



EL HOLOCAUSTO:

Las razones del mal

Por PETER HAYES

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Peter Hayes ha explorado uno de los eventos más trágicos de la Historia de la humanidad, la Shoá (el Holocausto), tratando ocho de las preguntas más comunes sobre esta catástrofe: ¿Por qué los judíos? ¿Por qué los alemanes? ¿Por qué la aniquilación, por qué tan rápida y total? ¿Por qué más judíos no se rebelaron? ¿Por qué no hubo ayuda del exterior? ¿Qué legado? ¿Qué implicaciones? ¿Qué lecciones? Peter Hayes aporta, con sus 35 años de experiencia, una visión que permite acabar con prejuicios y opiniones mal fundadas.

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The Holocaust seems to paralyze most people. The enormity of the death toll, the brutality with which it was executed, and the sheer speed with which millions of people were erased from the Earth seems to make us feel that we are inadequate in the face of understanding it. The most common words used in the United States to discuss the Holocaust are indescribable, incomprehensible, unfathomable. I'm a historian. The job of historians is to make clear to people how the world came to be the way it is, how and why things occur in the past. The notion that something is inexplicable is for a historian, dare I say it, a kind of heresy. And yet, in the face of this subject, we stop short. We say somehow it cannot be explained and I think I understand why. Because it is so horrible, it is so terrifying, that if we say it can be explained, we are on the verge of saying it made sense. It made no sense and yet it can, I think, be explained. And toward the end of my teaching career, I realized that the way to approach the problem of explanation was to do it the way the French philosopher René Descartes years ago said, "If you have a complicated question, divide it into manageable parts, deal with each part, and then the answers to the parts, if you're lucky, will add up to an answer to the complicated question." And in my case, because I taught bachelor students in the United States, I realized what the parts might be.

Every year, I would ask the students who

came to my course on the history of the Holocaust, "Why are you here? What do you want to know?" And every year, they would raise the same questions. Why the Jews? Why would a major country, indeed more than one country, why would the populations of more than one country decide that the way to improve the world in every way was to eliminate one relatively small and internally heterogeneous people? How could they possibly believe that a few million Jews amidst the vast population of Europe were the source of all troubles? Why the Germans? Why was this the people that set out to kill all the Jews? If you had asked people in Europe in 1912 and said to them, "In 30 years, what country on this continent will be killing and burning the corpses of a population, of the Jews," the answers would have undoubtedly been France or Russia. France because of the Dreyfus affair, which had recently occurred, Russia because the Kishinev pogroms, which gave rise to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion had just occurred. Why was it Germany? The country that in 1932 had won more Nobel Prizes than any other nation on the globe. A country that already in the 19th century had the highest literacy rate in Europe. A place that we would see as a quintessentially modern and advanced society. Why murder? Adolf Hitler rose to power giving speeches saying, "The Jews must be removed from Germany," "*Entfernen*." And *entfernen* is the verb for to remove. Remove may mean many things. If I want to remove this chair from the

stage, I can pick it up and put it through one of these doors or I can pretend I'm a rockstar and I can smash it on the floor. This is what he said to the German people. Why did remove come to mean kill? Why murder? Once the murder started, why was it so swift and sweeping? Most everyone knows, if they know one thing about the Holocaust, it's the six million Jews were killed and that six million Jews amounted to two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe in 1939. It was actually much worse than that. The Germans killed between 75 and 80 percent of the Jews who ever came within their reach. Many of the survivors were people who fled into the Soviet Union and were never under German control or lived in Scandinavia or Great Britain or Spain where the Germans could not reach them. 75 to 80 percent and they did this in the wink of an eye. Six million victims. Three million died in a space of only 11 months. They died between March of 1942 and February of 1943. Three-quarters of the victims, four-and-a-half million people, died in less than two years, 20 months between the invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941 and the German surrender at Stalingrad in February of 1943. This was a rate of killing unprecedented in the world. Why didn't more of them fight back? This is a question my naive students from the comfort of the American life posed. They all think they would have been Davy Crockett at the Alamo. When faced with German tanks, they think it would have been easy to stand up and everyone would have done it. So why didn't more fight back?



