

were dispatched by trains, and with horrible efficiency about six million were killed, approximately two-thirds of the previous Jewish population of Europe and about two-fifths of all the Jews in the world. Most came from Poland (three million) and the Soviet Union (one-and-a-half million), but with some exceptions, such as Denmark, Jews in other countries died in proportionate numbers. How mass extermination was carried out with ruthless efficiency is the subject of Raul Hilberg's meticulous and authoritative investigation.

Questions can nevertheless be raised. How did Nazi anti-Semitism evolve into mass murder? Hitler's racial ideology notwithstanding, was the Nazi leadership influenced by the additional millions of Jews in the newly conquered lands and by the imperatives of an inefficient bureaucracy? Exactly how important was Hitler's own role? Persecution could not have been effective without the participation—or acquiescence—of ordinary German men and women. These issues are explored by a controversial scholar of the subject, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. The debate between “intentionalists,” convinced that mass destruction was decided on from the outset, and “functionalists,” who see it as the end of an evolutionary process, is discussed by Michael Marrus. Of equal concern is the reaction, or lack of it, by the Allies, even when confronted with evidence that mass murder was taking place. Why did the Allies not aggressively try to save Jews before the war's end? Why did they refuse, for example, to bomb the rail facilities at Auschwitz? Historians Walter Laqueur and David S. Wyman analyze these questions and arrive at different conclusions.

# The Destruction of the European Jews

RAUL HILBERG



Raul Hilberg came to the United States from Vienna, served in the U.S. Army, and, as a member of the War Documentation Project, examined masses of German records. He began work on *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1948 and has published several studies concerning the fate of European Jews. He served as a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, and he testified for the Department of Justice in cases against individuals implicated in the killings. The following excerpt comes from the revised edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, a book concerned with the process by which the Holocaust took place. The “machinery” of destruction is recounted in sequential steps: first the definition of who were Jews, then their expropriation, their deportation, and, finally, their annihilation. The excerpt that follows describes the clearing of the ghettos that the Jews were forced to inhabit and their subsequent removal to extermination centers.

In the Reich-Protectorat area [most of Czechoslovakia], considerable difficulties were caused by privileged or semi-privileged categories of Jews. No such encumbrances hindered the deportations in Poland. There was no Mischling [half Jew, of which there were different categories] problem, no mixed-marriage problem, no old-Jews problem, no war-veterans problem. There were only handfuls of foreign Jews in Poland, some of whom were pulled out of the ghettos at the very last minute and some of whom were shipped to killing centers by mistake. Only one major difficulty arose in connection with any particular

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group of Jews, and that problem did not become acute until the end of 1942: the labor shortage. Arrangements had to be made to keep a few skilled laborers alive a little longer. These arrangements, which were concluded at the close rather than at the beginning of the deportations, will be discussed later.

As the ghetto-clearing operations began, notice of roundups would sometimes be given to the Polish population in announcements posted a day or so in advance. The Poles were told that any ghetto passes in their possession were canceled, and they were warned against lingering in the streets or opening windows while the evacuation was in progress. Anyone interfering with the operation or giving shelter to Jews was going to be punished by death, and any unauthorized presence in a Jewish apartment was going to be construed as pillage.

Inside the ghettos, the policemen and their helpers had to cope with another problem: filth, sewage, and vermin. In the words of the Gettoverwaltung, the work was "nauseous in the extreme [*im äussersten Grade ekelregend*]." In the Galician ghettos the police were confronted by vast epidemics. In the ghetto of Rawa Ruska, the Jewish population had concealed its sick in holes in the hope of saving them from deportation. Before the Rawa Ruska Aktion was over, the SS and Police had dragged 3,000 sick and dying Jews out of their hiding places. We have no overall figures for German losses incurred by reason of the epidemics, but in Galicia alone SS and Police Leader Katzmann reported that one of his men had died of spotted fever and that another 120 had fallen ill in the disease.

After a ghetto was cleared of Jews, the police and municipal officials had to enter the Jewish quarter and clean it up. Although Poles and Jews could be used for some of the dirtiest labor, the job was still far from pleasant. A large ghetto could be emptied in two or three days, but the cleanup operation required weeks or even months. Thus the Lublin ghetto was disbanded and its inhabitants deported April 17-20, 1942, but the cleanup action (*Säuberungsaktion*) was still in progress two months later.

The operation was carried out in stages. First, a demolition Kommando entered the ghetto and blew up all uninhabitable buildings. Next came the salvage crew (*die Lumpensammelkolonne*), which collected all sorts of junk left behind by the deportees. This detachment was followed by a clearing Kommando (*die Aufräumungskolonne*), which had to do the hardest work: the cleaning of the latrines. In some latrines the feces were piled up to a height of three feet. The *Aufräumungskolonne* had to use hoses to clean up the mess. The fourth crew consisted of carpenters and glass workers who sealed hermetically all doors and windows in order to enable the gas column (*Vergasungskolonne*) to kill all vermin in the apartments. Finally, the cleanup column (*Reinmachungskolonne*) was called to remove the dead rats, mice, flies, and bugs, and to tidy up the place.

