Introduction

Raul Hilberg: Life, Work, and Memory—Some Introductory Reflections

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> Everyone would like one or two, maybe three of his thoughts to remain when he's gone.
>
> —Raul Hilberg in Potsdam 1997

Prologue

On October 17, 1942, German and Ukrainian policemen under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Krüger deported 1,500 Jews from the Galician town of Buczacz to the extermination camp in Bełżec. Between 200 and 500 Jewish individuals unfit for transport, including patients from a local hospital, were summarily shot in the town. In the days that followed, the Jewish communities of the surrounding villages were rounded up in Buczacz, where they were ghettoized in churches and other abandoned public buildings. A typhoid epidemic soon raged before another 250 people, including forty-five children, were shot in a second purge in late November 1942. After four more deportations and killing sprees in late 1942 and the spring of 1943 claiming well over 10,000 victims, the town was declared "Jew-free" by the Germans in May 1943. This had been preceded by one final murder campaign in which 600 Jews were beaten to death in the streets of Buczacz.[1]

These events in the city of Buczacz, the destruction of its Jewish community in the manner described above, was a thousandfold occurrence in Eastern Europe under German occupation during World War II.

Buczacz, now the western Ukrainian city of Buchach, is just one of many places that became a killing field between 1941 and 1945. And yet this particular place is important in the context of this book, for Buchach was the hometown of Raul Hilberg's mother, Gisela Schächter, who was born nearby in 1896, when the town, then Butschatsch, was still part of the Habsburg Empire. As such, it is relevant to two essential aspects of the present volume. It points to Raul Hilberg's own personal history and to his lifelong research focus: the physical extermination of European Jewry under Nazi rule—because it is safe to assume that many of Hilberg's close and distant relatives who were living in or around Buczacz at the time, among them his Aunt Frieda, one of his mother's seventeen siblings, fell victim to these mass killings.[2]

The Nazi occupation of Buczacz is indicative of a seemingly banal truth: that every attempt to put Holocaust historiography in perspective, which is very much a focus of this volume, has to first deal with the hard facts, the actual murder of European Jewry. This millionfold murder is the main focus of our investigations, a topic Raul Hilberg spent over six decades studying, from the late 1940s until his death in 2007.

The present publication is based on an international conference held in Berlin in October 2017 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Hilberg's death. Its aim was to open new perspectives on the life, work, and impact of Raul Hilberg, assessing and critically examining his achievements. Far from a hagiography, the contributions collected here have endeavored to put Hilberg in the social, scholarly, and political context of his time and identify the limits of his approach. Rather than seeing in him the later doyen of Holocaust research, an attempt is made to reconstruct the long and arduous path of an academic maverick who moved from the margins of his field to the center without ever having adopted the approach of this center, at most modifying his own approach and subsequent results.

Those who knew Hilberg know that he never shunned controversy but always sought out academic debate, which he saw as the motor of scholarship. This was likely the major impulse behind his lifelong efforts: never to be content with the knowledge he had gained but to always keep collecting new sources and evidence. Hilberg could only ever imagine Holocaust research as an international endeavor involving young scholars, which is why this volume includes contributions from North America and Europe written by experienced as well as junior academics. It hopes to give new impetus, offering original and innovative views of Holocaust historiography and previously neglected

perspectives on Hilberg's work. Perhaps some readers will be encouraged to read or revisit Hilberg's magnum opus *The Destruction of the European Jews*, according to Christopher Browning "the most-cited but least-read" work of Holocaust research, and rediscover it from today's perspective.

The persecution and murder of European Jewry during the years of Nazi rule from 1933 to 1945 is one of the most investigated historical events in the world.[3] Research institutes dedicated to the history of the Holocaust exist in the United States and Israel and have more recently also been established in Germany. These recent additions include the Center for Holocaust Studies, founded in the summer of 2013 at the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. Since 2008, the Center for Holocaust Studies, in cooperation with partners in Berlin and Freiburg, has begun publishing a sixteen-volume source edition entitled *The Persecution and Murder of European Jews by Nazi Germany, 1933–1945*. In addition, the first academic chair devoted to the history and impact of the Holocaust was established at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main in 2017. The chair is linked to the directorship of the Fritz Bauer Institute, a research institute focused on the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust and named after the former Hessian attorney general who in the first decades of the newly founded Federal Republic devoted himself to the prosecution of Nazi crimes. Before the institute was founded in the mid-1990s a few other possible names were discussed, and a journalist with the weekly *Die Zeit* suggested naming the institute after Raul Hilberg: "We should therefore honor the man who took it upon himself, on our behalf, to write the history of the destruction of European Jews and whom we thanked by consistently ignoring him for three decades. The institute should be called the Raul Hilberg Institute, with the tagline Frankfurt Education and Documentation Center."[4]

In the end, this proposal was not successful, but the quote shows that by the 1990s American political scientist and Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg had attained a degree of public notoriety. The S. Fischer publishing house in Frankfurt am Main had just published a German translation of his principal work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, in an affordable three-volume paperback edition,[5] eight years after the initial German publication and nearly thirty years after the appearance of the original English version. Today the study is considered an "early standard work" of Holocaust literature, its author a "pioneer" of research on the murder of European Jewry.[6]

