair-mindedness. Yet, where historians working in the United States would place the Holocaust in their writings was not quite clear.

William Shirer, of Berlin Diary fame, in 1943 inadvertently identified many of the cross-currents that would help to determine the historically-graphical status of the Holocaust. From the beginning of the war civilian slaughters, he wrote, left all Germans "completely cold." "From all reports . . . Hitler is believed to have slaughtered two million Jews . . . ." But it was wrong for Americans to confuse "the greatest moral problem of our times." "Our inhumanity." The harsh truth is that all our efforts are dependent on Hitler alone. "And even if the five million Jews are saved, what about the twenty million Poles, the fifty million Russians . . . ." Even in war these remarks prompted Shirer's editor, the famed Paul Kellogg of the magazine Survey, to respond in an editorial comment against so many sweeping generalizations. Kellogg could "only lean on my faith in Germans I have known abroad no less than here" but "my faith is not without support from fugitives who have cleared the border, from the testimony of refugees, from the glimpses of rebel daring that leak out through the underground. These support," he preached, "the living wisdom from Burke to Madame Chiang Kai-shek [sic]—that you cannot indict a whole people.”

Many others contributed to the swirling currents. The Institute of Jewish Affairs, for example, established in 1940, primarily in response to the Hitler years, and through which Jacob Robinson, its director, made himself known, published a number of important studies under the title Starvation Over Europe (1943) and such other titles as Hitler’s Ten Year War on the Jews (1943), The Racial State (1944), and The Jewish Catastrophe (1944). In the pages of the labor Zionist Jewish Frontier and in the scholarly Jewish Social Studies appeared a steady stream of explanation, analyses, and judgments from the powerful and provocative pen of Hannah Arendt.

---

4 Speer, Inside the Third Reich, pp. 506-507.
One of these, from 1944, deserves extended quotation, in part because it turned out to be a prophecy about her relationship to the literature on the Holocaust. Thinking especially of Bernard Lazare, Heinrich Heine, and Franz Kafka, but surely as applicable to herself ("bold spirits who tried to make the emancipation of Jews that which it really should have been—an admission of Jews as Jews to the ranks of humanity. . . .") she wrote:

That the status of the Jews in Europe has been not only that of an oppressed people but also of what Max Weber has called a 'pariah people' is a fact most clearly appreciated by those who had practical experience of just how ambiguous is the freedom which emancipation has ensured, and how treacherous the promise of equality which assimilation has held out. In their own position as social outcasts such men reflect the political status of their entire people. It is, therefore, not surprising that out of their personal experience Jewish poets, writers, and artists should have been able to evolve the concept of the pariah as a human type—a concept of supreme importance for the evaluation of mankind in our day and one which has exerted upon the gentle world an influence in strange contrast to the spiritual and political ineffectiveness which has been the fate of these men among their own brethren.  

In 1949, in the very months when a Jewish state was being developed in Palestine, these kinds of positions were advanced from the same plat-
form where Jewish historians tried to make a formal start for the study of the disaster. Under the auspices of the Conference on Jewish Relations, an organization founded in response to the rising tide of anti-Semitism in the 1930's, at the New York School for Social Research (an institution which especially helped to absorb refugee scholars from Germany), the "Problems of Research in the Study of the Jewish Catastrophe, 1939-1945" came under scrutiny. Some of the scholars asked questions about the disaster in the context of Jewish history; some in the context of society.

Salo Baron and Philip Friedman spoke as rigorous historians of their people's past. We must make every effort to determine if the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history" is still valid; the primary task of the Jewish historian, proclaimed Baron, in the opening remarks to the Conference, was to identify and examine the "dissimilarities as well as the similarities between the great tragedy and the many lesser tragedies which preceded it." Friedman, one of a number of refugee scholars who had come from Central Europe to make their homes in the United States, made the destruction of European Jewry the focal point of his work. He bemoaned the quality of what he called "khurbn literature." To write, he said, "about the catastrophe or about personal experiences of this period has come to be a rather elemental passion, a popular movement which has its deep psychological and sociological roots. . . ." The flood of "inferior" work from amateurs overshadowed "the worthwhile material" endangering the standing of serious work about "our catastrophe." As a professional historian already at work on the Holocaust, Friedman distinguished between the general history of the war and the history of the Jewish people during the conflict. To the first, he assigned subjects of military campaigns, economic warfare, governments in exile, puppet governments in occupied countries, diplomacy, and resistance mov...
ments. "Of a secondary character only are the German terror and persecution of the civilian population, forced labor, population movements, the reactions of the civilian populations, the concentration camps... and similar factors." Research on the Jewish question had to be governed by the principal difference existing between Allied countries and European Jewry: the Allies fought for a democratic victory; European Jewry also fought, but for survival. Thus, for the Jewish historian "a different gamut of topics, subjects, and emphasis" presented themselves. "Most relevant are the suffering of the Jewish civilian population and until the final catastrophe of extermination, the struggle for life." Guarding himself against unimaginative and unrealistic compartmentalization he made the obvious plea: "just as the Jewish catastrophe in the Nazi era can be studied only in the broader context of the general events so the general European history of the period cannot be adequately interpreted without full understanding of the German war against the Jewish people." 9 Too much has happened and too much had been said for the Holocaust to remain in such seemingly modest parameters. The late Solomon Bloom, a student of European intellectual history, asked the sort of questions which in later years continued to arouse storms of controversy. 10 After examining the careers of the Jewish police chief in Vilna and of Mordechai Rumkowski, a man he called the dictator of Lodz, Bloom insisted that "the moral position of the dictator must be recognized as a datum for study. In accepting it, the student has the example of older, but not inferior social scientists, like Thucydides... who did not shrink from judgments of religion, taste and morality...." For "Jewish social scientists, there is another obligation still." It is possible, Bloom thought, that the Jew who made life and death decisions for other Jews derived "his ideas from folklore rather than from the more self-conscious and sophisticated culture." Consequently, and, he might have added, in line with the ideas of Jewish secularists and anti-clerics, and even some devoutly religious Jews caught up in the destruction, the student of Judaism is obliged to raise the question about "the sense... of mission; the hope or conviction that the Jews are an indestructible

