

A. Introductionⁱ

The greatest single tragedy of the Second World War was the use of concentration-extermination camps by Nazi Germany. These camps provided Hitler with the means to achieve his "Final Solution." These camps also provide the central problem of the modern world, what does life itself mean? The idea in this topic is not only to expose man's inhumanity to man, but also the practically limitless potential of totalitarianism. A new word was coined to deal with the phenomena of trying to eliminate a whole group of people, "genocide."ⁱⁱⁱ The course goal, specifically, is **to motivate students to evaluate human rights.**

B. Background

Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany in January 1933.ⁱⁱⁱ By March, the first concentration camps were opened. Originally constructed for political opponents, these camps soon also contained people labeled as criminals and shiftless. It was thought better to imprison ten people and have nine innocent, than to have one guilty person free. Numbers mounted. By 1939, there were 280,000 prisoners in about 100 camps. The reality of politics outside of Germany avoided the reality of politics inside. This was when the Prime Minister of Britain was proclaiming the greatness of his peace treaties. Peace and respect for human rights are not necessarily compatible.

The Nazi name was a shortened form of National Socialist, coined in 1930. This German political party, under Hitler, controlled Germany from 1933 until 1945. Confusing dualisms recurred in Nazism. Conservatism and radicalism; elitism and populism; modernization and antimodernity; dynamism and defense of the status quo; capitalism and statism; order and disorder; fanaticism and opportunism. These themes continue to run through Nazism in its current forms. These themes abound not only in the reality of what actually happened, Nazism, but also in the reality of how historians present what actually happened. Conservatives stress the revolutionary temper of the Nazi movement; liberals the collusion of traditional elites.^{iv} Conservatives note that Hitler brought the Volkswagen, 'Give me a people-car,' to Germany. Liberals note that without the Krupp industries, Hitler would not have been able to function. While the facts and the theories uniting the facts do slide and do shift, the overwhelming reality of the concentration camps demands explanation, from any perspective developed.

C. Purpose of the Camps

The concentration camps existed for the complete elimination of all opposition to Nazi rule and the master race. Several other purposes were also served. Slave labor was profitable. The medical profession engaged in experiments which were more torture than scientific. Even death did not end the ordeal. Human hair was used to make felt boots. Gold was extracted from teeth. Some of it was shipped to Zurich, Switzerland where it still exists in ingots. Body fats were used for soap. For a time the ashes from the crematoria were used as fertilizer. The practice ended when it proved too expensive.

In the spring of 1986 scholars seemed more than willing to blame the Allies for Nazi atrocities.^v The problem is that Nazi Germany truly was responsible for the Holocaust, not the Allies. The faulty runs as follows: the German people considered themselves more as subjects of the state, than as citizens who controlled the state. This permitted dire consequences. First, citizenship was denied to the Jews. Then the Jews were encouraged to leave Germany. At this point, some historians inappropriately fault the Allies for not taking in the Jews and others driven out of their homelands.^{vi} One boat of these refugees, for example, was sent away from the Norfolk harbor during this time.^{vii} Part of the difficulty rested in the fact that U. S. Jews decided not to pressure President Franklin D. Roosevelt for fear that an influx of European Jews might provoke an increase of anti-Semitism in the U. S.^{viii} Taking in these expatriates during the Great Depression would have made the extra mouths difficult to feed. The Allies are further faulted for not destroying both the crematoria and the transportation links, especially railroads.

A final note, more horrifying than the rest, deserves appendage here. The Holocaust was apparently committed by people like us, simply doing their jobs. Those who made the Holocaust possible were not

what we would think of as moral monsters. For example, Adolph Eichman, the German colonel in charge of the Holocaust, said that he had never killed even a fly. All that he did was to arrange railroad schedules. Scholars tell us that people like us are liable to be executioners or victims, either.

While historians debate how Hitler operated, the best insight seems to be that Hitler maintained his power by playing conflicting groups against each other.^{ix} Hitler initiated the Holocaust through a policy shot through with inconsistency, improvisation, and confusion. Hitler knew what he wanted to do and he was careful to conceal his plans until it was too late to stop him; but, nonetheless, the German nation had prepared the way for him. While Mein Kampf, the book Hitler wrote, did indicate the direction in which he would go, Mein Kampf was no blueprint. Had diplomats paid more attention to Mein Kampf than they did, the diplomats would have had a better sense of the direction Hitler was taking, but they would not have had a much better sense of the tactics Hitler was using.

