

# The Holocaust: Memories and History



The Holocaust:  
Memories and History

Edited by

Victoria Khiterer

with

Ryan Barrick  
David Misal

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Edited by Victoria Khiterer, Ryan Barrick and David Misal

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5477-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5477-1

*Dedicated to the Memory of  
Maria (Musia) Brovarnik  
and her sons  
Victor and Anatolii Brovarnik,  
killed by the Nazis  
in Rostov-on-Don in August 1942*



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume includes selected papers from the 2010, 2011 and 2012 Millersville University Conferences on the Holocaust and Genocide. I was the Director of the 2011 and 2012 conferences and helped organize the 2010 conference.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their innovative essays that constitute this volume and for their advice and encouragement. I want to thank especially Dr. Carol Garrard, who gave me the original idea to start this project, and Professor Antony Polonsky, whom I consulted numerous times during the preparation phase of the manuscript.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Millersville University administration and conference donors for their generous ongoing support of the conferences. I am also very grateful to my colleagues, the former Directors of the Millersville University Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, Professors Jack Fischel and Saulius Suziedelis for their mentoring and providing detailed instructions for preparation of the conference. I would like to give my thanks to Professor of San Diego State University Lawrence Baron, and Professors of Millersville University and Conference Organizational Committee members Onek Adyanga, Robert Bookmiller, Dennis Downey, and Tanya Kevorkian, and the Conference Administrator, Ms. Maggie Eichler, who provided exceptional help in the organization of the conferences. I want to give my special thanks to the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences Dr. Diane Umble and the Chair of the History Department Dr. Ronald Frankum for their support for the preparation of the conferences and encouragement of my work on the conference proceedings.

I would like to thank Judith Cohen, the Director of the Photographic Reference Collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Dr. Daniel Uziel, the Head of the Photo Collection of Yad Vashem Archives, and to Das Bundesarchiv (Koblenz, Germany) for allowing use of their archival photographic materials as illustrations for the volume.

Two of my students, David Misal and Ryan Barrick, co-edited the book with me. I am deeply indebted to them for their superb editorial work. I am also grateful my student Ashley Swift for her formatting of the text. Professor Marcus Levitt of the University of Southern California

performed an elegant polishing of several chapters, for which I give my sincere thanks.

My husband James Danaher devoted untold hours to perfecting the text and illustrations of this work. I am so grateful for his unflagging enthusiasm and for the inspiration that he gives me every day.

Without the collaborative work of many people, the preparation of the volume would certainly have been impossible. I appreciate their contributions, support, and encouragement throughout this endeavor.

Victoria Khiterer

## INTRODUCTION

### VICTORIA KHITERER

Where are you my boy?  
Where are you my dear?  
It seems you scream to me,  
From the ghetto fires ...

Moisei Teif, *Kikhelekh un  
Zemelekh*<sup>1</sup>

The mother and son of the Yiddish poet Moisei (Moishe) Teif (1904–1966) were killed by the Nazis in the Minsk ghetto. Teif devoted his poem *Kikhelekh un Zemelekh* (Cookies and Rolls) to the memory of his son. Many Holocaust survivors and bystanders were haunted by painful memories. Sometimes the memories were so traumatic that the survivors were unable to return to normal life. Some Holocaust survivors committed suicide after the war, many suffered from nervous breakdowns, and others died early, because the psychological trauma affected their health.

My mother's uncle Grigorii Brovarnik was mobilized into the Soviet Army as soon as Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. His wife Maria (Musia) and two children, eleven year old Victor and two year old Anatolii were killed by the Nazis with all other Jews in Rostov-on-Don in August 1942. Musia perhaps could have survived the Nazi occupation with her children, because her appearance was more Slavic than Jewish: she had blond hair and blue eyes. However her neighbor—*polizei* (a local member of the Nazi militia) denounced her to the Nazis.

Grigorii returned from the war as a disabled veteran, he lost both of his feet to frostbite in the battle for Stalingrad. Grigorii told my grandparents that he had nothing left to lose, he had lost already everything: his wife, sons, and his health. He said that if he found the traitor who denounced his family, he would strangle him with his bare hands. Grigorii was not afraid of anything, because in any case he did not want to live after his family perished. But the traitor disappeared after the war. Grigorii died in 1949 at the age of forty-seven from a heart attack.

The memories of the Holocaust survivors affected also the next generation, who often felt that they grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust. The painful memories that Holocaust survivors shared with their children often traumatized them. But in spite of the very traumatic character of memories about the Holocaust, the victims and survivors wanted that people never forget about their experience. Many Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, who did not hope to survive the war, wrote diaries and hid them in a clandestine archive, which was organized by the historian Emanuel Ringelblum. They did this, because they wanted to pass the true memory about their life to the world.<sup>2</sup>

Two thirds of European Jews (six of nine million) perished during the Holocaust. Often memories are all that is left of many of these people. These memories allow scholars better to understand the personal experience of Holocaust victims and bystanders and have, as a result, become a valuable source of information for a number of academic disciplines: history, philology, psychology, philosophy and arts. In addition, many films and fictional works also were inspired by the Holocaust survivors' reminiscences.