This completely ignores the imbalance of power. It also completely misunderstands who the Jews were. The Jews were not united in the face of what was happening to them. They were people divided by all kinds of differences. Political differences, some were Zionists, some weren't. Some were Socialists, some weren't. Religious differences, some were Orthodox, some were Neolog or reformed. Some were Hasids, still a third group. Some were highly traditional, some were not. In the face of the German onslaught, Jews had to figure out in Europe two things very quickly. They had to figure out, what are the Germans going to do with us? And then they had to figure out, what is the most effective response? To get agreement

on these two questions in advance was very difficult because when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, they didn't yet know what they intended to do with the Jews. How could the Jews know? So this is the next kind of question. Why did they get so little help? Why is it that no Allied government intervened to stop the massacre at the death camps? Why is it that no international organization such as the International Red Cross stood up and protested and circulated information? Why did the Roman Catholic Church, which had the best intelligence network in Europe, fail to speak out against the massacres? These questions are very profound. Why did survival rates vary? This is one of the most striking things. 75 to 80 percent of the Jews within the Nazi reach were killed. 75% of the Jews in France survived. 75% of the Jews in the Netherlands were killed. These are not countries that are very far away from each other. What accounts for the different outcomes for people? So these are the questions that my students would repeatedly pose and I built my course around answering those questions. Each week we would tackle in lectures I would give and discussion conversations with them, how do you answer each of these questions - remember Descartes? - in the hope that if we answered the small questions or smaller, they would add up to a larger answer.

I can take you through two questions that I think summarize the approach of the book and the method that I bring to bear. Two simple but stark questions: why were Jews killed and why couldn't or didn't anyone stop it? Now, the first question has, as all historical questions have, long-range origins and short-range origins, things that lie deeply embedded in the past and things that were relatively proximate to the events that we're talking about. The long-range origins of the persecution of Jews are deeply embedded in

the western Christian tradition. They are the result of the new message that Christianity brought into the world, which after all, is an offshoot of Judaism. The central teachings of Christianity are rooted in the Jewish faith, monotheism, covenant, an agreement between the Lord and his people, and the authority of scripture, writings that tell you how to behave and live. Christianity emerged in the world and took each of those things and changed them. Monotheism, one God, became the trinity, one God in three forms. Scripture, the Hebrew Bible, became part of the texts of the Christian Bible supplemented by the gospels and the epistles. Covenant, the agreement between the Lord and his people: in Judaism, this was the teaching that God will make the Jews a light unto the nations in return for obedience to the 613 laws that are in the Torah. The first five books of the Bible and Christianity says something different. It says covenant is not between a particular people and is not dependent on adherence to the laws. Anyone can become part of the covenant with the Lord if you accept the teachings of the New Testament of the gospels and the epistles. And these essentially abolish most of the 613 laws.

So in the early era of Christianity comes this new religion teaching people we have a new doctrine and if you follow it, you will enter into the covenant with the Lord and you will be saved. And the Jews are the people who said, "No, thank you." The Jews are the people who said, "We have a covenant. We have scripture. We have a monotheism. We're fine with it." Now, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire. It became the dominant faith. And as we can all understand from ordinary life, when we think we have something wonderful to offer and someone looks at us and says, "No," we tend to get offended and the offense may lead us to various forms of action. In the case of



Christianity, which argued that, "We know the one true way to salvation," saying, "No," was a problem. If someone got away with saying, "No," this would undermine the whole teaching that we have the new truth. And so beginning in the 4th century of the common era, Christianity developed official doctrines toward Judaism which basically said, "These people remain in darkness. They do not accept the new light of the world. They cannot prosper because if they prosper, this shows that they are getting away with saying, 'No,' and that might undermine the faith of some of the people who said yes. It might get them to turn away." And Christianity in the form of St. Augustine developed a doctrine that Jews must suffer but they must also survive because they once were the chosen people of God and if one day they wake up in the morning and they say, "Yes," this will be the sign of the coming of the kingdom of heaven and the rule of the earthly paradise of the Lord. To make them suffer, Christianity developed elaborate instruments to keep them contained and at arm's length from Christians.

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They were to be confined to ghettos. They were to be allowed to do only certain occupations. In this way, they lived in European society but they were not of European society. And then over the centuries, this elaborated into forms of suspicion about Jews. They not only were corrupting toward your faith, they might, in fact, poison wells. They might, in fact, spread plague. In an era where no one had scientific explanations for things, the easiest way to explain adversity was to say, "Somebody did it and we know these people are evil. These people have not accepted the truth of the Lord." Christianity spent roughly 1,400 years all over Europe elaborating this ideology that the Jews were potentially corrupting, that they were over time increasingly seen as instruments of the devil. They had to be kept at a distance. They were dangerous. And rather abruptly, in the 18th century, European society turned. The ideology that Jews had to be confined gave way to an ideology that they had to become

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productive. They had to become useful to the state and thus, they had to be freed from the ghettos, from the occupational restrictions because in the ideas of the emperor of Austria who started the emancipation of the Jews, if they were freed they could do all the things that everyone else did and sooner or later they'd pay more taxes. Now, that was the emperor of Austria.