D. Statistics

Precise figures are unavailable. Hundreds became thousands, thousands became hundreds of thousands. Fourteen million persons killed seems like a reasonable and very conservative approximation: 6,000,000 Jews; 5,000,000 Russians; 2,000,000 Poles; 500,000 Gypsies; 500,000 mixed, including 200,000 Germans. As Stalin put it, when one person dies, that is a tragedy, but when thousands die, that is merely a statistic.^x In the spring of 1974^{xi}, those figures were the equivalent of the total populations of: New York City, Los Angeles; Houston; Charleston, South Carolina; Portland, Oregon; Rochester, New York, and the entire state of Alaska.^{xii}

E. Conclusion

If anything good came out of this Holocaust, it would have to be the contemporary unification of the Jewish people. The sympathy of the world poured out to the Jews and they were given their own country for the first time in 2,000 years, Israel, which has remained a continuing source of trouble.^{xiii}

Although the Jewish people are not at peace, they are determined that the past will never repeat itself. This determination is an important component for any consideration of human rights in the modern world. By examining the Introduction to the Holocaust; Background; Purpose of the Camps; Statistics; and Conclusion, students have been able to evaluate human rights.

F. Conclusion (continued)

Further development is on pages 1183-1188 in the fifth edition of Chambers^{xiv} for totalitarianism in Communist Russia, and the democratic response to totalitarianism. Hitler himself is treated directly in the readings for Topics 33, 35, and 36.^{xv} The Nuremberg Trial video is scheduled as Topics 41 and 42.

Supplement

G. Statistics (continued)

Discrepancies in the figures are numerous. There are three main reasons: (1) since the German SS records were ordered destroyed, only fragments of the records survive; (2) living survivors do not like to talk about their personal experiences; (3) many of the camps used to lie behind the Iron Curtain and the Communists were uncooperative, giving out no figures. Significant remnants, however, were still present. The smell of burnt skin and hair still putrefies the air at many of the larger camps in Germany. Two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe had the "privilege of dying" for the Third Reich.

H. Conclusion (continued)

The National Archives have collected films on the American Jewish experience from 1929 to 1967. Films on Palestine and Israel cover the period from 1917 to 1967. As implied above in G. Statistics (continued), Soviet soldiers overran the major German extermination centers, where the majority of Holocaust victims perished. This means that not only are there poor statistics, but that there is also poor film footage. The Americans and British were far more careful to document what they saw. The

collection of films in the National Archives documents, how the American public slowly came to learn about and comprehend the extermination of European Jewry. The newsreels documenting the Zionist struggle against the British are particularly interesting as an early example of how political movements have used the media to mold public opinion.^{xvi}

If Catholics turned out to be hauntingly silent, what about the Zionists? Because of the emotions involved, serious scholarship is difficult, but possible. To begin with, though the Zionists sought to lead the Jewish people, the Jewish people of the free world were really unwilling to accept Zionist leadership. Zionists could not be expected to encourage Jews to go anywhere else than Israel, that is not to places like the United States.^{xvii}

Anti-Semitic and semi-anti-Semitic governments proved the best allies of the Zionists in establishing Israel. To blame the Zionists for not doing more than they did, misreads the political realities in which Zionism had to operate. Something was accomplished.^{xviii}

From 1934 to 1944 about seventy shiploads of people carried 40,000 immigrants to Palestine. These people just wanted to get away from Europe and were not particularly led by Zionism. Once the war started, Britain did its best to stop illegal Zionist-led immigration. Only when World War II ended did Zionism begin to use illegal immigration into Palestine as a political force to bring about the state of Israel.^{xix}

Scholars repeat that much more could have been done to save a few people, but political realities prevented much more from being done to save the masses. These comments are basically limited to European Jewry, but American Jewry is also involved in the scholarly debate about alternatives to what might have happened. Historical facts support the contention that the Holocaust is complicated and "full of collective human helplessness in the face of the most heinous crimes committed at a most terrible time for any people's leadership."^{xx}

I. Introduction

Because religion is often treated as a foil for responsibility and responsibility becomes a foil for religion, connecting religion with responsibility becomes a difficult task. That is one reason why such an effort has been made to document this lecture. At least one can relay what scholars are saying about religion, responsibility, and the Holocaust, even if one cannot present a convincing relationship between the three.