Still, the dilapidation in the ghettos was a comparatively minor annoyance the total picture, and the bureaucrats were not much concerned with it. Their

primary worry was the progress of the deportations, the rate at which Jewish was disappearing. The top men were interested only in speed. As early as June 18, 1942, Staatssekretär Dr. Bühler asked Higher SS and Police Leader Krüger when he would finish. Krüger replied that in August he would be able to "survey" the situation.

Krüger was a bit cautious because just then he was experiencing his first *Transportsperre*, a complete shutdown of traffic in deportation trains. The *Transportsperre* was instituted for only two weeks, and Krüger managed even then to wangle a few trains from Präsident Gerreis of the Ostbahn. Moreover, after the lifting of the restrictions, Krüger expected to resume the deportations with redoubled effort. Then, in July, another hitch occurred when the railway line to the killing center of Sobibór, on the Bug, broke down and had to be repaired. The SS and Police had hoped to deport several hundred thousand Jews to Sobibór.

On July 16, 1942, Obergruppenführer Wolff, chief of Himmler's Personal Staff, telephoned Staatssekretär Dr. Ganzenmüller of the Transport Ministry for help. Ganzenmüller looked into the situation and found that the matter had already been settled locally. Three hundred thousand Warsaw ghetto Jews had been diverted from Sobibór to Treblinka. Beginning on July 22, 1942, a daily train crammed with not fewer than 5,000 Jews per run was to leave Warsaw for Treblinka, while twice weekly another train carrying 5,000 Jews was to run from Przemyśl to Belzec. When Wolff received this news, he wrote the following letter of thanks:

Dear Party Member Ganzenmüller:

For your letter of July 28, 1942, I thank you—also in the name of the Reichsführer-SS—sincerely [*herzlich*]. With particular joy [*mit besonderer Freude*] I noted your assurance that for two weeks now a train has been carrying, every day, 5,000 members of the chosen people to Treblinka; so that we are now in a position to carry through this population movement [*Bevölkerungsbewegung*] at an accelerated tempo. I, for my part, have contacted the participating agencies to assure the implementation of the process without friction. I thank you again for your efforts in this matter and, at the same time, I would be grateful if you would give to these things your continued personal attention.

With best regards and

Heil Hitler!  
Your devoted  
W.

At the end of 1942, when the deportations were already two-thirds over, the SS and Police offices were confronted by another breakdown. Urgently, Krüger wrote to Himmler:

SS and Police Leaders today report unanimously that by reason of Transportsperre every possibility of transport for Jewish resettlement is cut off from December 15, 1942, to January 15, 1943. Because of this measure, our master plan for Jewish resettlement is severely jeopardized.

Obediently request that you negotiate with central offices of Armed Forces High Command and Transport Ministry for allocation of at least three pairs of trains for this urgent task [*das mindestens 3 Zugpaare für die vordringliche Aufgabe zur Verfügung stehen*].

Apparently the negotiations were not very successful this time, for on January 20, 1943, Himmler wrote to Ganzenmüller for more trains. The Reichsführer pointed out that he knew under what strain the railway network was operating but that the allocation of the trains was, in the last analysis, in Ganzenmüller's own interest. The Jews, said Himmler, were responsible for all the railway sabotage in the Generalgouvernement, the Białystok district, and the occupied eastern territories. Hence the sooner the Jews were "cleared out," the better for the railways. While writing about the eastern Jews, Himmler also took occasion to remind Ganzenmüller that unless trains were made available for the Jews of the western occupied areas, sabotage would break out there too.

While the shortage of transport was a particularly pressing problem in the planning of the whole operation, a host of complications was to arise after the organizational problems were solved. These ramifications developed like shock waves from a single point of impact: the discovery by outsiders of the true nature of the "resettlements."

If concealment was difficult within the German-Czech area, it was doubly difficult in Poland. The Reich-Protektorat area had no death camps and most Reich transports were moving out to the east. Poland, on the other hand, was the home of all six killing centers and Polish transports were moving in short hauls of not more than 200 miles in all directions. Many eyes were fixed on those transports and followed them to their destinations. The deputy chief of the Polish Home Army (London-directed underground force), General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, reports that in the spring of 1942 he had complete information about the Kulmhof (Chełmno) killing center in the Warthegau. When the Germans cleared the Lublin ghetto, the Polish underground traced the transports to Bełżec. The underground command could not find out what was going on inside Bełżec, but, estimating that 130,000 Jews had been shoved into the camp, the Poles concluded that it "was not big enough to accommodate such a large number of people." In July 1942 the Home Army collected reports from railroad workers that several hundred thousand Jews had disappeared in Treblinka without a trace.