The French Revolution, of course, had nobler reasons for emancipation. The brotherhood of man, *égalité*, the equality of man, *fraternité*. This ideology meant that the armies of the French Revolution all over Europe opened the gates of the ghettos, abolished the restrictions on what a Jew could or could not do. And the 19th century in Europe, the period from 1780 when the emperor of Austria emancipates the Jews, it took this long, until 1917, gradually, the Jews are freed in every European state from all of their restrictions. And many Jews welcomed these opportunities. They had never been allowed to go to university before. They welcomed the chance to do so. They could not become business executives. They could not become lawyers. They could not become doctors, but many of them had the ability to do these things and had never been allowed to do it. And all of a sudden, they could and they did. And the result was a group of people that had lived in European society but were not of it, suddenly came into European society as if they were immigrants and began to compete with others and occasionally win in their personal advancement in society. This was the development of the 19th century. It was generally positive. It was overwhelmingly successful for individual Jews, but it aroused a backlash. And it aroused a backlash because

emancipation, increasing prosperity, the Industrial Revolution, all of these things were not the only things happening in Europe.

There were things that were happening in the 19th century that disadvantaged other people. While many Jews, not all of them, while many Jews were rising, there were groups in European society that were declining, above all, artisans, people who were displaced by factories. In every European language there is a word for shoemaker, all right? There aren't too many shoemakers still in business. In every European language there is a word for what in English is called a cooper, they make barrels. No one makes barrels by hand anymore. The people who had these professions and often farmers who were subjected increasingly to lower price goods being imported from Argentina or from the United States because transportation costs were declining because the productivity of the land in the new world was so much greater than the productivity of the land in say Prussia, that the prices were being driven down by the competition.

People who were losing out by social change in the 19th century often looked for a simple explanation for what was happening to them. And they made a mistake that in English is called mistaking correlation for cause, something that is happening at the same time as something else is not necessarily the cause of the something else. But what many of the people who were losing out in society wanted to find was a quick explanation and the people who arose in the political movement called anti-Semitism said, "I know what it is. You're doing worse, but they're doing better. Somehow these are related and if we can stop



them from doing better, we can end you doing worse. We need to put them back in the boxes, the ghettos, the occupational restrictions, and so on." This is the movement that is 19th century anti-Semitism. This is what produced the Dreyfus affair. This is what produced all the writers, in France, Dumas, in Germany, Schopenhauer, every European country had someone who wrote books that denounced the Jews as the cause of all misfortunes and they sold a lot of copies. Many people were tempted because the tradition of regarding the Jews as dangerous, as alien, was so strong and now came a modern explanation for that argument with a new word behind it. The word anti-Semitism didn't exist until 1879. The word was invented to describe this. Now, the irony of this story is that in every European country there were literary figures and politicians who rode this horse, who tried to bring themselves to power.

And in many European countries, the books that expressed this ideology sold in multiple editions but politically, it was a

failure. In Germany, in the parliamentary elections between 1871 and 1912, no anti-semitic political party ever got more than 4% of the vote or 5% of the seats in parliament. It was a political bust. To run for office on the argument, in the famous German phrase, "*Die Juden sind unser Unglück*," "The Jews are our misfortune," did not have political traction. It did not work when that was the only argument that someone made. And there's a famous example of a man named Karl Lueger who gets elected lord mayor of Vienna but the same year he got elected lord mayor of Vienna, a Jew was elected lord mayor of Budapest. So anti-Semitism was loud, it was continuous, it was boisterous, it was also, in slang American, a bust. What changed all of this was World War I because in 1912 in the German parliamentary elections, the anti-Semites get 3% of the vote. If you flash forward to 1932, Adolf Hitler gets 37% of the vote. What happened to turn a political failure into a political success? One of the ironies of anti-Semitism is that the people who believe it depict Jews as parasites. They say, "Jews

are people who live within other populations and extract the wealth from them, they live off of others." But anti-Semitism as a political movement was completely parasitic. By itself, it never won. It needed some more powerful issue to attach itself to and rise to power. And in Germany, it attached itself to two things: economic crisis and emotional national humiliation. The economic crisis and the humiliation were related both to the defeat of Germany in World War I. And the peace terms that were imposed on Germany were harsh. They were not nearly as harsh as the peace terms the Germans would have imposed on the French if they had won, but Germans didn't think about that. They were very harsh terms and when they were combined with economic crises that arose in Germany after World War I, Germans could tell themselves, "The misery we are experiencing has been imposed upon us from outside. This is being done to us." Who did it to us?