J. Religion

Organized religion still has not cried out that the Holocaust was absolutely a moral evil. Even the Jewish concern is that the Holocaust must never happen again, to them. Those who did scream, those who continue to cry out that the Holocaust was an absolute moral evil, no matter who the victims were, are atheists, viz., the existentialists. In this, the moral stupor of contemporary religion in academia comes to make sense to me.^{xxi}

K. Responsibility

Until the spring of 1987 my sense of human nature rejected the notion that the German people generally were aware of what had happened. When students challenged me again, I outlined the type of evidence which would be convincing. The students, then, offered just that evidence.^{xxii} One student from a Catholic family stated that her family left Germany because of the oncoming Holocaust. Her grandfather then fought as a colonel in the U. S. Army and remained ashamed of his ancestry. To my argument that the concentration camps may have been at a distance and unknown to the inhabitants, the students replied that no place in Germany is much more than two and a half hours away from any other place. By 1993 students had indicated that between four and five hours were required to travel the

autobahn, from one end to the other. In any event, the Catholic family in question came from a distance of between two to two and a half hours from the nearest concentration camp.

From family traditions handed down, students said that the bodies were carted into the streets so that the countryside did know what was going on. The disposition of those bodies seemed to indicate that the deaths were from natural causes. A student from a Jewish family told how two of his family of thirteen survived by hiding in a beet bin for two years, in an unknown place on a farm which few people could locate.

A particularly scary aspect of all of this comes from the scholar who concludes "One cannot say for certain whether the Third Reich was a radical departure from, or a continuation of the preceding regimes."^{xxiii} This makes one wonder about the anti-German bias noted in so much U. S. historiography. Perhaps there is more reason than I would like to admit for thinking about the Germans as marching through history.

Recent scholarship^{xxiv} maintains that the suffering and devastation suffered by the Polish Jews was matched by the Polish Christians. The Jewish minority in Poland, at ten per cent,^{xxv} was approximately the same as the size of the African-American minority in the U. S. The widely held belief that the Polish political and military establishments practiced widespread discrimination against Jews, is not true. Hostility of leading Jewish groups in America and Britain toward the Polish did contribute to some anti-Semitism in Poland during the war. Unlike the assimilated Jews of Central and Western Europe and the U. S., Polish Jews were radically different, having a distinct culture and way of life. Additionally, the leadership of the prewar Polish Communist party was largely Jewish.

The Roman Catholic Church in Poland was not at its best. Certain ranking clerics aided the Germans both actively and passively, while the papacy stood by silently. Jewish leaders did much the same themselves, thinking that limited cooperation would lessen the devastation.^{xxvi} In many ways, the crucial issue as phrased by one of the survivors was to suffer "without bitterness and without hatred."^{xxvii}

In the face of the Holocaust, the Catholic Church was hauntingly silent. Scholars have tried to fathom why. Catholics in Nazi Germany were caught between Christian and humanitarian values on the one hand and nationalist and racist values on the other hand. Catholics were a minority in Germany and were anxious to be considered as German nationalists. As such, the Catholic minority was uninterested in identifying with fellow minorities, like Jews. In fact, Catholics used anti-Semitism as "a ubiquitous and politically malleable tool for Catholic social integration." Scholarship is indicating that the bishops were not fooled about the intentions of the Nazis. Their problem was in providing moral guidance and in sparking active resistance.^{xxviii} Silence before the Holocaust is being incorporated into Western values as wrong and unacceptable.

Resistance is a political, rather than a theological concept. Post Vatican II writers expect to find the Church involved in social and political matters. Such expectation was not present for the Church that faced Hitler. The Church more properly witnesses than resists. As a witness the Church proclaims the truth irrespective of political ramifications.^{xxix}

According to a leading scholar, Donald J. Dietrich, the problem for religious people is how one gives witness to human dignity and simultaneously restrict the right of revolution? At what point does the duty to obey lawful authority become a right to rebel, an obligation to rebel? So far, the Church has been in no mood to support revolutions, even against the likes of Hitler.^{xxx}

What happened in Nazi Germany was that the Church offered a religious, rather than a political response. The Church responded to Godless attacks upon the people with a determination to remain

faithful to the Gospel, rather than with a determination to throw off the political yoke of Godlessness. The Catholic Church resisted, but with religious and without political activities.^{xxxix}

These comments are not meant to imply that Protestants did not resist, because they did. In fact, Protestants were far more open in their resistance than were the Catholics. The reason for the above comments is that for the past ten years, the new research has focused on Catholics resisting totalitarianism.^{xxxii}