Biographical Outline

Together with Joseph Wulf and Léon Poliakov, Raul Hilberg belongs to the first generation of Holocaust scholars,[7] most of whom had Jewish roots and were directly affected by the persecution and murder perpetrated against the Jewish people between 1933 and 1945. Born in Vienna in 1926, Hilberg had to flee his native city in the spring of 1939 together with his Jewish parents, both originally from Galicia, eventually joining relatives in the United States. Prior to this he had witnessed the "Anschluss" of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938 and the subsequent humiliation of Jewish residents on the streets of the Danube metropolis. The Hilbergs lost their apartment during the November Pogrom. His father, an independent merchant, was arrested and slated for deportation to Dachau concentration camp. As a veteran of World War I he was ultimately released, albeit on the condition that his family leave the country as soon as possible. They succeeded in emigrating to Cuba by way of France. All of Hilberg's relatives living in Eastern Europe were murdered in the years that followed. In his 1996 autobiography he briefly talks about his family members in the book's opening pages, mentioning almost in passing the circumstances of their deaths. Hilberg writes the following about his paternal grandmother: "By 1942, in her eighties and blind, she lay in bed most of the time. Apparently that is where the German raiders found her and where they shot her on the spot."[8]

At the age of eighteen, Hilberg enlisted in the US Army, became an American citizen and returned to Europe, where he witnessed the last weeks of the war in Bavaria. Back in the United States, he attended Brooklyn College in New York, studying political science and history under Hans Rosenberg, a social and economic historian and émigré from Germany whose research on the Prussian bureaucracy would greatly influence Hilberg. Just as influential was his instructor Franz Neumann, whose lectures Hilberg attended while studying for his master's degree at Columbia University. In 1942, Neumann, likewise an émigré, had published *Behemoth*, one of the first scholarly investigations of the governmental workings of the Third Reich, describing its structure as resting on four pillars: the army, the administration, the economy, and the party.[9] Hilberg borrowed this idea, investigating one of these pillars in his master's thesis, completed in 1950: "The Role of the German Civil Service in the Destruction of the Jews." With his

master's thesis, he had found the topic that would preoccupy him for the rest of his life. In choosing his research topic, Hilberg was not so much motivated by his own experience of persecution and loss than by the ignorance he perceived in American society about the destruction of European Jewry. When the first reports of the mass murder of Jews in occupied Poland appeared in the papers during the war, Hilberg criticized what he considered the tepid response of Jewish associations in the United States. The silence surrounding the Holocaust once the war had ended, not least in Hans Rosenberg's lectures on European history,[10] was an "incentive" to him to engage in its scholarly investigation—or perhaps it was precisely Neumann's warning against choosing the topic of the Holocaust that spurred him on.[11]

Hilberg earned his PhD in 1955 at Columbia University with a dissertation entitled "Prologue to Annihilation: A Study of the Identification, Impoverishment, and Isolation of the Jewish Victims of Nazi Policy," comprising the first three chapters of his subsequent book. The 2,000-page typescript of his magnum opus *The Destruction auf the European Jews* was published in 1961 after a long and difficult search for a publisher.

Having collaborated on the War Documentation Project evaluating German files from the Nazi era confiscated by the Americans, and serving as an instructor at Hunter College in New York as well as at the University of Puerto Rico, Hilberg was eventually appointed assistant professor at the University of Vermont in 1956, where he taught in the political science department until his retirement in 1991. In the 1970s and 1980s, Hilberg became an acknowledged expert on the Holocaust, reporting on his findings during lecture tours in the United States as well as in Israel and Western Europe. In this capacity he was part of a German-speaking network of American scholars with transatlantic ties committed to writing German history in the postwar world.[12]

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed Raul Hilberg to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. Hilberg was also consulted as an expert witness in the trials of war criminals and Holocaust deniers. With his appearance in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), for which Hilberg was interviewed about the role of the German State Railways (Reichsbahn) and the Warsaw Ghetto diary of Adam Czerniaków, he effectively became a "public historian." Hilberg died in Vermont in 2007, honored throughout the world as a doyen of Holocaust research[13] whose work has been translated into numerous languages.

Scholarly Publications

The scholarly literature on the Holocaust can no longer be read, let alone processed, by any one individual. Countless regional studies in various languages, numerous specialized studies on individual institutions involved in the murder of Jews, and a multitude of investigations into the post-history of the Holocaust can be accessed in libraries around the world. In the early 1950s, when Hilberg began working on *The Destruction of the European Jews*, the situation was completely different. There were extensive source materials, of course, such as the files of the Nuremberg trials, the testimonies of survivors, and reports of the Jewish Historical Commissions, but there were very few comprehensive histories of the mass murder of Jews, the most important being Léon Poliakov's *Bréviaire de la haine: Le III° Reich et les Juifs*, for example, published in 1951 in Paris, and Gerald Reitlinger's *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939–1945*, published in 1953 in London. Hilberg, by his own account, was not familiar with either work when he began to write his own.[14]

In the introduction to *The Destruction of the European Jews*, he explains that the book is concerned with investigating the perpetrators of the genocide against the Jews and the details of *how* they were actually murdered. Hilberg expressly notes that the victims themselves are not the focus and that no attempt would be made to answer the question of *why* it had happened in the first place. On several hundred pages the author details the process of disenfranchisement and persecution, analyzing it primarily as a bureaucratic and administrative procedure. Following Rudolf Kasztner, Hilberg engages in an extensive study of the files to develop a model of the destruction process consisting of successive stages: definition, expropriation, concentration, and extermination. He tries whenever possible to disentangle the web of responsibilities and mention the perpetrators and accomplices by name. In doing so he makes clear that there existed a division of labor and that all German institutions, from the church to the finance ministry, played their part in the extermination of the Jews. He pointed out the complicity of the Wehrmacht and the Foreign Office decades before debates on that topic erupted in Germany in the 1990s. German society, according to Hilberg, formed a complex machinery of extermination that succeeded with incredible efficiency and problem-solving skills at murdering millions of people defined as Jews during Nazi rule.

