

Global Perspectives on the Holocaust

Global Perspectives on the Holocaust:

History, Identity, Legacy

Edited by

Nancy E. Rupprecht and Wendy Koenig

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DEDICATION

We dedicate this book to the memory of the late Dr. Susan Lee Pentlin, who served as a peer reviewer and expert on Holocaust denial for all three of our Cambridge Scholars Publishing Holocaust volumes. She was deeply committed to higher education, particularly to Holocaust education. Her life, like her work, was devoted to discovering, publishing, and preserving truth by exposing malfeasance, prejudice and hate as a teacher, scholar and concerned citizen. She loved and respected her husband, family, colleagues and friends; made important contributions to her profession; and made her University, her community and her state better places in which to live and work. All who knew her and many who did not but benefitted from her intelligence, vigor, kindness and honor will mourn her passing. Susan Pentlin's was a life well lived.

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PART I:
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

NANCY E. RUPPRECHT AND WENDY KOENIG

This volume of articles, based on papers originally presented at the Tenth International Holocaust Studies Conference at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is a useful contribution to scholarship insofar as it expands the coverage of Holocaust and Genocide issues from their traditional focus on Europe to a worldwide perspective. The theme of the conference, “Global Perspectives on the Holocaust,” reflected this international orientation.

In the 21st century, the process of globalization not only affects developments in science, politics, technology and industry, but also must be reflected in the work of scholars as nations, philosophers and artists re-frame their perspectives in international terms. The volume is interdisciplinary in terms of subject, perspective, and content. It also explores a variety of methodological approaches to supplement traditional historical research and argumentation. For example, the disciplines represented by the authors whose work is included in this book encompass history, psychology, religious studies, film, human development, international relations, literature, education, geography, gender studies, political science, global studies, and museum studies. More than 100 papers were submitted for consideration by the conference selection committee: Approximately a third of them were proposed by scholars from fifteen different countries outside the United States representing every inhabited continent on the globe except for South America.

After this introductory essay, a brief history of the Holocaust focuses on its international character. Written by Nancy Rupprecht, Professor of History and Chair of the MTSU Holocaust Studies Program, this Holocaust overview is included primarily for the benefit of general readers, students and scholars who are not Holocaust specialists. The major segments of this volume will be structured around three thematic areas of content: History, Identity and Legacy. Each section of the book

will begin with an article written by one of three prominent scholars invited to present their work in plenary sessions at the conference.

The first major section focuses on the global history of the Holocaust. It includes papers submitted primarily by historians and political scientists as well as specialists in Holocaust education and religion. The featured speaker, internationally acclaimed historian Gerhard L. Weinberg, presented a radical new approach to the globalization of Holocaust Studies called “A World-Wide Holocaust Project” that several Holocaust scholars participating in the conference pronounced astonishingly new and brilliant.

Weinberg argues that almost all scholarship on the Holocaust, including what was then the most recent synthesis of Holocaust research, the 776 page *Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* (2010), depicts the Final Solution (*Endlösung*) as designed to exterminate only the Jews of Europe and, therefore, is incomplete. He also maintains that this traditional approach is both short-sighted and wrong and argues that Hitler planned to kill not only all Jews in Europe but all Jews in the world as part of a demographic revolution he planned to impose on the entire globe. He bases his opinion primarily in archival sources and published documents and offers specific examples to document his assertions.

Furthermore, Weinberg maintains that the discussion of both the Holocaust and the Second World War has been artificially truncated because scholars have failed to connect the Holocaust with the German military’s plans to win the war. In addition, he argues that they have underestimated the personal interests and mendacity of the perpetrators in connection with the global compass of the *Shoah*.