Hitler makes a good foil for the polemicist, willing to grind and torture the facts for the purpose of character assassination. A recent book, described as displaying "most of the failings of undergraduate expository writing" compares Henry VIII to Hitler and Stalin. Henry VIII may have killed about two percent of his 2.8 million population during his thirty-eight year reign. Henry killed "thieves and vagabonds." The two million Jews of Hitler amounted to about two per cent of the population of occupied Europe. The ten million death toll of Stalin amounted to five per cent of the Russian people.^{xxxiii} While anyone can make any comparison, the killings of Henry VIII were spread out over a much longer period of time, were not as systematic, and were not as godless. Henry VIII was a Christian believer. Henry VIII was opposed to people because of their threat to the state, not because of who they were, versus Hitler's opposition to the Jews, or because they did not want to give up their land, versus Stalin's opposition to the peasants.

L. Israel

The fifth edition of Chambers deals with modern Israel on page 32 in the first section of this course and on pages 1247 and 1257 in this section. Those readings belong with Topics 37, China and 38, The Third World. Some comment on recent writings about Israel are in order in these lectures.

Throughout most of modern European history, Israel was under Moslem rule. Between 1832 and 1840 those parts of the Ottoman Empire commonly referred to as Syria and Palestine came under Egyptian occupation. This occupation opened the area to European and American interests.^{xxxiv} By the end of the century, in 1897, the first World Zionist Congress was convened in Basel, Switzerland, by Theodore Herzl. Under the leadership of Chaim Weizmann, the 1917 Balfour Declaration promised the Jews a homeland in what was then Palestine. The Balfour Declaration is treated on page 1112 in the fifth edition of Chambers, readings for Topic 32, Imperialism. That promise was kept with the creation of Israel in 1948.^{xxxv}

M. Conclusion

The incompatible inseparables at work here are those between violence and law, between politics and truth, as the way in which to maintain civil order and civic virtue. Students are reminded again to read, study, think, and prepare a comment.

Footnotes

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¹ For a 267 page treatment, which "easily qualified as the most readable, balanced, and perceptive survey of the subject of the Holocaust in history in any language," see Michael R. Marrus, The Holocaust in History as reviewed by Albert S. Lindemann, in The American Historical Review, 94, No. 4 (October 1989): 1088.

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ⁱⁱ Leo Kuper, The Prevention of Genocide, as cited in "Other Books Received," The American Historical Review, 92 (April, 198): p. 512.

ⁱⁱⁱFor an elaboration of the significance of this legal event, see Norman Rich, review of Eberhard Jackel, Hitler in History, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 90, No. 5

(December 1985), pp. 1223-1224. Beginning in academic 1988-1989, the space required for keeping my journals in my office was lost. That loss imposed an inability to retrieve full documentation for my lectures. That being the case, my time is better spent thinking about incorporating current research into these lectures than trucking over to the library for full documentation. Students, however, may profitably do the same for extra credit. Before beginning such a project, however, students should inquire whether or not the information has already been obtained.

^{iv}Roderick Stackelberg, review of Pierre Aycoberry, The Nazi Question: An Essay on the Interpretations of National Socialism, 1922-1975 in The American Historical Review, , Vol. 87, No. 2 (April 1982), p. 483.

^vSee Carole Fink, review of Monty Noam Penkower, The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust in The American Historical Review, 90 (April 1985): 406-7; also Norman Rich, review of Eberhard Jackel, Hitler in History, The American Historical Review, 90 (December 1985): 1223-4 for a differing view.

^{vi}See, for example, Richard W. Steele, review of Deborah E. Lipstadt, Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945, in The American Historical Review, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December 1986), p. 1289.

^{vii}See Irving Abella, review of David S. Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1943 in The American Historical Review, 90 (October 1985): pp. 1294-5.

^{viii}Anna M. Cienciala, review of David Engel, In The Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government in Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942 in The American Historical Review, 94 (April 1989): 486.

^{ix}Norman Rich, review of Eberhard Jackel, Hitler in History, in The American Historical Review, 90 (December 1985): 1224.

^xRichard W. Steele, review of Deborah E. Lipstadt, Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945, in The American Historical Review, 91 (December 1986): 1289.

^{xi}When John Dawson researched the major part of this lecture under my direction.

^{xii}Later research includes Konnilyn G. Feig, Hitler's Death Camps: The Sanity of Madness as reviewed in the The American Historical Review, 87 (December 1982): 1415.