In terms of methodology, Hilberg used the approach of his doctoral supervisor Neumann to analyze the four pillars of the Nazi state.[15] As in Neumann's *Behemoth*, antisemitism as an ideology of genocide receives little attention, whereas considerable importance is attributed to economic aspects driving the process of destruction. Occupational bans, expropriations, forced labor in ghettos, the theft of personal belongings from deportees after their arrival at the extermination camps, and, finally, the exploitation of their corpses are in Hilberg's eyes the hallmark of modern extermination. Hilberg emphasizes the following characteristics:

(1) the processual nature of the overall event, in which each step seemed to logically follow upon others without this being inevitable; indeed, it was an open-ended process and many decisions could have resulted in alternative courses of action;
(2) the decentrality of genocide, with no single determining authority but rather a multitude of agencies throughout the Reich and in the occupied territories dealing with individual aspects of it;
(3) the division of labor, allowing every official complicit in it to divest himself of responsibility;
(4) the complexity of the overall process, in which complicated legal issues and accounting processes had to be taken into consideration; for instance, with regard to the deportation trains crisscrossing Europe;
(5) the abovementioned economization at all stages of the process from persecution to extermination, as no expenses had been budgeted for genocide and it basically had to finance itself;
(6) the passiveness of the victims in the face of persecution, which Hilberg sees as a continuity in Jewish history, the result of years of conformity and assimilation.

Regarding the latter, Hilberg highlights the lack of effective Jewish resistance, since the process of extermination was nowhere successfully interrupted despite isolated local incidents of struggle and defiance. On the contrary, by forming Jewish councils (Judenräte) at the behest of the German authorities, the ghetto inhabitants effectively made themselves "tools" of their own destruction, he argues. These assessments gave rise to fierce controversy within the Jewish community when Hilberg's work was published and his theses adopted by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[16] Hilberg's work is still the subject of considerable criticism,

as he never retracted and only somewhat modified his conclusions about the lack of Jewish resistance in subsequent publications. That might be one explanation for the fact that a first Hebrew translation of *The Destruction* was only published in 2012, thirty years after the German edition. This first translation was followed by French, Polish, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and other language editions.

Something has indeed remained of Hilberg's work, far more than the handful of thoughts mentioned in the quote at the beginning of this introduction. Almost every account of the Holocaust down to the present day cites his work. Hilberg's analysis has served as a frame of reference and stimulated the work of countless other scholars. Hilberg's path from an outsider to the leading representative of a new field of research can be traced in the new editions of his principal work, which he revised and corrected over the years. *The Destruction of the European Jews* originally came out in 1961 with Quadrangle Books in Chicago, then a newly founded publishing house. The second, revised edition was published by Holmes & Meier in New York in 1985. The third English edition appeared in 2003 at Yale University Press, the prestigious publishing arm of an Ivy League school.[17]

Hilberg cultivated the self-image of a lone wolf; for instance, in his 1996 autobiography. Befitting that self-image, he maintained that *The Destruction* met with little response upon its initial publication in 1961, although that is a problematic statement.[18] There were positive reviews in respected scholarly journals such as *The American Historical Review* as well as in the national press, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Prominent and influential colleagues such as H. R. Trevor-Roper praised the work, along with renowned literary critics such as Alfred Kazin. Finally, a paperback student edition priced at $3.95 was published in 1967 and the publisher ran with a blurb celebrating *The Destruction* as an extraordinary accomplishment of contemporary history:

> This is the monumental, definitive history of the greatest human destruction process in the lifetime of man. It is the only study based upon the entire unindexed collection of Nuremberg documents and materials in the Federal Records Center and the Yivo Institute. Unique in authenticity, depth, and scope, it is a sourcebook for the specialist, an analysis for the theorist, and a story without parallel for the general reader.[19]

The publication of Hilberg's first book, initially delayed by his failure to find a publisher but ultimately well-timed given the heightened public

interest during the run-up to the Eichmann trial,[20] was followed by a ten-year publishing pause, primarily attributable to Hilberg's enormous teaching commitments at the University of Vermont. All his subsequent books dealt with the same subject, and in this regard can be understood as appendices to his magnum opus. His second book publication, *Documents of Destruction*, came out in 1971 and was a sourcebook intended for classroom use, although Hilberg himself only received his first opportunity to teach a class entirely devoted to the Holocaust in the mid-1970s.[21] The book serves as a supplementary volume to *The Destruction*, featuring selected key sources of Holocaust history with an introduction and the translations into English provided by Hilberg. In 1979, Hilberg and two colleagues published yet another sourcebook: the English translation of the diary of Adam Czerniaków, head of the Warsaw Ghetto Jewish Council from 1939 to 1942.[22]

Following another lengthy publishing break, in which he produced neither books nor programmatic papers, Hilberg's *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders* appeared one year after his retirement, an actor-centered treatment of the Holocaust ranging from Hitler to Pope Pius XII and complementing the structural-history approach taken in *Destruction*.[23] The book established a triangle of Holocaust actor groups and has remained a formative influence despite its critical reception.[24] Not long afterwards, in 1996, Hilberg turned his life and especially his magnum opus into the subject of his autobiography subtitled "The Journey of a Holocaust Historian." The final publication in his lifetime was *Sources of Holocaust Research: An Analysis*, published in 2001 and once more addressing the methodology informing his principal work.

