

## CASE STUDY 3

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# THE HOLOCAUST

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## THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust is the systematic, state-sponsored murder of six million Jews and millions of other people by the Germans and their collaborators during World War II.

The word holocaust is derived from the Greek word *holokauston*, a translation of the Hebrew word *Olah*, meaning a burnt sacrifice offered whole onto the Lord. It was the name given to this genocide because in the ultimate manifestation of the Nazi killing program—the death camps—Jews were murdered in gas chambers and their bodies were consumed whole in crematoria and open fires. The Germans called the murder of the Jews euphemistically but all too accurately “The Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” Defining the Jews as a question invited a solution, and the annihilation of men, women and children is all too final. Immediately after the war, the survivors called the murders, the *churban*, a word that evokes the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem in the years 586 B.C.E and 70 C.E., respectively. In contemporary Hebrew, the term used is *Shoah*, also meaning destruction but restricted solely to the events of World War II.

Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg (1985) has suggested that there were six stages to the destruction of the European Jews: (1) definition,

(2) expropriation, (3) concentration, (4) deportation, (5) mobile killing units and (6) death camps.

German law *defined* Jews in 1935 in the so-called Nuremberg laws, biologically based on the religion of their grandparents. Two or more Jewish grandparents put a person at risk. Three or more and they were defined as full Jews, much to their peril. From 1933-1945, the Germans promulgated some 400 pieces of law relating to *expropriation*. They isolated the Jews, confiscated their property and their possessions, and ultimately deported them from their homes. In Jewish history, this could be viewed as a process of disemancipation, depriving Jews of their rights as citizens, the loss of their civil rights and civil liberties. Expropriation was designed to make it ever more difficult for Jews to live in Germany or later in German-occupied territories. The impoverished community deprived of their rights was expected to leave. The early goal of German policy was forced emigration. Yet, there were two flaws with this plan. The Third Reich continued to expand, and as it expanded—to Austria and part of Czechoslovakia in 1938, to Poland in 1939, to Western Europe including France, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1940, to Greece, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1941—more and more Jews came under its control. Secondly, few countries were willing to accept Jews. The British did not permit massive immigration to Palestine and the United States would not

admit Jews except in conformity with preestablished national quotas, and even then, the full number of Jews allowed by law were permitted to enter in United States in only 2 of the 12 years of Hitler's rule.

Unable to leave, Jews were *concentrated* in ghettos pending a decision as to their fate. To the Germans, the ghetto was an interim arrangement. To the Jewish inhabitants, it was the form that life would take until the Germans were defeated or the war came to an end. Jews were *deported* from small towns to larger ghettos, some were shipped from Germany to ghettos in the east and from western European cities to transit camps. As a result, deportation occurred at several times during the destruction process. In 1941, a decision was made at the highest level of the German government to annihilate the Jews. The actual systematic killing began as *mobile killing units*—supported by local gendarmerie, police units, native antisemitic elements of the populations and the German army—murdered Jews in towns, villages, and cities throughout the German-occupied Soviet Union. The shooting and killing shook many of the murderers. Killing fields marred the landscapes of urban areas in German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union. Ponar was the site of destruction for 60,000 Jews of Vilna, Babi Yar for 33,771 Jews of Kiev in September 1941; Rumbulla, for 25,000-28,000 Jews from Riga in November 1941. The *Einsatzgruppen*, or mobile killing units, murdered more than 1.3 million Jews

**List of Essential Antecedents That Need to Be Addressed When Teaching About This Genocide**

- The origin of the Jews with the Biblical Hebrews; that the story of the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai are essential to Jewish consciousness and that Jews were exiled from their land in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E.
- The religious roots of antisemitism within Christianity, most especially that Jesus was a Jew, that crucifixion was a Roman punishment, that Jews were held responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and for denying his messianic mission, and that two traditions in Christianity—supercessionism and the teaching of contempt—were both deeply harmful to Jewish-Christian relations.
- The three forms of antisemitism—religious, political, and racial. Religious

antisemitism was rooted in a religious antagonism toward Judaism and could be resolved by conversion; political antisemitism was the use of hatred of the Jews to advance one's political agenda and could be resolved by emigration or expulsion; racial antisemitism is the hatred of Jews for their bloodlines, their very being. The Nazi form of resolution was annihilation.

