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# Understanding the Holocaust:

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## The Past and Future of

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### Holocaust Studies

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GREGORY WEEKS

- Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 248 pp., (pb), ISBN 0801486815.
- Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 280 pp., \$17.95 (pb), ISBN 0847696316.
- Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 238 pp., \$15 (pb), ISBN 0521012694.
- Debórah Dwork, ed., *Voices & Views. A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, 2002), 687 pp., \$44.95 (pb), ISBN 0970060211.
- Cornelia Hecht, *Deutsche Juden und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Dietz 2003), 432 pp., €32.00 (hb), ISBN 3801241378.
- Dan Stone, *Constructing the Holocaust: A Study in Historiography* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell Publishers, 2003), 308 pp., \$49.50 (hb), ISBN 0853034907.
- Sue Vice, *Representing the Holocaust* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell Publishers), 280 pp., £17.50 (pb), £42.50 (hb), ISBN 0853034966.

The extensive literature available about the Holocaust grows daily, and it seems to be nearly limitless in scope. The books that will be discussed in the following review are merely a microcosm of this literature, but unfortunately, they, like much of the other literature on the Holocaust, differ greatly in quality and focus. In a sense, this is an essay about the general themes and overarching concepts of Holocaust research as exemplified by the seven books reviewed here.

As a result of the sheer volume of literature on the Holocaust, its antecedents, and the crimes it entailed, it is nearly impossible to claim that one knows all of the literature. One may know all the books in a specific segment of Holocaust research, but with approximately 300 new books on the Holocaust and nearly fifty

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on the Third Reich appearing in English each year,<sup>1</sup> one would be hard-pressed to have read it all. The books published in other languages offer an even greater number.

The history of the Holocaust and the crimes of Hitler's Germany is far from complete. New facets are continually being discovered and old facets re-evaluated. New documents, oral history sources and opinions continue to flood the market. As the Second World War generation ages and dies, there may be other surprises, at least from the Allied side, as archives are opened, but this is likely to add little to the documentation that is already available in German archives and in foreign archives about Germany during this period. The opening of non-German archives will give us a more balanced and nuanced picture of the course of the war and what Germany's enemies actually knew about the crimes being committed as it progressed.

A number of books such as Richard Breitman's *Official Secrets* and Walter Laquer's *The Terrible Secret* have already dealt with the issue of Allied secrecy and the Holocaust, but we can expect to see more written on this topic as confidential and top-secret documents are slowly declassified in the coming years. British military historian John Keegan has described the Allied need for secrecy in order to win the Second World War and the importance of classification to keep the code-breaking operations at Bletchley Park under wraps, a topic that Breitman discusses in detail in *Official Secrets*.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the books published on the Holocaust, however, are not based on revealing new documents and are less new research than a re-evaluation of older claims and ideas. All except one of the books reviewed here fall into this category. The only truly original research is to be found in Cornelia Hecht's *Deutsche Juden und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik*, which, although in many ways flawed in its methodology, tackles the important subject of how Jews themselves viewed antisemitism in the pre-Nazi years. In saying this, it should be noted that Inga Clendinnen's *Reading the Holocaust* is new only because of her line of argument, that the Holocaust as a human-created event can be understood.

Even with nearly sixty years of Holocaust research and writing behind us, the debate over the Holocaust and how it should be presented and understood continues. Evaluating the works discussed has been challenging since the theses and

1 *Bowker's Books in Print Professional* lists 293 books for the subject heading 'Holocaust' for 2004, 300 for 2003 and 313 for 2002. For 2004, it lists forty-nine books under the subject 'National Socialism' and for 1998 and 1999, fifty and forty-two respectively. The author would like to thank Ronald Coleman of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Library in Washington, DC, for his assistance in confirming these figures with a search of OCLC WorldCat. The number of books catalogued in any given year differs slightly from the figures cited above, since books published earlier are often catalogued in the following year.

2 Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998); John Keegan, 'What the Allies Knew', *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 1996; Richard Breitman, Norman J.W. Goda, Timothy Naftali and Robert Wolfe. *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis* (Washington, DC: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 2004, and Cambridge University Press, 2005, with a new conclusion); and Walter Laquer, *The Terrible Secret. An Investigation into the Suppression of Information about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980).

subjects of analysis are diverse. There are, however, commonalities for discussion and comparison, points of contact between the works under review. The question of understanding the mass murder of millions is critical to all the works reviewed here, and yet there still seems to be no consensus on the question of whether the Holocaust is comprehensible or not. The sheer magnitude of the crimes in question leaves any scholar of this series of events to ponder their significance for future generations and the meaning of all of these lost lives.