History, Memory, and Memoir: Hilberg's Autobiography

Hilberg gave his 1996 autobiography the title *The Politics of Memory*, emphasizing that academic research is inextricably entangled in the collective memories circulating in society. In his memoir, Hilberg writes about collective memory in unfavorable terms. He acknowledges the need for "popularizers" and "*Geschichtsschreiber*" who are "distilling the content" of historical monographs and "highlight story and drama for a large reading public."[25] At the same time, he feels mistreated by some popularizers and categorically differentiates their output from the source-based writing of a true researcher like himself. *The Politics of Memory* thus provides an insightful commentary on the war generation's

perception of the conflict between history and memory. Hilberg lets his readers partake in the feelings of befuddlement and outrage with which he looks back at the treatment that *The Destruction of the European Jews* and its author received by different publics on different continents. In fact, the tensions and misunderstandings between history and memory form the main theme of Hilberg's surprisingly short reflections, more autobiographical essay than full-blown memoir.

Yet Hilberg also intimates that the tensions are not naturally given and that history and memory serve similar purposes: "The words that are thus written take the place of the past; these words rather than the events themselves, will be remembered."[26] That is a perfectly fine definition of collective memory crafted through cultural remediation, if we take the term "words" as short shrift for culture; that is, language, sound, and images.[27] In addition, Hilberg identifies a concrete example of history/memory congruence. As far as his career and scholarship was concerned, he believed history and memory to be out of tune and out of touch—with one important exception. In the last decades of his life, he finally felt understood and appreciated by popularizers in a few European countries who were "knowledgeable," "erudite," and "interested in the origins of my formulations."[28] Hilberg's remarks suggest that the relationship between history and memory should be historicized and has entered a more conciliatory phase in the twenty-first century, not least of all as a result of the rise of Holocaust memory in the second half of the twentieth century.

The story of the unlikely rise to memory relevance from the margins of academia begins with the figure of an immigrant teenager trying to fit in in his new American homeland and, for that purpose, adjusting the values and memories of his European childhood. The teenager turns into an academic overachiever relegated to the sidelines of academia because the memories of persecution and mass murder that he turns into the subject of historical inquiry are held at bay by a generation of academic teachers who studied European history selectively.[29] Hilberg's academic advisors were not ready to turn the omnipresent memories of Nazi crimes into an opportunity to explore the crimes' history, in contrast, one might want to add, to memories of recent warfare and Nazi politics that quickly became subject to scholarly inquiry.

And the tensions between history and memory continued, turning the teachers' aversion to studying genocide into a self-fulfilling prophecy, albeit only temporarily. In one of the dramatic turning points in the memoirs, Hilberg's would-be-advisor Neumann issued a stark

warning. Choosing to study the Final Solution will be "your funeral," Neumann predicted, ending a promising academic career before it has even begun.[30] Over many pages, *The Politics of Memory* lives up to that prediction. Hilberg reports time and again how his scholarship fails to meet the public's expectations shaped by peculiar memory needs. The publication of *The Destruction* is poorly timed, and the text is variously too honest, too scholarly, or too Jewish-American, before it proves to be appropriately European in the conciliatory denouement of the book.

At the beginning of his career, Hilberg sensed indifference and "a general unpreparedness" for his research subject before being caught up in a whirlwind of controversy in the 1960s, pitching his uncomfortable historical truths against the solace of partisan memory.[31] For Hilberg, his acknowledgment of the Jews' cooperation in their own destruction set him on a collision course with Israeli and Jewish memory, resulting in what he terms "a thirty-year war against Jewish resistance."[32] Time and again he deplores the "campaign of exaltation" and the "inflation of resistance" that result in a myth of Jewish heroism comforting Jewish communities the world over but also falsifying the historical record and causing "a fade-out of the perpetrator" in memory culture.[33] The comforting kitsch reflects collective and personal needs, including the personal needs of intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt, who are riding roughshod over Hilberg's sophisticated explanations of the implementation of the Final Solution.[34]