- The Armenian genocide is an antecedent to the Holocaust. It shared much in common with the Holocaust, both were undertaken by the state against ethnoreligious communities partially integrated into society; and differs in important ways in that Jews were stigmatized as deicides and the attack against them was global in scope.
- Extreme Nationalism—Nazism was a most extreme manifestation of German nationalism. The Nazis believed that Aryans were the master race and

that Germany was destined to rule the world and dominate culture. They not only excluded the outsider—the Jews—but viewed the Jews' annihilation as essential to the national salvation of the German people.

- Industrialization—The destruction of the Jews followed many of the principles of industrialization in the sense that an assembly line was introduced wherein the victim upon arrival faced selection. Those chosen to live were sent to work, and those who were selected to die faced the confiscation of all possessions, then a process of undressing, gassing, recycling—gold teeth were taken, hair was shaved—and cremation. Body fat was even used as fertilizer.
- Social Darwinism—Social Darwinism was based on a reading of Charles Darwin's idea of survival of the fittest. Social competition and struggle were

to eliminate those unfit and permit the most fit to dominate. In the case of Nazism, the struggle between the German and Jew for dominance was a fight until the death for survival.

- Totalitarianism—Hitler and his followers sought total control not only of the apparatus of government but of society as a whole. From March 1933 onward, Hitler's decree had the force of law, and from 1934 onward he was not only the head of government but the head of state.

**Note:** The last three antecedents to the Holocaust—extreme nationalism, industrialization, social Darwinism and totalitarianism—are often taught in explaining the Holocaust—as they should be—and consequently, they are present but not particularly emphasized in this essay.

between 1941-43. Special units returned in 1943 to dig up the bodies and to burn them and thus to eradicate evidence of their crime. The goal, then, was no longer forced emigration but systematic annihilation, the murder of all Jews, a new configuration for the human species, the Final Solution.

*Death camps* were the essential instruments of the "Final Solution." Whereas *Einsatzgruppen* killers were sent to their victims, in the death camps the process was reversed; the victims were mobile and the killing centers stationary. The death camps became factories producing dead corpses, effectively and efficiently at minimal physical and psychological costs to German personnel. At Chelmo, the first of the killing centers, mobile gas vans were used. Elsewhere, the gas chambers were stationary and linked to the crematoria where bodies were burned. Sobibor, Treblinka, and Belzec were dedicated to murder alone. Auschwitz was three camps in one, a prison camp, a slave labor camp, and a death camp, called Auschwitz II or Birkenau.

Death camps basically constituted the "industrialization" of killing. The death camp was in essence a killing factory using the elements of assembly-line mass production perfected in the nineteenth and early twentieth century industrialization process. Those parts of the body that were of value were recycled; gold was taken from the victims' teeth and hair was shorn and used to stuff mattresses and to line submarines. Human fat was *not* used for soap, as myth has it, but ashes were used for fertilizer. The three camps of Auschwitz were linked, as slaves were worked until they were no longer useful and those unable to work were sent to Birkenau for gassing. Leading German corporations in Auschwitz III made massive corporate capital investments. They expected the camps to last for years and to recoup their investments.

While Jews were the primary victims of Nazism and were central to Nazi racial ideology, other groups were victimized as well, some for what they did do, some for what they refused to do, and some for what they were.