Well, the Allies because they wrote the peace treaty, but also, after 1917 there was nervousness throughout Europe about the threat of the Bolshevik revolution, the danger of a Bolshevik takeover. And there were various figures who had been in command of Germany during the defeat in World War I who decided that the way to shift the blame from themselves was to say, "The loss of the war was caused by people inside the country who sabotaged the war effort." Who led those people? The Jews. This was the argument that was made. They led the sabotage of the war effort. They led the Russian revolution, so they said. They didn't have too many examples to prove this. Trotsky was one but not much more. But they used these arguments and these arguments were presented to a German people in the 1920s and then when the Depression struck, that felt increasingly victimized, immiserated. And the Nazis came along, Hitler in particular, and said to them,

"It's not your fault. I know whose fault it is and we will remove them and then all the problems will go away." Now, when I say it that way, this is not much of an oversimplification, when I say it that way, it's ridiculous. What kind of audience believes such a thing? Well, people who are desperate and fearful and scared and who wonder how they are going to get out of the problem and are not convinced by any other political party's solutions that are being offered. And so this way, you get an expansion of the people in Germany willing to vote for someone who takes an anti-Semitic stance. The appeal of anti-Semitism is coupled with a sense that no one else has a better answer and this is how you get to 37%.

But 37% it's not a majority. In fact, when Adolf Hitler was appointed prime minister of Germany, chancellor, on January 30th, 1933, 55% of the Germans had never voted for him, never. He was a minority chancellor. He made more votes than anyone else, which is why he's picked, but he did not have a majority. The number of Germans who actually accepted the argument that the Jews are the central problem of their life and must be eliminated became large, but it did not become the whole. And this is a very important moment in the story. I have written books about two German companies, very big corporations, both chemical companies, both hardhearted in the city of Frankfurt. In 1933, these two companies had 45 members of their boards of directors. Not a single one was a Nazi, none. One of the two companies had made one donation to the Nazi party, very small amount, 10,000 Reichsmark, at one point in the middle of 1932 when it looked like Hitler was at the peak of his success. Neither company had ever advertised in Nazi newspapers, which is another way of contributing to the party. All of the members of the board of directors at these two companies that I can find traces of actually mistrusted the idea of Hitler



becoming chancellor. They thought he was dangerous. They thought he didn't understand economics. Both companies sold a lot of their production overseas and they knew that Hitler's policy of high tariffs and restrictions might be bad for their business.

That's 1933, at the moment when Hitler came in, 37% relate to that. 1943, 10 years later, most of the board of directors of both companies are members of the Nazi party. What's more important is that both of these companies are up to their armpits in the crimes of the Nazi state. Both of them have fired their Jewish employees fairly rapidly. Both of them have engaged in the takeovers of Jewish property increasingly in Germany at knockdown prices, outside of Germany at complete extortionist procedures. They both become involved in using slave laborers, both forced laborers from the occupied countries, then slave laborers from the concentration camps. And they both are partners in the making of a product called Zyklon. They own the rights and they sell it to the SS and it is used at Auschwitz and Majdanek to kill approximately

1.3 million people. Now, how do you get from 1933 to 1943? How do you get from 37% of the people endorse Nazi teaching because they vote for it and 1943 where almost every German acts as if he endorses the ideology of the party? It doesn't matter what's in their heads, it matters what they do. And they almost all become complicit in this process. How does that happen? Well, this is a big part of the answer to why Jews are killed because the Nazi party state has total control of what is said in the public sphere. You cannot turn on CNN, you cannot get the BBC, you cannot even get the Times of London at a German newsstand. Germany is a hermetically sealed society in which the only voices are the voice of the state repeatedly saying, "Everything that's wrong is their fault and everything will get better when we remove them." And this is a big part of what happens.

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The International Red Cross in Geneva knew from the moment that the gassings began what was happening and they knew about the deportations from the ghettos and so on. How'd they know?

propaganda, it's through such little things as this. If you wanted to be a lawyer in Nazi Germany and you were preparing to take your license exams, a precondition for that was that you had to spend a summer at a kind of military camp where you were drilled and marched around like a soldier and you listened to the ideological teaching of the party. And you would not be allowed to take your license exam and to get your law license unless you had satisfied the party people at the camp that you were ideologically sound. Same thing was true if you wanted to be a school teacher, elementary or middle or higher level. So this is the way in which people's personal advancement became caught up in imitating or at least seeming to accept the ideology of the regime. And along with the indoctrination came intimidation. There's a famous example of a German named Sebastian Haffner who wrote a book called *Geschichte eines Deutschen*, Story of a German. He fled the country in 1938, but before that he was within Nazi Germany. And he tells a story about the day he was walking down a street in Berlin with his girlfriend and the stormtroopers marched by, a battalion of stormtroopers in brown shirts, carrying a swastika flag. And people on the sidewalks responded to this, because they knew what they were supposed to do, by raising their hand and anyone who didn't, someone in the formation would fall out and beat them up and the police would not protect that person. So there was indoctrination, there was intimidation, and there was intoxication because after all the misery of the '20s, the economic problems, the

Nazi regime carried out the fastest economic recovery in the world. It did it by means that could never have lasted.

