

**Jürgen Graf**

# **THE GIANT WITH FEET OF CLAY**

**Raul Hilberg  
and his  
Standard Work  
on the  
“Holocaust”**



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*“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces; then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”*

– Daniel 2:31-35 (RSV)

## I. Introduction

According to the official version of history, during the Second World War the German National Socialists carried out a mass murder against the Jewish population that was unparalleled in its monstrosity and its systematic ruthlessness. Many millions of Jews, we are told, were taken from German-ruled lands and packed off to ‘extermination camps’ in the Polish territories and there killed, mostly in gas chambers but some in gas vans. We are also told the Germans massacred an immense number of Jews behind the eastern front. The total number of victims of gassing or shooting as well as of those who died from disease, exhaustion, hunger or other cause supposedly runs to five or six million.

This claimed unique genocide is usually labeled with the word ‘Holocaust,’ which comes from the Greek word *όλοκαυστός* for “*entirely burned*,” and which has spread throughout and beyond the Anglo-Saxon language domain since the release of the US motion picture of the same name in 1979.

The version of the fate of the Jews during the Second World War just summarized can be found in all the dictionaries and history books of the Western world. It is taken as axiomatic in any public discussion

on the ‘Holocaust.’ Deviation from this version is discouraged. Dissenting voices are stilled by a powerful media censorship and in many European states they are suppressed with police-state terror tactics.

In the last few decades a vast literature on the ‘Holocaust’ has appeared, but there is general agreement that there is one work which can be regarded as the standard work on the subject: Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*.

Born in Vienna in 1926, the Jew Hilberg emigrated to the United States with his parents in 1939. In 1944 he joined the American Army. In 1948 he began to study the question of the destiny of the Jews under the National Socialist regime. In the years 1951/52 he worked in the Federal Documentation Center at Alexandria, Virginia, where his job was to evaluate captured German documents. In 1952 he was awarded a Master’s degree in Political Science, and in 1955 the Doctor’s degree in Law. As is the case with most other authors who have dealt with the ‘Holocaust,’ he is not a historian by profession. However, for many years at the University of Vermont, in addition to International Relations and US Foreign Policy he has taught on the history of the Jews during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup>

*The Destruction of the European Jews* first appeared in 1961 and was reprinted unchanged in 1967 and 1979. In 1985, a “revised and definitive” edition with a few changes followed. Amazingly, the voluminous work was not published in German until 1982, and then only by a small publisher (Olle and Wolter in Berlin). It was called *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*. We will use the three-volume edition published May 1997 by Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag in Frankfurt, based on the “definitive” English version of 1985.<sup>2</sup>

Hilberg’s study on the ‘Holocaust’ claims to be the unrivalled best and most exhaustive work of its kind. This is made unmistakably clear in the introduction to the German edition of the work:

*“If the phrase ‘standard work’ has any meaning at all, Hilberg’s famous comprehensive history of the Holocaust must be considered as such. [...] The theme of this work is the malefactors, the plan, the method of operation and the operation itself. With the ‘coolness and precision’ which characterizes the great historians (Süddeutsche Zeitung) Hilberg traces the*

<sup>1</sup> For Hilberg’s biography see the Introduction to the German edition of Hilberg’s work, (*Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt 1997), and also Barbara Kulaszka (ed.) *Did Six Million Really Die?*, Samisdat Publishers, Toronto 1992, pp. 5f. ([www.ihr.org/books/kulaszka/falsenews.toc.html](http://www.ihr.org/books/kulaszka/falsenews.toc.html))

<sup>2</sup> 3 vols., Holmes and Meier, New York 1985.

*involvement and participation of the ruling elites in the government, in industry and the armed forces in the destruction of the Jews. The functional dedication of the ordinary bureaucrat, railway man, policeman and soldier to the work of annihilation will also be traced. A type of criminal steps forward (who will be named) who will never stand before a judge after 1945: the Prussian general, the national conservative ministerial official, the diplomat, the jurist, industrialists, chemists and medical doctors.*

*Hilberg has collected and refined the material for his book throughout his lifetime. He is known as the best-informed specialist on the sources, which for the most part came from the perpetrators. They have recorded the proof of their deadly handiwork—with characteristic thoroughness—a hundred thousand times over—with official stationery and seals.*

*The present comprehensive history of the Holocaust is ‘source material for specialists, analysis for theoreticians and a history book without parallel for the general public.’ (Sunday Times).”*