Sometimes the information spilling out of the camps was quite specific. In the Lublin district the council chairman of the Zamość ghetto, Mieczysław

Garfinkel, was a recipient of such news. During the early spring of 1942 he heard that the Jews of Lublin were being transported in crowded trains to Bełżec and that the empty cars were being returned after each trip for more victims. He was asked to obtain some additional facts and, after contacting the nearby Jewish communities of Tomaszów and Bełżec, was given to understand that 10,000 to 12,000 Jews were arriving daily in a strongly guarded compound located on a special railroad spur and surrounded by barbed wire. The Jews were being killed there in a "puzzling manner." Garfinkel, an attorney, did not give credence to these reports. After a few more days, two or three Jewish strangers who had escaped from Bełżec told him about gassings in barracks. Still he did not believe what he heard. On April 11, 1942, however, there was a major roundup in Zamość itself. Counting the remaining population of his ghetto, Garfinkel calculated a deficit of 3,150 persons. The next day, the thirteen-year-old son of one of the council functionaries (Wolsztajn) came back from the camp. The boy had seen the naked people and had heard an SS man make a speech to them. Hiding, still clothed, in a ditch, the young Wolsztajn had crawled out under the barbed wire with the secret of Bełżec.

What the Home Army had found out through its investigations, and what Garfinkel had discovered almost unwittingly, ordinary people were suspecting without much proof. The population drew its conclusions quickly and spread them as rumors throughout the occupied Polish territory. By late summer of 1942 almost every inhabitant of Poland, whether outside or inside a ghetto, had some inkling of what was going on. In the end even children knew the purpose of the deportations. When, during the summer of 1944 in the Łódź ghetto, the children of an orphanage were piled on trucks, they cried, "*Mir willn nicht shurban!* [We don't want to die!]"

The Jewish leadership in the Polish ghettos stood at the helm of the compliance movement, and ghetto chiefs were the implementors of the surrender. Always they delivered up some Jews to save the other Jews. Having "stabilized" the situation, the ghetto administration would bisect the remaining community. And so on. Moses Merin, president of the Central Council of Elders for Eastern Upper Silesia, presided over such a shrinking process. On the eve of the first deportations, Merin made his first decision. "I will not be afraid," he said, to "sacrifice 50,000 of our community in order to save the other 50,000." During the summer of 1942 the other 50,000 Jews were lined up in a mass review, from which half were sent to Auschwitz. Merin commented after that deportation: "I feel like a captain whose ship was about to sink and who succeeded in bringing it safe to port by casting overboard a great part of his precious cargo." By 1943 there were only a few survivors. Merin addressed them in the following words: "I stand in a cage before a hungry and angry tiger. I stuff his mouth

with meat, the flesh of my brothers and sisters, to keep him in his cage lest he break loose and tear us all to bits."

Throughout Poland the great bulk of the Jews presented themselves voluntarily at the collecting points and boarded the trains for transport to killing centers. Like blood gushing out of an open wound, the exodus from the ghettos quickly drained the Polish Jewish community of its centuries-old life.

However, in an operation of such dimensions not everybody could be deported so smoothly. As the circle of Jewish survivors shrank, the awareness of death increased, and the psychological burden of complying with German "evacuation" orders became heavier and heavier. Toward the end of the operations increasing numbers of Jews hesitated to move out, while others fled from the ghettos or jumped from trains to find refuge in the woods. In the Warsaw ghetto a few of the surviving Jews rallied in a last-minute stand against the Germans.

The Germans reacted to the recalcitrant Jews with utmost brutality. Howling raiders descended upon the ghettos with hatchets and bayonets. In the Warthegau the police were sent into such actions in a half-drunk stupor. Every Gestapo man assigned to ghetto-clearing duty received daily an extra ration of a little over half a pint of brandy. The *Gettoverwaltung* in Łódź demanded a brandy allocation for its employees, too, on the ground that employment without such brandy was "irresponsible." In Galicia the Jews were particularly aware of their fate because they had already witnessed the mobile killing operations in 1941. In the words of the SS and Police report, they "tried every means in order to dodge evacuation." They concealed themselves "in every imaginable corner, in pipes, chimneys, even in sewers." They "built barricades in passages of catacombs, in cellars enlarged to dugouts, in underground holes, in cunningly contrived hiding places in attics and sheds, within furniture, etc."

In the Galician operations massacres were interspersed with deportations, particularly during the *Transportsperren* in the early summer of 1942 and in December-January 1942-43. Often, the old and infirm Jews were not transported at all, but shot in the course of the roundup. The general mode of procedure in Galicia may be illustrated by events in three towns.

In Stanisławów, about 10,000 Jews had been gathered at a cemetery and shot on October 12, 1941. Another shooting took place in March 1942, followed by a ghetto fire lasting for three weeks. A transport was sent to Belżec in April, and more shooting operations were launched in the summer, in the course of which Jewish council members and Order Service men were hanged from lampposts. Large transports moved out to Belżec in September and October, an occasion marked by the bloody clearing of a hospital and (according to reports heard by a German agricultural official) a procession of Jews moving to the train station on their knees.