9 Actually, these comments were made later, first in 1950, at the International Conference on World War II in the West held in Amsterdam, and then in 1951, in Jewish Social Studies, XIII (July, 1951), 235, 250. In 1950, he also published Oswiecim in Yiddish (Buenos Aires); in 1954, he edited Martyrs and Fighters (New York).

10 I am assuming that the particular intensity of the controversy over Eichmann in Jerusalem (New York, 1964) is in part, but only in part, explained by the way readers responded to Bloom's kind of thinking. On the controversy, see Jacob Robinson, And the Crooked Shall be straight: The Eichmann Trial, The Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative (Philadelphia, 1965); Arendt, *Dr. Robinson,* The New York Review of Books. The Leo Baeck Institute in New York has catalogued articles in the controversy under Miss Arendt's name.
and eternal people, that “The Lord will leave a remnant.”’ For all of “these and other such turn up in the thinking and self-justification of the dictator. . . .” Bloom dared the Jewish social scientists not to judge Jewish folklore, tradition, and ideology.11

Hannah Arendt pushed beyond him. For her, Hitler “was not like Jenghis Khan and not worse than some other great criminal but entirely different. The unprecedented is neither the murder itself nor the number of victims and not even ‘the number of persons who united to perpetrate them.’” It was much rather, she said in 1949, “the ideological nonsense which caused them, the mechanization of the execution and the central and calculated establishment of a world of the dying in which nothing any longer made sense.” Concentration camps were “the laboratories in the experiment of total domination” in which the “human person” was “transformed into a completely conditioned being whose reactions can be calculated even when he is led to certain death. . . .” Her evidence told her that “SS men in charge were completely normal; their selection was achieved according to all kinds of fantastic principles, none of which could possibly assure the selection of especially cruel or sadistic men.” She could only “guess in what forms human life is being lived as though it took place on another planet,” but it appeared “to be beyond doubt that within this whole system the prisoners did not fail to fulfill the same ‘duties’ as the guards themselves”; it also appeared that those inmates who had “not done anything,” in comparison with criminals and political prisoners, “were the first to disintegrate.” Bruno Bettelheim, she knew, had argued in 1943, that the speed of disintegration resulted from “the middle-class origins of the ‘innocents’—at his time mostly Jews.” But he was wrong. “We know from other reports, especially also from the Soviet Union, that ‘lower-class innocents’ disintegrate just as quickly.”12

Obviously, Miss Arendt was after something big and frightfully im-
important. Her context was society; her searchlights philosophy, history, sociology, and psychology. When Baron tried to identify the “unprecedented aspects of the Nazi attack on Jews, quite apart from its magnitude,” he identified these points of difference within Jewish history: the geographic area was much larger; there had occurred a much greater loss of the world’s Jewish population; there had existed a “considered plan to eliminate all Jews”; there had been a “finality and immutability of the fate of Nazi victims”; all the other disasters in Jewish history “almost invariably [were] mass reactions unsupported by, indeed often directed against, state organs.” When Miss Arendt tried to identify the unique aspects of the Nazi attack on Jews, quite apart from its magnitude, she insisted it was only to be found in the absence of utilitarian criteria, as these had usually been understood in the past. (She had in mind aggressive wars, massacres of enemy populations, massacres of a “hostile people,” extermination of natives in the “process of colonization,” slavery, driving forced labor gangs, or striving for world rule.)

These questions, generalizations, and judgments helped to determine the place of the Holocaust in American historical writing. In no time at all, Miss Arendt’s words of 1944, seemed applicable to the kinds of thinking that engaged her, Bloom, and Bettelheim. In no time at all, too, historians in the United States seemed content to ignore the works of colleagues in America and elsewhere especially concerned with “the suffering of the Jewish population and . . . its struggle for life,” and with the efforts to find a place for the Holocaust in Jewish history.