It did it by basically spending vast amounts of government money on military production, armaments, and other things that the country needed for the war effort. This was unsustainable over time but Hitler didn't plan to sustain it over time. He planned to conquer other countries and take their wealth to pay for it. So the armaments developed, the economy prospered, and then Germany began to expand without firing a shot. The takeover of Austria, the takeover of the Sudetenland, the occupation of today's Czech Republic, every one of those steps was a glorious advancement for people starved of national pride. And Germans increasingly said, "*Wir sind wieder wer*," "We are somebody again and we owe it to the Führer." So this is the environment. It's a closed world, it's a world that teaches all Germans there are only two categories of human beings, us and them. All obligations are to us. You owe no moral obligation to anyone else because all life is the struggle of the law of the jungle and if you are soft hearted, pitiful, sensitive, kind to your enemies, you will surely lose. And so the ideology was to smite your enemy before he smites you and meanwhile, you want to argue with our ideology? Look how well we've done. The nation is prospering, the expansion is working, and so on. So this is how a German society becomes converted from a society in which there were some anti-Semites into a society in which almost everyone behaves



as an anti-Semite. But why murder? The Nazi regime tried to drive Jews out of Germany in the 1930s. It succeeded in driving out almost 300,000 German Jews out of the country. It couldn't drive more out. There were about 560,000 people the regime regarded as Jews in 1933, but it couldn't drive the rest out because other countries were reluctant to admit refugees during the Depression. Sound familiar? So with this restriction, there was a residual population of Jews in Germany and the Nazis believed they had stabbed the country in the back. If there's another war, we cannot win it if these people are there to sabotage us again.

And not only that 560,000 were remaining, but every time Hitler acquired more territory, Austria, the Sudetenland, the Czech Republic, he got more Jews. And thus, the Nazis increasingly realized by the late 1930s that they were chasing their own tail and that it was going to get worse because the two central pieces of Nazi ideology contradicted each other. The first centerpiece, the future of

the nation depends on it being free of Jews, *judenrein*. Literally, that means cleansed of Jews, pure of Jews. That was the first thing. We cannot win another war if any of them are still here. We have to get rid of them. On the other hand, Hitler wanted living space, *Lebensraum*, in German, and he didn't want living space just anywhere. He didn't want the Spanish colonial empire. He didn't want the British colonial empire. He believed that in the 20th century, a great power had to be either like the United States or like the USSR. It had to be connected, contiguous. It had to include within itself all the resources necessary, enough food to feed the people, enough minerals to power the war effort. His model, I'm ashamed to say, was the expansion of the United States in the 19th century from the east coast across the continent, wiping out or almost wiping out everyone in the path and acquiring this empire of resources. And he wanted to do that, but for Germany, if you're going to create a contiguous empire and you're going to acquire a living space, that meant Eastern Europe. That meant his area of

conquest was going to be Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus. What was the problem? He wanted a Jew-free country and he wanted the lands with the largest Jewish population in the world. That was still the old Russian pale of settlement where Jews had been largely confined. That was the center of gravity of the population of Jews in Europe, certainly, and in the world in general. And beginning in 1938, the Nazis increasingly recognized the contradiction. They increasingly recognized that you can't have a Jew-free empire and this land at the same time by driving people out, by removing them that way. So the history of the years from the pogrom in November 1938 to the beginnings of the massacres in the invasion of the Soviet Union, the history of those years is the Nazis figuring out that they have no way to deport people. They have no way to send them away any other way. The only way they can achieve a Jew-free empire within their reach is to kill these people. And then having realized that, they realize they can do it in two steps.

Who's looking?

They can kill all of the Jews in their path as they invade the Soviet Union because who's looking? It's under the cover of war. There are no foreign correspondents to see this. People will know only what they want people to know and they will kill these people and avoid any problem of administering Jewish populations. But what about the Jews they've already conquered in Poland, in Germany itself, in the Netherlands, in France, and so on and so forth? They realize almost simultaneously that they have a way of eliminating all of these people at very low cost and at very little expenditure of effort, that they can kill them in batches quickly. And so this is the answer to the question why are Jews killed? Long run hatred, recent political concerns, the warping



of the German public mind by relentless Nazi ideology on this simple theme, and then the recognition that there's no other way out to square the circle of what they want. Why couldn't or didn't anyone stop it? Let us start with the Jews themselves. They were too few, a tiny minority of the population anywhere. The largest share of the population of any country was in Poland, 10%, too few. Too divided along political lines, divided along ritual lines, divided along even what you might call communal lines because all these different segments of Jewry in Europe had their own institutions, they had their own hospitals, they had their own orphanages, and so forth. If you go to Krakow today in Poland, you can still see the area that was the Jewish quarter that was the ghetto. There are actually three synagogues side-by-side, right? It's like in America with Protestant churches. And so these are these internal divisions and it was very difficult for them to overcome these in order to answer those two questions. What are they going to do with us?



