The Holocaust and World War II

The Holocaust and World War II: In History and In Memory

Edited by

Nancy E. Rupprecht and Wendy Koenig

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

NANCY E. RUPPRECHT AND WENDY KOENIG

This volume of articles, based on papers originally presented at the Ninth International Holocaust Studies Conference at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is an important contribution to scholarship insofar as it focuses on the connection between World War II and the Holocaust as it was lived as well as how it is remembered, commemorated and taught. It is a unique contribution to scholarship not only because it is truly interdisciplinary in terms of subject and content, but because it explores a variety of methodological approaches to supplement traditional historical research and argumentation.

After this introductory essay, the book is divided into four additional sections. The second section consists of two brief histories, one a military history of World War II and another that discusses the origins and development of the Holocaust. This section is included primarily for the benefit of students or general readers who are not specialists in these areas of history. "World War II: A Brief History" was written by Gerhard L. Weinberg, author of *A World at Arms; A Global History of World War II* and Professor Emeritus of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The Holocaust: A Brief History" was written by Nancy E. Rupprecht, Professor of History, Chair of MTSU Holocaust Studies Program and co-editor of this volume.

The third section of the book, titled "History As It Was Lived" includes six articles. The first three consider individuals of the WW II era who made an important impact on the Holocaust and WW II, for better or for worse, as well an ordinary person whose life was irrevocably changed by these catastrophic years. The final three articles of this section examine some of the significant events of this era from a different perspective by utilizing new methodological approaches or exploring topics that have been long neglected by historians. These include a consideration of the impact of class, gender and geography in occupied Slovenia during the Second World War and an investigation of the

Massacre of black French African troops on the Western front in 1940 as well as in German POW camps.

The fourth section of the book, titled "History As It Is Taught" evaluates pedagogical approaches used to expand awareness and preserve the memory of WW II and the Holocaust through academic education. It includes articles that discuss Holocaust pedagogy and scholarship in both Europe and North America.

The fifth and final section of the book, titled "History As It Is Remembered," discusses strategies used to commemorate WWII and the Holocaust. The first two articles discuss how memories have been expressed though a variety of narrative approaches, including oral testimony, literature, and graphic narrative, also known as the medium of sequential art. The final three articles analyze how the history of that era, including the relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust, has been presented and commemorated in museums and memorials.

History As It Was Lived

The first three papers of Part III focus on individuals, while the last three papers discuss historical events. Gerhard L. Weinberg contributes the article "Roosevelt, Truman and the Holocaust" In it he evaluates the difficult decisions made by American Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry S Truman in light of the perilous political climate of the United States during the 1930s and 1940s.

Roosevelt's determination to help ameliorate the persecution and suffering imposed by Adolf Hitler's dictatorship on his perceived enemies, especially Jews, ran afoul of both American immigration laws and conservative administrative policies put in place by his predecessors. Weinberg effectively counters the anti-Roosevelt arguments propounded by some scholars. He does this by explaining Roosevelt's reasons for enacting the specific policies he put in place to assist Europe's Jews rather than bombing the railroad lines to Auschwitz-Birkenau or similar actions that his critics advocate in hindsight. Weinberg demonstrates how the alternate policies Roosevelt pursued saved the lives of thousands of Jews by a variety of expedients including but not limited to the creation of the War Refugee Board. Roosevelt also unequivocally supported the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and the creation of an international tribunal to try war criminals in the post-war era.

Roosevelt's successor, Harry S Truman, contributed positively to mitigating the disaster of the Holocaust in several ways including insisting

on separating Holocaust victims from others in displaced persons camps. He supported the creation of an independent Jewish state in Palestine to which many European Holocaust victims wished to immigrate-–especially Polish Jews who often faced virulent antisemitism in their native country. Truman, on behalf of the United States, officially recognized the state of Israel within an hour of its creation despite a good deal of opposition both from abroad and from his own State Department.

Weinberg also explains how Truman—in opposition to the wishes of some of his allies who wished to summarily execute war criminals—effectively insisted on an international tribunal to try German and other criminal perpetrators. The preparations for those tribunals—including interrogations, oral testimony, affidavits and the collection of documents, films and other evidence—provide judges lawyers and others with literally millions of documents to argue and/or decide cases based on the principles established at International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, principles that set important precedents in international law that have been used to prosecute contemporary transgressors such as Slobodan Milošević and Charles Taylor. These documents and other materials also provide scholars with important tools to investigate the past as well as to refute the absurd theories of Holocaust deniers.

Weinberg's article provides scholars and students with important information to consider when evaluating WW II, the Holocaust and immediate post-war era, as well as the careers of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. The next article discusses some of the political impediments to saving European Jews put in Roosevelt's path by an obstructionist official in his own administration.