The publication and reception of Raul Hilberg’s book in 1961 made that vantage point only too apparent for anyone who also knew the works of Gerald Reitlinger and Robert Koehl, and the English-language publications from the Wiener Library in London, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Leo Baeck Institute, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City. Hilberg’s astounding study, preoccupied with

14 Historians in the United States ignorant of the work of Jewish historians usually are also unaware that Jewish historians had problems similar to those of German scholars who were trying to find a place for the Hitler period in German history. For a summary of the problem of Jewish historiography, see Leni Yahil, “The Holocaust in Jewish Historiography,” Yad Vashem Studies, VII (1968), 57-71. For comment on the problem in German historiography see Hans Hersfeld, “Germany: After the Catastrophe,” in Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse (eds.), The New History: Trends in Historical Research and Writing Since World War II (New York, 1967), pp. 77-89, and Hans Mommsen, “Historical Scholarship in Transition: The Situation in the Federal Republic of Germany,” Daedalus, C (Spring, 1971), 475-508.
15 Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews (Chicago, 1961); Gerald Reitlinger, The Final Solution (London, 1953); Robert L. Koehl, RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939-1945 (Cambridge, 1957); Wiener Library Bulletin; Yad Vashem Bulletin; Yad Vashem Studies; Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook; the problems of bureaucracy and admission states, could only evoke admiration for his approach which had been first used in Prussia by Hans Rosenberg, then a co-faculty member.
16 Even though Hilberg stated: “Germans and the ways in which they talk about Jewish behavior made us talk about.”
17 It was clear enough that German sources, but an American scholar Jewish passiveness was one of the finest would not be so startling, even in The same reviewer thought that Hilberg sale condemnation of the German bureaus officials who did what they could to all. He saw no reason to criticize Hilberg about Jews during hundreds of years of
problems of bureaucracy and administration in modern totalitarian states, could only evoke admiration from anyone with respect for an approach which had been first used so successfully in the 1950's on Prussia by Hans Rosenberg, then a colleague of Bloom's at Brooklyn College. Even though Hilberg stated explicitly that his book was about Germans and the ways in which they hunted and killed Jews, his loose comments about Jewish behavior made his work generally known and talked about. It was clear enough that his study was based largely on German sources, but an American scholar thought his section explaining Jewish passiveness was one of the finest in the book. By itself such praise would not be so startling, even in The Journal of Modern History, but the same reviewer thought that Hilberg had gone "too far in his wholesale condemnation of the German bureaucracy. There were courageous officials who did what they could to alleviate the lot of the Jews. . . ."

He saw no reason to criticize Hilberg for his "wholesale" judgments about Jews during hundreds of years of European history.

III

I believe now that the indifference to the Jewish side of the war may have been aggravated by a strange transformation in the vocabulary people used when they spoke and wrote about the catastrophe. I have used "Holocaust" in this article, but in 1949, there was no "Holocaust" in the English language in the sense that word is used today. Scholars and writers had used "permanent pogrom"—this term of Jacob Lestschinsky in 1941, meant that the pogrom had "no passing or limited political and economic aims but the extirpation, the physical elimination of its Jewish citizens"—or the "recent catastrophe," or the "recent Jewish catastrophe," or the "great catastrophe," or "disaster," or "the disaster." Sometimes writers spoke about annihilation and destruction without use of any of these terms. All of them, by intent or accident, translated accurately the Hebrew words shoa and khurban because like them they carried only secular freight. (Yiddish, the other language so
profoundly involved with the disaster and with the literature about it, contributed besides *khurbn*, the word *umikumen*.)

In 1953, the state of Israel formally injected itself into the study of the destruction of European Jewry, and so became involved in the transformation. In the anguish of mourning the dead of Europe and the dead who fell in Israel's lonely fight for nationhood, the Knesset gave posthumous citizenship to the 6,000,000 and established, in controversy, Yad Vashem as a "Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority" in language not especially encouraging to the spirit of objective scholarship.

"May every person in Israel, every Jew wherever he may be, be know that our People has its own reckoning, the reckoning of the generations of the Eternal People—a reckoning of an Eternal People, whose entire history is proof and evidence of the prophetic promise: And I said unto you in your blood, 'Live' [Ezekiel, 16-6]." Two years later Yad Vashem translated *shoa* into "Disaster" and announced for itself and YIVO in New York that henceforth the study of the catastrophe would be divided this way: "The approach of the Disaster, 1920-1933"; "The beginnings of the Disaster, 1933-1939"; and "The Disaster, 1939-1945."

But then the change occurred quickly. When catastrophe had lived side by side with disaster the word holocaust had now and then. In 1951, for example, Jacob Shatzky of YIVO spoke of "the Nazi holocaust," but apparently he did not mean to apply the phrase specifically to the destruction of European Jewry. Between 1957 and 1959, however, "Holocaust" took on such a specific meaning. It was used at the Second World Congress of Jewish Studies held in Jerusalem, and when Yad Vashem published its third yearbook, one of the articles dealt with "Problems Relating to a Question about Yad Vashem switched from "It retained the title of its yearbooks *Catastrophe and Resistance.*"

In other words, conversion of the "Holocaust" began before the public Eichmann's capture. There were thus exclusively, preferring to apply it to a nuclear holocaust, but there appear Within the Jewish world the word's cause Elie Wiesel and other gifted write ings or in articles for *Commentary* at *Midstream* made it coin of the realm. Congress had no choice. As Jewish sch and in various languages revealed the suffering of the Jewish population physical survival, the international using "Holocaust" became so signifies Division, committed to a policy of folk to create a major entry card: "Holocaust"

---

20 Jacob Lestschinsky, *Erev Churbn* (On the Eve of Destruction) (Buenos Aires, 1951); Samuel Gringanz, in *Jewish Social Studies*, XIV (October, 1952), 326-327; Leo Schwartz, *ibid.*, 379-379; Theodor Abel, *ibid.*, V (January, 1943), 79; Werner J. Cahnman, "A Regional Approach to German Jewish History," *ibid.*, (July, 1945), 211-224; Oscar Korbach, "The Founder of Political Anti-Semitism," *ibid.*, VII (January, 1945), 3-4; Adolf Kober, "Jewish Communities in Germany from the Age of Enlightenment to Their Destruction by the Nazis," *ibid.*, IX (July, 1947), 230-238; Lestschinsky, "The Anti-Jewish Program: Tsarist Russia, The Third Reich and Independent Poland," *ibid.*, III (April, 1941), 147-145; Yad Vashem, *Aims and Activities* (Jerusalem, 1955); Friedman, "Research and Literature," used most of these terms interchangeably. For examples of the use of *shoa* in Biblical writings see Ps. 33-5, 63-10, 35-17, Job, 30-3, 14, 38-27; Ez. 38-9.