That was a moving target because the Germans kept changing their mind about what they were going to do with them. And then what do you do in response? Because when we look at what happened throughout Eastern Europe, whether the ghetto decided to resist the Germans, whether it decided to appease the Germans and cooperate with everything the Germans asked, whether it decided to mix those strategies, the story always ends the same way, almost everyone is killed. There was no right answer to the second question. There was no right answer to what do we do effectively to stop this because they were too powerless and too alone, as well as being too divided and too few. They did not have much support from the countries in which they lived. They did not have many weapons. They did not know the answer to what faced them. What about outsiders? Why didn't the Allies stop it? Why didn't the International Red Cross stop it? Why didn't the Pope at least do something to undermine it? Well, the short answer to that question is

because every party involved always thought it had something more important to do, something that took priority. If you look back at American immigration policy in the 1930s, why didn't the United States, a big country, which in those days had 130 million people and now has 310 million people, obviously, there was room for more people, why didn't the United States throw open its doors and let hundreds of thousands of people in? Well, because American politicians said to the American people, "The Depression is still on. They will come, they will take your jobs, they will cost you money, and there will be spies among them." Nowadays we would say terrorists.

They said spies. And so the argument was you can't let more people in because that will undermine security. Well, this is true after the war starts. Everyone always has some priority that seems more important. And there was another difficulty. During the time when most of the camps were operating, up until 1943, the only places where the Allied forces had planes that could bomb Europe were Britain and Egypt. During the life of the death camps, none of those planes from there could fly, get to the death camp, drop bombs, and get back to the base on a single tank of gas. It simply couldn't be done and these camps, even when they were finally identified, and it took time for the allies to identify, they were simply out of reach. And then most of the killing occurred before the German surrender at Stalingrad while the Germans were winning the war, while the Allies were on the defensive, which also made it harder. But there's a complication to the story because in the spring of 1944 most of the victims of the Holocaust were already dead, but in the spring of 1944, the Germans were bringing almost half a million Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz. And while they were doing that, American troops had advanced far enough up the Italian peninsula that you

For the Pope, the most extreme fear was that if he spoke out against, and he was well-informed about what was happening to the Jews, the Nazis might close the churches

could fly a plane from Italy to Auschwitz and bomb it and get back. And we do fly planes, but they don't bomb the camp, they bomb the factories of IG Farben that are near the camp making synthetic fuel. As I said, there is always something more important to do. For the Allies in May of 1944, what was more important? Well, in June of 1944 something was about to happen, the invasion of Normandy. And the Allies were concentrating their airpower on blowing up all the bridges over the French rivers so the Germans couldn't resupply.