The Galician town of Rawa Ruska, only about twenty miles from Belżec, was a railway junction through which deportation trains passed frequently. A

survivor, Wolf Sambol, recalling scenes of shootings in the town, quotes a drunken Gendarmier man shouting at the victims: "You are not Jews anymore, you are the chosen. I am your Moses and I will lead you through the Red Sea." He then opened fire at the victims with an automatic weapon. The same survivor remembers a little girl under the corpses, pushing herself out covered with blood, and looking carefully to the right and left, running away. Transports moved out of Rawa Ruska as soon as the *Sperre* [blockade] was lifted in July 1942. Although the nature of Belżec was no longer a secret that summer, the Rawa Ruska Jewish Council pursued a cooperative course, and large numbers of Jews gathered at the collecting point for transport. Their wish, said Sambol, was to live half an hour longer (*Ihr Wunsch ist es, eine halbe Stunde älter zu sein*). Several thousand others, however, sought to hide, and many jumped from trains.

One transport pulled out from the southern Galician town of Kołomyja on September 10, 1942. In its fifty cars it carried 8,205 deportees. Some of the victims had been driven to the train on foot from villages in the area, while others had been waiting in the town itself. Neither group had had much to eat for days before departure. The slowness of the train, pulled by an under-powered locomotive that periodically had to stop, contributed to the agony of the Jews inside. They stripped off their clothes in the heat, ripped off the barbed wire at the aperture near the ceiling of the car, and tried to squeeze through and jump out. The Order Police Kommando, consisting of one officer and fifteen men, shot all of its ammunition, obtained more rounds from army personnel along the way, and finally hurled stones at escapees. When the train arrived in Belżec, 200 of those aboard were dead.

Such scenes aroused people in the entire district. Once a Polish policeman related his experiences freely to an ethnic German woman who then wrote anonymously to Berlin. Her letter reached the *Reichskanzlei*. The Polish policeman, she wrote, had asked her whether she was not finally ashamed of being an ethnic German. He had now become acquainted with German culture. During the dissolution of the ghettos, children had been thrown on the floor and their heads trampled with boots. Many Jews whose bones had been broken by rifle bullets were thrown into graves and covered with calcium flour. When the calcium began to boil in the blood, one could still hear the crying of the wounded.



## The Terrible Secret

WALTER LAQUEUR

Walter Laqueur was born in Germany but left in 1938. A distinguished professor of history, he is an eminent commentator and an expert in international affairs. He chairs the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University and edits the *Washington Quarterly*, a review of strategic and international issues. He also directs the Institute of Contemporary History and the Wiener Library in London, coedits the *Journal of Contemporary History*, and teaches contemporary history at Tel Aviv University. His books include studies on European history, the Middle East, guerrilla movements, Zionism, terrorism, fascism, nationalism, and human rights. Do all of Laqueur's answers appear equally valid, or are some more credible than others?

The evidence gathered so far shows that news of the 'final solution' had been received in 1942 all over Europe, even though all the details were not known. If so, why were the signals so frequently misunderstood and the message rejected?

The fact that Hitler had given an explicit order to kill all Jews was not known for a long time. His decision was taken soon after he had made up his mind to invade Russia. Victor Brack, who worked at the time in Hitler's Chancellery, said in evidence at Nuremberg that it was no secret in higher party circles by March 1941 that the Jews were to be exterminated. But 'higher party circles' may have meant at the time no more than a dozen people. In March 1941, even Eichmann did not know, for the preparations for the deportations

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and the camps had not yet been made. First instructions to this effect were given in Goering's letter to Heydrich of 31 July 1941. The fact that an order had been given by Hitler became known outside Germany only in July 1942 and even then in a distorted form: Hitler (it was then claimed) had ordered that no Jew should be left in Germany by the end of 1942. But there is no evidence that such a time limit had ever been set. It would not have been difficult, for instance, to deport all Jews from Berlin in 1942, but in fact the city was declared empty of Jews by Goebbels only in August 1943. Witnesses claimed to have seen the order, but it is doubtful whether there ever was a written order. This has given rise to endless speculation and inspired a whole 'revisionist' literature—quite needlessly, because Hitler, whatever his other vices, was not a bureaucrat. He was not in the habit of giving written orders on all occasions: there were no written orders for the murderous 'purge' of June 1934, for the killing of gypsies, the so-called euthanasia action (T4) and on other such occasions. The more abominable the crime, the less likely that there would be a written 'Führer-order.' If Himmler, Heydrich or even Eichmann said that there was such an order, no one would question or insist on seeing it.

The order had practical consequences, it affected the lives or, to be precise, the deaths of millions of people. For this reason details about the 'final solution' seeped out virtually as soon as the mass slaughter started.