Steven L. Jacob's study discusses the career of American official Breckinridge Long, a man whose obstructionist policies may have been indirectly responsible for the deaths of thousands of European Jews during the Holocaust. Long, who became a friend of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War I, was appointed Ambassador to Italy during the early months of the Roosevelt presidency. Long 's admiration for Mussolini led to his recall to Washington, but in 1940 he was named Assistant Secretary of State in charge of its Immigrant Visa Division. That position enabled him to successfully utilize lies, distortions, and obstructionism to create a number of roadblocks to prevent thousands of Jews fleeing from discrimination and death in Europe from finding a refuge in the United States. Finally, in the face of determined opposition by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morganthau, Jr. and other key Roosevelt advisors, Long was demoted and removed from his position in 1944. He preferred to resign, thus eliminating one barrier to the

Roosevelt administration's determination to pursue a more aggressive policy to save European Jews.

In contradistinction to the articles above that consider policies concerning European Jews as a whole, Diane Plotkin's article discusses the fate of one of the millions of Jewish Holocaust victims. Leo Laufer was born to a family of Hasidic Jews in Lodz, Poland on March 15, 1924. The Laufers were so poor that when the Germans occupied Lodz, the family was not required to move because they already lived in the ghetto. Laufer rejected Hasidism but provided for his family by working in a factory and supplementing this income by conspiring with a Christian neighbor in a small-time smuggling operation. When Laufer refused to cut a fellow Jew into it, he reported Laufer to the Gestapo who arrested and deported him to a series of five different forced labor camps between 1940-1943. Ironically, had he not been arrested, he probably would have been transported to the death camp of Chelmno with his family in 1942.

After enduring extreme privation, surviving typhus and experiencing brutality at the hands of non-German guards, he was transported in a cattle car to Auschwitz-Birkenau in August, 1943. In comparison with what he had endured, Auschwitz seemed an improvement to him over his previous camps. Probably because he arrived at Auschwitz at a time when the labor supply was low, he was assigned to a work camp devoted to weaving and plaiting after being issued clean clothing and allowed to shower and shave. Things changed for the worse in October, 1944 when Laufer was transferred to Buchenwald, his seventh and most horrifying camp. Selected for the infamous death march from that camp, Laufer escaped and hid for four days in a cave until he eventually found safe harbor with the American army in Ohrdruf.

Plotkin argues that Laufer survived by a combination of wit, adaptability and luck, but she also believes that the privations of his youth, living in cramped quarters with little food and no running water or inside plumbing, taught him survival techniques that were extremely useful during the Holocaust. Laufer's life illustrates the fact that amid the horror and death designed for the Jews of Europe by Adolf Hitler and facilitated by the indifference of the world, such stories of survival are worth remembering.

Andrej Pančur's article, "The Holocaust in the Occupied Slovenian Territories: The Importance of Class, Gender and Geography" provides the transition from individuals to events in this section because it discusses the impact of the events of the *Shoah* on different categories of people. He argues that there are few absolutes applicable to an analysis of the fate of Jewish and gentile residents in the occupied Slovene territories during

World War II. Using a database of 95,000 individuals, Pančur concludes that geographical location was of primary importance in determining the likelihood of an individual's survival, especially for Jews. For example, 16 percent of Jews from parts of Slovenia occupied by Germany and Italy, where relatively few Jews lived, perished during the Holocaust, while 84 percent of Jewish residents living in Hungarian occupied territory, where the majority of Jews were clustered, died during the *Shoah*.

Pančur also uses his database to draw related conclusions about the survival rate of gentile and Jewish residents of occupied Slovenia based on age, social class and gender. He establishes that among the gentile Slovenian population, in comparison with farmers, people who were public officials, teachers, artisans or traders had four times less chance to survive WW II. He also demonstrates that those most likely to perish were born after 1900 and that men accounted for 89 percent of all victims. On the other hand, Pančur explains that a person's occupation did not matter for Jews who were universally selected for death, but that age was a factor in determining the likelihood that an individual Jew would survive. Children and "elderly" people were far more likely to die than those between 15 and 45 years of age. He also concludes that Jewish men were far more likely to survive than Jewish women. While some historians have attributed the higher death rate of Jewish women to Hitler's determination to wipe out the next generation of Jews, Pančur argues that the higher survival rate for men is due to the probability that more men than women were pressed into forced labor camps where they had a higher survival rate than those sent directly to the death camps.

Rebecca Margolis's article, "Hitler *In Kinderland*: Holocaust Writing for Children in the Canadian Yiddish Press: 1938-1945," emphasizes the link between the events of the war and the Holocaust reported in the Yiddish press. This article illustrates the fact that, in contrast to conventional historical wisdom that few people in North American understood the depth of antisemitic persecution before and during the Second World War, information about the Holocaust was easily available to readers of Yiddish newspapers both in articles directed toward adults and in columns for children.

Contrary to the mainstream media's marginalization of Jewish genocide during the Second World War, Canada's largest Yiddish daily newspaper, Montreal's *Keneder Adler* (*Canadian Jewish Eagle*) revealed the diverse ways in which the Jewish community responded to the mass murder of European Jews between 1938 and 1945, even in articles aimed at children. In the Yiddish press the writers mourned the dead, called for action on behalf of the living and insisted that silence was not an option.

Readers and writers who were part of the Yiddish speaking community were forced to come to terms with discrimination, expropriation and destruction that was part of a long history of Jewish persecution and, simultaneously, barbarity without precedent.