The second major segment of the book discusses how persecution of individuals during the Holocaust had a profound and often disastrous impact on the development of personal identity. The lives of innocent and often apolitical people frequently were ruined or ended by factors relating to their personal identities, factors such as age, sexual orientation, gender and geography. Papers in this section represent the disciplines of gender studies, psychology, social science, and history. The featured speaker for this part of the conference was author Alexandra Zapruder. Her presentation “Rywka Lipszyc: Coming of Age in the Lodz Ghetto,” was based on her widely praised book, *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers’ Diaries of the Holocaust* that, in turn, was based on research compiled from the Holocaust diaries of 60 teen-aged boys and girls who survived the *Shoah*. *Salvaged Pages* won the National Jewish Book Award in the Holocaust category and subsequently was made into a major documentary film titled “I’m Still Here: Real Diaries of Young People Who Lived through the Holocaust”. With the exception of Anne Frank, scholars have

neglected or slighted the suffering of children and teens during the *Shoah* as well as the psychological impact of the Holocaust on young people. Zapruder's work has given them back their voices and preserved a wealth of the primary sources they created in readable form. It is almost impossible to read these diaries without being changed and enriched by them.

The third major segment of the book will focus on the legacy of the Holocaust insofar as it includes lessons learned or not learned. The first part of this section will consider the implications and consequences of the *Shoah* that have been successfully incorporated into new forms of expression. These are designed not only to commemorate and preserve the various types of Holocaust experiences but also to actively transmit those experiences through new cultural approaches to inject the reality of the historical Holocaust into contemporary terms in order to make the *Shoah* more relevant, important and instructional for the 21st century. The second part of this section will focus on the failure of the post-war generation to learn the most important lesson that the Holocaust experience offered—that of tolerance. This failure has resulted most horribly in the legacy of late 20th and early 21st century genocide and ethnic cleansing as well as the current resurgence of antisemitism in Europe. The papers in this segment represent the disciplines of political science, international relations, geography, film, literature, art history and human development. The contribution of our third featured plenary speaker, widely acclaimed Australian historian Paul R. Bartrop, expounds on the fundamental connection between the Holocaust and modern genocide. His conference presentation was titled “Holocaust Studies and Genocide Studies: Is there a Difference? And if so, Why?” Bartrop, the author of over a dozen books on Holocaust and Genocide Studies, recently was honored with the prestigious appointment as the King Distinguished Visiting Professor of Holocaust Studies at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and he currently serves as the Director of the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Human Rights Studies at Florida Gulf University. His article seamlessly explores the connection between Holocaust and Genocide studies that vitally documents the imperative influences—for better and for worse—that the past always imposes on the future.

The final segment of the volume warns of the peril that accompanies the failure to learn from mistakes made before, during and after the Holocaust in order to enable contemporary governments to intervene in time to prevent similar catastrophes. The section also discusses the necessity to develop new disciplinary approaches to analyze, evaluate and

compare genocides as well as to investigate the impact of various forms of potentially lethal persecution on human beings and human behavior.

The remainder of this Introduction will preview each of the three major segments of the book.

History

Featured Article: Gerhard L. Weinberg, Professor Emeritus, University of North Carolina, “A Worldwide Holocaust Project”

Paul Lubotina, Austin Peay University, Clarksville, Tennessee, “Reconciling History: The Holocaust in Scandinavia”

Paul Lubotina’s article examines the changing interpretations of Finnish and Norwegian collaboration with Nazi political and military officials during WW II up to and including admissions of culpability by the governments of Finland and Norway in 2012. Until the late 1970s, historians and politicians in both countries rejected any suggestion that Scandinavians willingly participated in the Holocaust except for the fact that the Finnish government fought as “Brothers in Arms” with the Germans and the undeniable culpability of Vidkun Quisling’s government in Norway. Lubotina maintains that after the defeat of Germany, the Soviet Union wielded a great deal of political pressure in Scandinavia, which prevented both Norway and Finland from admitting any collaboration with Nazis for fear of political repercussions. However, as the USSR’s power declined, historians began to reassess the role Scandinavians played in the Holocaust, increasing the estimate of the number of Finnish Jews, Jewish refugees and prisoners of war sent from Finland to extermination camps, from seven to over 3500 individuals. Lubotina’s article discusses the direct cooperation among the German, Finnish, and Norwegian governments during the Holocaust as well as provides information concerning ideological and economic reasons for Finland’s cooperation with Germany and Norway during the war years.