Although Hilberg occasionally refers to popular media such as film, he is primarily engaged with a different arena of memory politics more closely attuned to his line of work; that is, the memory of the Final Solution as it is reflected in the world of academic teaching, publishing, reviewing, and conferencing. And that arena at the intersection of history and memory is often a big disappointment for Hilberg: "No institution of higher learning in the United States was really interested in research about the destruction of the Jews"; German publishers showed primarily "a concern for former perpetrators"; and any scholar or journalist willing to agree with Hilberg's thesis of Jewish accommodation ran the risk of "offending a significant segment of the Jewish community worldwide."[35] Hilberg felt slighted by key institutions and protagonists of academic memory until he finally received the recognition he thought he deserved in the place where he least expected it: Germany before and after unification. He had become, in his own words, "a European author," prompting the scholar looking back over his life in the 1990s to measure the distance between history and memory by the memory

standards of the 1990s.[36] Judging by the standards of the 1960s, the first edition of *The Destruction* received significant recognition. But in an age and place that recognized the Final Solution as a unique historical event spelling out extraordinary memory obligations, Hilberg's monumental scholarly efforts fit the bill like no other publication and were celebrated accordingly. At the end of his career, in a surprising confluence of history and memory not devoid of irony, Hilberg turned into the scholarly equivalent of the figure of the Holocaust survivor whose veneration and one-dimensional heroism he detested. With this turn of events, Hilberg triumphed over his pessimistic advisor: "If Neumann's *Behemoth* was the classic description of the German Nazi system, then *The Destruction of the European Jews* was the *Behemoth* of Jewry's annihilation."[37] *The Politics of Memory* comes to rest in a gratifying acknowledgment of scholarly heroism.

Hilberg succeeds in reconciling history with memory because his memoir conveys Holocaust exceptionalism in exemplary fashion. For the narrator and main protagonist of *The Politics of Memory*, the unprecedented nature of the Final Solution is never in doubt. Hilberg confirms the uniqueness of the Holocaust in passing as an axiom requiring neither detailed elaboration nor explicit justification. The dictum is explicitly acknowledged on page 84, not because Hilberg assumes the reader needs convincing but because he wants to emphasize that he lacked a scholarly blueprint and was forced to build the intellectual edifice of *The Destruction* from scratch: "No literature could serve me as an example. The destruction of the Jews was an unprecedented occurrence, a primordial act that had not been imagined before it burst forth."[38] Consequently, the reconciliation of history and memory can only happen on history's terms when memory finally catches up with the truth that Hilberg knew all along, and that, counterintuitively, attained axiomatic status in West Germany after the historians' debate of 1986/87.

For good reasons, Hilberg takes pride in his extraordinary knowledge of the documentary basis of Holocaust history and the facts and truths he has helped to develop based on that evidence. It would be tempting to follow his lead, and that of many other historians, and interpret the relation between history and memory as one based on a clear separation of labor: history is a truth-seeking endeavor while memory is identity-driven.[39] Plus, as historians are quick to add and Hilberg implies in *The Politics of Memory*, the world would be a better place if memory contained a little more truth and a little less emotional baggage. However,

the relation between history and memory is more complicated than Hilberg implies, at least if we believe historical theorists and philosophers of history who study the research and writing activities of professional historians.[40] According to their assessment, historians are indeed in the business of finding and relating facts; for instance, the fact that Göring signed an order to Heydrich on July 31, 1941.[41] But another intellectual activity, one closely related yet qualitatively different from the fact-finding mission, constitutes an equally important professional responsibility of historians. As they sieve through sources, historians aggregate old and new facts and shape them into comprehensive interpretive models about past and present worlds. That interpretive labor imbues facts with complex meaning and pivots around key concepts, so-called colligatory concepts.[42] Successful colligatory concepts combine two seemingly contradictory qualities. On the one hand, they are wide-ranging and abstract and can therefore integrate many facts. On the other hand, they have a concrete and intuitively compelling edge and are thus capable of conveying meaningful interpretations of past facts in a nutshell. These qualities explain the success of concepts such as machinery of destruction, cooperation in one's own destruction, or uniqueness of the Holocaust.

And here is the beauty, or, depending on one's perspective, the dilemma of historical labor: somewhere along the way from the facts to the overarching concepts, from Göring's order to the dictum of uniqueness, the chain of evidence breaks down. Concepts can have all kinds of qualities; they can, for instance, be elegant, compelling, or logically sound, but not factual. Unlike facts that derive their integrity from having been generated according to widely shared research protocols, concepts and interpretive schemes assume validity based on the objectives and values they project, and these objectives and values will always be controversial.

Interpretations creating meaningful connections between past, present, and future are not necessary evils but the very reason for the existence of all cultural uses of the past, including professional history. Hence, interpretation via colligation is the task of both history and memory, but history and memory have a different relationship to facticity. Dealing in factual events is a necessary although not sufficient requirement for successful historians seeking recognition for their work in democratic societies, while memory, depending on social settings and modes of mediation, can more easily combine non-factual concepts with non-factual (e.g., fictitious) or counterfactual events without necessarily

losing credibility or moral integrity. Consider, for instance, colligation through sound or images, which plays a decisive role in memory, while history lacks clear and widely shared protocols for ascertaining the truthfulness, let alone moral integrity, of visual and sonic codes of communication.

Since history and memory share the duty to interpretation via nonfactual colligation, the relation between history and memory is more fluid than Hilberg and many of his colleagues assume. Key interpretive models travel back and forth between history and memory and between academia and society. Hilberg, for one, would never have experienced the appreciation of young European popularizers if the concept of the Holocaust and of Holocaust uniqueness had not shaped popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s through media events such as *Holocaust* and *Schindler's List*. In the years since the conference marking the anniversary of Hilberg's passing, the interpretive framework facilitating Hilberg's success has been challenged by the rise of alternative concepts reflecting different objectives and values. The notion of the Holocaust's singularity integrated a wide swath of memory culture and academic research in the West. Many governments, non-governmental organizations, cultural institutions, and scholars shared a commitment to a cohesive set of colligatory concepts associated with the theme of historical uniqueness. However, climate change, new humanitarian crises, and the historical distance to the era of the world wars gave rise to new memory needs and interpretive strategies. The ascent of anthropogenic and postcolonial memory does not prevent scholars from pursuing the type of Holocaust research Hilberg accomplished but it renders that type of interpretation of the "Final Solution" less likely to gain political traction. Some of the concepts Hilberg used to gather facts, advance research, and help shape the memory of the Final Solution have once again, as in the 1950s and 1960s, assumed a sense of untimeliness.