The systematic massacres of the *Einsatzgruppen* [mobile killing units] in Eastern Galicia, White Russia, the Ukraine and the Baltic countries became known in Germany almost immediately. True, the scene of the slaughter was distant and it took place in territories in which at the time civilians and foreigners were not freely permitted to travel. But many thousands of German officers and soldiers witnessed these scenes and later reported them and the same is true of Italian, Hungarian and Romanian military personnel. The German Foreign Ministry was officially informed about the details of the massacres; there was much less secrecy about the *Einsatzgruppen* than later on about the extermination camps. The Soviet Government must have learned about the massacres within a few days; after several weeks the news became known in Western capitals too, well before the Wannsee Conference. The slaughter at Kiev (Babi Yar) took place on 29–30 September 1941. Foreign journalists knew about it within a few days; within less than two months it had been reported in the Western press. The massacres in Transnistria became known almost immediately. Chelmno, the first extermination camp, was opened on 8 December 1941; the news was received in Warsaw within less than four weeks and published soon afterwards in the underground press. The existence and the function of Belzec and Treblinka were known in Warsaw among Jews and non-Jews within two weeks after the gas chambers had started operating. The news about the suicide of Czerniakow, the head of the Warsaw *Judenrat*, reached the Jewish press abroad within a short

time. The deportations from Warsaw were known in London after four days. There were some exceptions: the true character of Auschwitz did not become known among Jews and Poles alike for several months after the camp had been turned into an extermination centre. At the time in Poland it was believed that there were only two types of camps, labour camps and extermination camps, and the fact that Auschwitz was a 'mixed camp' seems to have baffled many.

If so much was known so quickly among the Jews of Eastern Europe and if the information was circulated through illegal newspapers and by other means—there were wireless sets in all major ghettos—why was it not believed? In the beginning Russian and Polish Jewry were genuinely unprepared, and the reasons have been stated: Soviet Jews had been kept uninformed about Nazi intentions and practices, Polish Jews believed that the massacres would be limited to the former Soviet territories. At first there was the tendency to interpret these events in the light of the past: persecution and pogroms. The Jewish leaders in Warsaw who learned about events in Lithuania and Latvia in early 1942 should have realized that these were not 'pogroms' in the traditional sense, spontaneous mob actions, nor excesses committed by local commanders. There are few arbitrary actions in a totalitarian regime. The *Einsatzgruppen* acted methodically and in cold blood. The majority of Jewish leaders in Eastern Europe did not yet realize that this was the beginning of a systematic campaign of destruction. The whole scheme was beyond human imagination; they thought the Nazis incapable of the murder of millions. Communication between some of the ghettos was irregular; Lodz ghetto, the second largest, was more or less isolated. But rumours, on the other hand, still travelled fast. If the information about the 'final solution' had been believed it would have reached every corner of Poland within a few days. But it was not believed and when the 'deportations' from Polish ghettos began in March 1942 it was still generally thought that the Jews would be transported to places further East.

Jewish leaders and the public abroad (Britain, America and Palestine) found it exceedingly difficult in their great majority to accept the ample evidence about the 'final solution' and did so only with considerable delay. They too thought in categories of persecution and pogroms at a time when a clear pattern had already emerged which pointed in a different direction. It was a failure of intelligence and imagination caused on one hand by a misjudgment of the murderous nature of Nazism, and on the other hand by a false optimism. Other factors may have played a certain role: the feeling of impotence ('we can do very little, so let us hope for the best'), the military dangers facing the Jewish community in Palestine in 1942. If the evidence was played down by many Jewish leaders and the Jewish press, it was not out of the desire to keep the community

in a state of ignorance, but because there were genuine doubts. As the worst fears were confirmed, there was confusion among the leaders as to what course of action to choose. This was true especially in the U.S. and caused further delay in making the news public. In Jerusalem the turning point came with the arrival of a group of Palestinian citizens who had been repatriated from Europe in November 1942. The leaders of the Jewish Agency, who had been unwilling to accept the written evidence gathered by experienced observers, were ready to believe the accounts delivered by chance arrivals in face-to-face meetings.

Millions of Germans knew by late 1942 that the Jews had disappeared. Rumours about their fate reached Germany mainly through officers and soldiers returning from the eastern front but also through other channels. There were clear indications in the wartime speeches of the Nazi leaders that something more drastic than resettlement had happened. Knowledge about the exact manner in which they had been killed was restricted to a very few. It is, in fact, quite likely that while many Germans thought that the Jews were no longer alive, they did not necessarily believe that they were dead. Such belief, needless to say, is logically inconsistent, but a great many logical inconsistencies are accepted in wartime. Very few people had an interest in the fate of the Jews. Most individuals faced a great many more important problems. It was an unpleasant topic, speculations were unprofitable, discussions of the fate of the Jews were discouraged. Consideration of this question was pushed aside, blotted out for the duration.