Steven Leonard Jacobs, University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa Alabama, “Shanghai Jewry: A Story Less Well Known and Little Told”

On the occasion of his 25th anniversary as Rabbi of Temple Emanuel of Kensington, Maryland, the late Leon M. Adler (1921-1988) commented during a newspaper interview:

...I was sent to China and stationed in Shanghai. There, to my surprise, I found about 25,000 Jewish refugees. They were primarily from Germany and Austria, but there were also some rabbinical groups, remnants from the Mirer and Lubavitcher Yeshivas, from Poland and Russia. The Shanghai refugees were the very last group to escape the Nazis. It was too late for them to go to any other country. Russia only allowed them transit. So they crossed Russia in sealed trains to Vladivostok. From Vladivostok they went to Japan, which let them stay only for a while, then sent them to Shanghai, one of the few open ports in the Far East.

This comment from his Rabbi sparked Jacob's interest in the fate of the Jews of Shanghai, especially those in the Shanghai ghetto. Formally known as the Restricted Sector for Stateless Refugees, the ghetto occupied one square mile in Japanese occupied Shanghai in which approximately 20,000 Jewish refugees were located by the Japanese government. These Jewish refugees from Nazi occupied Europe were settled in the poorest and most crowded area of the city. However, because the ghetto was not walled, local Jewish families and a variety of charities were able to supply them with basic shelter, food and clothing. Jacobs believes that the fate of these Shanghai Jews, including their human resiliency in adapting to a new country with a different culture, is underrepresented in Holocaust research and publication.

Naomi J. Robertson, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, "The Glass House as an Embodiment of the Changing Fate of Jews in Budapest from 1848 to the Present"

Naomi Robertson's article presents a fascinating collective history of residents of The Glass House, 29 Vadasz Street in Budapest. Their experiences are preserved through historical records and illustrated by the oral history of one of its residents, Irena Braun Lefkovicova, who lived there from October 1944 until its liberation in January 1945. The house itself was a glass factory owned by industrialist Arthur Weiss until the last years of the Second World War.

The occupation of Hungary began in March 1944 and was quickly followed by the concentration of urban Jews in a ghetto where soon they were joined by Jews from Hungary's provinces. These deportations, engineered by Adolf Eichmann, began in May 1944, and by July 350,000 Jews had been sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

As Eichmann consolidated his stranglehold on Hungary's Jewish population, Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz worked behind the scenes issuing Swiss temporary protective visas to several thousand Jews. He worked

with Moshe Krausz, of the Palestine Office, to arrange travel documents and transport for Jews to the safety of Palestine. Because this work required office space, Lutz and Krausz were pleased to accept Weiss' offer of the glass factory offices, which, through Lutz's influence, came under the protection of the Swiss consulate.

Members of the Zionist Resistance movement also resided in the Glass House. These men and women engaged in various acts of subterfuge and sabotage, including providing forged passports, operating an underground network to provide safe passage for young Jews to Palestine, and rescuing many inhabitants of the ghetto. By the end of 1944 some 3,000 people had found refuge in the Glass House.

Robertson applied the research technique of prosopography to a study of the inhabitants of the Glass House in 1944-45, a group of people that shared one common objective: survival. Their efforts toward this goal were not always harmonious, and while most were young, they varied in their other attributes. The Hungarian National Committee for Attending Deportees (DEGOB) compiled a sociological profile of Hungarian Jewish survivors, and chronicled the biographies of some 5,000 of them. Cross-referencing the list of Glass House survivors with records from DEBOG, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum provides a rich source of information on this extraordinary place that is supplemented by oral history interviews with Irena Braun Lefkovicova.

Dan J. Puckett, Troy University, Montgomery, Alabama, "Alabama's Jews and Refugee Resettlement, 1938-1941"

Because of the tremendous threat that Nazi antisemitic policy posed to European Jews, Alabama's Jews organized themselves at both the local and state levels to work for the rescue of Jews who remained in Nazi-dominated Europe. These efforts included both lobbying for relaxed immigration policies and opening Palestine as refuge for persecuted European Jews, but Alabama residents also sponsored refugees who had managed to flee from Central Europe. Although their lobbying efforts had little effect on the policies of the United States or Great Britain, their sponsorship of refugees had a profound effect both on the refugees and on Alabama's Jewish communities.