That Hilberg’s work is the result of an immense and devoted labor is recognized even by Revisionists, those who dispute the current version of the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich. For the Frenchman Prof. Robert Faurisson, one of the most prominent Revisionists, Hilberg stands “*high above Poliakov, Wellers, Klarsfeld and others like them.*”<sup>3</sup> Because of Hilberg’s dominant position in orthodox ‘Holocaust’ literature the Revisionists have had to confront his work again and again. The first such confrontation was in 1964, three years after the appearance of the first edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*. At that time, the Frenchman Paul Rassinier, a former Resistance fighter, ex-prisoner of the NS concentration camps Buchenwald and Dora, and the founder of Revisionism, made a full attack on Hilberg. In his book *Le Drame des Juifs Européens*, Rassinier made a thorough study of Hilberg’s statistics on Jewish population losses during the Second World War. He rejected the latter’s conclusion that the number of Jewish victims should be set at 5.1 million; he said Hilberg could only have arrived at this number by a gross manipulation of his data. According to Rassinier, and based on Hilberg’s data, the real number of Jewish NS victims was less than one million.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Robert Faurisson, “*Mon expérience du révisionnisme.*” in: *Annales d’Histoire Révisionniste*, no. 8, spring 1990; quoted from Robert Faurisson, *Écrits révisionnistes (1974-1998)*, 4 volumes, privately published 1999, p. 954 (vol. III).

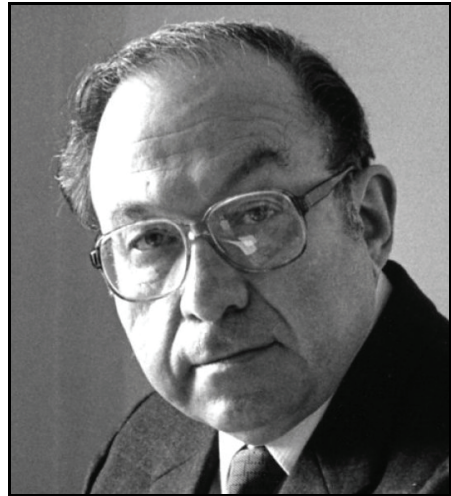
([www.aaargh.vho.org/fran/archFaur/1986-1990/ RF9003xx1.html](http://www.aaargh.vho.org/fran/archFaur/1986-1990/ RF9003xx1.html))  
<sup>4</sup> Paul Rassinier, *Le drame des juifs européens*, Les Sept Couleurs, Paris 1964, Reprinted by La Vieille Taupe, Paris 1984, pp. 15-32, 107-221.  
 ([www.aaargh.vho.org/fran/archRassi/dje/ dje.html](http://www.aaargh.vho.org/fran/archRassi/dje/ dje.html))

Revisionist research has not stood still in the more than 35 years since the appearance of Rassinier's critique of Hilberg. However, there has never been a comprehensive analysis of the methods Hilberg applied nor a critical appraisal of his conclusions. The purpose of the present work is to remedy that lack.

Our investigation will concentrate on the following points:

- What proofs does Hilberg provide that the NS regime planned the physical destruction of Jews living in its area of control?
- What proofs does Hilberg provide for the existence of extermination camps, that is, camps erected solely or partially for the murder of Jews and provided with killing gas chambers for this purpose?
- What proofs does Hilberg provide for the figure of close to 5.1 million which he claims is the number of Jewish victims of National Socialist policy?

There will be no discussion on the persecutions and deportations of Jews during the Second World War nor on the suffering of Jews in camps and ghettos, which are doubted by almost nobody: Hilberg's work rests on incontestably solid source material here. The mass shootings of Jews behind the eastern front are a different matter. It is not disputed by anyone that shootings took place; what is in dispute by Revisionist researchers is the extent of these shootings as claimed by Hilberg and other orthodox historians. On this point too we will examine critically the numbers of victims Hilberg claims and the sources he has used.




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*Raul Hilberg*

In short, we will attempt to determine whether Hilberg's great work on the 'Holocaust' deserves the scholarly merit it lays claim to or must be found lacking.



## II. General Remarks

Three points are noteworthy on a first reading of Hilberg's work:

### 1. Consistent Ignoring of Opposing Theses

Whoever undertook to read Hilberg's standard work without further knowledge of the problems in the study of the 'Holocaust' would never suspect that the version of events offered there is in dispute. Hilberg does not utter the least suggestion that there is a school of researchers who dispute not only the existence of a policy of extermination of the Jews in the Third Reich but also the existence of 'extermination camps' and homicidal gas chambers. Other advocates of the orthodox version of the 'Holocaust' at least mention the existence of such deviant ideas, usually only to malign them without studying them.<sup>5</sup> Hilberg, however, pretends he has never heard anything of the Revisionists. He pretends he has never heard of the studies of such respected and serious scholars as Arthur Butz, Wilhelm Stäglich or Robert Faurisson. Hilberg does not make mention of a single Revisionist book or a single Revisionist journal, and he does not even peripherally discuss any Revisionist objection to the annihilation thesis.