In these works the debate about the meaning of the Holocaust appears to be more important than the debate about how the Holocaust should be defined. What should we take away as a lesson from the Holocaust? The phrase ‘never again’, seen on monuments throughout Germany and eastern Europe, seems to be too little. There must be more, and the authors of these works struggle with the difficulties of trying to comprehend an event that is viewed by some as unique in human history. The uniqueness of the Holocaust has been a constant point of contention in its historiography, and its significance does not seem to have waned in the recent literature. Old debates are discussed while at the same time new arguments enter the mix, thus complicating the issues at hand even more. In various ways each book reviewed here grapples with old issues and new arguments to ‘invent’ a consensus that gives meaning to the deaths of millions in one of the most horrible human tragedies of all time. What exactly is the Holocaust and what does it mean for us? On this point, the books take very different stances.

There is something unnerving about any attempt to comprehend the Holocaust. Perhaps it is possible to believe that one has come to an individual understanding of the Holocaust as Inga Clendinnen claims, but this reviewer would argue that this is an utter impossibility. The comprehension required to contemplate such events would test the limits of our humanity.

Clendinnen’s *Reading the Holocaust* is interesting because it takes the point of view of the ‘casual’ reader of Holocaust literature and seeks to assist ‘perplexed outsiders’ (p. 5) in understanding how the Holocaust could occur and reviewing the literature available on this subject. Clendinnen states in her introduction that her purpose is ‘to challenge that bafflement, and the demoralisation which attends it’. She wants ‘to dispel the “Gorgon-effect” – the sickening of imagination and curiosity and the draining of the will which afflicts so many of us when we try to look squarely at the persons and processes implicated in the Holocaust’. She states succinctly,

I want to arrive at a clearer understanding of at least some of those persons and processes to be confident that the whole is potentially understandable. This is not a matter of arriving at some ‘Aha! now I comprehend everything!’ theory or moment. The understanding I seek comes from framing sufficiently precise questions to be able to see exactly what is before us, whether persons or processes. It is both cumulative, and never complete. (p. 4)

Unfortunately, it is exactly this precise framing of questions that is not found in Clendinnen’s work. Although she has worked on anthropological studies of how societies function, this particular work seems to be quite superficial, since it is a treatise based on her reading of Holocaust literature rather than a history based on

primary documents. Clendinnen's reputation was established with her work relating to Latin American history, but she does not show the same depth of knowledge in Holocaust studies as in her previous field. *Reading the Holocaust* was named a *New York Times* 'Best Book of the Year' and awarded the New South Wales Premier's General History Award in 1999. Daphne Merkin in her *New York Times* review describes the book as 'meditations on the unthinkable', and this is accurate. She says that *Reading the Holocaust* 'signals . . . a radical departure point, clearing a space out of cluttered and "jealously guarded" rhetorical arena for the discussion to be freshly and impassionedly taken up, without recourse to the proprietary claim of either intensive scholarship or actual witnessing', but *Reading the Holocaust* can hardly be described as the 'radical departure point' that Merkin sees.<sup>3</sup>

For lay readers, *Reading the Holocaust* is appealing. In fact, being able to explain the Holocaust is appealing to any Holocaust scholar. A collective explanation of the Holocaust, much as we may want one, is simply not an option. *Reading the Holocaust* claims to answer the major question of post-Second World War Holocaust studies, namely that of comprehension, yet Clendinnen either oversimplifies or entirely misunderstands major debates in Holocaust research – for example, she writes that Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen are both flawed in their evaluations of the Holocaust in Poland when the scholarly community is generally agreed that Daniel Goldhagen's theses are both provocative and, at times, untenable.<sup>4</sup> As Christopher Browning makes clear in an essay, 'different historians reading the same set of interrogations would not produce or agree upon an identical set of "facts" – beyond an elementary minimum – out of which a narrative of events . . . could be created'.<sup>5</sup> Goldhagen and Browning ask very different questions about the nature of the Holocaust and thus come to very different conclusions based on their interpretations of the documents they have reviewed.