21 Yad Vashem, *Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority* (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 7, 9, 19; *Jerusalem Post*, August 20, 1953. The Zionist Congress discussed such an authority in August, 1945. The *Vaad Leumi* of Palestine Jewry kept the idea alive. After the establishment of Israel, Ben Zion Dinur, historian and Minister for Education and Culture, was instrumental in the Knesset's passage of the bill establishing Yad Vashem; Professor Dinur became its first head. Controversy in the Knesset involved the opposition of Herut to Moche Sharet's government over the Reparations Agreement with Germany, and the Knesset's left-wing members, some of whom wanted to mention by name in the law specific groups of fighters.

22 *Jewish Social Studies*, XIII (April, 1951) Related to the Study of the Jewish Resistance Yad Vashem Studies, III (1959) 41-65; Zvi Ba ing to a Questionnaire on the Holocaust," *ibid* of others, such as Friedman's "Problems of Re trope," *ibid.*, pp. 25-40, published in this volume w of Jewish studies held in Jerusalem in 1957. T p. 35, has a reference to "Research on the He been writers who spoke of the Nazi holocaust phrase was applied to the general destructive: the phrase in that way as early as 1945. Cohn of Higham, *History*, pp. 200, 204; Robert I America's Foreign Relations (Chicago, 1964), *Concise History* 1919-1945 (New York, 1960), a picture of Hiroshima after the bomb—this Ghastly scenes in a Nazi extermination ca. (New York, 1959) was a novel about the Coc word was used in titles of anthologies, memoirs European Jewry: Alexander Deuts, *The Holoc et al., *The Holocaust* (London, 1967); Levit Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Holocaust Literature (Messengers from the Dead: Literature of the Holoc mation about the Library of Congress comes fro via telephone on August 10, 1971. The Catica from individuals who tried to find out why th 1968, the Library catalogued "Holocaust" to World War II—Personal Narrative, Jewish, is of Jews by communities.
“Problems Relating to a Questionnaire on the Holocaust.” Afterwards Yad Vashem switched from “Disaster” to “Holocaust” although it retained the title of its yearbooks *Yad Vashem Studies of the Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance*.

In other words, conversion of the destruction of European Jewry into “Holocaust” began before the publication of Hilberg’s book and before Eichmann’s capture. There were those who refused to use the word so exclusively, preferring to apply it to the Civil War, World War II or III (a nuclear holocaust), but there appeared no formal effective opposition. Within the Jewish world the word became commonplace, in part because Elie Wiesel and other gifted writers and speakers, in public meetings or in articles for *Commentary* and journals such as *Judaism* and *Midstream* made it coin of the realm. By 1968, even the Library of Congress had no choice. As Jewish scholars in various parts of the world and in various languages revealed with Jewish sources the details of the suffering of the Jewish population and its struggle for spiritual and physical survival, the international serial and monographic literature using “Holocaust” became so significant, said the Library’s Catalogue Division, committed to a policy of following usage, that it felt compelled to create a major entry card: “Holocaust—Jewish, 1939-1945.”

22 *Jewish Social Studies*, XIII (April, 1951), 175-176. Bernard Mark, “Problems Related to the Study of the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Second World War,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, III (1959) 41-65; Zvi Bar-Or and Dow Levin, “Problems Relating to a Questionnaire on the Holocaust,” *ibid.*, 91-117. These papers and a number of others, such as Friedman’s “Problems of Research on the European Jewish Catastrophe,” pp. 25-40, published in this volume were read at the Second World Congress of Jewish Studies held in Jerusalem in 1957. The *Yad Vashem Bulletin* (April, 1957), p. 35, has a reference to “Research on the Holocaust Period.” Of course, there had been writers who spoke of the Nazi Holocaust even before 1951, but their use of the phrase was applied to the general destructive impact of Nazism. Morris Cohen used the phrase in that way as early as 1945. Cohen, *A Dreamer’s Journey*, pp. 256-257.

Thus it was that a word brought into the English language by Christian writers centuries ago—they took the Greek word used in the Septuagint exclusively for translating words in the *Torah* meaning sacrifices consumed by fire—came to be the noun symbolizing a new phenomenon in Western civilization: the destruction of European Jewry. It was also, I believe, that a change in word usage in the English language helped to shift concern from the particularity of the disaster within Jewish history to an emphasis on its uniqueness in modern history. In turn, that shift made it easier to level the charge of parochialism against Holocaust advocates, who, like myself, usually cannot conceive of Auschwitz without the Nazis' anti-Semitism. After all, Miss Arendt had all along insisted that the uniqueness of Auschwitz lay elsewhere! "Antisemitism by itself," she declared, "has such a long and bloody history that the very fact that these death factories were chiefly fed with Jewish ‘material’ has somewhat obliterated the uniqueness of this operation. . . . Antisemitism only prepared the ground to make it easier to start the extermination with the Jewish people."