Throughout the decade, individual Jews or Jewish families sponsored relatives and friends to enable them to flee Europe and begin a new life in the United States. In 1938, Alabama's Jewish communities began to work with the National Coordinating Committee and the National Refugee

Service to resettle German, Austrian, and Czech Jews in communities throughout the state. Puckett's article examines three issues: how the antisemitic persecution in Nazi Germany energized Alabama's Jewish community to aid European Jews; how Alabama's Jews organized themselves, at both the state and local levels, to ameliorate the refugee crisis; and how these organizations cooperated with the NCC and NRS to resettle Jewish refugees.

Ethan Hollander, Political Science, Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana, "International Hierarchy and the Final Solution"

Ethan Hollander crafted an argument that some scholars who attended this conference pronounced both new and startling. Based on archival research and using methodology employed by scholars in international relations and comparative political science, he concludes that, ironically, Jewish survival was more likely in countries that collaborated with Nazi Germany than in those that did not. In countries and areas where local leaders resisted German demands or refused to cooperate with what they considered to be an evil regime, they often were bypassed entirely or removed from office, leaving Germany to implement the Final Solution without hindrance. The irony is that resistance to German rule often had deleterious consequences for a country's Jewish population, whereas collaboration with Germany frequently had beneficial ones.

Hollander explains that most collaborators who helped local Jews did so for reasons of *Realpolitik* or crass political opportunism. Nevertheless, the correlation between political administration and victimization rates is an interesting one because it forces scholars to reconsider the influence of antisemitism, geography, or other local factors in comparative perspectives when considering rates of Jewish survival.

Joel David Cameron, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, Missouri, "Local Collaborators and the Murder of the Jews of Galicia, 1941-1944: Two Case Studies"

Cameron's article examines the implementation of the Holocaust in Galicia, with particular attention to the role of local collaborators and the local police forces created by the German occupiers and staffed by local collaborators during 1941-44. His article is based on research conducted in the State Archive of the L'viv Oblast' and the *Bundesarchiv*, Ludwigsburg, Germany.

The murder of the Jews of Galicia can be divided into four distinct phases. In the first phase, the summer and fall of 1941, Jewish persecution was characterized by pogroms and other acts of violence. The second phase, the summer and fall of 1942, is when most of Galicia's Jews were killed in mass shootings or via deportations to Belzec. During the third phase, the spring and summer of 1943, Jewish ghettos in Galicia were liquidated. The fourth phase ended with the liberation of Galicia in the summer of 1944. It is characterized by 'Jew Hunts' during which the Germans sought to murder those Jews who had eluded them. During all of these phases local collaborators, including local police forces, participated in pogroms and other atrocities, guarded Jewish ghettos, hunted Jews, and participated in mass shootings and deportations. Cameron argues that the role of local collaborators throughout Europe merits further study in Holocaust research.

Identity

Featured Article: Alexandra Zapruder, "Rywka Lipszyc: Coming of Age in the Lodz Ghetto"

Joachim Neander, Independent Scholar, Krakow, Poland, "German Victims of Auschwitz"

Neander argues that because Germans were undoubtedly the primary perpetrators during the Holocaust, the suffering of approximately 100,000 German prisoners at Auschwitz has been almost totally ignored. In addition to the 67,000 German Jews deported to Auschwitz, about 9,000 German Romani, and 10,000 "Aryan" Reich citizens were committed there. For these individuals, who defined themselves as Germans, persecutions by their fellow countrymen and women forced them to confront and perhaps to question their sense of national identity. Regardless of "race", many of those who were liberated in January, 1945 faced further hardship and discrimination in the post-war world. This is particularly true of Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, those labeled "asocials" or criminals and gypsies. Many of them were interrogated by the same policemen and sent to prison by the same judges who committed them to a concentration camp during the war. Finally, only those who were Jewish or Romani were permitted to organize themselves to plead their cases. Moreover, those who were neither Jews nor gypsies, were excluded from both recognition as victims and from material compensation for their losses in the post-war world.