It is not Clendinnen's argument that forming precise questions about the Holocaust can help us to comprehend it or her misunderstanding of the Browning/Goldhagen debate that bothers this reviewer most; it is the way in which the work is written as a whole. It is neither a historical study nor a literary analysis. It is an essay in book form with footnotes to literature consulted that lacks a historical approach. Clendinnen's argument, it seems, is based on her previous anthropological research in understanding societies and not on the vast research that already exists on the Holocaust. Clendinnen deludes herself if she believes that by reading books on the Holocaust and scrutinising the biographies of Nazi leaders, *Sonderkommando* members and Order Policemen she can 'understand' the Holocaust. She pays special attention

3 Daphne Merkin, 'Meditations on the Unthinkable', *New York Times*, 11 April 1999, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/04/11/reviews/990411.11merkint.html> (accessed on 12 June 2005).

4 See Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

5 Christopher R. Browning, 'German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, and Historical Reconstruction: Writing Perpetrator History from Postwar Testimony', in Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 30–1.

to Primo Levi's autobiography, noting how important he is for understanding the Holocaust in her view, and certainly this is one moving eyewitness account of the brutality of the Holocaust, but it is not the only one, nor can it provide all the answers.

A question that Clendinnen fails either to ask or to answer is whether the entirety of the Holocaust can be covered in a single history like hers or if the magnitude of the event itself precludes its being treated in this way. What Clendinnen offers her readers is an attempt to approach Holocaust historiography by questioning the way in which previous Holocaust history has been written and by critically evaluating and examining both the sources and the suppositions and presuppositions of the authors.

In contrast to *Reading the Holocaust*, Debórah Dwork's edited volume *Voices & Views: A History of the Holocaust* covers most of the major areas of Holocaust research, with essays by scholars recognised in their respective fields. Through contributions by, for example, Saul Friedländer, Robert S. Wistrich, Christopher R. Browning, Raul Hilberg, Yehuda Bauer, Primo Levi, Michael R. Marrus and Henry L. Feingold, the reader is given a cross-section of the state of current Holocaust research and not only a feeling for the directions in which present research is progressing but also samples of writing from some of the best scholars working on these topics. The introduction explains that the book is the first volume in a series titled 'Teaching the Holocaust: History, Perspectives and Choices', designed to be an 'educational resource' for 'people across a spectrum of professions who wish to know more than they do now about the history of the Holocaust' (pp. 3–4).

*Voices & Views* is divided into ten sections: 'Jews, Gentiles, and Germans', 'World War I and the Interwar Period', 'The National Socialist Regime', 'Refugee Policy', 'Gentile Life under German Occupation', 'Jewish Life under German Occupation', 'The Machinery of Death and the Murderers', 'Rescue', 'The Rescuers' and 'After the Holocaust'. The idea is to set a moral example, and the chapters have been chosen by Dwork to meet this need. Among these is David S. Wyman's 'The Abandonment of the Jews', which is an excerpt from his 1998 book of the same title. Wyman's chapter, which deals with the United States' inactivity in relation to rescuing Jews during the Holocaust, makes fascinating reading. Moral culpability at both the highest and lowest levels is examined.

The book's sections focus primarily on the Jewish experience in the Holocaust and not on other minority groups such as homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses, who were also persecuted and killed during the Holocaust. Although it is quite comprehensive, *Voices & Views* does not cover the entire spectrum of Holocaust scholarship. This follows a pattern in Holocaust research and writing of either broadly defining the Holocaust to include all victims of Nazi terror or making the claim that the Jewish experience in the Second World War was unique compared with other genocides that have occurred before and after, including what happened in Armenia in 1915 and Rwanda in 1995.

Dwork makes good use of various photo archives, especially those of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Associated Press. There is one misleading caption on page 177, where German policemen who were part of the invasion

force are referred to as 'Viennese Police', but in general the photographs are both interesting and illustrative. The maps and charts in the book are also extremely useful as both reference and teaching resources, especially the ones that make clear the routes of the *Einsatzgruppen*, deportation routes and the change in the Jewish population throughout Europe from 1939 to 1945. In addition, the index is also invaluable for anyone who wishes to use *Voices & Views* as a reference book, especially in the case of university or public libraries.

In the end, *Voices & Views* lives up to its title as a compilation of Holocaust research and a companion to current research in the field by some of the leading scholars in their respective disciplines. It is critical and enlightening on a broad range of subjects. It has the 'voices' of survivors and the 'views' of experts in Holocaust studies. It is both readable and well researched, and it clearly serves the purpose that it set out to accomplish, namely to be used as a resource for those teaching the Holocaust. In this, it is an admirable accomplishment. The format is appealing, and Dwork's experience in writing and editing previous books shows in the professional job she has done here. *Voices & Views* is truly a monumental work and will be appreciated as a reference work for scholars as well as scholarship in its own right.