However, that difference between Holocaust advocates and those who share Miss Arendt's views on the place of anti-Semitism in the development of Nazi Germany's particular methods of domination and annihilation must not obscure the more fundamental agreement between them. In its totality, she also said in 1949, the German way "must cause social scientists and historical scholars to reconsider their hitherto unquestioned fundamental preconceptions regarding the course of the world and human behavior."24

IV

For most historians in America World War II cast so narrow a shadow that they almost missed the destruction of European Jewry. After 1945, they wrote textbooks about modern Europe, the twentieth century, or about the history of the United States without any concern for the kind of appreciation a Friedman or a Miss Arendt had for the actual past, or as it had been told by some colleagues here, in Europe, and Israel.25 Moreover, the Holocaust did not usually reverberate in the consciousness of historians in the United States when they wrote the secondary liter-
IV

World War II cast so narrow a shadow of European Jewry. After 1945, Europe, the twentieth century, or annexation without any concern for the kind of parole that had for the actual past, or eavesdropped here, in Europe, and Israel. Usually reverberate in the consciousness when they wrote the secondary literature of their profession. Admittedly, that literature is vast, but it would appear that the generalization applies to most colleagues writing about recent German and American history, or about World War II in particular. Leaving aside the historians whose primary professional preoccupation is Jewish history, after one adds to scholars already mentioned George Mosse, Fritz Stern, and Gunther Lewy, one soon runs out of names of historians working in the United States who have moved the Holocaust toward the center of their historical consciousness.

No doubt there is many a historian whose work does not touch either subject, but who, in strange places, reveals the presence of each in his historical imagination. Richard B. Morris, for example, known especially for his work on colonial America and the early national period, felt compelled to write in a review that *A Dual Heritage* "is a serious contribution not only to an understanding of the role of American Jewry in the generation before the Holocaust but also to the development of the movement for political reform in America." Peter Gay, whose pagan hero in the enlightenment was David Hume, in his first venture into American history, wrote a beautiful dedication to "the many thousands of pilgrims, Jewish and not Jewish . . . whom Hitler compelled to discover America . . . to the D.P.'s who came out of the camps without families and who, with the indelible numbers on their arms and their indelible memories . . . started new families. . . ." All of these, he said, "were in their own ways heroes . . . in danger of being forgotten and deserve to be remembered."


In general, however, I believe, the place of the Holocaust in the secondary literature is like its place in histories of World War II written by Louis Snyder and Gordon Wright. Snyder's was a popularized account based on his vast knowledge of modern European history. From his own preface, where he speaks of the "devastating man-made holocaust of World War II," and from Eric Sevareid's remarks in the introduction ("in World War II . . . we shivered in the cold stench of medieval mania loosed from the catacombs of the Dark Ages, for this time men saw in the Germanic insanity mass butchering following from deliberate purpose, . . .") there is no doubt Snyder understood what happened, but in the work itself he makes about as much room for the Holocaust as a good survey of Western civilization since Columbus.

Wright's account is different. Even though in much of this book the destruction of European Jewry is at the periphery of his consciousness, he does stop for a moment and devotes two, long, tightly written paragraphs to the Nazi racial policy which "reached its epipome . . . when applied to the Jews." He does not attend to the special set of circumstances in which Jews found themselves and seems overly concerned to make sure his reader understands that Jews "were not the only victims of the extermination camps." But, by leaning heavily on Hans Buchheim and his German colleagues, and on Koehl's monograph he is able to convey an impression about the execution of the Final Solution with which scholars steeped in Jewish sources could find little fault. The problem with Wright lies elsewhere.

For Wright there is no Jewish community, and perhaps for that reason no Jewish resistance. In and of itself his silence on the subject of resistance among Jews would not be so startling. However, Wright has an especially good discussion of the entire resistance movement in Europe in which he seeks to explain why patterns of resistance were different in character and timing from one country to the next. Thus, he lauds the

—

Snyder, World War II. Some historians may have a methodological principle which prevents them from asking "why" if their evidence is silent about Jews, or reveals decisive indifference to them. I do not pretend to understand such a principle, but see Osgood, Ideals, pp. 400, 415, and William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal 1933-1940 (New York, 1963), p. 286. On World War II literature, see also Louis Morton, "World War II: A Survey of Recent Writings," The American Historical Review, LXXV (December, 1970), 1987-1970.


—

This comment does not apply to the bibliography the uprisings in 1943, but under the section "Na Enemies." There are no entries under "Resistance" "(formidable Dr. Robinson); Osc. Nazis," Commentary, XXXIV (November, 196
Gerd Korman

Poles: "Hitler's policy, to be sure, left Poles virtually no choice: not to resist meant ruthless exploitation and national degradation. To a people as proud and stiffnecked as the Poles their duty was clear: they gradually organized an elaborate network of institutions that some Poles described as a 'secret state.'" Their uprising in 1944, in Warsaw, was one of the "most heroic chapters in the history of the European resistance." In the text there is not a whisper about that other uprising in Warsaw a year before when a tiny group of descendants from the Bible's stiff-necked people rose against the Germans.24

By comparison, and only by comparison, Wright spends an inordinate amount of space probing the particularity of the admittedly complex and poignant positions in which anti-Nazi Germans found themselves. He wrote:

More than 200,000 Germans were imprisoned or interned during the prewar years, and many others went into voluntary exile. The flow into the concentration camps continued after 1939, though at a slower rate. This preventive action destroyed much of the potential resistance leadership. Furthermore, the Nazi regime's police state techniques made underground plotting exceptionally hazardous, for no one could be sure whom to trust. An additional handicap was Allied suspicion. Efforts by resistance leaders to make contact with Allied officials were usually viewed skeptically by the latter; the German underground failed to get the kind of aid and encouragement that buoyed up the spirits of resisters elsewhere. All in all, it is perhaps astonishing that active resistance ever developed in war-time Germany.