However, personal memories alone cannot restore the entire picture of the Holocaust. In many cases the Holocaust survivors, bystanders and perpetrators provide contradictory information about the same events. Often they did not know or do not remember the names of the victims and perpetrators and the exact dates of the events they are describing. Because of this scholars are obliged carefully to analyze these memories and compare them with other available sources. Furthermore, since the Nazis exterminated entire Jewish communities in many cities and towns of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust, personal memories are not always available for researchers. In such cases scholars use other available documentary sources and research methods: archival materials, including photography and films, archeology, and statistics. Thus through a combination of all available sources and research methods scholars enable us better to understand the Holocaust and other genocides.

This book is a collection of seventeen articles which analyze Holocaust memories, photo documents, literature and films, as well as teaching methods in Holocaust education. Most of these essays were originally presented as papers at the Millersville University Conferences on the Holocaust and Genocide in 2010–2012.

The first chapter of the book, *Holocaust by Bullets and Extermination Camps*, analyzes two different ways that the Nazis used to murder Jewish people: mass shooting in occupied Soviet territory and killing in gas chambers in Nazi extermination camps.

In his essay *Holocaust by Bullets—“Hitler’s Hidden Holocaust”?* **Peter Black** rejects the widespread view that the gas chambers were developed because the Nazis were psychologically traumatized with the mass shooting of Jews. Black shows that the Nazis used both methods of killing simultaneously: “gas chambers had been an instrument of Nazi mass murder well before the invasion of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia; shooting operations continued in occupied territories wherever that method was more practical, long after stationary killing centers were functioning in areas where they were more practical.”<sup>3</sup> Black also argues that the mass shooting of Jews in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was not “the hidden Holocaust,” which was allegedly discovered or rediscovered by Father Patrick Desbois.<sup>4</sup> The first scholarly publications on these topics appeared in the early and mid-1950s, but the mass shooting of Jews in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was overshadowed by the factories of death, the extermination camps, which had the capacity to kill tens of thousands of people per day. Thus the Soviet film-maker Roman Karmen reported that Babi Yar was “a country cemetery compared with Maidan [Majdanek concentration camp].”<sup>5</sup> Black wrote that another reason why the topic remained under-researched for a long time was the ban on discussion of the Holocaust in communist countries. Only with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe did Holocaust archival materials become available to scholars.

The second essay in chapter one, *Rethinking the Elimination of Traces of Mass Murder at the Treblinka Extermination Camp* by **Tomas Vojta**, is based on the testimonies of camp prisoners and perpetrators. The article describes the development of killing methods in Treblinka, one of the largest extermination camps where the Nazis killed between 870,000 and 925,000 Jews.<sup>6</sup> The essay also discusses how the Nazis, and after the war Polish communist authorities, attempted to erase the traces of the crime.

The second chapter of the book *Visualizing the Holocaust* analyzes the reliability of photo materials about the Holocaust. Soviet propaganda often falsified photographs for ideological reasons; because of this the West did not want to believe the Soviet photography about horrible Nazi crimes during the Holocaust. The Nazis, bystanders and victims of the Holocaust had a totally different outlook on the same events, and their photographs are affected by their views.

**David Shneer** shows in his essay *Is Seeing Believing? Photographs, Eyewitness Testimony, and Evidence of the Holocaust* that the West did not trust Soviet photojournalism due to its ideological bias. So when the Soviet media published photographs of the victims of the Holocaust, the

West considered these pictures unreliable. After the liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camp at Majdanek, the Soviets organized visits there of the local population and foreign journalists so that they could see for themselves this factory of death. Shneer also describes the new research methods of the Holocaust, which scholars have begun to use in the twenty first century. Thus to provide more evidence about the mass killing of the prisoners in Sobibor extermination camp archaeologists have recently began its excavation.

**Judith Cohen** shows in her essay *Jewish Ghetto Photographers* how differently Nazi and Jewish photographers saw the life of Jews in the East European ghettos. Although many Nazi photographers were professionals and provide the best quality pictures, there is no compassion in their photography to the sufferings of the ghetto inhabitants. Jewish photographers show many nuances and aspects of the Jewish life in the ghettos hidden from the Nazis. These pictures help us better to visualize the life of Jews in the ghettos.

Chapter Three *In the Shadow of the Holocaust* analyzes survivors' testimonies and memories about the Holocaust. The chapter deals also with collective memories about the Holocaust and its suppression in the Soviet Union.

**Judith Kaplan-Weinger** and **Yonit Hoffman** analyze in their essay *Testimonies of Jewish Holocaust Survivors: Characterizing the Narratives of Resistance and Resilience* the narrative testimonies of survivors who engaged in organized resistance activities and those who did not. They show that resilience was a key psychological characteristic of the individuals who joined partisan groups and actively resisted the Holocaust.

**Eric D. Miller's** essay *The Double-Edged Sword of Remembering the Holocaust: The Case of Jewish Self-Identity* shows that memories about the Holocaust shaped the self-identity and consciousness not only of the Holocaust survivors, but all Jewish people.