Neutrals and international organizations such as the Vatican and the Red Cross knew the truth at an early stage. Not perhaps the whole truth, but enough to understand that few, if any, Jews would survive the war. The Vatican had an unrivalled net of informants all over Europe. It tried to intervene on some occasions on behalf of the Jews but had no wish to give publicity to the issue. For this would have exposed it to German attacks on one hand and pressure to do more from the Jews and the Allies. Jews, after all, were not Catholics. In normal times their persecution would have evoked expressions of genuine regret. But these were not normal times and since the Holy See could do little—or thought it could do little—even for the faithful Poles, it thought it could do even less for the Jews. This fear of the consequences of helping the Jews influenced its whole policy.

Neither the United States Government, nor Britain, nor Stalin showed any pronounced interest in the fate of the Jews. They were kept informed through Jewish organizations and through their own channels. From an early date the

Soviet press published much general information about Nazi atrocities in the occupied areas but only rarely revealed that Jews were singled out for extermination. To this day the Soviet Communist party line has not changed in this respect: it has not admitted that any mistakes were made, that the Jewish population was quite unprepared for the *Einsatzgruppen*. It is not conceded even now that if specific warnings had been given by the Soviet media in 1941 (which were informed about events behind the German lines) lives might have been saved. As far as the Soviet publications are concerned the Government and the Communist Party acted correctly—Soviet citizens of Jewish origin did not fare differently from the rest under Nazi rule, and if they did, it is thought inadvisable to mention this. The only mildly critical voices that have been heard can be found in a few literary works describing the events of 1941–42. Some Western observers have argued that the (infrequent) early Soviet news about anti-Jewish massacres committed were sometimes dismissed as 'Communist propaganda' in the West and that for this reason the Soviet leaders decided no longer to emphasize the specific anti-Jewish character of the extermination campaign. This explanation is not at all convincing because Soviet policy at home was hardly influenced by the *Catholic Times*, and it should be stressed that domestically even less publicity than abroad was given to the Jewish victims from the very beginning.

In London and Washington the facts about the 'final solution' were known from an early date and reached the chiefs of intelligence, the secretaries of foreign affairs and defence. But the facts were not considered to be of great interest or importance and at least some of the officials either did not believe them, or at least thought them exaggerated. There was no deliberate attempt to stop the flow of information on the mass killings (except for a while on the part of officials in the State Department), but mainly lack of interest and disbelief. This disbelief can be explained against the background of Anglo-American lack of knowledge of European affairs in general and Nazism in particular. Although it was generally accepted that the Nazis behaved in a less gentlemanly way than the German armies in 1914–18, the idea of genocide nevertheless seemed far fetched. Neither the *Luftwaffe* nor the German navy nor the Afrika Korps had committed such acts of atrocities, and these were the only sections of the German armed forces which Allied soldiers encountered prior to 1944. The Gestapo was known from not very credible B-grade movies. Barbaric fanaticism was unacceptable to people thinking on pragmatic lines, who believed that slave labour rather than annihilation was the fate of the Jews in Europe. The evil nature of Nazism was beyond their comprehension.

But even if the realities of the 'final solution' had been accepted in London and Washington the issue would still have figured very low on the scale of Allied priorities. Nineteen forty-two was a critical year in the course of the war, strategists and bureaucrats were not to be deflected in the pursuit of victory by considerations not directly connected with the war effort. Thus too much publicity about the

mass murder seemed undesirable, for it was bound to generate demands to help the Jews and this was thought to be detrimental to the war effort. Even in later years when victory was already assured there was little willingness to help. Churchill showed more interest in the Jewish tragedy than Roosevelt and also more compassion but even he was not willing to devote much thought to the subject. Public opinion in Britain, the United States and elsewhere was kept informed through the press from an early date about the progress of the 'final solution'. But the impact of the news was small or at most shortlived. The fact that millions were killed was more or less meaningless. People could identify perhaps with the fate of a single individual or a family but not with the fate of millions. The statistics of murder were either disbelieved or dismissed from consciousness. Hence the surprise and shock at the end of the war when the reports about a 'transit camp' such as Bergen-Belsen came in: 'No one had known, no one had been prepared for this.'

MISSSES pool

One of the questions initially asked was whether it would have made any difference if the information about the mass murder had been believed right from the beginning. It seems quite likely that relatively few people might have been saved as a result and even this is not absolutely certain. But this is hardly the right way of posing the question, for the misjudgment of Hitler and Nazism did not begin in June 1941 nor did it end in December 1942. The ideal time to stop Hitler was not when he was at the height of his strength. If the democracies had shown greater foresight, solidarity and resolution, Nazism could have been stopped at the beginning of its campaign of aggression. No power could have saved the majority of the Jews of the Reich and of Eastern Europe in the summer of 1942. Some more would have tried to escape their fate if the information had been made widely known. Some could have been saved if Hitler's satellites had been threatened and if the peoples of Europe had been called to extend help to the Jews. After the winter of 1942 the situation rapidly changed: the satellite leaders and even some of the German officials were no longer eager to be accessories to mass murder. Some, at least, would have responded to Allied pressure, but such pressure was never exerted. Many Jews could certainly have been saved in 1944 by bombing the railway lines leading to the extermination centres, and of course, the centres themselves. This could have been done without deflecting any major resources from the general war effort. It has been argued that the Jews could not have escaped in any case but this is not correct: the Russians were no longer far away, the German forces in Poland were concentrated in some of the bigger towns, and even there their sway ran only in daytime—they no longer had the manpower to round up escaped Jews. In short, hundreds of thousands could have been saved. But this discussion belongs to a later period. The failure to read correctly the signs in 1941–42 was only one link in a chain of failures.