David Chrisinger, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, “‘Bending the Bars of Their Cage’: Identity and Survival by Subterfuge in Hitler’s Germany”

Historians of Nazism and the Holocaust have only recently begun to focus intensely on German treatment of homosexual men during the Third Reich. Many have come to believe that the Nazi totalitarian state completely dictated the conditions of everyday life and was successful in creating a marked division between those who belonged (“Aryan” Germans) and those who did not belong (homosexuals, among many others) to the German *Volksgemeinschaft*, or “national-racial community.” Postwar scholarship has institutionalized this ideologically imposed perception.

However, Chrisinger argues that these observations lack intellectual rigor and inadvertently obscure historical reality. Although they undoubtedly characterize the everyday experience of some homosexual men, they fail to account for the everyday experience of those gay men who were able to maintain their gay lifestyles in the face of state persecution by emphasizing their “Germanness” and concealing their “gayness.”

Chrisinger’s article adds previously silenced gay voices to the discussion of the lives of homosexual men in the Third Reich and also forces scholars to rethink German history from the margins to reevaluate established conceptions of what it meant to be German in Hitler’s Reich.

Ronit Fisher, University of Haifa, Israel, “Prelude to the Holocaust in Romania: The Significance of Eugenics, Ethnicity and Race in the Development of Romania’s National Identity”

“Blood is the Biological substrate of heredity; consanguinity, on the intellectual, emotional and social level, means the same sentiments, ideas and tendencies. Race is therefore the condition of a nation’s existence; it is its conception of life itself. The nationality principle is based on this fundamental truth...”

These words, written by Romanian author Nicolae Rosu, in 1935, emphasize the important role of eugenics for state formation in inter-war central Europe. The “nationalization” of eugenics in these countries resulted from a prevalent belief that the fate of a nation was determined by the improvement of its racial qualities.

The primary focus of this article is how the Eugenics movement in interwar Romania combined the general European elements of the Eugenics phenomenon with specific responses to local conditions.

Eugenicists in interwar Romania strongly advocated the implementation of a professionally controlled and biologically based form of national identity. In turn, eugenics transformed the Romanian state from an indistinct entity governed by impersonal laws to a nation governed by biological laws. This transformation is carefully examined through the two perspectives that Fisher argues provide the key for understanding the Romanian Holocaust: antisemitism and gender.

Vandana Joshi, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India “The Holy Ghost, the Sleeping Beauty and the Prince Charming: Narratives of Sexual Discontent in World War II Germany”

Forbidden sexual relations between Jews and Germans in Nazi Germany have been studied extensively by scholars, but forbidden relations between Aryan women and prisoners of war have received little attention in the academic community. Vandana Joshi’s article demonstrates that, in spite of criminal sanctions against sexual relations between Germans and POWs, forbidden sex became an embarrassing and frequent reality during WW II. She relies on Gestapo and judicial records to argue that women’s subjective experiences and lived realities did not synchronize with the state’s claims of an insulated utopian *Volksgemeinschaft* (national-racial community) during the war years. The more the regime sponsored marriage for ‘racially pure’ citizens in forms such as wartime, long distance and post-mortem marriages, the more marriage lost its traditional meaning.

The physical absence of husbands and the relative autonomy enjoyed by soldiers’ wives often led to racial and sexual transgressions, even though discovery could lead to denial of state maternal benefits, loss of citizenship and penal servitude for guilty soldiers’ wives. Nonetheless, many women entered into sexual liaisons with POWs of various ethnicities and racial backgrounds and thereby lost the legal right to their children and families. If a wife was found legally guilty of adultery with a POW and or *Rassenschande* (racial defilement), both legal custody of her children and the responsibility for home making was transferred from the wife to her soldier husband. Only if her husband appealed for mercy and professed his continued faith in his wife, was there any possibility for his wife to be “rehabilitated” and, therefore, have her maternal relationship with her children restored. This reallocation of the legal right to define legitimate marriages and paternal relationships from the married couple to the state demonstrates that the German state claimed the ultimate right to control the bodies and behavior of the wives of German soldiers. Joshi’s article

provides important new information concerning the topics of wartime citizenship, sexuality, maternity, morality, paternity, gender and race relations in Nazi Germany.