About This Volume

The chapters in this volume range from a reception history of Raul Hilberg's publications to linguistic and narratological analyses of his magnum opus and new insights into his source materials. The focus here is on the historiographic context of Hilberg's lifework. The authors offer a critical appraisal of his pioneering study and its spiritual fathers, take a closer look at conflicts surrounding *The Destruction*; for example,

involving Hannah Arendt, and explore blind spots and limitations of Hilberg's work; for example, regarding gender issues. The volume thus presents a retrospective of eight decades of Holocaust historiography as well as a prospective look at the future of the field.

The book is divided into two parts, the first collecting contributions on Hilberg's main work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, the second bringing together chapters contextualizing Hilberg in Holocaust historiography. Both parts are concluded with a critical commentary.

Part I opens with a chapter by Dan Michman, who emphasizes that Hilberg's work is the most important case study of what can happen to a minority in a modern society characterized by a well-organized administration and a top-down bureaucracy. Michman questions some aspects of Hilberg's central four-step model, finding it too rigid and narrow and suggesting an alternative conceptualization of the Holocaust that expands Hilberg's focus on bureaucratic processes. Michman recognizes the continued significance of Hilberg's magnum opus for Holocaust research, even though his father, Joseph Melkman, in his position as the director of Yad Vashem, once rejected Hilberg's manuscript for publication.

Like Michman, Peter Klein sees the forced emigration of Jews as a blind spot in Hilberg's model of successive stages and criticizes his conclusions. In his opinion, Hilberg overlooked two things: the fact that emigration was a political concept for solving the "Jewish question" supported by Hitler and other party functionaries before the war, and that Jewish organizations engaged in untiring efforts to shape a money-generating emigration policy before 1940. Klein contends that Hilberg, working from a limited source base, generally interprets documents on emigration policy as evidence for expropriation to make them conform to his four-step model.

Hilary Earl offers insights into the Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen trial of 1947–48 and illustrates how the testimonies of Otto Ohlendorf, the former SS-commander of Einsatzgruppe D, influenced the writings of Hilberg and other Holocaust scholars in different ways. Ohlendorf's narrative of a top-down process ordered by Adolf Hitler, motivated mainly by Nazi ideology and accompanied by Jewish passivity, were adopted by many historians and long accepted as indisputable facts.

The next two chapters are devoted to individual aspects of Hilberg's work. The contribution of Jürgen Matthäus investigates Hilberg's response in his writings and spoken remarks to the controversy surrounding a possible "Führerbefehl," a signed order by Hitler to exterminate the Jews that likely never existed. Hilberg only rarely intervened in

the debate, which is somewhat surprising given the duration and intensity of the debate and the pivotal role his magnum opus *The Destruction of the European Jews* played in the discussions. Matthäus explains that Hilberg sought to avoid small answers to big questions and focused instead on details that shed light on the sequence of events in their essence. Put differently, Hilberg tried to grasp what he called in the interview with Claude Lanzmann in *Shoah* the "*gestalt*" of the whole process. Hilberg was guided by an interest in the processual nature of persecution that resulted from the actions of a complex collective of perpetrators and the behavior of victims who were both part of a system of interactions that drove the dynamic of extermination.

In her contribution on the women in his life and work, Doris Bergen views Raul Hilberg from the perspective of a gender historian and sums up his work as the Sisyphus-like endeavor of an "existentialist hero" without, however, failing to discuss the conflicts he had with numerous female colleagues. Bergen's paper is followed by an interview transcription being published here for the first time. Offering interesting insights into his childhood in Vienna and his development as a Holocaust scholar, the interview was given to Austrian historian Evelyn Adunka when Hilberg visited Vienna in 1992 to present the German translation of *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*.[43] It was Hilberg's first public appearance in his birthland Austria.

The two chapters concluding Part I of this volume deal with Hilberg's use of language. Nicolas Berg sees in Hilberg's laconic style his underlying approach as a historian and Holocaust scholar and takes the reader on a journey from ancient Sparta, the capital of Laconia, to an imaginary twentieth-century Laconia, the linguistic homeland of Hilberg. The machinery of extermination, one of Hilberg's key figures of speech, is examined by Wulf Kansteiner in a selective text analysis of the last English edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*. He shows how the work and its author internalized the efficiency criteria of the German perpetrators.

Part I is rounded off with a critical commentary by Olof Bortz, who wrote his PhD about Hilberg.

Part II begins with a chapter by Christopher Browning, who examines Hilberg's publications of the three decades after *The Destruction*: an article and book about the German Reichsbahn, the translation of and introduction to the diary of Adam Czerniaków, and finally Hilberg's remarkable study, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*. Browning discusses the changes in Hilberg's interpretation of the role of the Judenräte and the limitations of his bystander category.