Word for word, Hannah Arendt and Oscar Handlin have used almost identical language about Jewish resistance.25

A recent issue of The American Historical Review illustrates the ways the Holocaust reverberates in the minds of European historians working in the United States on subjects other than the war. Fritz Stern, Gerald D. Feldman, and Henry Ashby Turner each examined the subject of economics and politics in the period between Bismarck's time and the rise of Hitler. To be sure, writing about the friendship between Gerson Bleichröder and Bismarck all but forced Stern to say something about the Jewish component of the relationship, but Stern demonstrates that he has worked through the conceptual problem of the place of Gentile-Jewish relations in nineteenth-century German history, and knows what

---

24 This comment does not apply to the bibliography where there are references to the uprising in 1943, but under the section "Nazi Persecution of 'Racial' and Political Enemies." There are no entries under "Resistance Movements."
is demanded of him as a European historian by virtue of the destruction of European Jewry. "What was it that linked the Jew—hedged in by apprehensions and uncertainties, a partial stranger in the land he loved too well, and the Junker. . . ." He remarks that Bleichröder's visit to Versailles in 1871 "inflamed the already surprisingly fierce anti-Semitism in those all-Gentile surroundings." Finally, he takes the long view:

Bleichröder's spectacular rise marked an important stage in the history of German Jewry. . . . In their rise and fall the Bleichröders describe a kind of Jewish Buddenbrooks. The social and psychological precariousness of their position, always present beneath the glittering surface, became desperately clear after the rise of the Nazis. Bleichröder's descendants appealed to Adolph Eichmann to be exempted from deportation. It was a poignant, futile end to the story of the Bleichröders in Germany.

There is nothing like this at all in the articles by Feldman and Turner, who are interested in the relationship of big business to the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Party. Turner includes the following passage, which is the only reference in both pieces to Jews and anti-Semitism in Germany: "[Emil] Kirdorf did not withdraw because the Nazis were anti-democratic, aggressively chauvinistic, or anti-Semitic (even though he, like most business leaders, was himself not an anti-Semite). What drove him out of the party was the social and economic radicalism of the Left-wing Nazis." Fortunately, for readers of The American Historical Review, Ernst Nolte, a German scholar from Marburg, admittedly associated by some with a monolithic and "totalitarian" interpretation of National Socialism, identified an important issue which simply was excluded by Feldman and Turner. Hitler seemed to share the "passionate thinking" of most businessmen, together with officers, professors, clergymen, civil servants, and even functionaries of the Social Democratic Party, and therefore gained their support. "The guilt of the German industrialists lies not in the fact that they were children of their time. . . . It lies in their failure to recognize that the fundamental nature and ultimate consequences of National Socialism—the self-sufficient racial state, withdrawing from all disturbing communication with the world. . . ."

I have left to the last historians working in the field of American history because the phenomenon of the Holocaust at the moment directly affects only the years since 1933. Until print specifically examining aspects of the last few years a number of book-Jewish refugee crisis of the 1930's and seeking to leave Europe then and during address themselves to the question 14 years after Henry Morgenthau, Jr., had Collier's. Are Morgenthau's charges with another attitude in 1942, 1943, asible to save the lives of hundreds of the historians of the future could prove.

In 1971, in that future, after a number on the subject—Henry Feingold uses title—the question remains as open-e World War II. In conjunction with other his administrations, these works are in fact made about European Jewish others of the American popular

---

266 Societas—A Review of Social History

Gerd Kor.

---


33 Handlin, "Resistance", Leon Poliakov, "Jews," Jewish Social Studies, XI (January, 1 Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis Rescue; Edward N. Saveth, "Franklin D. Ross American Jewish Yearbook, XLVII (1945-19 Jewish, The Refugees and Immigration Restri American Jewish Historical Society, XLV (J "The United States and the Persecution of Jewish Social Studies, XXX (October, 1968), historians can use the Holocaust as one of the for making the argument that American soci after World War I. James T. Leutner, for exar "done something, had he tried," that "Long and "that human lives were the subject of the box to pigeon hole." See The Journal of As 216-217. James T. Patterson adds Roosevelt's to the president's "timid support" of the Fai during the war and to his "dealing with Japi such evidence enables him to say that James 3 Soldier of Freedom (New York, 1970) shows FE in principle than in practice." Ibid., p. 218. I makes no reference at all to the Jewish refug volume of his study of Roosevelt in Political Sc 289. See also Robert H. Perrell's review of 1 (Baltimore, 1969) in The American Histor 613-614.