In *In kinderland* (Children's Land), a column intended for the *Keneder Adler's* youngest readers, children were not sheltered from the events of the Holocaust. For example, during the spring of 1944, the column referred openly to the destruction of human life on a scale without precedent. Both senior journalists and young writers contributed articles that made specific reference to the millions of Jews murdered by the Nazis. For the readers of the column, as for the Yiddish press as a whole, the war was inextricably linked with the fate of the Jews in direct and immediate ways. The peril facing the Jews was a constant presence on the front and editorial pages, as well as throughout the rest of the newspaper. Margolis focuses on the weekly *In kinderland* column to determine the ways in which themes, images, events, and people associated with the Holocaust appeared in writing authored for and by children.

Raffael Scheck, author of *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940*, contributes an article titled "Racial Hatred: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940" to this volume. The most prominent group of these victims was several thousand French Algerian soldiers who were massacred by the German army during the western campaign of 1940. Countless other black soldiers were killed in sectors of the front where German units secretly agreed not to take any black prisoners. Those black Africans who survived were forced to endure an extremely brutal march to prisoner of war camps; they were provided with neither food nor water and sometimes were exposed to random abuses and/or murder by their guards.

Scheck's essay also places the experiences of the black French African prisoners of war into the broader context of the treatment of black people by the Nazis. He establishes the fact that black people in Hitler's Germany experienced severe discrimination, but he also argues that they did not suffer the systematic, relentless and radicalizing persecution meted out to Jews. Instead, Scheck argues that the National Socialist regime believed that the Jews manipulated black people to weaken the "Higher Culture" established by Germans by diluting its genetic stock and, thereby, eventually undermining the Third Reich. It is important to remember that in an era in which blatant racism was a fact of life in much of the world, the absurdity of Hitler's racial politics might not have been as clear to his contemporaries as it is in hindsight.

History As It Is Taught

Part IV of the book features articles that address pedagogical and theoretical aspects of Holocaust education. The first two articles investigate how existing and emerging historical research may be incorporated into Holocaust-related curricula and classroom projects. In "New Historical Accounts of the Holocaust in France and Italy" Rennie Brantz considers recent work by a variety of scholars (Paula Hyman, Renee Poznanski, Henri Russo, Susan Zuccotti, Michele Sarfatti) investigating local collaboration with the Third Reich on the part of public officials and private individuals in France and Italy and offers suggestions as to how recent historical research related to the Holocaust may be integrated into the classroom. Such attempts will allow students and teachers to discuss not only facts related to the Holocaust itself but to appreciate how historical accounts are supplemented and, sometimes, altered with the emergence of new research and perspectives.

In the second article, "Authenticating Polish-Jewish Relations During the Holocaust in the Historical Fiction of Uri Orlev," Rosemary Horowitz argues for the use of "authentication projects" (assignments using nonfiction sources to validate facts in historical fiction) by social studies, language arts and other K-12 teachers in the United States who are interested in including works of historical fiction as part of their approach to Holocaust education. After an introduction to Polish-Israeli author Uri Orlev's Holocaust-related novels for young adults, Horowitz outlines a number of possible projects that draw together incidents from the novels with commonly-used designations such as "perpetrators," "victims," "bystanders," "helpers," "resisters," and "smugglers." Each designation is paired with correlative historical texts that may be used to "authenticate" Orlev's fictional representation of Holocaust-era events.

The third article, "Germany is NOT *Judenfrei*: Including the Study of Post-Holocaust Jewish Life in Germany in Holocaust Education," by Ann L. Saltzman and Joshua Kavaloski, expands the discussion of Holocaust education to include college-level study tours. This article emerged following a 2007 study tour to four German cities (Munich, Nuremberg, Berlin and Dresden) during which the authors (acting as leaders of the trip) required students to not only visit historical sites but also to interact with a variety of individuals, including Holocaust survivors, German government representatives, Jewish community members and scholars. Comprised of a semester-long pre-departure course, entitled "German-Jewish Literature and Culture Before, During and After the Holocaust" and a three week visit to Germany, the experience, as described in the article, reveals the

differences between regions in their attempts to memorialize, or downplay, the Holocaust. Although the authors note that not all Jewish communities are united, they emphasize encouraging trends such as the reestablishment of Jewish communities in Germany, including the construction of new synagogues. This method/approach forced students to rethink the assumption that German Jews who survived the Second World War necessarily immigrated to Israel, the United States or other countries, and encouraged them to consider the ongoing tensions and sense of fragmentation found within Jewish communities in Germany today.

Anatoly Podolsky, Director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, contributes the fourth article, "The Holocaust in Ukraine: The Place of National Collective Memory" to this section. He argues that an understanding of Holocaust history has been impeded in Ukraine because scholars, journalists, teachers and students fail to recognize the reality that Jews and Jewish culture are not alien to their country but are a part of the multicultural society that Ukraine has become in the post-war era. One example of compartmentalizing Ukrainian history that Podolsky views as a major obstacle to correctly understanding World War II and the Holocaust is the fact that the *Holodomor* (the Great Famine of 1932-1933 deliberately engineered by Stalin) is depicted as a Ukrainian tragedy while the Holocaust generally is portrayed as an exclusively Jewish problem separate from the whole of society. He maintains that Ukrainian history will be understood correctly and completely when the educational establishment integrates the history of all ethnic groups and expunges the xenophobia, interethnic intolerance and antisemitism from the curriculum. After a synopsis of Ukrainian Holocaust education since it was made mandatory in secondary schools in the 1990s and recommended by the Minister of Education and Science to be included as part of the university curricula in 2000, Podolsky argues that some positive developments have occurred that he hopes eventually will result in an appreciation of WW II and Holocaust history in Ukraine in a genuinely multicultural context.