Moving from this compilation of research in the field to an introductory study of the Holocaust, Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* is one of the best general histories this reviewer has seen on the Holocaust and would be ideal as an undergraduate-level textbook for teaching this subject. Despite the large literature on the Holocaust, there have been very few good general overviews produced that are sufficiently factually accurate to be used as readings for undergraduate courses on this topic, and this slim volume provides an accurate and brief introduction to Holocaust history.

Bergen is associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame and is the author of *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. With *War and Genocide*, she takes on a difficult subject and covers all its facets: social, political, cultural, military and historical. This is no easy task, and to do this in clear and eloquent language as Bergen does is no mean feat. Bergen does not fall into academic jargon. She tells the story of the Holocaust in a succinct manner and makes it understandable to a wide readership.

There seems to be no end to the endorsements of the book from recognised Holocaust scholars including John K. Roth, Michael R. Marrus, Alan E. Steinweis, Nathan Soltzofus and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, and this praise is richly deserved. Bergen takes a difficult subject and makes it understandable to the average reader while maintaining historical standards and retaining important detail. This is excellent for making the facts of the Holocaust accessible to a wide audience, and it is very successful in achieving this purpose.

Bergen keeps up an excellent narrative flow while describing how the National Socialists came to power in Germany, interwove racism and military conquest, and finally implemented their plans for the destruction of Europe's Jews. She clearly places the Holocaust in its correct historical context by making direct reference to the Second World War as a cover for the Nazis to commit their crimes. As with

Bergen, the trend in recent literature since the 'Crimes of the Wehrmacht' exhibition in Germany and Austria has been to place the Holocaust within the greater context of the Second World War, something that had previously been neglected. The Holocaust does not stand alone, but must be understood in relation to the wartime objectives of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist state.

Doris Bergen skilfully navigates through the landscape of war and genocide in the Holocaust and clearly delineates the stages of the mass murder of millions of Europeans who did not fit the ideal established by the Nazis. In doing this, she uses her own personal discretion and knowledge of the subject to write a balanced history of all of the groups targeted for 'extermination' by the Nazis as well as to discuss the motivations of the perpetrators. While it may seem strange to examine Adolf Eichmann and his motivations, understanding the Nazi killers is important in any attempt to understand the enormity of the Holocaust and its meaning. Although Bergen does not include much new information on the Holocaust, her recounting of the events in question is well worth reading and critically questions previously held notions about the relationship between war and genocide in Nazi Germany.

The history of the Holocaust is a complicated subject and should not be diluted. Bergen's *War and Genocide*, unlike many of its competitors, avoids this fatal flaw by using her own personal research to test conventional wisdom and give the reader a more nuanced perspective on the events in question. Bergen's weakness on the personal motivations of some individual perpetrators, although problematic, can also be seen as a strength of the work because it allows for classroom discussion of these issues.

In conjunction with Bergen's introductory history, Cornelia Hecht's *Deutsche Juden und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik* is well worth examining in order to gain an understanding of the antecedents of the Holocaust. Hecht's solidly researched study builds a strong narrative argument about German-Jewish identity and how German Jews reacted to daily antisemitism during the Weimar Republic. Hecht refers to the First World War as the 'era of disappointments' and the Weimar Republic as the 'era of hope', yet in the Weimar years there were numerous attacks against Jews throughout Germany.

As Hecht states, 'The fate of the German Jews was, in many respects, closely bound up with the fate of Germany, the fate of the Weimar Republic, this unloved and only grudgingly accepted democratic post-war state' (p. 407). The Republic brought the Jews de facto equality, but, at the same time, it allowed antisemitism to rise and gain the upper hand. Via the cases that Hecht describes, the reader gets a feeling for Jewish life in a strongly antisemitic society. She traces the antisemitism of the Third Reich back to the period prior to Jewish emancipation during the Weimar Republic, and argues that Jews clearly felt its prevalence in Germany while at the same time never giving up hope that this might some day change. She says, quite correctly,

The fear of the participation of the National Socialists in the government would have been much lower if German Jews had had the impression that their position in the majority society



stood on a stable foundation, supported and defended by the pillars of the Republic. (p. 405, my translation)

The inner-Jewish conflict between Zionists and non-Zionists traces its roots back to the understanding of antisemitism in the Republic and how dangerous it actually was.