Political dissidents, trade unionists, and Social Democrats were among the first to be arrested. Additionally, German and Austrian male homosexuals were arrested and, like the others, were later incarcerated in concentration camps, where some 5,000 died. There was no systematic persecution of lesbians. Jehovah's Witnesses were also a problem for the Nazis because they refused to swear allegiance to the state or to register for the draft and would not utter the words, "Heil Hitler." Twenty thousand in number among Germany's more than 65 million people, many were incarcerated. They could be freed from the concentration camps if they renounced their faith. Few did. Their pacifism was so com-

plete that they could serve as barbers and valets for the SS, even in the camps.

Poles, too, were a particular target of Nazi persecution in the aftermath of the German invasion: Polish priests and politicians were murdered, Polish leadership was decimated and the children of the Polish elite were kidnapped and raised as "voluntary Aryans" by their new German "parents." The rest of the Polish population was to be trained to be subservient to the Germans.

Along with the Jews, two other groups were targeted for systematic murder. Beginning in 1939, the Germans initiated a plan of "euthanasia," a euphemistic name for the murder of mentally retarded, physically disabled, and emotionally disturbed Germans who were seen as a contradiction to the ideal of Aryan supremacy held by the Nazis. The gas chambers and crematoria were first developed for their murder; a signed order by Adolf Hitler initiated this process. These "medicalized" killings came to a formal halt in 1941, after the Catholic Church and the parents of the victims protested. In fact, they were driven underground where they continued informally in concentration camps. Systematic murder intensified from "euthanasia" which killed tens of thousands, to genocide where slaughter was in the millions.

The other group singled out by the Nazis were the Roma and the Sinti, known collectively as the Gypsies, who were systematically killed in the gas chambers alongside the Jews in death camps such as Auschwitz.

By war's end six million Jews were dead, two out of three European Jews were dead, one in three of all Jews in the world.

Covering 21 countries and a period of 12 years, the Holocaust varied country by country, region by region, year by year. We know where it ends; with liberation in May 1945, with the rebuilding of the lives of the Holocaust survivors in its aftermath, a process that continues to our own days; and with the rebuilding of Jewish life in Israel, in the United States and in other countries to which survivors emigrated, a process that also continues to our days; and with an understanding of the Holocaust as a central event in twentieth century Western civilization, a process that is also ongoing.

#### WHERE DOES THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST BEGIN?

Does the history of the Holocaust begin with the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party or with the German defeat and the victorious Allies' punitive responses to the German defeat in World War I—the penalties of the Versailles treaty that demanded harsh reparations from the German nation? Does it begin with the emancipation of the Jews and their inte-

gration into German society and with the dream that Jews could be part of rather than apart from the German nation? Does it begin with the statement of Konstantin Pobedonostev, the Supreme Prosecutor of the Holy Synod and one of the most influential advisors the Russian czar who in May 1882 promulgated the infamous one third Laws—one third of the Jews will be killed, one third of the Jews will leave the country, and one third of the Jews will be assimilated in the population—which the czar approved? By doing so, he thus formulated—and anticipated—the history of the Jews over the next 70 years. Does it begin with the Armenian genocide, the first major genocide of the twentieth century and with the failure of the Western world to remember the Armenians, the very words that Hitler is reported to have invoked on the eve of the German invasion of Poland? Or does it begin even earlier with the history of antisemitism and its evolution from religious antisemitism to political antisemitism and finally to the singularly distinct Nazi contribution of racial antisemitism that was expressed in what Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (1996) described as “exterminationist” antisemitism or as Raul Hilberg (1985) said so very simply: “The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live” (p. 9).

There are cogent, intellectually compelling historical reasons to include each of these issues as antecedents to the study of the Holocaust and thus to ensure that our students understand that the Nazi policies did not emerge creation *ex nihilo*, but within a specific context that require some background and some understanding

### THE JEWS

Teaching the Holocaust is not a course about Jews; it is about their victimization. But there is an essential moral task and intellectual task that can be accomplished within the framework of teaching the Holocaust. The moral task is: to remember, emphasize and teach that before the Jews were victims, they were people. If we know them as people, we will care more about their victimization. And if we know their history, we will also understand facets of their brutalization and annihilation that were directly linked to their historical experience, such as, the burning of synagogues and Torah scrolls, shaving beards of Orthodox Jews, and so forth.