**Jacqueline Cherepinsky's** paper *Babi Yar: The Absence of the Babi Yar Massacre from Popular Memory* discusses why the memory of one of the largest massacres of Jews during the Holocaust is absent from the public consciousness. She explains that because of state anti-Semitism Soviet authorities intentionally erased all traces of the Holocaust from the collective memory.

Chapter Four *Representation of the Holocaust in Russian Literature* shows how many Soviet Jewish writers and poets experienced the Holocaust as shocking and traumatic, and turned to it in their writings. Many of them witnessed the Shoah as war correspondents and lost close relatives in the Holocaust. However Soviet censorship allowed

publications about the Holocaust only during the war and for a few years afterwards. With the development of the policy of state anti-Semitism in the late 1940s all publications about the Holocaust were forbidden in the Soviet Union.

**Maxim D. Shrayer** analyzes in his essay *Lev Ozerov as a Literary Witness to the Shoah in the Occupied Soviet Territories* the poem *Babi Yar* by Lev Ozerov (pen name of Lev Goldberg, 1914–1996). Ozerov visited his native Kiev after its liberation in November 1943. Based on eyewitness testimonies about the massacre in Babi Yar, Ozerov wrote an article *Kiev, Babi Yar* for Ilia Ehrenburg's and Vasily Grossman's *Black Book*.<sup>7</sup> Ozerov also described the horror of the Jewish massacre in Kiev in his poem *Babi Yar*. The poem was written in 1944–45 and published in 1946 and become one of the first Soviet literary works about the Shoah. Shrayer wrote “Given the dearth of official Soviet information about the Shoah, Ozerov's *Babi Yar* was—or immediately became—much more than a literary text.”<sup>8</sup> However the poem should not be over-read “as a historical document at the expense of its artistry and aesthetics.”<sup>9</sup>

**John and Carol Garrard** discuss the Holocaust theme in Grossman's novel *Life and Fate* in their essay *Art from Agony: Vasily Grossman and the Holocaust*. The book was banned by Soviet censorship and the manuscript was confiscated by the KGB in 1961. The reason for such harsh treatment of the book was not only the Holocaust theme, which was forbidden in the Soviet Union, but also the criticism of Stalinism in Grossman's work. A copy of the manuscript was smuggled to the West and published there in 1980. The book was published in the Soviet Union only with the liberalization of the political regime during *Perestroika* in 1989.<sup>10</sup> The Garrards show that Grossman's depiction of the Holocaust in his novel *Life and Fate* is based upon historical fact and the personal tragedy of the author. Grossman's mother and a mentally ill relative were killed during the massacre of the Jews of Berdichev. Based on archival materials, opened for researchers after the collapse of Communism, the Garrards reveal the history of the Berdichev massacre and found the names of its perpetrators and local collaborators.

**Victoria Khiterer's** essay *The Life and Fate of Soviet Jews in Aleksandr Galich's Play “Matrosskaia Tishina” and the Film “Papa”* discusses how the play and film represent important processes of Jewish life in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s – mid 1950s, including assimilation, the Holocaust and the Jewish national awakening. Both main characters of the play and film, the father Abram Schwartz and his son David, perished during World War II. Abram was killed by the Nazis in his native town Tul'chin, while David was mortally injured fighting

against the Nazis on the front. The Holocaust and the tragic fate of his father compelled David to rethink his negative attitude toward his Jewish origins and cause his national awakening just before his death.

Chapter Five *The Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide in Film* discusses the representation of the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide in film from the early Holocaust and genocide cinema to recently made films. The authors analyze the relevance and accuracy of Holocaust and Genocide representations, the possibilities and limitations for artistic expression of these themes.

**Stuart Liebman's** essay *Early Holocaust Cinema: Jews Under the Sign of the Cross* analyzes four early Holocaust films—*Vernichtungslager Majdanek—Cmentarzysko Europy* (1944), *Death Mills* (1945), *Osventsim* (1945), and *Daleka cesta* (1948). The author shows that both documentary and fiction films used the Christian cross as symbol of the suffering and death of the Holocaust victims. These films “de-judaized” the Holocaust victims and showed their sufferings through universal symbols accepted by the gentile society. Thus early Holocaust films “made in both east and west, sidestepped a truth that we know all too well today: namely, that the Jews—and to a somewhat lesser extent, the Roma and Sinti peoples—suffered a unique fate among the countless Nazi victims . . .”<sup>11</sup>

**Marat Grinberg** demonstrates in his essay *Non-Belated Trauma: Jean-Pierre Melville and the Beginnings of Holocaust Cinema* how scholars and film critics have neglected the question of Jewishness in the works of French film director Jean-Pierre Melville (1917–1973). Grinberg provides a new analysis of Melville's first film, *The Silence of the Sea* (1947–49), and argues that “Jewishness was of tremendous importance to Melville and played a fundamental role in his aesthetics in both coded and implicit, but also direct ways.”<sup>12</sup> Grinberg argues that this film about the French Resistance “needs to be viewed as essentially a Holocaust film.” The film provides an entire discourse on the Nazi extermination camp Treblinka.