Susanne Heim subsequently explores how Hilberg's second book, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders*, and his perspective on the perpetrators has influenced the genesis and composition of the massive sixteen-volume source edition *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany, 1933–1945* that has been published in German since 2008 and in English since 2020. Heim, who was the project director of the German edition for many years, explains how the source edition was inspired by Hilberg's handling of perpetrator documents, although the documents selected for the edition engage with a broader spectrum of perpetrator perspectives than Hilberg's publications.

Sybille Steinbacher summarizes Hilberg's contributions to Holocaust research, highlighting his pathbreaking conceptualization of genocide as a systematic, yet chaotic, and proactive bureaucratic process involving all sectors of German society, his reticence to integrate the perspectives of victims and survivors in his research, and his skepticism about the politics of Holocaust memory prompting him to stay on the sidelines of many key debates of 1980s and 1990s.

Magnus Brechtken complements Steinbacher's appraisal by engaging with an often overlooked but nonetheless constitutive element of scholarly research and reflecting on Hilberg's powerful presence at academic conferences. The meetings were pivotal to Hilberg's academic reputation and thus helped shape his career as a scholar and public intellectual. In addition, the conferences played an important role in establishing the field as a discipline in its own right, not least because they gave a platform to voices like Hilberg's.

The last three chapters of Part II discuss Raul Hilberg's relationship with three defining figures of his lifetime: Franz Neumann, Philip Friedman, and Hannah Arendt.

Quite likely, Hilberg would have devoted his energies to studying the Nazi murder of Jews even if he had never met Franz Neumann, but his dissertation would certainly have taken on a very different shape if Hilberg had never read *Behemoth*. Alfons Söllner investigates the manifold influences of Neumann's work on Hilberg's analysis and takes a closer look at Hilberg's 1950 master's thesis, which he describes as a key "catalyst of Holocaust studies."

The contribution of Elisabeth Gallas takes a comparative look at two very different pioneers of Holocaust research in the United States: Raul Hilberg and Philip Friedman. The two were contemporaries, worked in close geographical proximity, and had overlapping research interests. Consequently, their work and reception show

numerous parallels and points of intersection, although the perspectives and premises of their research were almost diametrically opposed to each other. Hilberg and Friedman held very different opinions about the relevance of the reactions and views of Jewish victims for any professional historical analysis of the Nazi crimes. Gallas investigates these conflicting approaches to studying the Holocaust by applying the methods of the history of experience and knowledge. She highlights similarities and differences in terms of Hilberg's and Friedman's self-understanding, biographical background, and intellectual influences, exemplified by their respective mentors, Franz Neumann and Salo Baron. This comparative exercise also puts into sharper focus the development of Holocaust studies after 1945, including the marginalization experienced by Jewish historians.

According to Anna Corsten, the conflict between Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt can be attributed to their belonging to different academic settings and their practice of different thought styles, motivating Hilberg to immerse himself in perpetrator documents while Arendt sought to distance herself from these sources. Yet despite their competitive relationship and the pronounced disparity of their work in terms of content, methods, and scholarly habitus, Hilberg and Arendt shared a sense of outrage about German society's inability to mount any meaningful resistance against genocide. Plus, they were driven by the same passionate commitment to Holocaust research and subjected to harsh criticism by Jewish organizations.

In his comment, Peter Hayes concludes that the chapters of the second half of the volume highlight the rewards and risks involved in being an intellectual trailblazer like Hilberg and illustrate the nonlinearity of Hilberg's career and the development of Holocaust research in general. He adds that Hilberg, his trailblazing notwithstanding, remained a scholar of his time. Therefore, his convincing analysis of the history of the Holocaust suffers from a few important blind spots, including a lack of analytical engagement with the so-called "Holocaust by bullets."

Epilogue

The final word of this introduction shall be given to Eberhard Jäckel (1929–2017), who traveled to Hilberg's home in Burlington, Vermont, in the early 1980s to persuade him to accept an invitation to the first scholarly conference in Germany dedicated to the murder of Jews in

World War II. Jäckel achieved his aim; Hilberg came to Stuttgart in 1984, where he held his first academic lecture on German soil. Jäckel, who remained in close contact with Hilberg, concluded his opening remarks at the Stuttgart conference with the following words, words that take us back, in a manner of speaking, to the first lines of this introduction and the city of Buchach. The challenge faced by historians in their striving for critical interpretation, Jäckel said, is

> probably nowhere bigger than in the area we've chosen to study. It is compounded by the crippling horror and moral outrage that everyone has likely felt who has ever taken a closer look at the history of this most abysmal of crimes. In this respect, some may find the diligence of the scholar to be an inappropriate exercise in hairsplitting. Having said that, we would not have convened for this congress if we hadn't been convinced that the study of this monstrous mass murder is an important task of the historian.[44]

René Schlott is a freelance historian and associated researcher at the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam. He received his PhD in 2011 at the University of Giessen and is working on a biography of Raul Hilberg. He was awarded scholarships from the German Historical Institutes in Paris, Rome, and Washington, from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and from the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. He published numerous papers about life, work, and legacy of Raul Hilberg and is coeditor, with Walter H. Pehle, of Raul Hilberg's *The Anatomy of the Holocaust. Selected Works from a Life of Scholarship* (2020).