The fifth and concluding article of this section will be "Some Basic Problems in Implementing Holocaust Education" by Joachim Neander. As a researcher and teacher involved with curriculum development, evaluation and extracurricular Holocaust education, Neander raises important questions related to the stated ambitions associated with Holocaust education and points to the potential pitfalls that stem from ignoring what may be described as the "hidden curriculum": i.e. the totality of all of the "messages communicated by the organization and operation of schooling apart from the official or public statements of school mission and subject area curriculum guidelines." Beginning with a

discussion of the educational guidelines suggested by the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF), Neander explores how some of the strategies commonly used in Holocaust education may, in fact, produce results far from those intended, particularly in relation to combating antisemitism, teaching tolerance and countering Holocaust denial. The article also discusses the "transfer of learning" problem (the application of skills and knowledge in one context being applied in another context) in relation to Holocaust education, in that the emphasis on affective rather than cognitive learning makes assessment difficult and highly subjective. Neander concludes with an inquiry into the genuine possibility of "learning from history" and suggests pedagogical strategies, such as the "taxi driver" concept of "picking up the child where he or she is standing," that acknowledge different backgrounds, belief systems and living situations, in the hope of enhancing the effectiveness of Holocaust education around the world.

History As It Is Remembered

The fifth and final part, "History As It Is Remembered," opens with two articles that consider how selected works of Holocaust literature challenge the widely accepted narrative, either through expanding the definition of "victim" to include suicides or by pushing the boundaries of acceptable genre when representing the memories of child survivors of the *Shoah*. Mark A. Mengerink's article, "Suicide in Alexander Donat's *The Holocaust Kingdom:* Recovering 'Unrecorded Voices'," investigates Donat's strategies in his memoir for recovering said "voices" and discusses the work's limitations in this capacity. Through an examination of the "motives" that Donat imparts to the described suicides, Mengerink reveals that such attempts often fall short, sometimes due to the nature of suicide during the Holocaust but also because of Donat's emphasis on the themes of responsibility to family and abandonment throughout his memoir.

In "Childhood, Photography and Comics: Narrating the Shoah in *Paroles d'étoiles,*" Audrey Brunetaux discusses the graphic narrative *Paroles d'étoiles*, the result of a collaboration between Jean-Pierre Guéno, director of Radio France Editions, and cartoonist Serge Le Tendre that recounts the suffering of Jewish children and teenagers in Occupied France during the Second World War. Using a combination of survivor testimony, photographs and comic frames, the authors transgress the conventions associated with the Holocaust memoir while producing a hybrid form that traverses the gap between past and present, childhood and adulthood, and public and personal history. Brunetaux argues that the visual force of the book and the dialogical narrative, created

through the re-appropriation of testimony through the narrator's rather than the survivor's voice, demonstrates that the graphic narrative is an "appropriate and ethical form of literary representation" to portray and witness the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators.

The remaining three articles in Part V discuss strategies used by various museums dedicated to the commemoration of the Holocaust. In "'Sound' History: Acoustic Design in Holocaust Museums," Wendy Koenig, art historian and co-editor of this volume, investigates the auditory features of the permanent exhibitions at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, Illinois and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. as well as the "processional" aspect of the exhibition layouts, particularly areas within the layout that allow visitors to bypass sound-based displays. Koenig describes examples of increased consideration of "soundscapes" and auditory experiences in historical research in order demonstrate the legitimacy of this mode of inquiry. She argues that the role of acoustic design in Holocaust museum exhibitions must receive more attention, given the shift away from "object-centered" exhibitions, which give primacy to the visual, and the move toward the experiential approach of "story-centered" museums, which rely less heavily on "authentic" objects in favor of reconstructions based upon oral histories and recollection. In addition to revealing how many of the auditory experiences offered by Holocaust museums are either easily bypassed or stand in competition with one another, due to acoustic bleed, Koenig also discusses how decisions regarding the use of sound, whether it be the voices of particular individuals as witnesses or narrators or the inclusion of music and chants from Nazi rallies, are strongly influenced by the ideological mission of the particular institution. Koenig's article invites readers and museum visitors to bring critical eyes and ears to their encounters with Holocaust museum narratives.