There was not one reason for this overall failure but many different ones: paralyzing fear on one hand and, on the contrary, reckless optimism on the other; disbelief stemming from a lack of experience or imagination or genuine ignorance or a mixture of some or all of these things. In some cases the motives were creditable, in others damnable. In some instances moral categories are simply not applicable, and there were also cases which defy understanding to this day.

## The Abandonment of the Jews

DAVID S. WYMAN



David S. Wyman received his Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1966 and is a professor of history (emeritus) at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. His work on the Holocaust has been regarded as controversial. He not only accuses American leaders of ignoring strong evidence of atrocities against the Jews, but he also asserts that the American State Department and British Foreign Office actually stymied efforts to save thousands of Jews from extermination. How do his views compare with those expressed by Walter Laqueur in the previous selection?

Why did America fail to carry out the kind of rescue effort that it could have?

In summary form, these are the findings that I regard as most significant:

1. The American State Department and the British Foreign Office had no intention of rescuing large numbers of European Jews. On the contrary, they continually feared that Germany or other Axis nations might release tens of thousands of Jews into Allied hands. Any such exodus would have placed intense pressure on Britain to open Palestine and on the United States to take in more Jewish refugees, a situation the two great powers did not want to face. Consequently, their policies aimed at obstructing rescue possibilities and dampening public pressures for government action.
2. Authenticated information that the Nazis were systematically exterminating European Jewry was made public in the United States in November 1942. President Roosevelt did nothing about the mass murder for fourteen

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months, then moved only because he was confronted with political pressures he could not avoid and because his administration stood on the brink of a nasty scandal over its rescue policies.

3. The War Refugee Board, which the President then established to save Jews and other victims of the Nazis, received little power, almost no cooperation from Roosevelt or his administration, and grossly inadequate government funding. (Contributions from Jewish organizations, which were necessarily limited, covered 90 percent of the WRB's costs.) Through dedicated work by a relatively small number of people, the WRB managed to help save approximately 200,000 Jews and at least 20,000 non-Jews.
4. Because of State Department administrative policies, only 21,000 refugees were allowed to enter the United States during the three and one-half years the nation was at war with Germany. That amounted to 10 percent of the number who could have been legally admitted under the immigration quotas during that period.
5. Strong popular pressure for action would have brought a much fuller government commitment to rescue and would have produced it sooner. Several factors hampered the growth of public pressure. Among them were anti-Semitism and anti-immigration attitudes, both widespread in American society in that era and both entrenched in Congress; the mass media's failure to publicize Holocaust news, even though the wire services and other news sources made most of the information available to them; the near silence of the Christian churches and almost all of their leadership; the indifference of most of the nation's political and intellectual leaders; the President's failure to speak out on the issue.
6. American Jewish leaders worked to publicize the European Jewish situation and pressed for government rescue steps. But their effectiveness was importantly diminished by their inability to mount a sustained or unified drive for government action, by diversion of energies into fighting among the several organizations, and by failure to assign top priority to the rescue issue.
7. In 1944 the United States War Department rejected several appeals to bomb the Auschwitz gas chambers and the railroads leading to Auschwitz, claiming that such actions would divert essential air power from decisive operations elsewhere. Yet in the very months that it was turning down the pleas, numerous massive American bombing raids were taking place within fifty miles of Auschwitz. Twice during that time large fleets of American heavy bombers struck industrial targets in the Auschwitz complex itself, not five miles from the gas chambers.
8. Analysis of the main rescue proposals put forward at the time, but brushed aside by government officials, yields convincing evidence that much more

could have been done to rescue Jews, if a real effort had been made. The record also reveals that the reasons repeatedly invoked by government officials for not being able to rescue Jews could be put aside when it came to other Europeans who needed help.

9. Franklin Roosevelt's indifference to so momentous an historical event as the systematic annihilation of European Jewry emerges as the worst failure of his presidency.
10. Poor though it was, the American rescue record was better than that of Great Britain, Russia, or the other Allied nations. This was the case because of the work of the War Refugee Board, the fact that American Jewish organizations were willing to provide most of the WRB's funding, and the overseas rescue operations of several Jewish organizations.



America's response to the Holocaust was the result of action and inaction on the part of many people. In the forefront was Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose steps to aid Europe's Jews were very limited. . . .