^{xiii}Mrs. Jirran, who teaches geography, has a special interest in the Middle East. She has found Jimmy Carter, The Blood of Abraham, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985) very useful for understanding what is going on.

^{xiv}Pages 993-1034 in the fourth edition of Chambers.

^{xv}Students are also directed to the video produced by Charles Synder, available in the Thomas Nelson Community College Library. Also see Michael Biddis, "The Nuremberg Trial: Two Exercises in Judgment," J. Contemp. Hist., 16 (July 1981): 597-615 as cited in Recently Published Articles, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 1982), p. 67 Hitler is indexed for pages 1130, 1131, 1132, 1164, 1173-1175, 1176, 1177-1178, 1196, 1202, 1204, 1205 in the fifth edition of Chambers.

^{xvi}Aaron Berman, review of The Holocaust, Israel, and the Jews: Motion Pictures in the National Archives, Charles Lawrence Gellert, comp., The Journal of American History, Vol. 77, No. 4 (March 1991), pages 1457-1458.

^{xvii}Yaacov Shavit, review of Dalia Ofer, Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944 and Dina Porat, The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939-1945, The American Historical Review, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), pages 900-902.

^{xviii}Yaacov Shavit, review of Dalia Ofer, Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944 and Dina Porat, The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939-1945, The American Historical Review, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), pages 901.

^{xix}Yaacov Shavit, review of Dalia Ofer, Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944 and Dina Porat, The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939-1945, The American Historical Review, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), pages 901.

^{xx}Yaacov Shavit, review of Dalia Ofer, Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944 and Dina Porat, The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939-1945, The American Historical Review, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), pages 902.

^{xxi}See Lucy S. Dawidowicz, review of John F. Morley, Vatican Diplomacy and the Jews during the Holocaust, 1939-1943 in The American Historical Review, 86 (February 1981): 125.

^{xxii}These students met in HIST 103-03, Tuesday and Thursdays, 9:30-11:00. Also see Karen J. Winkler, "Scholarship: German Scholars Sharply Divided over Place of Holocaust in History: U. S. experts are alarmed by what many perceive as an attempt to absolve country of its Nazi past; intellectuals' role questioned," The Chronicle of Higher Education, May 27, 1987, p. 4. ff.

^{xxiii}Roderick Stackelberg, review of Pierre Aycoberry, The Nazi Question: An Essay on the Interpretations of National Socialism, 1922-1975 the quotation cited from p. 225 in The American Historical Review, 87 (April 1982): 483.

^{xxiv}Edward D. Wynot, Jr., review of Richard C. Lukas, The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939-1944 in The American Historical Review, 92 (February 1987): 172.

^{xxv}Anna M. Cienciala, review of David Engel, In The Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government in Exile and the Jews, 1939-1942 in The American Historical Review, 94 (April 1989): 485.

^{xxvi}See the various writings of Hannah Arendt.

^{xxvii}Etty Hillesum, Letters from Westerbork, p. 78 as cited in the review by Elena Malits, C.S.C. in Religion and Intellectual Life, 6 (Sp/Sum 1989): 247.

^{xxviii}David J. Diephouse, review of Donald J. Dietrich, Catholic Citizens in the Third Reich: Psycho-Social Principles and Moral Reasoning, The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 2 (April 1990), pages 530.

^{xxix}Donald J. Dietrich, review of Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich in The Catholic Historical Review, 76, No. 4 ?? (October 1990), page 873-874.

^{xxx}Donald J. Dietrich, review of Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich in The Catholic Historical Review, 76, No. 4 ?? (October 1990), page 873-874.

^{xxxi}Donald J. Dietrich, review of Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich in The Catholic Historical Review, 76, No. 4 ?? (October 1990), page 873-874.

^{xxxii}Donald J. Dietrich, review of Die Katholiken und das Dritte Reich in The Catholic Historical Review, 76, No. 4 ?? (October 1990), page 873.

^{xxxiii}Lacey Baldwin Smith, review of Jasper Ridley, Henry VIII: The Politics of Tyranny, (New York: Viking, 1985), 473 pp. in The American Historical Review, ??: (February, 198): 391-2.

^{xxxiv}Elva Bogert Crawford, review of Abdel-Raouf Sinno, Deutsche Interessen in Syrien und Palastina 1841-1898, The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 1 (February 1992), pages 216-217.

^{xxxv}Judith S. Levey and Agnes Greenhall, editors, The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, (New York: Avon Books, 1983), pages 941-942.