### WHAT DO STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE JEWS?

It is essential to situate the Jews in Europe, defining the origins of Judaism with the Biblical Hebrews and the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, establishing the formative experience of slavery and the Exodus from Egypt, defining the monotheism of the Jews and the covenant at Sinai, and providing a sense of the commandments with an emphasis on circumcision and linking the Biblical Hebrews to the land of Israel. The theme of exile and return in Judaism should be emphasized with mention of the first exile and more detailed concentration should be placed on the second exile, which left Jews living in exile, without a country of their own, without sovereignty and without an army.

Because neither the situation of Jews in twentieth-century Europe nor the death camps and the Holocaust itself can be understood apart from the vexed and painful relationships between Jews and Christians since the birth of Christianity—and the hostility of Christianity toward Judaism—particular emphasis should be given to Jesus as a practicing Jew and his rootedness in Judaism. The story of the crucifixion should be presented as understood by contemporary historians and endorsed by Vatican II, which depicts crucifixion and *the* crucifixion as a Roman crime, an act committed by Pontius Pilate and not by the Jewish community of his era and de-emphasizes the later account of the crucifixion that are found in the Gospels. Students should have a passing familiarity with the theological debate between Christianity and Judaism over the Messianic mission of Jesus of Nazareth and with the break between Christianity and Judaism after the death of Jesus. They should be aware of the problem of supercessionism within Christianity, the view that Christianity had come to fulfill Judaism, the New Testament to complete the Old without leaving room to the religiously legitimate ongoing life of the Jewish people and of Judaism as a religion—as well as with the teaching of contempt for Judaism that was prevalent in the thought of some major Christian thinkers.

My sense is that this may be the only time in a student's education in which this information is conveyed and it can be done so in a respectful and dispassionate manner; not to challenge the religious beliefs of either faith but to present their disagreements in context. We should also indicate that there was a social dimension to the religious dissent and move quickly through some mention of the expulsions in the Middle Ages and also to the antisemitism of Martin Luther and finally to the struggles of the Enlightenment and to forms that Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Judaism took and the forms of post-Enlightenment antisemitism.

It is also important to provide detailed information on the inner forms of Jewish life in the areas occupied by the Germans depicting the diverse Jews who came under German control and who were sent to their death—

from the fiercely pious to the passionately secular, Zionist and Bundist, Socialist and Communist, and all those in-between. This should include specific attention to the inner life of these Jews in all of its complexity and in all of its contradictions and conflicts, including Sephardic Jews from North Africa to Greece and Bulgaria who were also murdered in the Holocaust.

It is also proper to debunk the all too prevalent myth of Jewish powerlessness. In his work *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, David Biale (1987) has summarized the Jewish predicament: "From biblical times to the present day, Jews have wandered the uncertain terrain between power and powerlessness, never quite achieving the power necessary to guarantee long-term security, but equally avoiding, with a number of disastrous exceptions, the abyss of absolute impotence. They developed the consummate skill of living with uncertainty and insecurity" (p. 210).

### ANTISEMITISM

A consideration of antisemitism is essential to understanding Nazism, the targeting of the Jews and thus, indispensable in a study of the Holocaust.

One must begin with religious antisemitism. As uncomfortable as this may make certain teachers, especially those teaching in schools with fundamentalist students, the roots of Nazi antisemitism are to be found in Christian antisemitism. Thinkers as diverse as Holocaust scholars Raul Hilberg, Yehuda Bauer, David Bankier, Omar Bar-Loew, and Daniel Goldhagen all emphasize the Christian roots of antisemitism, and major Christian scholars have for three generations stood four square behind a reconsideration of Christian antisemitism. Recent events such as the visit of Pope John Paul II to Jerusalem in 2000 and the renunciation of Martin Luther's teaching on the Jews by the American Lutheran Church in 1994 have made teaching this history of antisemitism far easier because teachers can invoke not only the authority of dissenting and formerly avant garde Christian thinkers but even slow to change Christian Churches which have taken monumental steps to ensure that this form of antisemitism cannot recur and will not receive the veneer of respectable Christianity. Pope John Paul II (2000) put it succinctly: "Antisemitism is anti-Christian."