In addition to the books already cited Appearance: United States Foreign Policy a 1969); Selig Adler, The Isolationist Impulse: Its III., 1966); Robert A. Divine, American Immig 1957); John M. Blum (ed.), From the Morgenth Allian Nevins, Herbert Lehman and His Era Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William E.
ian by virtue of the destruction linked the Jew—heded in by
al stranger in the land he loved arks that Bleichröder's visit to
surprisingly fierce anti-Semitism
lly, he takes the long view:

an important stage in the history of fall the Bleichröders describe a
xial and psychological precarious-
triumph beneath the glittering surface
rise of the Nazis. Bleichröder's
ichmann to be exempted from
end to the story of the Bleich-

articles by Feldman and Turner,
of big business to the Weimar
cludes the following passage,
es to Jews and anti-Semitism in
draw because the Nazis were anti-
anti-Semitic (even though he, not an anti-Semite). What drove
I economic radicalism of the Left
of The American Historical Review,
largely, admittedly associated by
arian interpretation of National
el which simply was excluded by
share the "passionate thinking"
ficers, professors, clergymen, civil
he Social Democratic Party, and
flict of the German industrialists
dren of their time... It lies in
undamental nature and ultimately
self-sufficient racial state, with-
cation with the world..."34
working in the field of American
Holocaust at the moment directly

affects only the years since 1933. Until 1962, only Handlin ventured into
print specifically examining aspects of the Holocaust in Europe, but in
the last few years a number of book-length studies have looked at the
Jewish refugee crisis of the 1930's and American policies towards Jews
seeking to leave Europe then and during the war itself. All these works
address themselves to the question Leon Poliakov raised in 1949, two
years after Henry Morgenthau, Jr. had published his dramatic article in
Collier's. Are Morgenthau's charges well-founded, he asked? "Is it true
that another attitude in 1942, 1943, and 1944 would have made it pos-
sible to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews?" He knew only
the historians of the future could provide the answer.34

In 1971, in that future, after a number of articles and after three books
on the subject—Henry Feingold uses the word "Holocaust" in his sub-
title—the question remains as open-ended as it was in the midst of
World War II. In conjunction with other studies about Roosevelt and
his administrations, these works are helping us to know what decisions
were in fact made about European Jewry by men in government and all
other elements of the American population.35 As that knowledge is be-

34 Handlin, "Resistance"; Leon Poliakov, "Mussolini and the Extermination of the
Jews," Jewish Social Studies, XI (January, 1949), 1; Arthur D. Morse, While Six
Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy (New York, 1968); David S. Wyman,
Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis (Amherst, 1968); Feingold, Politics of
Rescue; Edward N. Saveth, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Jewish Crisis 1933-1945,"
American Jewish Yearbook, XLII (1945-1946), 37-50; David Brody, "American
Jewry, The Refugees and Immigration Restriction (1933-1942)," Publications of the
American Jewish Historical Society, XL (June, 1956), 219-247; Sheldon Spears,
"The United States and the Persecution of the Jews in Germany, 1933-1945,"
Jewish Social Studies, XXX (October, 1968), 215-242. I am aware that American
historians can use the Holocaust as one of the ways for showing FDR's clay feet and
for making the argument that American society became increasingly dehumanized
after World War II. James R. Leutzner, for example, knows that Roosevelt could have
"done something, had he tried," that "Long was a sticking cog in the machinery," and
"that human lives were the subject of the paperwork routinely shuffled from in-
box to pigeon hole." See The Journal of American History, LVIII (June, 1971),
216-217. James T. Patterson adds Roosevelt's "reluctance to admit Jewish refugees"
to the president's "timid support" of the Fair Employment Practices Commission
during the war and to his "dealing with Japanese Americans." Patterson's sum of
such evidence enables him to say that James MacGregor Burns in his Roosevelt: The
Soldier of Freedom (New York, 1970) shows FDR to have been a "better Jeffersonian
in principle than in practice." Ibid., p. 218. Robert A. Divine, on the other hand,
makes no reference at all to the Jewish refugee crisis in a review of Burns' second
volume of his study of Roosevelt in Political Science Quarterly, LXXVI (June, 1971),
289. See also Robert H. Ferrel's review of Divine's Roosevelt and World War II
(Baltimore, 1969) in The American Historical Review, LXXV (December, 1969),
613-614.

35 In addition to the books already cited see also Arnold A. Offner, American
 Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938 (Cambridge,
1960); Selig Adler, The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction (Glencoe,
il., 1966); Robert A. Divine, American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952 (New Haven,
1957); John M. Blum (ed.), From the Morgenthau Diaries (3 vols.; Boston, 1969-1967);
Allan Nevins, Herbert Lehman and His Era (New York, 1963); Robert Dallek,
coming grounded in reliable evidence, the written history of the United States since World War I is being drawn into the entire question of the destruction of European Jewry. In time, no doubt, some scholars examining American history since 1914 will also wonder if America's responses to the Armenian disaster in the first year of the war were symptomatic of fundamental changes in American society which led to the institutionalization of racism and nationalism in the quota principle of immigration legislation.36

One other area in American history has involved the Holocaust. Stanley Elkins has used Bruno Bettelheim and other students of personality disintegration in the concentration camp to probe the effects of slavery on personality. Coming at a time when many historians were especially attracted to the behavioral sciences, his concern with personality changes prompted much informal and formal discussion about Jewish behavior in concentration camps and the use of each without the other in the study of adult personality changes under slavery or in modern industrial society.37

These discussions have probably expanded the reverberative distance of the Holocaust in the time consciousness of American historians, but they seem not to have made them more aware of the substantial histori-