Legacy

Featured Article: Paul R. Bartrop, “Considering the Holocaust and Genocide: Is There A Difference, and Does it Matter?”

Audrey Brunetaux, Colby College, Waterville, Maine, “*La Rafle & Elle s’appelait Sarah*: Memory-Work and Mediality”

Brunetaux’s article confronts the legacy of the *Vél d’Hiv* round-up, which led to the deportation of 13,000 Jews in Paris in July 1942, by analyzing two recent French films: Roselyne Bosch’s *La Rafle* (The Round Up) and Gilles Paquet-Brenner’s *Elle s’appelait Sarah* (Sarah’s Key). She argues that the films renegotiate French guilt regarding the events through unconventional portrayals of the round-up, their computerized recreation of the actual site of the Vélodrome d’Hiver, and their depiction of the French internment camps from which Jews were transferred and deported to concentration, work and death camps in the East. Although the sites themselves were destroyed and erased from the French landscape after World War II, the recreations in the films allow viewers to recapture and re-appropriate the historical events while bridging the gap between past and present. Through their aesthetics and their *mise-en-scène*, these fictional films do not supplant historical events but rather challenge viewers to reconsider the complexities inherent in Vichy France. Brunetaux argues that the films succeed in imaging the Holocaust aesthetically without trivializing it.

Matthew Cook and Derek H. Alderman, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, “Public Memory and Empathy in Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine* Project”

Cook and Alderman’s article examines German artist Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine* (Stumbling Stones) project as part of his discussion of how the Holocaust past has become embedded in the landscape of Germany through memorials. The *Stolpersteine* are 10.16 by 10.16 centimeters (4-by 4-inch) memorial stones placed in sidewalks in front of homes or businesses that were the last known locations of Holocaust victims. Demnig has explained that his project personalizes the memorialization of

the Holocaust by pointing to individuals rather than focusing on the sheer number of victims. Cook's fieldwork investigates the range of meanings that people derive from the *Stolpersteine* in Berlin. By investigating a smaller scale of memorial and placing it within the national and international context, Cook's research offers insight into the processes involved with Holocaust memorialization and the local, national and international struggles over meaning.

Wendy Koenig, Long Beach City College, Long Beach, California, "For the Sake of an Encounter: Oral Testimony in Holocaust Museums"

Koenig's article examines the history of audio and video collection of survivor testimony as well as strategies employed for the presentation of such testimonies within the exhibition spaces of Holocaust museums in the United States. She explores the ramifications of particular "listening" situations, including the use of headphones, iPod Touch audioguides, and controlled collective encounters. In addition, Koenig considers whether current approaches allow for the sustained engagement necessary for the visitor to differentiate the experience of listening to Holocaust testimony from other types of acoustic and/or verbal encounters. Koenig concludes by examining selected examples of innovative acoustic strategies as a means to explore alternatives to conventional exhibition design.

Nadja Weck, Vienna University, Austria, "European Holocaust Memory versus Local Practice in Western Ukraine: Dealing with the Holocaust in the Town of Sambir"

Weck's article discusses the manner by which the west Ukrainian town of Sambir attempts to represent its past in relation to the Holocaust. The town drew attention when local residents blocked the construction of a memorial park commemorating Jewish inhabitants who were murdered in the Holocaust. Instead of the park, three metal crosses were erected on the town's old Jewish cemetery and they were labeled as commemorating the "Victims of Fascist and Communist Terror 1939-1950." By examining interviews with local residents, works of popular history and other memorial sites, Weck investigates why the town's Jewish history was swept under the rug. One decisive feature of Ukrainian memory discourse is the attempt to distance the country from Soviet conceptions of history, even as the aesthetics associated with Soviet memorials are often maintained. The town of Sambir emerges as an unusual case, given that the nearby town of Stary Sambir openly acknowledges and commemorates

the mass murder of local Jews. Through this comparison, Weck reveals the complex negotiations involved in Ukrainian treatments of the past and its relationship to Holocaust memory.