Again, it is imperative that the religious roots of antisemitism be taught, and in doing so, it must include the role of Jews in Christianity, the tradition of contempt, the problem of supersessionism and the transformation of the portrayal of the crucifixion in the Gospels. One must emphasize that religious teaching had social consequences and remember the admonition of Abraham Joshua Heschel (1965): "Speech has power

and few men realize that words do not fade. What starts out as a sound ends in a deed" (p. 81).

Students also need to learn that the Enlightenment did not end the problem of antisemitism, but that Enlightenment thinkers often attacked Judaism and Jews to delegitimize Christianity, masking their critique of the latter to vehemently attack the mother religion. At the least, mention must be made regarding the emerging role of Jews as citizens of a "secular" state and the problem of heterogeneous society and the sense of displacement that some sensed by the greater integration of the Jews.

The political use of antisemitism must also be explored, most especially in the form it took in Vienna, the city so formative to Hitler's own development. Vienna was a cosmopolitan city in which Jews flourished when Hitler lived there. It was the home of Sigmund Freud and Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism; and yet, it was also the home of several movements that impacted Hitler, including political antisemitism, which, under the leadership of Karl Lueger, exploited antisemitism for political gain and the concept of Social Darwinism, which viewed society as the battleground in the struggle for survival of the fittest. Tolerant and open, there was also an undercurrent of the hatred and antagonism that were to fuel Hitler's view of the world. In the Vienna of his youth, Hitler may well have learned how to utilize hatred to propel his movement.

Racial antisemitism must be seen in its context as part of the eugenics movement as an outgrowth of some particular readings of Darwin's survival of the fittest, which gave a scientific cover to deep-seated hatreds. The Nazis exploited that science, trained, and educated scientists who endorsed the Nazi killing programs—beginning with the T-4 murders of those deemed to be incurably ill (the mentally and physically handicapped) by Nazi medicine from 1939 onwards. It was in these programs that the role of the gas chambers came to the fore, that key elements of the killing process were refined, essential personnel trained, and the role of the physician firmly established.

Surely, the full range of Nazi racism must be explored, but the particular focus on and the passionate animus toward the Jews must be understood. It was the foundation for much that was soon to happen.

### ANTECEDENTS

We must also explore other antecedents. Hitler and the National Socialists fostered an atmosphere of extreme nationalism, *Deutschland über Alles*, "Germany above all." They redefined the German nation to exclude the Jews, even those who had dwelled in Germany for generations, and to include the *volkdeutsch*, people of German ancestry whose family had lived

elsewhere for generations. They introduced the concept of social Darwinism, viewing the world as a social struggle among inferior and superior races, viewing Germany as being engaged in a national struggle for its own survival, which required the destruction of the Jews. They ruled by the Führer's decree, which had the force of law. Germany became a totalitarian society; all power was concentrated in one political party—opposition parties were outlawed in 1933, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly were curtailed, there was no separation of powers between the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. As Nazi rule evolved, all power, indeed all legitimacy, was concentrated in Adolf Hitler. During the years 1933-1939, even before the start of World War II, Hitler and his followers had created a Nazi society and a police state, in which the party and its leader dominated all aspects of society. Even the army swore allegiance directly to the Führer and not to the constitution or the state.

### GENOCIDE

It is important to note that the study of other genocides and/or a comparative study of genocide need not diminish the uniqueness of the Holocaust; rather, such efforts can provide greater understanding of its singularity. As to the argument that no comparisons can be made to the Holocaust, medieval theology taught us how to approach God without diminishing the uniqueness of the Divine by *via positiva* and *via negativa*.