36 John Higham in his Strangers in the Land (New Brunswick, 1955) makes some suggestions along this line at the very end of the book. Charles A. Beard, The Open Door at Home (New York, 1944), pp. 179-200. In 1955, the quota concept was being applied by the Works Project Administration in Chicago for assuring blacks at least five percent of the jobs in the construction industry. Correspondence in the files of Lawrence Oxley: National Archives. I am grateful to Professor James Gross, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell, for this reference.


cal literature available from their colleagues on the Jewish side of the Holocaust. Why not? (1) the market, overshadowing the good work perhaps leaving unsoiled only Hilberg and their work is not steeped in Jewish sources and by the other side.38 (2) Historians in the Unites States since World War I is being drawn into the entire question of the destruction of European Jewry. In time, no doubt, some scholars examining American history since 1914 will also wonder if America's responses to the Armenian disaster in the first year of the war were symptomatic of fundamental changes in American society which led to the institutionalization of racism and nationalism in the quota principle of immigration legislation.36

One other area in American history has involved the Holocaust. Stanley Elkins has used Bruno Bettelheim and other students of personality disintegration in the concentration camp to probe the effects of slavery on personality. Coming at a time when many historians were especially attracted to the behavioral sciences, his concern with personality changes prompted much informal and formal discussion about Jewish behavior in concentration camps and the use of each without the other in the study of adult personality changes under slavery or in modern industrial society.37

These discussions have probably expanded the reverberative distance of the Holocaust in the time consciousness of American historians, but they seem not to have made them more aware of the substantial histori-

38 Dawidowicz, Jewish Social Studies, XXXII (June, 1968), 9-9. The evidence of the animosities between herself, Hilberg, in "Formidable Dr. Robinson."

written history of the United States into the entire question of the Holocaust. Why not? (1) Amateurs continue to flood the market, overshadowing the good work available in English, and perhaps leaving unsoiled only Hilberg and Miss Arendt, just because their work is not steeped in Jewish sources and has been severely attacked by the other side. (2) Historians in the United States, sensitive to our closeness to the events, may consider the combined efforts of Reitlinger and Hilberg and of Miss Arendt as the best obtainable for the time being. (3) From the very beginning, perhaps, historians here assumed the subject was the special domain of colleagues in Europe, particularly in Germany. (4) Efforts among social scientists to identify the fundamental components of human behavior make the particularity of detailed European history about Jews, Jews and Gentiles, and about Jewish behavior under German rule all but unnecessary for even the historian engaged in analogical analysis. (5) The other millions who died in World War II, and since then, the outrageous suffering and killing of millions in Africa and Asia make it difficult to treat the destruction of European Jewry as another unique experience of the peculiar Jewish people. (6) Finally, it is also possible that historians in the United States may well consider the Holocaust as a subject whose primary significance lies in Jewish history and as such is parochial in nature.

There are three cogent reasons for suspecting that this last answer is closest to the mark of an admittedly fascinating but difficult problem whose roots are deep and entangled. (1) As a breed, historians are not especially heroic. They know that their work will be scrutinized for the tell-tale marks of anti-Semitism or self-hate. (2) The Jew has not been an indigenous element in the literary imagination of Americans as he has been in the imagination of Europeans. Leslie Fiedler once claimed that when the Jew did appear in American letters, as in the 1920's, he was usually an importation from medieval Europe's storehouse of stereotypes. (3) Most working historians are so overwhelmed by nationalism that they forget in practice what they know in theory. David Potter ten years ago reminded his colleagues that they do not treat nationalism as one of many sets of competing devotions within one person or group of persons residing in a political territory. Thus, they often assume as legitimate only one set without considering the legitimacy of

---

38 Dawidowicz, *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXII (July, 1970). Miss Arendt provides evidence of the animosities between herself, Hilberg, and other Jewish commentators in “Formidable Dr. Robinson.”

any of the competitors.⁴⁰ The Jew in any nation-state in the hands of that kind of historian is always at a competitive disadvantage. Hence, to Samuel Eliot Morrison and Henry Steele Commager, Anne Frank was a little “German” girl even when writing her diary.⁴¹ In 1969, however, Anne became a “Jewish” girl.⁴²

Evidence abounds that Americans are becoming more sensitive about the complexity of their nationality. “Southern novelists, Jewish writers, Negro authors, and Beat pundits,” we are told by the Literary History of the United States evaluating postwar fiction in America, “had emerged from the tragic underground of culture as the true spokesmen of mid-century America.”⁴³ No doubt in response to them and in response to the events of their times, historians in the United States struggled to make room for Blacks and Indians as they never had before, and for the first time appeared to find new room for Jews and other ethnic groups whose devotions American historians, beclouded by nationalism or material environmentalism, sometimes attributed to the slow rate of Americanization or disparagingly considered as destructive delusions of romantic nationalism.⁴⁴

But for the present, it is fair enough to say that there is no Holocaust phenomenon in the historical writing of Clio’s disciples in the United States, except among practitioners of Jewish history and Jewish intellectuals.

⁴⁴ In addition to the work of Charles A. Beard, see, for example, Sam B. Warner, Streetcar Suburbs (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 11-12; Caroline F. Ware (ed.), The Cultural Approach to History (New York, 1940), pp. 1, 72; Christopher Lasch, “The Trouble with Black Power,” The New York Review of Books, X (February 29, 1968), 4-14.