Despite its reputation as antisemitic, Hecht says that the CV (Cartell Verband, the Catholic fraternity system in Germany) proved to be a 'bulwark' for German Jews against antisemitism. According to Hecht, without the help of CV members and their contacts with public figures, the Jews would have been in an even worse predicament (p. 407).

Because of the prevalent and open antisemitism, German Jews increased their participation in cultural life and inadvertently caused a rise in this same antisemitism as German non-Jews came to believe that Jewish influence on the press, publishing and culture was becoming too great (p. 403). Hecht describes the 'moral indifference' of German non-Jews and the constant battle of the 'Jewish press' against this situation, and, in the end, offers a differentiated view of the Weimar Republic and its Jews that tells us a great deal about daily life, German antisemitism and the general views of the 'Jewish press', as well as the daily frustrations of Jews with the Weimar system. She uses sources from archives in Moscow, Jerusalem and Berlin as well as a broad sample of publications from the 'Jewish Press' in Weimar Germany to build her argument. Much of her information, especially about the Cartell Verband is new, and it clarifies our present picture of Jewish integration and Jewish-Christian conflict in the Weimar years (p. 403). Hecht's final sentence makes the impact of this clear: 'How bad it would come to be, however, no one could imagine.'

For those interested in Holocaust film studies, Sue Vice's *Representing the Holocaust* has many interesting tidbits, although most of them are not new or revealing. *Representing the Holocaust* is a collection in honour of Bryan Burns (1945–2000) containing diverse essays on the Holocaust and Holocaust research in Great Britain. For this reviewer, the most interesting part of the collection was the historical, which focused on the British museum landscape and also dealt with the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies in London in a chapter by J. M. Ritchie. This centre has done more than nearly any other organisation to call attention to exile studies and act as a clearing house for research on Austrian and German exiles in the United Kingdom during the Second World War.

The focus of *Representing the Holocaust* is the portrayal of the Holocaust in history, film, cultural approaches, biography and literature. The book is thus divided into sections, with two or three chapters in each, dealing with these topics. The thread linking these various essays is weak, and there is a lack of transition between them, but the authors know their material well and delve into the details of the representation of the Holocaust in research and filmmaking. This emphasis on literature and film representations of the Holocaust becomes clear when reading the essays in the volume. The methods and means of analysis used are very much textual and contextual. This said, the collection is both multi- and interdisciplinary, and covers research



currently being conducted in the United Kingdom as opposed to the United States, Germany or Israel. Sue Vice's own essay on Binjamin Wilomirski's *Fragments* deals with 'Holocaust Envy: "Why wasn't I there, too?"' and tackles the questions raised by invented Holocaust memoirs or forgeries claiming to be authentic Holocaust memoirs. Clearly, the danger posed by trickery of this kind is that it distorts the historical record and can lead researchers to false conclusions. Although interesting, this book is not really intended for use in teaching a course on the Holocaust and will be of more interest to the academic specialist, especially those interested in the course of Holocaust research in Britain, than it will be to general readers or for coursework.

Dan Stone's *Constructing the Holocaust* helps us to evaluate the wide-ranging complexity of the 'intellectual problems' associated with the Holocaust, particularly the problems of historiography and pre-existing historiographical traditions, as well as narration and method. Stone is not alone in dealing with these issues. The difficulty of Holocaust memory is addressed in several of the other works reviewed here, including Clendinnen's *Reading the Holocaust* and Omer Bartov's *Germany's War and the Holocaust*.

In fact, *Constructing the Holocaust* deals with issues similar to those addressed by Clendinnen. Stone, who is lecturer in twentieth-century European history at Royal Holloway, University of London, examines Holocaust historiography in the light of recent critical philosophy of history arguments. He focuses on the paradox of trying to comprehend the Holocaust using methods inherited from Western civilization, when the Holocaust calls into question the basis of that very civilization. Stone is the author of *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain*<sup>6</sup> and edited *Theoretical Interpretations of the Holocaust*.<sup>7</sup> Using both traditional historiography and philosophy of history, Stone makes a compelling argument for the use of new historiographical methods such as textual, contextual and non-narrative approaches in writing about, studying, analysing and researching the Holocaust (pp. xiv–xv).