In the *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, Robert Melson (1999) offers several parallels between the Holocaust and Armenian Genocide and several important distinctions. Melson (1999) regards the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide as the "quintessential instances of genocide in the modern era" (p. 69). Mass murder were the "products of state initiated policy whose intentions were the elimination of the Armenian community from the Ottoman Empire and the Jews from Germany and Europe and beyond" (Melson, 1999, p. 69). Furthermore, Melson argues, both victimized groups were "ethnoreligious communities that had been partially integrated and assimilated into native societies" (Melson, 1999, p. 69). In that regard, both were "total domestic genocides" (p. 69). Thirdly, Armenians and Jews were unmistakably communal or ethnic groups, not political groups or classes. Finally, both mass murders were the products of modern ideologies in circumstances of revolution and war.

Melson also delineates three significant distinctions. While both groups were regarded as inferior, only the Jews were stigmatized as deicides—murderers of the Christ. He concurs with Holocaust scholars Richard Rubenstein and Yehuda Bauer that an essential component of the Holocaust was the religious dimension of the hatred of the Jews. Secondly,

Armenians were a peasant, agrarian society while living on their own land. Jews were urbanized and, with the exception of the small Zionist groups who sought the Jewish future in the Jewish homeland, the overwhelming majority of the murdered Jews were seeking to continue to dwell and to be included into the countries in which they lived. *Finally—and most importantly—the Nazi racial ideology was global in scope, seeking to murder all Jews everywhere.* There was no plan for the global elimination of all Armenians everywhere. In fact, even during the height of the slaughter, Armenians continued to reside in Istanbul and other Turkish cities (Melson 1999, p. 70).

There are several direct links between the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide: Hitler's statement to the German high command in 1939 (see below); the invention of the term "genocide" by Raphael Lemkin—with the Armenian experience clearly in mind—when in 1933 he submitted a draft proposal to the League of Nations for an international convention on barbaric crimes and vandalism; the use of photographs as a form of protest by Armin Wegner who photographed and distributed for publication pictures of the Armenian genocide and three decades of pictures of the Holocaust. (As my late former colleague and noted historian Sybil Milton has shown, Wegner documented and circulated his pictures of the Armenian and the Jewish experience to call attention to both events, to protest both killings.); the modeling of behavior in such instances as when the resistance fighters in Warsaw and Bialystock saw their deeds as a contemporary Musa Dagh, the site of Armenian resistance during the Armenian genocide, south of the coastal town of Alexandretta and west of ancient Antioch (Franz Werfel's (1934) important novel *Forty Days at Musa Dagh*, which was widely read in Europe, served to transmit the model of Musa Dagh to Jews in Warsaw and Bialystock who invoked that experience as a guide to their behavior under very different circumstances more than a quarter of a century later.); and the actions of Henry Morgenthau Jr., the distinguished son of a distinguished father who saw his father's open opposition to the Armenian genocide when he served as Ambassador to Turkey during World War I as the model of what he should do during the Holocaust. Morgenthau Sr. had risked prestige and position when, as Ambassador to Turkey during World War I, he vehemently protested the fate of the Armenians. At the fateful moment on January 13, 1944, when his staff confronted him with a report entitled "On the Acquiescence of the American Government to the Murder of the Jews," Morgenthau Jr., too risked career and position to confront President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Their meeting in turn led to the creation of the War Refugee Board, one of the few American efforts on behalf of rescue.