The next article, "*Were the House Still Standing: Maine Survivors and Liberators Remember the Holocaust:* Digital Technology and New Media as a Means of Storytelling in Creating an Imaginative Template to Preserve Holocaust Testimony," is contributed by Professor of Art Robert Katz and acoustic ecologist Douglas Quin. The authors relate the events that led to the founding of the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine (HHRC) and describe the collaborative efforts that resulted in the multi-media installation *Were the House Still Standing: Maine Survivors and Liberators Remember the Holocaust*, currently installed in the Michael Klahr Education Resource Center on the campus of the University of Maine at Augusta (also home to the HHRC). Seeking an artistic vision that would integrate storytelling and documentary, the design team, including Katz, Quin and documentary filmmaker Matt Dibble, created an installation that utilizes four synchronized

video streams, three wall-mounted screens and sixteen channels of audio. This approach integrates audio testimony with musical passages, soundscapes and sound effects. The authors emphasize that sound effects and music were considered central to the visitor experience from the outset of planning and the installation offers a variety of aural encounters. These include survivor testimony, soundscapes composed from site-specific recordings in the United States, Poland, Holland and France, archival recordings, themes and improvised variations on *niggunim* (melodic instrumental compositions). In response to Koenig's entreaty for a more studied consideration of acoustic design in Holocaust museums, Katz and Quin's article demonstrates how a genuinely communal visual and aural experience may be created within the museum space.

As described by Israeli architect and scholar Stephanie Rotem in her article "The Holocaust Taught and Commemorated in Museums," Holocaust museums "form a synthesis between historical research and emotional experiences." Her research considers the role played by certain architectural parameters, specifically light, layout and façade, in the construction of a particular Holocaust narrative and visitor experience. Rotem demonstrates how light design within exhibition spaces may serve a variety of metaphors, accentuating "democratic ideology" at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, "education" at The Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills, Michigan, "Zionism" at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and "resistance" at the Ghetto Fighter's Museum in Kibbutz Lochamel Hagetaot, Israel. Although sometimes less obvious to visitors, architects also employ symbolic forms within their plans to emphasize particular messages. Rotem discusses works, such as Daniel Libeskind's distorted Star of David layout at the Jewish Museum Berlin and its relationship to the absent Jews of Berlin. Additionally, the explains how the hexagon—the six sides representing the "six million"—in the "Hall of Remembrance" at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum is employed as a means to emphasize the uniqueness of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

PART II:

BRIEF HISTORIES

CHAPTER TWO

WORLD WAR II: A BRIEF HISTORY

GERHARD L. WEINBERG

After the Munich Conference, Adolf Hitler regretted having recalled his order to initiate hostilities. His "lesson" from Munich was never to pull back from war again, but to initiate hostilities in 1939. To keep his eastern border quiet while fighting Britain and France, he wanted the countries in the east to subordinate their policies to Germany. In the winter of 1938-39 he succeeded with Hungary and Lithuania. Poland's leaders, though they considered substantial concessions in serious negotiations, were unwilling to surrender this country's recently regained independence without a fight. Early in 1939 Hitler therefore decided to attack Poland in the fall and not to become involved in negotiations that might make it difficult to initiate hostilities, as he believed had happened in 1938. If Britain and France held to Poland, they would be fought at the same time; if not, their turn would come the following year. To avoid any danger of a peaceful settlement, his ambassadors in London, Paris, and Warsaw were kept from their posts in the critical days of August; and the final demands on Poland, designed to rally the German public, were withheld until they could be declared lapsed.[1]

Rather than the initiatives of Japan in seizing Manchuria in 1931 or Italy in attacking Ethiopia (Abyssinia) in 1935, the war initiated by Germany on September 1, 1939 is taken as the beginning of World War II, because Japanese and Italian actions were continuations of prior expansionist policies, not the implementation of truly new policies. As Hitler had explained to his military commanders days before the invasion of Poland, this was a war for the annihilation of Poland and its people, not

[1] For the immediate background, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy 1933-1939: The Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2005), Part 2, chaps. 26-28.

the attainment of some new border. His backdating his October 1939 authorization for the systematic killing of the handicapped and his moving forward the January 1939 public announcement of the intent to murder the Jews, in both cases to September 1, 1939, illuminate how Hitler saw the conflict as the beginning of the demographic revolution on a German-dominated globe. Neither the Italians nor the Japanese understood that this was not a war for specific pieces of land, bases, colonies, or status, like prior global conflicts such as the Seven Years War or World War I. This discrepancy in the purpose of the war contributed to the unwillingness and inability of the three nominal allies to develop substantial coordination in military operations and diplomacy.[2]

In the 1930's Josef Stalin had repeatedly signaled Berlin a willingness to work out an agreement, but he had been rebuffed. Since the Soviet Union had no common border with Austria or Czechoslovakia, his first targets, Hitler saw no point in a deal with Moscow. When Stalin gave signs of interest in agreement with Germany early in 1939, Hitler changed his attitude. The Soviet Union had a border with Poland and could help break any blockade of Germany that the western Powers might impose. Whatever concessions were made to Stalin for the quick crushing of Poland and economic assistance thereafter would be reclaimed by the speedy defeat of the Soviet Union after Germany's victory in the west. Hitler's thinking explains why German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was authorized to give Stalin whatever he wanted—including things the latter did not request.