Stone's *Constructing the Holocaust*, Clendinnen's *Reading the Holocaust* and much of the 'new' Holocaust history deal with universal questions of meaning related to the Holocaust. Perhaps it is the distance of sixty years after the events in question that allows, even forces, these authors to tackle these questions and examine the sense and senselessness of the Holocaust from the standpoint of the philosophy of history. Perhaps we shall never be able to explain the tragedy of the Holocaust and its significance for humankind. Both Stone and Clendinnen question the meanings and positioning of the Holocaust in history. Stone asks the reader to examine 'the processes and techniques whereby meanings are constructed' (p. ix). As Jonathan Webber writes in his Foreword,

After all, 'history' does not mean just the past itself, but also how the past is recorded, communicated and supposedly understood; so if the Holocaust should change the way we think about the world,

6 Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002.

7 Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001.

have we radically reassessed how we retell the story of the tragedy? For if we have not done so, have we really made sense of the totality of this past?

Stone's subtitle is 'A Historiography of the Holocaust', and he devotes the second part of his book to debates surrounding 'The uniqueness of the Holocaust' and 'Narrative theory and Holocaust Historiography', as well as 'Modernity and the Origins of the Holocaust'. He is interested in memory and the historicisation of the Holocaust, and his second chapter deals with Nazism as a historiographical problem and other primary issues in Holocaust historiography. In chapter 3, 'An Aggressive Silence', Stone confronts head-on many of the same issues as do Clendinnen and Bartov regarding Germany after the Second World War, especially the initial focus on the perpetrators rather than on the victims of the Holocaust. As Stone writes, 'Only once the conservative ascendancy had been effected in Germany did German historiography begin to discuss the Holocaust' (p. 98). According to Stone, it took until 1961 for the first German monograph on the subject, *Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich*, to appear, nearly sixteen years after the end of the war. Stone goes on to say that 'While the silence of German historians on the subject of the genocide of the Jews is startling in its aggression, it took its cue from the West'.

Stone does an insightful job in questioning the sustainability of our modern historical narrative regarding the Holocaust, or, as reviewer Mark Levine, of the University of Southampton, phrases it on the book jacket, 'the way historians so often fail to adequately deal with the chaotic, the irrational and the violently excessive'. This may be an attempt to comprehend the Holocaust, but it is done here in a way that is logical and forces readers to question their previously held views and beliefs. Stone's differentiated approach is a welcome respite from Clendinnen's bold claims, and he speaks to authors like Clendinnen when he writes, 'Clearly, the Holocaust can be narrated and has been many times. The issue is really about why, given the obviously chaotic nature of the events, it is still most often narrated in such a way as to render it coherent' (p. 224).

In his own way Stone offers a reflected and acceptable approach to studying the Holocaust that Clendinnen fails to produce in her musings, but, like Clendinnen, he sees the need for new narratives of the Holocaust. As he himself states, 'Indeed, the Holocaust presents us with the clearest example of the need to find new narratives for experiences that do not sit comfortably with the more comfortable platitudes of tradition' (pp. 223–4).

The problem with Holocaust research really seems to be that no one single researcher can ever have seen all the evidence, have waded through all of the sources or claim to have tackled all of the major questions, and even if he or she had, there would still be differences of interpretation. In the end, all Holocaust-related research is specialised, and it is a subject better dealt with by teams of researchers in various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, literature and political science than by individuals if we want to achieve a full picture of its enormity. The advantage of a compilation of research like Dwork's is that it provides readers with

the breadth and depth so often missing in general single-author histories of the Holocaust.

The question of the literary handling of the Holocaust and the entire discipline that has grown up around literary depictions are cases in point. Literature, especially fiction, does nothing towards increasing our knowledge of the facts. It serves a different purpose, namely that of dealing with and responding to the moral and ethical questions raised by the Holocaust. It is this coming to terms with the past ('*Aufarbeitung*') through a discussion of moral and ethical issues that is the focus of much of current Holocaust research. Our sensibilities find it difficult to deal with the questions that any study of the Holocaust poses.

The most interesting part of *Constructing the Holocaust* is Stone's analysis in chapter 4 of the 'main' authors in Holocaust historiography (p. 146). He covers Raul Hilberg, Lucy Dawidowicz, Martin Gilbert, Helmut Krausnick and Saul Friedländer to exemplify the agreements and disagreements in Holocaust research. Of course, any selection of this type is going to be arbitrary since the canon of Holocaust literature is vast, but Stone masters this well. In fact, Bartov's analysis of German Holocaust historiography in *Germany's War and the Holocaust* resembles Stone's and comes to similar conclusions about German reluctance to confront their Second World War history.