The oft-reported story of Hitler's address to the German High Command in Obersalzberg on the eve of the Polish invasion bears repetition. Hitler told his officers:

I have issued the command—and I'll have any body who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad—that our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction of the enemy. Accordingly, I have placed my deathhead formations in readiness—for present only in the East—with orders to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space (*Lebensraum*), which we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians? (quoted in Office of the United States, Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, 1946, Vol. 7., p. 753)

Contrary to some claims, I regard the statement in its entirety as reliable. This version of Hitler's speech is traceable to Louis Lochner, the famous American correspondent in Berlin, who received a copy of the notes of the meeting from Hermann Maass, who received it from Hans Oster, a key assistant of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, director of the Abwehr, the counterintelligence department of the German high command. The information was sent to London on August 29th. (In 1944 Maass was a leader in the conspiracy against Hitler.)

Gerhard Weinberg (personal communication, 1990) has said that this speech was "clearly designed to reassure his [Hitler's] listeners and assuage any doubts they might have" (n.p.). The audience, Weinberg said, "consisted of men who had themselves as adults lived through the events to which Hitler referred" (Weinberg, 1990). This was not the first time that Hitler had invoked the Armenian experience. He had previously used it as an example of how common massive resettlement had been in history.

The implications of Hitler's reference to the Armenians are clear: had the world remembered the Armenian experience, German offices might have been more reticent to carry out such a campaign of terror and destruction. Remembrance might have protected future generations.

A Convention for the Prevention of Crimes of Genocide was adopted by the United Nations on December 9, 1948. Lemkin had a major hand in drafting the Genocide Convention, which was designed to overcome the claims of the Nuremberg defendants that they had violated no law. The Convention specifically defines the various aspects of Nazi genocide as criminal. It prohibits the killing of persons belonging to a group (the final solution); causing grievous bodily or spiritual harm to members of a group; deliberately enforcing upon the group living conditions which could lead to complete or partial extermination (ghettoiza-

tion and starvation); enforcing measures to prevent births among the group (sterilization); forcibly removing children from the group and transferring them to another group (the "Aryanization" of Polish children).

The adoption of the Convention was followed by the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1949, the United Nations adopted the Geneva Convention on the Laws and Customs of War, enunciated the rights of prisoners of war and the conduct of armies toward the populations they control. Yet articulation of the crime is no guarantor of its prevention.

I suspect that many teachers will read this discussion of antecedents, roll their eyes and say "what does he know?" I get three hours to teach the Holocaust while reading *Night* or *The Diary of Anne Frank* in a literature course. Trust me, I do know as I always listen to teachers when we meet. My response: Do not make the perfect the enemy of the good. Do the best that you can with the time allotted you. I was asked in this short essay to be prescriptive of the desirable not descriptive of the possible.

### Recommended Reading on the Holocaust

Berenbaum, M. (Ed.). (1997). *Witness to the Holocaust: An illustrated documentary history of the Holocaust in the words of its victims, perpetrators and bystanders*. New York: HarperCollins.

This volume includes documents related to a wide array of issues, including the following: the first regulatory assault against the Jews, early efforts at spiritual resistance, the Nuremberg Laws, *Kristallnacht*, the beginning of ghettoization, the Judenrat, the *Einsatzgruppen*, Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jews, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the Nuremberg Trials.

Hilberg, R. (2003). *The destruction of the European Jews—college student edition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

This is the college student edition of Hilberg's highly acclaimed three-volumes set, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Commenting on the three-volume set, Holocaust scholar David Wyman asserted that it constitutes "the standard text in the field."

Langer, L. L. (1991). *Holocaust testimonies: The ruins of memory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

A sustained analysis of the unique ways in which oral testimony of survivors contributes to humanity's understanding of the Holocaust.

Rubinstein, R. L., & Roth, J. K. (1987). *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and its legacy*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

Using a multidisciplinary approach in this philosophical history of the Holocaust, the authors analyze the roots of the Holocaust, the power of the Nazis in Germany and abroad, the reactions and responses of the Christian community, the business world, and the literary community; and the "silence of God"; among other issues.

Wiesel, E. (1969). *Night*. New York: Avon.

A searing account of Wiesel's experiences during the Holocaust, including the murder of his mother and youngest sister in Auschwitz, and his father's death at the end of a death march.

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