The timing of the German-Soviet agreement of August 23, 1939 had an enormous impact on the war. In World War I, the Soviets had made a separate peace with Germany early in 1918. This enabled Germany to move forces from the eastern to the western front for major offensives there. By then, however, Germany had been so weakened by prior years of fighting, while the British and French were being reinforced by a growing stream of American soldiers, that the effort to defeat the Allies failed. In World War II, the Soviets made a deal with Germany just before rather than years into the war. The agreement enabled the Germans to drive the Allies off the continent in the north, the west, and the south, and it left the Soviet Union alone with the Germans in the east. As a result, the Soviet Union would be first in a poor position for defense against Germany, then in a good position for offense across the same land area, while the same agreement left the western allies first in a good defensive position,

[2] See the entry "Axis Strategy and Co-operation" in *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97-99.

protected by the Channel and the North Atlantic, then in a poor position for offensives: the water was equally wide in both directions.

The German invasion of Poland had been carefully prepared. Fake attacks in Germany by concentration-camp inmates, who had been murdered in Polish uniforms, provided the incidents to justify war. Once hostilities opened with a German air attack on a Polish town and bombardment of the Polish base in Danzig (Gdansk), German forces struck across the territory that Prussia had annexed from Poland in 1772 and returned in 1919. Major German units invaded Poland from East Prussia in the north and Silesia in the south. Having delayed their mobilization to avoid blame for a new war, lacking modern military equipment, and trying to defend a long border, the Poles were defeated rapidly in spite of spirited resistance at several pints.[3] Some Polish soldiers escaped to the west via Romania to continue fighting; several Polish warships escaped, and Polish intelligence shortly before the war had provided the British and French with equipment and information about their success in breaking into the German enigma coding system. Polish hopes of continuing resistance through the winter from eastern Poland were crushed by the Red Army, which invaded Poland from the east. German and Soviet soldiers met and moved to an agreed partition line.

The British government of Neville Chamberlain had warned Berlin that an attack on Poland would lead to war. When the Germans refused to withdraw, England declared war, followed by France and the dominions of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Union of South Africa took longer because of division among the white population, while the Irish Free State declared neutrality. The war at sea began immediately, but the French and British did not believe that they could mount a major offensive in the west until their forces, especially the British army, were much stronger. In spite of German massive air attacks on cities in Poland, the Royal Air Force faced rigid restrictions. Instead of bombs, it dropped leaflets on German cities, hoping that the German people might resist their government. Although there were a few doubters in the Third Reich, and a tiny minority in the military and political elite did attempt to overthrow the Hitler regime later in the war, the bulk of the German population held to the government until the end.[4]

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[3] A fine recent account may be found in Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity,* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

[4] For a general survey of the war on all fronts, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II,* new edition, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Hitler hoped to launch an attack in the west through Holland and Belgium in the late fall of 1939, but the need for clear weather (so the German air force could support the advancing troops) and doubts among German military commanders led to postponements through the winter. During this interval, four important developments altered the situation. The Soviet Union began to annex the three Baltic States, but Finland refused to make the territorial and diplomatic concessions that Moscow demanded. Anticipating a campaign of a few days, the Soviets attacked Finland at the end of November but ran into trouble, as effective Finish resistance caused heavy casualties. A massive onslaught early in 1940 caused Finland to sue for peace. Stalin abandoned the puppet government that he had intended to install and agreed to terms in March 1940. This conflict had two effects that were significant for the wider war. First, it drove Finland into the arms of Germany in 1941, in hopes of recovering territory lost by the peace treaty and perhaps of acquiring more. Second, it confirmed the German perception of a weak Red Army, as Hitler and his generals saw the checks it had received but not that its soldiers had fought on in the face of losses, inadequate training and equipment, and terrible weather.

The second important development during what was called the "phony war" was a series of soundings by some in Germany about their overthrowing Hitler and making peace if the Allies would make peace on reasonable terms. These soundings went through several channels, including the Vatican. The Allies gave hints of interest in an arrangement, but the Germans did not act against the regime. Since some of those who had been thought to oppose the Nazi regime were subsequently active in preparing the invasion of the two neutral Scandinavian countries and then the three neutral Low Countries, no British government thereafter listened to such soundings unless the German opposition first acted at home.

The third development during the winter was the preparation of German plans for invading Norway and Denmark. The Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, Admiral Erich Raeder, began urging an invasion of Norway in October 1939 (assuming that Denmark would be occupied to assure communication with Norway) for two main reasons. He was anxious to avoid the situation that Germany's navy had faced in World War I, when it was confined to the North Sea without secure access to the Atlantic. Secondly, in the winter, when the Baltic Sea was frozen, Germany depended on the transportation of Swedish iron by train to the Norwegian port of Narvik and then by ship to Germany. Hitler rejected Raeder's simultaneous advice to initiate hostilities with the United States, since Germany had neither completed building its own navy to fight the

American navy nor did it have an ally with such a fleet. After some consideration, Hitler agreed to invading Norway and Denmark. Plans were made for a combined operation with most of the German surface fleet, substantial air units, and army forces transported by parachute and ship.