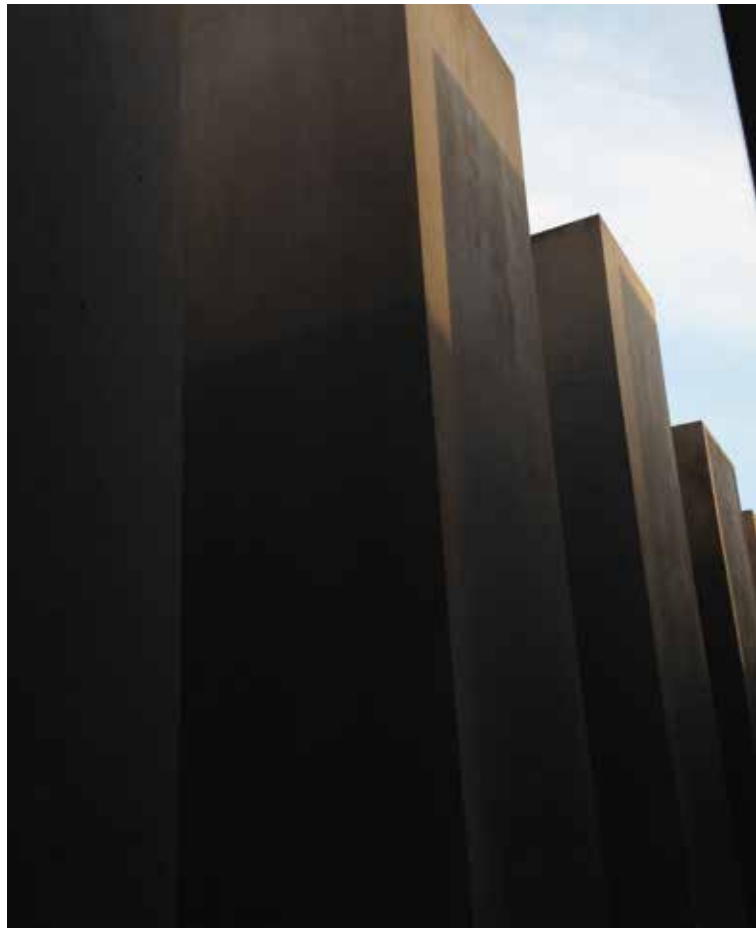
In the spring of 1944 was the highpoint of the rockets raining down on London, the V1s and the V2s. And the British thought the most important thing to be doing now is blowing up the launching pads which were in Belgium and the Netherlands. And the Americans thought that in preparation for D-Day and so on, the military targets of greatest importance were exactly that IG Farben factory. Blow up all their fuel supplies so they can't move and fight back. And so the military planners all say, "We're sorry about this. It's terrible what you tell us is happening there. Yes, we could bomb the rail lines, but they'll just fix them and we have other things to do." The International Red Cross in Geneva knew from the moment that the gassings began what was happening and they knew about the deportations from the ghettos and so on. How'd they know? Because Switzerland was a neutral power. That meant that Swiss factories were still based in Poland. There was a Swiss factory at a place called Pabianic, which had a ghetto, and the Swiss factory director watched

the deportation of the Jews, their loading into train cars, their dispatching to some unknown destination. He wrote this back to his headquarters in Geneva, which is also the headquarters of the International Red Cross. And the leaders of this company talked to the leaders of the Red Cross and the information passed and yet, the Red Cross said nothing. Why? Because the leaders of the Red Cross thought, "Our principal job during war is to get food and other supplies to prisoners of war behind both lines." That's what the Red Cross was founded for, that was what its first obligation was. And so they said, "If we speak out, the Nazis will block that and we can't send relief supplies to Allied soldiers who are in POW camps and maybe the reverse would happen. Our whole reason for being would be undermined."

This brings me to the argument of the Catholic Church because the Catholic Church has one central reason for being, the salvation of souls. In the Catholic theology that I was taught growing up in the 1950s that this life that we are experiencing right now is, after all, just a rehearsal. This is not the real life. The real life comes afterwards and the real life is not for everyone. It is for those that are holy and pious enough to get there. And in Catholic teaching in those days, it has modified somewhat, the teaching was that for you to get from here to there, for you to be saved, you must have access to the sacraments. You must have access to baptism, communion, confirmation, confession, holy orders, matrimony, the anointing of the sick at the end, and so forth. So salvation comes

through the sacraments and you cannot order the sacraments on Amazon. You get the sacraments from someone, the priest. There is no salvation without the priest and that means the churches have to stay open, the priests have to continue to function. And the whole reason for being of the church is endangered if the churches close.

For the Pope, the most extreme fear was that if he spoke out against, and he was well-informed about what was happening to the Jews, the Nazis might close the churches. They had already arrested hundreds of priests in Poland. There was a chance that they would extend this. And so the Pope had many things in his mind and many things to calculate, but when he had to look at himself in the mirror and say, "Am I doing the right thing or I'm not doing the right thing?" he could always say to himself, I cannot prove he did say this, but he could always say to himself, "My first obligation is the salvation of souls. I cannot save souls without keeping the churches open. I have to keep the sacraments available and there is too much risk if I speak out and endanger that." Everybody had something else to do. And then one more thing that was extremely important, back to what I said about the speed with which this happened. The Germans were able to construct a murder mechanism that was very fast and that required almost no investment on their part. The principal death camps in Poland outside of Auschwitz were three camps, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and a place called Chelmno. These four places killed two million people. If you go to any of them today, you will find almost no trace.



You'll find monuments. They were small. They were a couple of football fields together. The gas chambers, when they were first built, were made out of wood, two rows of wood with sand in between and some tar paper on the outside. That's all that was required. And they were connected to captured Soviet tank motors that produced carbon monoxide gas. The only cost of these operations was the gasoline, which was cheap.

At Auschwitz they used Zyklon. Zyklon was almost as cheap. It cost five Reichsmarks in those days for a kilogram. You could kill 1,500 people at a time with about five kilograms. The cost of killing 900,000 Jews at Auschwitz was less than one US cent per corpse in 1942. That's how inexpensive the gas was.