**Lawrence Baron's** essay *The Armenian–Jewish Connection: The Influence of Holocaust Cinema on Feature Films about the Armenian Genocide* shows the parallels and connections between films about the Armenian Genocide and Holocaust films. Baron shows that the production of films about the Armenian Genocide was for a long time blocked by the Turkish government. However, Jews in interwar and wartime Europe turned to the topic of the Armenian Genocide, because they saw in the Armenian Genocide a precursor to their own persecution by Nazi Germany. After World War II several movies about the Armenian



Genocide were produced, which made analogies to Holocaust films, and used images and scenarios from them.

**Dan McMillan's** essay *Dehumanization and the Achievement of Schindler's List* discusses Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993). He argues that the film explores the theme of dehumanization in the Holocaust using as an example the behavior of two of the film's protagonists, Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth, Kommandant of the Plaszow slave labor camp. While Schindler in the film underwent a moral transformation and became committed to saving the Jews, "Goeth has become something inhuman by embracing the belief that Jews are vermin."<sup>13</sup> McMillan believes that *Schindler's List* was "ahead of its time in exploring the degree and forms of dehumanization in the Holocaust"<sup>14</sup> and that the film makes a significant contribution in the understanding and popularization of Holocaust history.

In his essay *Holocaust Fantasy Films and Historical Considerations* **Michael Rubinoff** analyzes why the genre of Holocaust fantasy films has become very popular among audiences in recent years. In his view, recent films of this genre, such as *Max* (Mejyes, 2002), *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Herman, 2004), and *Inglourious Basterds* (Tarantino, 2009) "have drawn their inspiration from creative fantasies."<sup>15</sup> He believes that the popularity of such films can be explained by the public's continued interest in the Holocaust, and the use film directors take with the genre through dark comedy, implausible storylines, the exaggeration of heroic Jewish resistance, and desire to revise of historical outcomes. These films distort the traditional views of the Holocaust and have a strong impact on the perception of the Holocaust by the popular audience.

Chapter Six *Teaching the Holocaust* searches for new and innovative methods of teaching the Holocaust to college students. The young generation of college students sees the Holocaust as an event of the distant past, so new teaching methods are needed to explain for students the importance of these events.

**Kevin Simpson** and **Jon David K. Wyneken** propose in their essay *Remembering the Architecture of Death: Teaching the History and Psychology of the Holocaust* to teach the Holocaust as an interdisciplinary course, using historical and psychological approaches to the topic. They give special emphasis to the processes of the memorialization of the Holocaust and the ambiguities of the recollections of the perpetrators, collaborators, and bystanders. Simpson and Wyneken recommend the use of audiovisual materials such as documentary films, podcasts, memoir excerpts, and archival photographs in teaching the Holocaust.

**Valerie S. Thaler** describes in her essay *Utilizing Holocaust Films in the College Classroom: One Instructor's Insights* methods of teaching the Holocaust through film for university students. Based on her own teaching experience, Thaler shows the value of films such as *A Film Unfinished*, *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *Sarah's Key*, and *Life is Beautiful* in teaching the Holocaust. She explains to students how the Holocaust is represented in film and teaches them view the historical material from an analytical, rather than emotional, perspective. She also helps students to think critically about directors' multiple objectives in making films which deal with the Holocaust.

This collection of essays, based on new multi-disciplinary research and innovative methods of the teaching of the Holocaust, opens many new unknown aspects and provides a new outlook on the topic. Lev Ozerov ended his poem *Babi Yar* by words "Don't forget ... Don't forgive ..." <sup>16</sup> It was crucially important for the Holocaust victims and witnesses that people remember these tragic events. This book will help us better understand the Holocaust and pass our knowledge to future generations.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Kikhelekh un zemelekh*, <http://congressforjewishculture.org/2012/08/moishe-teyf-1904-1966/> (accessed November 29, 2013); <https://joindiaspora.com/p/2001571> (accessed November 29, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Peter Black, *Holocaust by Bullets—"Hitler's Hidden Holocaust"?*

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Roman Karmen, "Lublin Extermination Camp Called 'Worst Yet' by Writer," *Daily Worker*, August 14, 1944, 8. Cited in David Shneer "Is Seeing Believing? Photographs, Eyewitness Testimony, and Evidence of the Holocaust."

<sup>6</sup> Treblinka. *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005193> (accessed November 29, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Ilya Ehrenburg, Vasily Grossman, *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Maxim D. Shrayer, *Lev Ozerov as a Literary Witness to the Shoah in the Occupied Soviet Territories*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (Oxford, Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), III, 669–670.

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Stuart Liebman, *Early Holocaust Cinema: Jews Under the Sign of the Cross*.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Marat Grinberg, *Non-Belated Trauma: Jean-Pierre Melville and the Beginnings of Holocaust Cinema*.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in McMillan, *Dehumanization and the Achievement of Schindler's List*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Michael Rubinoff, *Holocaust Fantasy Films and Historical Considerations*.