The fourth development during the winter was a change in the German plan for attack in the west. As Hitler had explained in 1938, this campaign was to begin with a strike through the Netherlands, as well as Belgium and Luxembourg—not only through the latter two, as in World War I. The original concept was for a sweep with an emphasis on the right flank. However, the western Allies prepared for such a thrust. Doubt was thrown onto the German design when a German plane made an emergency landing in Belgium with material on the original plan. Thereafter, primarily at the insistence of German intelligence officers, who correctly anticipated what the French and British would do, the concept was changed. Now the Germans planned to thrust through the Ardennes on the left flank of the attack and cut toward the English Channel. Relying on a slow reaction by the western Allies to this attack, the Germans would entrap whatever forces the Allies sent into the Low Countries.[5]

Before the clearing of the weather made the western offensive possible, the Germans struck in Scandinavia. In early April 1940 German warships with troops aboard secretly left for Copenhagen, Oslo, and additional Norwegian harbors, including Narvik. While the Danish government surrendered, the Norwegian government refused to do so. Its guns sank a German heavy cruiser on the approaches to Oslo. The king and his government left to continue the fight rather than surrender to Germany or the Norwegian Nazi, Vidkun Quisling, who gave his name to traitors thereafter. Allied forces tried to aid the Norwegians, but with the temporary exception of Narvik, which they abandoned once the Germans struck in the west in May, they operated in such confused fashion that the Germans took over the country. The Allied troops were evacuated, and in London the fiasco ironically brought to power its architect, Winston Churchill.

Two other aspects of the fight for Norway had significant repercussions. First, although during the naval battles accompanying the struggle for Norway the British took substantial losses, including the aircraft carrier "Glorious," the losses of the German navy proved more significant. The Germans lost several cruisers and numerous destroyers, and their only two battle cruisers, the "Scharnhorst" and the "Gneisenau," were damaged. Both were out of commission during the critical months of the summer

[5] Ernest R. May, *Strange victory: Hitler's Conquest of France,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

and early fall of 1940. While the victory of the British in the Battle of Britain was won in the air, the German' failure to attempt an invasion was due at least as much to their naval losses in the Norwegian campaign.

The second aspect of long-term significance concerned the Soviet Union. The Soviets had assisted the German invasion of Norway, especially by providing a naval base on Soviet territory from which the Germans shipped essential material to Narvik. German control of Norway's naval and air bases had a major impact on Allied efforts to send supplies to the Soviet Union once the Germans attacked this country. Both the great losses suffered by Allied supply convoys to Russia's northern ports and the periodic interruptions in sending such convoys resulted partly from the prior Soviet policy of helping Germany.

On May 10, 1940, the Germans began their invasion of Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg with parachute drops at critical points and armored thrusts at the southern portion of the new front. The French and British tried to assist the invaded neutrals by moving forward, as they had planned and the Germans anticipated. Furthermore, the French supreme commander, General Maurice Gamelin, sent the major French reserve forces into Holland. So when the Germans broke through in the Ardennes and headed for the Channel, no substantial Allied forces were available to plug the gap.

With no effective attack on the German thrust from both flanks, hopeless confusion in the French command structure, and the surrender of the Dutch and Belgian forces, the British commander, Lord Gort, saved the British and part of the French units that had been cut off, ordering a retreat to Dunkirk for evacuation. The German commander, Gerd von Rundstedt, wished to maintain a strong armored force to attack southward against new defenses that the French were developing, and, with Hitler's agreement, he temporarily halted the armored divisions that were headed for Dunkirk. Hitler hoped that Hermann Göring's promise to destroy the Allied force from the air could be implemented. Because the area was close to the bases of the Royal Air Force, this proved impossible. Although the Allies suffered heavy losses and left their vehicles and other equipment, over two hundred thousand British and over one hundred thousand French soldiers were carried to England, where the former played a significant role in rebuilding the British army.

The German thrust south quickly broke through the dissolving French army. Against those who wanted to continue the fight from North Africa, the new French leader, Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain, requested an armistice on June 17. Eager to finish the fighting in the west in order to turn east, Hitler arranged terms that involved the occupation of much of

France—including its Atlantic coast—but he did not include the more extravagant conditions that Italy demanded. Pétain's government would be called after the small town of Vichy where it resided in unoccupied France. It was allowed to keep a small army at home and larger forces in the colonies. There, at the Marshal's orders, they fought the British, the Free French, and the Americans, but never the Germans, Italians, or Japanese, whenever any moved into French territories. The Free French were those who followed General Charles De Gaulle in refusing to cease fighting. They did so from the basis first of his headquarters in London, then from French colonies in Africa and the South Pacific that supported De Gaulle.

The dramatic German victories in the west led to decisions in the world's capitals that framed the rest of World War II. Under Churchill's leadership, the London government decided to fight on, and it had the bulk of the population behind it. The hope was that Britain could hold off or defeat a German invasion but, if not, it would continue the war from Canada (where the country's gold and foreign securities reserves were shipped), while guerrillas made the occupation forces uncomfortable. Victory was anticipated at the end of a long war, in which blockade was to combine with uprisings among the conquered peoples of Europe, whom the Germans' policies were certain to antagonize, substantial bombardment of Germany, and possibly help from the United States. A major feature of German actions up to this point, the bombing of cities and strafing of civilian refugees, reduced restrictions on the Royal Air Force in 1940.