In December 1942, the President reluctantly agreed to talk with Jewish leaders about the recently confirmed news of extermination. Thereafter, he refused Jewish requests to discuss the problem; he even left the White House to avoid the Orthodox rabbis' pilgrimage of October 1943. . . .

It appears that Roosevelt's overall response to the Holocaust was deeply affected by political expediency. Most Jews supported him unwaveringly, so an active rescue policy offered little political advantage. A pro-Jewish stance, however, could lose votes. . . .

The main justification for Roosevelt's conduct in the face of the Holocaust is that he was absorbed in waging a global war. He lived in a maelstrom of overpowering events that gripped his attention, to the exclusion of most other matters. Decades later, Dean Alfange doubted that he actually realized what the abandonment of the European Jews meant: "He may not have weighed the implications of it to human values, to history, to a moral climate without which a democracy can't really thrive."

Roosevelt's personal feelings about the Holocaust cannot be determined. He seldom committed his inner thoughts to paper. And he did not confide in anyone concerning the plight of Europe's Jews except, infrequently, Henry Morgenthau. There are indications that he was concerned about Jewish problems. But he gave little attention to them, did not keep informed about them, and instructed his staff to divert Jewish questions to the State Department. Years later, Emanuel Celler charged that Roosevelt, instead of providing even "some spark of courageous leadership," had been "silent, indifferent, and insensitive to the plight of the Jews."

... [T]he Roosevelt administration turned aside most rescue proposals. In the process, government officials developed four main rationalizations for inaction. The most frequent excuse, the unavailability of shipping, was a fraud. When the Allies wanted to find ships for nonmilitary projects, they located them. In 1943, American naval vessels carried 1,400 non-Jewish Polish refugees from India to the American West Coast. The State and War departments arranged to move 2,000 Spanish Loyalist refugees to Mexico using military shipping.

When it was a matter of transporting Jews, ships could almost never be found. This was not because shipping was unavailable but because the Allies were unwilling to take the Jews in. In November 1943, Breckinridge Long told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that lack of transportation was the reason the State Department was issuing so few visas. "In December 1941," he explained, "most neutral shipping disappeared from the seas.... There just is not any transportation." In reality, ample shipping existed. Neutral vessels crossed the Atlantic throughout the war. Three Portuguese liners, with a combined capacity of 2,000 passengers, sailed regularly between Lisbon and U.S. ports. Each ship made the trip about every six weeks. Most of the time, because of the tight American visa policy, they carried only small fractions of their potential loads. Two dozen other Portuguese and Spanish passenger ships crossed the Atlantic less frequently but were available for fuller service.

Another stock excuse for inaction was the claim that Axis governments planted agents among the refugees. Although this possibility needed to be watched carefully, the problem was vastly overemphasized and could have been handled through reasonable security screening. It was significant that Army intelligence found not one suspicious person when it checked the 982 refugees who arrived at Fort Ontario. Nevertheless, potential subversion was continually used as a reason for keeping immigration to the United States very tightly restricted.

A third rationalization for failing to aid European Jews took the high ground of nondiscrimination. It asserted that helping Jews would improperly single out one group for assistance when many peoples were suffering under Nazi brutality.

The Roosevelt administration, the British government, and the Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees regularly refused to acknowledge that the Jews faced a special situation. One reason for this was to avoid responsibility for taking special steps to save them. Such steps, if successful, would have confronted the Allies with the difficult problem of finding places to put the rescued Jews.

Another reason was the fear that special action for the Jews would stir up anti-Semitism. Some asserted that such action would even invite charges that the war was being fought for the Jews. Emanuel Celler declared years later that Roosevelt did nearly nothing for rescue because he was afraid of the label "Jew Deal"; he feared the political effects of the accusation that he was pro-Jewish. The Jews, according to artist Arthur Szyk, were a skeleton in the democracies' political closet, a matter they would rather not mention.

The fourth well-worn excuse for rejecting rescue proposals was the claim that they would detract from the military effort and thus prolong the war. That argument, entirely valid with regard to projects that actually would have hurt the war effort, was used almost automatically to justify inaction. Virtually none of the rescue proposals involved enough infringement on the war effort to lengthen the conflict at all or to increase the number of casualties, military or civilian.

Actually, the war effort was bent from time to time to meet pressing humanitarian needs. In most of these instances, it was non-Jews who were helped. During 1942, 1943, and 1944, the Allies evacuated large numbers of non-Jewish Yugoslavs, Poles, and Greeks to safety in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere. Difficulties that constantly ruled out the rescue of Jews dissolved. Transportation somehow materialized to move 100,000 people to dozens of refugee camps that sprang into existence. The British furnished transport, supplies, much of the camp staffing, and many of the campsites.

It was not a lack of workable plans that stood in the way of saving many thousands more European Jews. Nor was it insufficient shipping, the threat of infiltration by subversive agents, or the possibility that rescue projects would hamper the war effort. The real obstacle was the absence of a strong desire to rescue Jews.