<sup>16</sup> *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*. Ed. Maxim D. Shrayder (Armonk, NY, London: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), I, 579.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

# **HOLOCAUST BY BULLETS AND EXTERMINATION CAMPS**

# HOLOCAUST BY BULLETS: “HITLER’S HIDDEN HOLOCAUST”?

PETER BLACK

*Peter Black’s paper, as inferred from the question mark behind the title of the 2009 National Geographical Film, “Hitler’s Hidden Holocaust,” challenges the notion that that piece of the Holocaust implemented in shooting operations was unknown to or ignored by professional historians of World War II, Nazi Germany, or what is now called the Holocaust—the physical annihilation of the European Jews, only to be “discovered” through the work of popular writers such as journalist Richard Rhodes and cleric Father Patrick Desbois. Black’s article traces the interest in and publications on shooting operations in the USSR and in German occupied–Serbia from the beginnings of legal proceedings against Nazi offenders in the 1940s, through the first histories of what we now call the Holocaust in the 1950s and early 1960s. It covers the importance of the shooting operations in the extensive scholarly debate over the decision–making process initiating the so–called Final Solution during the 1980s and early 1990s. Black also places the Einsatzgruppen (the mobile offices of the Security Police and SD) into a more proper context and role as “expert consultants” on implementing the Final Solution within the broader framework of SS and police command on German–occupied territory; and dispels the stubborn myth that the Nazis invented the gas chamber solely because the shooters were having too much psychological difficulty with this in–your–facing killing. Gas chambers had been an instrument of Nazi mass murder well before the invasion of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia; shooting operations continued in occupied territories wherever that method was more practical, long after stationary killing centers were functioning in areas where they were more practical. Finally, the paper suggests several factors, including media focus, survivor testimony from Auschwitz–Birkenau, and inaccessibility to documentation, eye–witnesses, and physical sites until after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc in 1989–1991, in directing public/popular attention to Auschwitz as the iconic image of Nazi mass murder and atrocity.*

This paper is devoted to the topic of the “Holocaust by Bullets,” which happens to be the title of a highly publicized and well-received book published in 2008 by Father Patrick Desbois. Over the past several years, Father Desbois has traveled extensively through Ukraine, Belarus, and, more recently, Poland, uncovering shooting sites and mass graves containing the remains of victims of the Holocaust and other victims of the Nazi regime.<sup>1</sup> In a 2002 publication, entitled *Masters of Death*, and more forcefully in a 2009 *National Geographic* television documentary, entitled *Hitler’s Hidden Holocaust*, Richard Rhodes maintained that Nazi shooting operations in the former USSR were virtually unknown to Holocaust scholars and historians. Such commentary infers—implicitly or explicitly—that the “Holocaust by Bullets” remained “hidden” until Rhodes, Desbois, and others discovered it and thrust it into the public consciousness in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Consider the following quote from the introduction to Father Desbois’s poignant memoir: “The first mass victims of the Holocaust went largely forgotten through most of the post–World War II era. Their stories and the fates of their communities were obscured by clouds of Soviet secrecy and anti-Semitism.”<sup>2</sup> Or consider Rhodes’ blunt statements of 2002: “The story of the *Einsatzgruppen* is almost unrelievedly grim, which is perhaps why it has hardly been told;” and “... It is impossible to understand how the Holocaust unfolded without knowing this part of the story, because the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres preceded the invention of the death camps and significantly influenced their development;” or: “Himmler ... wanted his victims without bloodshed and his SS men to be just like other workers, which is the fundamental reason he switched the method of killing from *Einsatzgruppen* executions to gas vans and gas chambers.”<sup>3</sup> In the *National Geographic* documentary, Rhodes reiterated his point and speculated that historians had neglected the significance of the shooting operations because, perhaps like the SS men Rhodes described, they did not want to “confront” that particular horror: “The general belief of historians is that the death camps were the center of the story, that the *Einsatzgruppen* killings have been shrugged off as wild excesses of the SS, which means to me that those historians also didn’t want to confront this situation.”<sup>4</sup> In the same film, Michael Berenbaum remarked that the shooting operations presented three problems for the perpetrators: “The first, it was public. The second was that it was too personal. And finally ... it was a waste of bullets.”<sup>5</sup> The editors of a volume published to accompany an exhibit in Paris on Father Desbois’s work claimed in 2007 that, despite numerous “judicial inquiries, the Holocaust which took place in Eastern Europe has remained virtually unknown.”<sup>6</sup>

There is no question that encouraging public interest in the shooting operations of the Holocaust era, whether or not the victims in each individual case were Jews, deepens understanding of the mechanics of Nazi population policies and, specifically, “final solution” policy and extends the limits of memory relevant to the victims of the Nazi regime. You should understand that I will not minimize the importance of this history in my remarks. Removed from the context of the process of the dissemination of Holocaust era information to the general public, however, the underlying assumptions of these statements might spawn misleading conclusions, both about the history of the “final solution” and about the history of its historiography.

Were Nazi-sponsored shooting operations really “hidden”—unnoticed or unconsciously ignored by historians and prosecutors—until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Are they significant because they memorialize only the “first wave” of Holocaust victims, or because they inspired the gas chamber? If we attribute the murder of 2.5 million Jews to the *Einsatzgruppen* alone, have we done justice to the memory of the victims by identifying *all* of the perpetrators? If any of these assumptions are misleading—or even false—what would lead anyone to conclude that they were accurate?