Bartov, a professor of history at Brown University, deals with the problems of Holocaust scholarship by focusing on how worldwide historiography has viewed Germany and the Second World War with regard to the Holocaust. Bartov is interested in the relationship between the war and genocide and establishes his framework early on. As he writes,

The army had long managed to protect itself from the charges of complicity with the Nazi regime that had been levelled at other agencies of the dictatorship. Although scholarship had begun exposing military involvement in Nazi policies as early as the 1960s, and with increasing momentum since the 1980s, the public at large often either did not know about these specialised studies or preferred to ignore their implications. (p. xi)

Bartov begins by describing the historiography and historical debates surrounding *Germany's War and the Holocaust* and moves into a discussion of the moral choices faced by German soldiers during the Second World War and the comparability or uniqueness of this 'German experience' in this conflict. Bartov's historiographical focus, although interesting, is long and involved and eventually turns into a literary analysis of post-war German literature, including the work of Heinrich Böll and Günther Grass. These exercises do not, however, clear up the question of what Germany's war was all about. They deal more with the various opinions about the war and the path to genocide than they do with the war itself. The book's subtitle, 'Disputed Histories' is, thus, more appropriate than 'Germany's War and the Holocaust'.

In this vein, one thing that Bartov does very well is challenge Daniel Goldhagen's thesis, expounded in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, that Germans were eliminationist antisemites. Furthermore, he makes it clear that Goldhagen's deliberate decision not

to focus on the death camps means that a major component of the Holocaust is omitted and that the focus is shifted from the 'racial war' of which the Holocaust was clearly a part.

Interestingly enough, however, a significant question about the racial war waged on the Eastern Front by Nazi Germany is not covered in Bartov's book, namely how East Germany dealt with the Holocaust and commemoration of the Second World War after the fact. Bartov leaves this out of his discussion of post-1945 Holocaust research and German atonement for the crimes of the Nazi regime. Fortunately, Jeffrey Herf has done a fine job of dealing with this question in *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, which won the American Historical Association's George Louis Beer Prize in 1998 and was the co-winner of the Fraenkel Prize in Contemporary History from the Institute of Contemporary History and the Wiener Library in London.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, Bartov's discussion of the so-called *Historikerstreit* (disagreement of historians) also fails to break new ground. He comments on the disagreement between functionalists and intentionalists, writing that functionalism appears to have been the dominant strategy for dealing with the Holocaust in Germany after 1945. Functionalists focused then as now on the factors in the 'Hitler State' (Martin Broszat) that led to genocide, and argue that neither an understanding of the perpetrators nor of their victims leads to a better understanding of why the Holocaust occurred. Bartov then examines attempts by Götz Aly to place perpetrators back in the study of the Holocaust in order to shed more light on the crimes and atrocities committed by the Germans through an examination of Nazi racial and population policies. He criticises Aly for his failure to see National Socialist racism as central to the regime, but offers little to back up his criticism that Aly has in truth ignored this topic. This book is elegantly and eloquently written and covers the major controversies in Holocaust research well; however, it is aimed at a more general audience and not at specialists.

This review is subtitled 'The Past and Future of Holocaust Studies', and a word needs to be said about that before closing. As the survivors of the Shoah and National Socialist crimes have begun to die, there has been renewed interest in questioning past views of the Holocaust. New research agendas addressing old questions will surely lead to new debates about the origins and significance of the Holocaust. As our knowledge increases so does the number of unanswered questions requiring new investigation. How does one contemplate the hatred and prejudice that lead to crimes of mass murder? How does one make palpable the change of seemingly 'ordinary' men into murders and brutal killers? It is not an easy task and one that many would be loath to tackle, yet these books address these themes and come to very different conclusions about what the Holocaust means and what its lessons should be. In fact, the books reviewed here show the trend towards re-evaluating Holocaust narratives in history and literature, and, whether we agree or disagree with their conclusions,

8 Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

we must admit that this discussion is important in order to prevent future crimes of this magnitude.

In the end, however, there may never be a consensus on whether the Holocaust can be truly understood. The magnitude of the crimes committed and the scores of fates involved are just too immense to claim a full understanding. It is an emotional issue, both for researchers and survivors, and no single book can do justice to its immensity.