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Auschwitz was basically already existing buildings that had been a cavalry barracks and the Germans just took it over and turned it into prisoner barracks. At Birkenau, you can see some brick buildings that were the first barracks that were put up. Where'd they get the bricks? They destroyed all of the Polish houses in the villages around them and took the bricks and used them to build the barracks. There's no money involved in this at all. At Treblinka, when they turned the wood gas chamber into a stone one in the summer of 1942, they got the bricks by blowing up the chimney of a large factory and then they took the bricks and they used them to make the walls. What I'm getting at here is it didn't cost them much. Once they decided that they had the means of doing it, it was very easy for them to pull together the required resources and as a result, the Holocaust made a profit.

A simple way of illustrating this is Auschwitz. We have pretty good records about the building of Auschwitz. We know how much it costed to be built. We have pretty good records about the garrison of Auschwitz. We know how much they were paid and how many of them. The total operating costs came to 30 million Reichsmark. The total revenues, leasing the inmates to companies and government offices that wanted to use them to make products or build factories and so on, 60 million Reichsmarks. It's 100% profit. Why couldn't anyone stop this, so forth? Number one, it wasn't a big strain for the Germans to do it. Geography worked

against stopping it. There were few means of impeding it. And thus, it rolled and it rolled very fast. Most of the killing occurred in 1942 and then a little bit thereafter. So in all of this story about why no one was able to get in the way, there are some pretty specific explanations and the last one, the one that has to do with how much help the Germans got because they did not do this alone, more Jews in Lithuania were killed by Lithuanians than were killed by Germans. In Ukraine, pretty close, maybe that extreme. In Hungary, 437,000 people put on trains to Auschwitz over 55 days. Do the math about how many people a day. Who did that? Not Germans.

The Hungarian police did that. There were two or three hundred Germans in Budapest directing the whole operation, but everywhere where the Jews were being rounded up and put on the trains, it was being done by Hungarians. In the advance into the Soviet Union, the Romanians killed hundreds of thousands of Jews in their path because they were part of the invasion force. So how did that happen that they got so much help? In the Netherlands 75% of the Jews were killed. Most of those people are rounded up by Dutch police, not by Germans. What happened? Now, here, timing is very important. The earlier the Germans attacked, the more the people in the occupied countries thought that the Germans were going to win the war and the right thing to do was to cooperate with them. And that has something to do with what

happened in the Netherlands. But in Eastern Europe, the real explanation is the Jews got caught in the crossfire between nationalism and communism because those countries Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union and had been subjected in the early '30s to a great famine. The hatred of Stalin was enormous. These people wanted their independence, which they now have. And when the Germans marched in, they thought, "If we curry favor with the Germans, then maybe they will give us our independence. And besides, many of us don't like Jews anyway and have deep-seated anti-semitic feelings. If the price of cooperating with the Germans is helping the Germans to kill Jews, we're in." And in Lithuania it was the same story. And in Poland it wasn't about nationalism because there was no chance that the Germans were ever going to give Poland independence, but it was about anti-communism and the way in which Poles were constantly told, not just by the Germans, but by their own leadership, many of their own political parties, that, "The Jews always sympathize with communism."

If you were a Jew living in eastern Poland in 1941, knowing what the Nazis had done to the Jews in western Poland when they occupied the country, what would you choose between Hitler and Stalin? The saying at the time was, "Stalin brought life imprisonment, but Hitler brings the death sentence." And so there was a certain truth to the fact that some Jews in this part of the world thought that their only survival mechanism available was to cooperate with the Soviet Union, but most Jews didn't do this, yet the nationalists in all of these countries portrayed the Jews as pro-Soviet and they portrayed the Nazis as potentially on our side. And the Jews got caught in this conflict and increasingly in those countries, the anti-communist people chose up sides with the Nazis and helped in the killing.

Bio



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Es catedrático de Historia y Alemán. Especialista en la Alemania moderna durante el dominio Nazi y en el Holocausto. Es Profesor Emérito de estudios sobre el Holocausto en la Theodore Zev Weiss Holocaust Educational Foundation en la Northwestern University, así como miembro del Comité Académico del United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Ha recibido numerosos premios por su labor como docente, que combina con la escritura.

Historians, generally, shy away from why questions. We often think that the way to deal with the complexity of the past is to show people how things happened and they will deduce from that why, but the Holocaust is such an enormous subject that it's hard to proceed that way. We have wonderful narrative histories of the Holocaust that tell the story from beginning to end. I don't think anyone will ever do it better than Saul Friedländer. It's two volumes, though, and it's 2,000 pages and when you get to the end, it's hard to still have a clear idea of why these events occurred. I have tried to do this by chopping it up in smaller questions, asking why those things developed that way in hopes that we will all get a sense of why the whole thing unfolded as it did.