## I. Unknown or Unnoticed? A History of the History

The crimes of the *Einsatzgruppen* were neither hidden nor forgotten at the end of World War II. At Nuremberg, shooting operations on the Eastern Front were a focal point of investigators and prosecutors. At the major trial, Allied prosecutors submitted into evidence a monster report of October 15, 1941 by *Einsatzgruppe A* commander and *SS-Brigadeführer* Walter Stahlecker. They called to the stand as prosecution witnesses both *Einsatzgruppe D* commander Otto Ohlendorf and Reich Security Main Office official Walter Schellenberg, who was deeply implicated in working out the agreement between the Security Police and the High Command of the Army on the duties and functions of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the occupied Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, U.S. prosecutors conducted a subsequent Nuremberg proceeding in 1947–1948 under the auspices of the International Military Tribunal against surviving leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Among the defendants were *Einsatzgruppe C* commander Karl Rasch, Stahlecker’s successor as commander of *Einsatzgruppe A*, Heinz Jost, and Erich Naumann, who replaced Artur Nebe as commander of *Einsatzgruppe B* in November 1941. Prosecutors used many of the documents, including the daily composite reports from the field compiled by the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*—RSHA)



in Berlin and distributed to all of the key Reich civilian and military agencies, that form the basis for our understanding of the shooting operations today. The IMT judged the officers responsible for the *Einsatzgruppen* harshly, convicting Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the former chief of the RSHA, and sentencing him to hang at the major trial. In the proceedings against Otto Ohlendorf et al., the tribunal convicted 21 out of 22 defendants, sentencing fourteen of those convicted to death.<sup>8</sup> Two of the subsequent Nuremberg proceedings were devoted to military commanders, both in the High Command of the German Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*—OKH) and in the regional commands in the Balkans, responsible for the involvement of military personnel in planning and implementing shooting operations on the Eastern Front and in German-occupied Serbia.<sup>9</sup> Postwar authorities in Poland, the former Yugoslavia, and former Soviet Union tried *Einsatzgruppen* personnel and their auxiliaries at locations near where the crimes were committed. Held behind the Iron Curtain, however, these trials were indeed unknown in the West and their records remained inaccessible to scholars until the late 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

The developing Cold War cooled ardor for prosecuting Nazi offenders on both sides of the Iron Curtain, particularly after the respective leaders of West and East Germany, Konrad Adenauer and Walter Ulbricht, set the end to such prosecutions as one price that the Western Allies and the Soviet Union had to pay for the integration of the German republics into the respective blocs.<sup>11</sup> By 1955, virtually no nation, much less an international court, was prosecuting Nazi offenders. Within three years, all Nazi offenders convicted by Allied or Soviet tribunals, but not executed, were back out on the street. The Cold War, however, did not completely extinguish either prosecutorial or historical interest in the *Einsatzgruppen*. After a political dispute over civil service tenure for former Nazi officials encouraged the establishment of a West German Central Agency of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*—ZdSt) in 1958, one of the first major proceedings, those against Bernhard Fischer-Schwader et al., in 1958 in Ulm, involved numerous officials of the *Einsatzgruppen*.<sup>12</sup> Over the next fifteen years, West German authorities indicted numerous commanders and mid-level SS and police officials on charges of having conducted or participated in shooting operations on the territory of the occupied Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Though the proceedings were open and followed extensively in the press, the record of these trials, in accordance with standard practice of

the German Federal Republic, was not available, even to scholars, for another two decades.

Neither journalistic nor historical interest in shooting operations in the Soviet Union was entirely absent at this time. The two most important works on the Holocaust—indeed before we called it the Holocaust—from this period gave the shooting operations at least as much attention as the killing centers.<sup>14</sup> Appearing in 1960, journalist William L. Shirer's best-selling history of Nazi Germany addressed shooting operations.<sup>15</sup> After the conclusion of the Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt am Main in Germany in 1965, four of the historical briefs prepared for the prosecution were published. Two were related to shooting operations: Helmut Krausnick devoted attention to these killings in "The Persecution of the Jews"; while Hans-Adolf Jacobsen first spotlighted the German Army's role in Nazi crimes in his "The Commissar Order."<sup>16</sup> Both Reitlinger's *Final Solution* and Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews* were reissued in 1968 and 1967, respectively.<sup>17</sup>

During the late 1970s, shooting operations again surfaced in legal proceedings, scholarly work, and popular culture. Just as the most significant wave of West German prosecutions receded, FRG requests for the extradition of former Lublin Concentration Camp female auxiliary guard Hermine Braunsteiner-Ryan, who had resided in New York State with her husband since the late 1940s, awakened interest in the United States in taking legal measures against Nazi offenders, who had come in the late 1940s and early 1950s as displaced persons and refugees. Since many had been Soviet nationals and had joined auxiliary units of the SS and police that conducted shooting operations, these received renewed press coverage, keeping the issue alive and generating a tremendous amount of previously unavailable documentation over the next three decades. Many of the proceedings conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) three decades ago focused on non-German auxiliaries, who participated in shooting operations. These investigations targeted the perpetrators at the ground level. They revealed that the German units often required assistance from non-German police, military, and administrative auxiliaries to implement the "Holocaust with Bullets."