Christopher P. Davey, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah, “Fighting Atrocity: Rethinking the Connections between Gross Violations, Civil Resistance and Humanitarian Interventions”

Davey considers historical moments when campaigns of non-violence and human rights have emerged as civic, non-violent responses to gross violations of these human rights. In Kosovo and East Timor in the 1990s, these social dynamics coalesced into campaigners enticing international humanitarian intervention through strategic use of nonviolence. Using primary sources from participants engaged in the non-violent struggle for human rights, Davey establishes new lines of questioning about the role of civil resistance in responding to the trajectory of genocide before such acts unfold beyond the responsiveness and current limits of humanitarian action.

C. Elizabeth Propes, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee, “Contextualizing the Holocaust as a Human Event”

Scholars and institutions dedicated to the remembrance of the Holocaust frequently link teaching about the Holocaust with the goal of further genocide prevention, but popular education seems to fail at making this connection. Propes argues that Holocaust education needs to embrace a greater contextualization of the Holocaust by incorporating materials from other genocides and by embracing a more fundamental theoretical approach to understanding genocide in general. She focuses upon identifying characteristics that link genocides and, in that process, identifies specific materials from other historical events that can be used to help students comprehend specifics of the Holocaust as well as understand how any culture might descend into such genocidal activities. Her approach forces students to consider the ideologies and processes that allow so-called ordinary people to become capable of genocide.

Global Perspectives on the Holocaust: History, Identity, Legacy features innovative scholarship that provides both scholars and students with new perspectives and methodologies that will allow them to study the Holocaust and genocide in new ways that will encourage them to evaluate and project the lessons of the past into the present through a world-wide

perspective. We believe that the future of Holocaust scholarship must become both increasingly global and interdisciplinary and that this volume contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the events and legacy of the Holocaust.

PART II:

**THE HOLOCAUST:
A BRIEF HISTORY**

CHAPTER TWO

THE HOLOCAUST: A BRIEF HISTORY

NANCY E. RUPPRECHT

“. . . So then, to tell my story, here I stand. . .
You hear me speak. But do you hear me feel?”¹

When Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist party seized power on January 30, 1933, there were approximately 525,000 Jewish people living in Germany, less than one percent of the population. Using a combination of force and terror, Hitler quickly destroyed the Weimar Republic and created a totalitarian state based on racial ideology in theory, in law and in practice.²

The Holocaust or *Shoah*,³ the genocide directed primarily against the Jews of Europe, developed gradually and inexorably with small discriminatory

¹ Written by German/Jewish poet Gertrud Kolmar who was murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. These lines are from the poem *Die Dichterin* (“The Woman Poet”) from *Dark Soliloquy*, a book of selected poems by Kolmar.

² This brief history was composed from a variety of sources written, primarily but not exclusively, by historians. I want to acknowledge my intellectual debt to those upon whom I relied in writing this essay. They include Marion Kaplan, Gerhard L. Weinberg, Raul Hilberg, Martin Gilbert, Christopher Browning, Michael Marrus, Deborah Dwork, and the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Older versions of this essay also may be found under the title “Holocaust Overview” on the website of the National World War II Museum in New Orleans and that of the Tennessee Holocaust Commission.

³ For many years scholarship on the Holocaust focused on the German perpetrators rather than their victims, primarily because the Germans created most of the written official records. However, in the recent past more emphasis has been placed on Holocaust victims; new methodologies and categories of analysis, such as questions of gender and class, have been developed, and projects to videotape the testimony of Holocaust survivors have broadened the scope of Holocaust scholarship.

measures, such as university quota limits for Jews and the prohibition of Jewish ownership of German land (both in 1933), and escalated with the Nuremberg laws of 1935 that defined what it meant to be a Jew,⁴ deprived Jews of German citizenship and legally prohibited them from a variety of occupations. At this time laws also were passed making sexual relations between Germans and those of unacceptable race into a new crime called *Rassenschande* (racial defilement or racial pollution) that was punishable by a variety of sanctions up to and including the death penalty for both participants.⁵