In Germany, a major repercussion and three decisions flowed from the victories. The repercussion was enormously increased public enthusiasm for the regime. The lengthy and eventually unsuccessful struggle on the western front in World War I appeared to have been replaced by a quick victory. Most of the doubting minority now rallied to those who were already convinced.

The new decisions involved both the eastern and western Fronts. Even before the French request for an armistice, General Franz Halder, chief of the army's general staff, had begun to draft plans for an invasion of the Soviet Union. He understood that in Hitler's thinking the campaign in the west was preliminary to the seizure of vast lands in the east. Other German military leaders also drew up such plans. Hitler hoped, like Halder, that the invasion could be launched in the fall of 1940. Examination of the steps needed to implement this project convinced Hitler by the end of July 1940, however, that this plan was not practical. He set the invasion for late spring or early summer of 1941. The two countries that the Soviet Union had, with German assistance, deprived of parts of their land, Finland and

Romania, were expected to join Germany in attacking the Soviets. German military and diplomatic preparations for a combined offensive in the east accordingly began in the late summer of 1940.[6]

The second German decision was to try to crush Britain quickly before turning east. The islands were to be invaded and occupied. Detailed arrest lists were compiled. These would be implemented by police headed by the same person who was later designated for Moscow, Alfred Six. An invasion presupposed control of the air. In the ensuing Battle of Britain, the British won because of a combination of excellent fighter planes and pilots, the skilled utilization of radar, and inadequate numbers of German planes and pilots. Without a substantial navy to shield a landing force, the Germans turned to bombing British cities in the hope of forcing surrender. Although it caused casualties and damage, this effort from August 1940 to May 1941 failed to lessen the determination of the British public and government.[7]

The third decision, which was ordered and temporarily implemented before all the others, was to prepare for war with the United States. Armaments preparations for such a conflict had begun in 1937, and keels for the first of the super-battleships believed needed had been laid down in early 1939. Construction was halted when Germany started the war. Now that war in the west was believed over, construction on the blue-water navy was ordered resumed on July 11, 1940. German insistence on ownership of air and naval bases in Northwest Africa for war against the United States led to Spain's refusal to enter the conflict, and the German naval building program was again halted in the fall of 1941, but for a while it looked as if the wars that Hitler intended would be carried out according to his preferences.[8]

The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had reluctantly refrained from entering the conflict in 1939. As he saw Germany winning in early 1940, he decided to join in order to assure Italy part of the spoils. Although he had talked loudly about the benefits of war, he had not prepared the Italian military for a major conflict. Once they entered the war, Italian forces made no substantial advances against the French, contributed minimally to the bombing of Britain, added a bit more to German submarine operations in the Atlantic, and failed dismally in Africa. The brief Italian drive into

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[6] Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union 1939-1941,* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

[7] Richard Overy, *The Battle of Britain: The Myth and the Reality,* (New York: Norton, 2000).

[8] Norman J. W. Goda, *Tomorrow the World: Hitler, Northwest Africa, and the Path toward America,* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998).

British Somaliland was soon reversed, as British forces overran Italian Northeast Africa in the winter of 1940-41. A delayed minimal offensive from Libya into Egypt was soon reversed by the victory of numerically inferior British troops, who thereupon advanced into Libya. Fearful that Germany's moving troops into Romania (as part of plans to attack the Soviet Union, which Hitler had not shared) would threaten Italian aspirations in the Balkans, Mussolini ordered an ill-prepared and soon blocked invasion of Greece. The war that Mussolini imagined almost over was just beginning, and his German ally had to bail Italy out in Africa as well as the Balkans.[9]

Spain's dictator Francisco Franco also wanted to enter the war quickly, before it ended, hoping for great colonial expansion in Africa. When he discovered that the Germans expected full ownership of bases on and off the coast of northwest Africa—and began to see that the war might not be over—Franco decided not to enter the conflict. He subsequently assisted the German submarine campaign and German intelligence, and was eager to help the Germans in other ways, but he refrained from entering hostilities.

The first Soviet response to Germany's victories was quickly to gather in anything that Berlin had promised earlier, lest peace break out. The Baltic States were formally annexed, as was a large part of Romania, some of it once Russian, some once Austrian. There were hopes of further gains, but these were thwarted by Germany. Stalin never grasped that the Germans' changed policy toward Finland and Romania was part of a plan to attack the Soviet Union. He hoped to continue the alignment with Germany, sent Foreign Commissar Molotov to Berlin to work out a new arrangement, and devoted the following months to forging an agreement with Berlin. Neither his own intelligence agency's securing a copy of the German invasion plan in December 1940 nor a confirming summary of it provided by the United States in February 1941 could awaken Stalin. He made many conciliatory gestures to Berlin, but he never understood the reason behind the silence these evoked

Having suffered defeat by Soviet forces at Nomonhan in 1939, the Tokyo government decided that it was time to seize European colonial possessions in south and southeast Asia. Japan took the first steps in this direction in September 1940, joining an alliance with Germany and Italy and moving troops into northern French Indo-China. Concern about striking before the United States left its bases in the Philippines in 1946

[9] There is a series of books on Italy's role in the war by MacGregor Knox beginning with *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).