As the OSI was forming in 1977–1978,<sup>18</sup> the shooting operations became the pivotal context in the bitter historians' debate between "intentionalists" and "functionalists" over the timing of the decision to implement the "final solution." Scholars could now gain access to early FRG proceedings conducted during the late 1950s and 1960s, including documentation obtained by German prosecutors from Polish, Soviet, and

Czech archives. Stimulated by the publication of the proceedings of a conference in Stuttgart in 1979, no fewer than four volumes appeared specifically on the *Einsatzgruppen* over the next two decades.<sup>19</sup> The *Einsatzgruppen* and their activities figured into dozens of other books and essays related to the decision to implement the “final solution.”<sup>20</sup> Using West German investigative records for his 1992 groundbreaking work, *Ordinary Men*, Christopher Browning focused on the “Holocaust by Bullets” in Poland. He was one of the first to alert the general public that the *Einsatzgruppen* and the SS were not the only shooters. Browning’s work analyzed the role of the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*), many of whose officials were not even members of the Nazi Party.<sup>21</sup>

The two decades between 1975 and 1995 also generated profoundly intensified public interest in the Holocaust, neither excluding nor hiding Nazi shooting operations. Eichmann prosecutor Gideon Hausner published the first English language edition of his memoir and history of the Eichmann trial in 1966.<sup>22</sup> Following Nora Levin’s first stab at a history of the Holocaust in 1968, Lucy Dawidowicz’s popular *The War Against the Jews* appeared in 1975.<sup>23</sup> Though each author found in Auschwitz the culmination of that war, neither neglected to cover shooting operations. Nor were these killings “hidden” from the fictional Weiss family in the popular novel by Gerald Green, *Holocaust*, which appeared in 1978, followed by a CBS television mini-series that captivated millions in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup> One year later, President Jimmy Carter issued an executive order establishing a United States Holocaust Memorial Council (USHMC) tasked with establishing a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust on the Mall in Washington, D. C. The Council decided to cast the Memorial in the form of a Museum with a Permanent Exhibition; the narrative of that exhibition did not hide the “Holocaust by Bullets” when the Museum opened in 1993.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the bitter debate that erupted in Germany, when the exhibit entitled “Crimes of the Wehrmacht” opened in 1995, focused public attention on the German Army’s responsibility for shooting operations.<sup>26</sup>

The assumption made by Richard Rhodes and implied in the work of Patrick Desbois that the “Holocaust by Bullets” was, before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, hidden, forgotten, or underemphasized in historical scholarship and even in offerings to the general public seems open to question. Nevertheless, the notion of a “hidden Holocaust” has some resonance in the public imagination. Neither Babi Yar nor Kam’yanets’-Podols’k became the icon of the Holocaust in the way Auschwitz did, although Babi Yar has become to shooting sites what Auschwitz has always been to killing centers.<sup>27</sup> While relatively less significant concentration camp sub-

camps, such as Ebensee and Ohrdruf, have furnished the halls of Holocaust memory, the names of countless Holocaust shooting sites in Ukraine, Belarus, the Crimea, and Russia remain unknown to us—if, in fact, they ever had names. Some villages that were located near these sites are also unknown to us because they no longer exist. After killing Jews and Communists, the Germans and their auxiliaries murdered virtually everyone else in so-called anti-partisan operations. Lidice was legion in the occupied USSR.

Why did Auschwitz, and the concentration camp in general, become the icon of Nazi evil? After all, as Hitler noted publicly, the democracies, not the Nazis or the Fascists, had invented and named the concentration camp: Great Britain in South Africa, and the United States in the Philippines.<sup>28</sup> The trial of Adolf Eichmann, held in Jerusalem in 1961, seems to have had an initial impact here. In tying the murder of *all* six million Jews to him, Israeli prosecutors lent Eichmann a name recognition that ranks third in Holocaust history behind only Hitler and Anne Frank. In fact, Eichmann, who attained the SS rank of *Obersturmbannführer* (Lieutenant Colonel), supervised approximately twenty men in a small subsection of the Gestapo. His superiors in the RSHA tasked him with organizing the deportation of Jews from much of Europe, including Germany, Austria, the Czech lands, Slovakia, German-annexed Danzig-West Prussia, Denmark, Norway, Northern Italy, Greece, France, and the Low Countries. Without question, he contributed to the deaths of approximately 1,230,000 Jews and around 20,000 Roma and Sinti—surely enough to hang him many times over. Eichmann had little, however, if anything, to do with the murder of eighty percent of Holocaust victims, including those in the Government General and District Białystok (2.77–2.9 million); the German and Romanian occupied Soviet Union (approximately 1.5 million); the Gau Wartheland (200,000); Serbia (15,000); and three fourths of those killed in Croatia (20,000).<sup>29</sup> Yet Eichmann has two recent scholarly biographies; meanwhile *SS-Brigadeführer* Odilo Globocnik, whose Operation Reinhard staff killed around 1.7 million Jews and the Higher SS and Police Leaders in the East, including Friedrich Jeckeln, who was responsible for the mass shooting operations at Kam'yanets'-Podols'k, Babi Yar, Riga and Liepaja in Latvia, still await scholarly biographies.<sup>30</sup>