Virulent antisemitism was a core belief of Hitler's ideology (*Weltanschauung*) from the very beginning. According to Hitler, the allegedly alien racial stock represented by the Jews was particularly dangerous to Germany because of their wide distribution and imagined influence as well as the fact that they had assimilated successfully into German society. As early as April 6, 1920, Hitler promised a cheering crowd that he was determined "to pull up the [Jewish] evil by its roots and exterminate it completely." ("*das Uebel an der Wurzel zu packen und mit Stumpf und Stiel auszurotten.*")

Antisemitism was not a new experience for German Jews or, for that matter, for Jews anywhere in Europe, North America or the rest of the world in the early 20th century. Probably because it is tempting to view history backwards through the lens of the present, much of our media and

Although some scholars prefer the Hebrew word *Shoah* (catastrophe) to the term Holocaust, this history will use Holocaust.

⁴ The Nuremberg laws defined "full Jews" as having three or four Jewish grandparents or those with two Jewish grandparents who were married to Jews and/or belonged to a Jewish community. All other people who had two Jewish grandparents were defined as First Degree *Mischlinge*, people of mixed racial ancestry. Second Degree *Mischlinge* were defined as people with one Jewish grandparent and Aryans were defined as people with no Jewish grandparents. The term *Mischling* frequently was used in a much more pejorative connotation than my translation implies. In some contexts it is more accurately translated into English as "half-breed" with all the negative implication that term connotes.

⁵ *Rassenschande* prosecutions for sexual intercourse between Jews and German gentiles were much more common than prosecutions for sexual relations between gentiles and Afro-German *Mischlinge* or gentiles and Gypsies (Sinti and Roma). Although there were a relatively small number of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich, approximately 385 of them were sterilized to preclude their further procreation and, during the war, some were conscripted for forced labor. On the other hand, some black German *Mischlinge* joined the Hitler Youth and/or fought in the German army during WW II.

some historians who ought to know better imply that Adolf Hitler's antisemitism struck a responsive chord in Germans because it was based on a deep reserve of antisemitic hatred. However, this type of argument distorts historical reality in three important ways. First, it equates Hitler's rabid "racial" antisemitism with traditional religious antisemitism and conflates the two. Second, this conflation leads students and scholars to underestimate the radical, virulent, perpetual and all-consuming nature of Hitler's antisemitism. Third, it isn't true.

It is not difficult to demonstrate that 20th century Germans were not rabidly antisemitic before Hitler's seizure of power. When the German empire was created in January 1871, Jews were granted almost complete legal equality with gentiles on the national level. There were some iniquities on the state level that remained in place until 1919 when the Weimar constitution established universal legal equality for Jews—more than a dozen years before Hitler's seizure of power. However, even before 1919, when some state antisemitic restrictions remained on the books, those restrictions were significantly less onerous than the iniquities of the pre-imperial era. Most Jews understood this, assimilated into German society and considered Germany their homeland.

Moreover, considering the pogroms⁶ and the active persecution of Jews in Russia and eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the political storm that erupted in France over the maltreatment of Alfred Dreyfus, the first Jewish officer assigned to the French general staff, it is not surprising that most Jews in Imperial Germany believed that they were in a much better position than Jews in much of Europe and also better off than Jews had been in the German past. Disproportionately large numbers of German Jews served their fatherland in front-line combat during the Great War, many as volunteers, because they felt at home in their fatherland.⁷

⁶ Pogrom is a Yiddish word, derived from Russian, meaning a violent attack on a specific community of people. Historically, the word has been applied to attacks on Jews, especially in late 19th and early 20th century Russia.

⁷ On October 11, 1916 the German military ordered a *Juden-zählung* (Jewish or Jew census) in the German army to determine how many Jewish soldiers were fighting in the front line as opposed to serving in the rear echelons and/or in administrative jobs. The expectation was that it would indicate that a disproportionate number of Jews were serving in the rear but it showed exactly the opposite—compared to gentile Germans, Jews were proportionately over-represented in the front lines. The military suppressed the findings of the census because it did not document their expected results. In Germany in the 1930s Jewish WW I soldiers who had been decorated for valor sometimes were spared roundups and minor harassment, but it did not exempt them from the final solution.