Wulf Kansteiner was Professor of Memory Studies and Contemporary History at Aarhus University and held a PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles. He was a cultural historian, historical theorist, and memory studies expert whose research focused on representations of history in visual culture, especially in regard to Nazism and the Holocaust, the narrative structures of historical writing, and the methods and theories of memory studies. He is the author of *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (2006) and coeditor of *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture* (2016) and *Agonistic Memory and the Legacy of 20th Century Wars in Europe* (2022). He was also cofounder and coeditor of the journal *Memory Studies* and

past President of the Memory Studies Association. Kansteiner died suddenly in August 2025 only months before the publication of this volume, which was his idea and is now part of his legacy. This volume is dedicated to him and his memory.

Notes

1. "Buczacz," in Guy Miron and Shlomit Shuhani, eds. *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos*, vol. I, A-M (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 86–88. See also Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).
2. Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 30.
3. For reasons of readability, the terms extermination of European Jews, genocide, Holocaust, and Shoah are used interchangeably in the following. The authors are aware of differences in meaning and origin. On the history of these terms, see James Edward Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
4. Otto Köhler, "Die Rationalität von Auschwitz. Frankfurter Diskussion um die Errichtung eines Holocaust-Forschungszentrums." *Die Zeit*, 1 November 1991. See also Sybille Steinbacher, this volume.
5. Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1990). The German translation was first published in Berlin in 1982 by Olle & Wolter.
6. Torben Fischer, "Raul Hilberg. Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden," in *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" in Deutschland. Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945*, edited by idem and Matthias N. Lorenz (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), 274–75.
7. Only in the late 1970s and early 1980s did the term "Holocaust" gain currency in the transatlantic sphere in reference to the genocide of European Jews by Nazi Germany. Scholars with roots in Eastern Europe had tended to use the word churban or khurbn (Yiddish for "destruction") in the early years of Holocaust research. The "destruction" in the title of Hilberg's magnum opus is likely a direct translation of this term into English. The Nazi euphemism "final solution" (Endlösung) was also frequently used; for example, in one of the first complete works on the topic: Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939–1945* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1953).
8. Hilberg, Politics, 25.
9. See Armin Nolzen, "Franz L. Neumanns 'Behemoth.' Ein vergessener Klassiker der NS-Forschung," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 1 (2004): 150–53, and Michael Wildt, "Franz Neumann und die NS-Forschung," in *Franz Neumann. Behemoth. Struktur und Praxis des Nationalsozialismus*, edited by Alfons Söllner and Michael Wildt (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2018), 663–99.

10. Hilberg, Politics, 58.
11. Ibid., 66.
12. See most recently Philipp Stelzel, *History After Hitler: A Transatlantic Enterprise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
13. Among others by Sven-Felix Kellerhoff, "Ein Leben für die Holocaust-Forschung," *Die Welt*, 6 August 2007.
14. Hilberg, Politics, 70.
15. See Alfons Söllner, this volume.
16. See Anna Corsten, this volume.
17. On the changes he made to the book, see Christopher Browning, this volume.
18. The first to point this out was Olof Bortz: *"I Wanted to Know How this Deed Was Done." Raul Hilberg, the Holocaust and History* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Faethon, 2017).
19. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Harper & Row, 1967). This paperback edition is not fully identical with the 1961 hardcover edition. It does not have a subtitle and includes additional sources; for example, on the role of the German State Railways in the deportations, as Hilberg himself points out in his postscript (770–71).
20. René Schlott, "Der lange Weg zum Buch. Zur Publikationsgeschichte von Raul Hilbergs 'The Destruction of the European Jews'," in *ZeitRäume: Potsdamer Almanach des Zentrums für Zeithistorische Forschung 2015*, edited by Frank Bösch and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 143–52.
21. The seminar was entitled "Contemporary Jewry." The description in the course catalog of 1974/75 went as follows: "Emancipation in the diaspora; annihilation under the Nazi regime; the establishment of Israel and its wars with Arab states" (Bulletin of the University of Vermont 1974–75, September 1975, 274). Hilberg's first Holocaust course labelled as such was offered in the academic year 1982–83.
22. Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron, and Josef Kermisz, eds. *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniaków: Prelude to Doom* (New York: Madison Books, 1979).
23. Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
24. See Susanne Heim, this volume.
25. Hilberg, Politics, 138.
26. Ibid., 83.
27. Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
28. Hilberg, Politics, 198.
29. Ibid., 49, 51, 66.
30. Ibid., 66.
31. Ibid., 124.
32. Ibid., 128.
33. Ibid., 135, 136, 131.
34. Ibid., 156.
35. Ibid., 164.
36. Ibid., 174.
37. Ibid., 190.
38. Ibid., 84, see also 59 and 64.

39. Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24; Allan Megill, "History, Memory, Identity," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 3 (1998): 37–62.
40. Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Georg Gangl, *Telling It Like It Really Was. On the Form, Presuppositions, and Justification of Historiographic Knowledge* (Oulu: University of Oulu, 2023).
41. Hilberg, Politics, 78.
42. Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Kuukkanen, Postnarrativist Philosophy.
43. Hilberg highlighted the interview and the interviewer in his autobiography as "exceptionally perceptive and insightful": Hilberg, Politics, 202.
44. Eberhard Jäckel, "Die Entschlußbildung als historisches Problem." *In Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Entschlußbildung und Verwirklichung*, edited by idem and Jürgen Rohwer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1987), 9–17, here 17 (first published in 1985).

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