Second, while more Jews died in Auschwitz than at any other single Holocaust killing site, more Jews *survived* Auschwitz (perhaps 100,000) than any other facility under Nazi rule—killing center, ghetto, or concentration camp. By comparison, survivors of the other four killing centers number less than *five hundred*. The three most widely read literary

figures of the Holocaust survived Auschwitz: Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and Anne Frank.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, unlike the other four killing centers, let alone the thousands of shooting sites, the physical remains of Auschwitz survived as well. SS and police personnel dismantled Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Chelmno completely before the arrival of Soviet troops. Therefore, one should not judge the twenty-first-century explorers in the history of the “Holocaust by Bullets” of excessive self-promotional zeal: it seems little wonder that as Auschwitz became the symbol of Nazi evil for novelists and sociologists, philosophers and playwrights, psychologists and poets, shooting operations receded into the back rooms of the popular imagination.

## II. Did Shooting Operations Inspire the Killing Centers?

This notion originated in the 1950s, based largely on a 1946 postwar account of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski that Himmler grew sick to his stomach as he observed a shooting operation outside of Minsk in mid-August 1941. Himmler, so the story goes, remained deeply unsettled by the carnage that he had seen and continued to fret about the psychological health of his killers, whom he believed to be “decent” men. That evening, he directed *Einsatzgruppe B* commander and *SS-Brigadeführer* Artur Nebe to explore other, more “humane” means of killing. Ultimately, he approved the gas van and the gas chamber in order to get the job done without the splatter of brain matter on the uniforms of his men and without an unnecessary waste of bullets.<sup>32</sup> The chronological *Holocaust* sequence of shooting operations in the USSR (1941–1942) and mass murder in gas chambers (1942–1944) appears to lend support to this theory, as do Himmler’s orders concerning rest and recreation during “comradely evenings” for the shooters after a hard day’s work. The story of Himmler’s indisposition at the shooting site outside Minsk lends it color.

The weakness of the source material for this last, and simple, but often forgotten, chronology of the context of events in the Holocaust era undermines the viability of the theory of linear development from close range shooting to gas van and gas chamber killing technology. To begin with, Christian Gerlach has questioned the reliability of von dem Bach-Zelewski’s account of Himmler’s illness at the killing site near Minsk. After the shooting, Himmler visited a psychiatric clinic in Nowinki and ordered Nebe to liquidate the in-patients. In the context of this order, Himmler and Nebe discussed other means of killing. Nebe later experimented with carbon monoxide gas and explosives on persons

suffering from mental illness. The only certainty about Himmler's immediate response to the shooting is that he gave an impromptu speech to the shooters in which he depicted the operation as "repulsive" (*widerlich*), adding that he would not be pleased if Germans did this sort of thing "gladly," but that this "bloody business" (*das blütige Handwerk*) was a "necessary defensive operation."<sup>33</sup> Not that Himmler was unaffected or unconcerned for the psychological welfare of his men.<sup>34</sup> He had understood from before the war that the treatment of the real and perceived enemies of Nazi Germany would demand difficult psychological sacrifices from his men but that their duty was to be "tough," while remaining "decent" in performing these stressful tasks. On November 8, 1938, speaking to SS generals at a commemoration of the 1923 Hitler *putsch*, Himmler, referring to the SS Death's Head Units (*Totenkopfverbände*), which guarded the concentration camps, remarked that: "A master race must be able to exclude people who are harmful to the community from the community without Christian compassion, but nevertheless remain decent while doing this ... A master race must be able to shoot when a harmful person flees, but must never abuse him. That would not be decent, since he cannot defend himself."<sup>35</sup> Five years later, shortly before the completion of the "final solution," Himmler spoke to his SS generals in Poznań and told them:

Most of you know what it means when 100 corpses are lying there together, when 500 are lying there, or when 1000 are lying there. To have held fast through that and, other than exceptions spurred by human weaknesses, to have remained decent: that has made us tough ... All in all we can say that we have carried out this most difficult assignment out of love for our nation [*Volk*]. In doing so, we have sustained no internal damage, in our souls, in our character.<sup>36</sup>

Himmler *was* concerned for the welfare of his men—his prescriptions for how they should spend their evenings after a day of shooting innocent human beings reflect that concern as much as they do his pedantic inclination to monitor their private lives.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, he expected them to "produce" in "final solution" policy, regardless of whether they shot or gassed "enemies" of the Third Reich.

If the issue of motivation already undermines the viability of a linear development from shooting operations to gas chambers, two chronologies make the argument difficult to sustain. The first concerns the use of gas to murder. The Germans did not start thinking about either gas chambers or gas vans in the late summer 1941. They adopted poison gas as a method to carry out mass murder in the late autumn 1939 and developed the gas van