When Hilberg published the first edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961, he could perhaps have justified ignoring viewpoints which threw doubt on the accepted version of the fate of Jews in the Third Reich; the few Revisionist works of the time were fairly modest.<sup>6</sup> In 1985 such a position was no longer tenable. (It is worth noting

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<sup>5</sup> In the introduction to the collection *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt 1986), edited by Eugen Kogon, Hermann Langbein, Adalbert Rückerl and others, the editors thunder against the "apologists for Nazi theory and practice" who "deny" the events of the past, from which in any case the reader can see that there are some who dispute the accepted version of the 'Holocaust.' Of course, neither authors nor titles are named.

<sup>6</sup> One exception is Paul Rassinier's remarkable book *Le Mensonge d'Ulysse*, which had

that Revisionist research has made great progress since that year while the proponents of the extermination thesis have been marching in place and, with the sole exception of Jean-Claude Pressac, have nothing new to offer.)

Because ignoring or suppressing counter-arguments is a telltale sign of unscholarly method, considerable doubt must be cast on the credibility of Hilberg's scholarship.

## 2. No Photos, No Description of the Homicidal Gas Chambers and Gas Vans

Hilberg's gigantic three-volume work, running to 1,351 pages, contains exactly three photographs, namely those on the title pages of the three volumes. (*Destruction of the European Jews*, hereafter called *DEJ*, runs to 1,232 pages; there are no photographs.) In the text itself there is not one photograph, which must be considered unusual for so extensive a work. Likewise, he offers his reader no description of a gas chamber or a gas van, although this would seem to be important in view of the novelty and the monstrousness of the use of such killing machines. There is no illustration or sketch which might give inquisitive readers insight into how these gruesome instruments of murder allegedly functioned.

Hilberg's aversion to encounter the physical reality of the concentration camps and the so-called 'extermination camps' can also be seen in the fact that he has never personally undertaken an investigation at the locations of the camps. Before 1985, this man who had begun his studies on the 'Holocaust' back in 1948 had spent exactly one day in Treblinka and another half day in Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau – *and in all three cases this was only to participate in memorial ceremonies*. He has never visited any of the other concentration camps at any time.<sup>7</sup> This has a very odd appearance. In contrast to Hilberg, Revisionists such as Dietlieb Felderer, Robert Faurisson, Carlo Mattogno, Gernar Rudolf and the writer of these lines, and also the non-Revisionist

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appeared as early as 1950 (reprinted by La Vieille Taupe, Paris 1980; [www.aaargh.vho.org/fran/archRassi/prmu/prmu.html](http://www.aaargh.vho.org/fran/archRassi/prmu/prmu.html)). However, this is a report of personal experience—necessarily colored by subjective impressions—and not a work of scholarly rigor.

<sup>7</sup> Hilberg's statement under cross-examination by defense attorney Douglas Christie in the first Zündel trial in Toronto in 1985, cited in Barbara Kulaszka, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 16.

Jean-Claude Pressac, have made thorough examinations of the buildings where the witnesses say the mass murders took place and have studied the applicable construction drawings. Such on-site research is absolutely necessary for solving this controversy.

### 3. Discrepancy between the Title and the Contents of the Work

There is no doubt that the larger part of the material Hilberg presents rests on reliable sources. This applies particularly to the four hundred pages in which he describes the persecution of the Jews (*Judenverfolgung*), the anti-Jewish laws and measures taken by Germany and her allies. However, the work is not entitled *The Persecution of the European Jews* (*Die Verfolgung der europäischen Juden*), but *The Destruction of the European Jews* (*Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*), and his title is not suitable for the work taken as a whole. Someone who has struggled through the 283 pages of the first volume has not yet encountered the subject for which Hilberg has named his work. The first 123 pages of the second volume, namely pages 287 to 410 (*DEJ*, v. 1, pages 271-390), are devoted to the “*Mobile Killing Operations*”; this concerns the mass killings behind the eastern front. No fewer than 515 pages (pp. 411 to 926; *DEJ*, v. 2, pages 391-860) deal with the deportations of Jews from areas controlled by Germany or her allies. With respect to the deportations, the facts are largely undisputed.

That which makes the ‘Holocaust’ so spectacular and bestial in the popular imagination, namely the industrialized slaughter in extermination camps, first shows its face on page 927; this is the beginning of the chapter on “*Killing Center Operations*” (*DEJ*, v. 3, pages 861-990). Yet the reader must persevere for another hundred pages until the subject finally comes around to the “*Killing Operations*”; in the previous five subchapters “*Origins*,” “*Organization, Personnel and Maintenance*,” “*Labor Utilization*,” “*Medical Experiments*” and finally “*Confiscations*” in the “*Annihilation Centers*” were discussed. Remarkably, the subchapter “*Killing Operations*” is only nineteen (!!!) pages long (*DEJ*: 18); on page 1046 (*DEJ*, p. 979), the subject has already moved on to “*Liquidation of the Killing Centers and the End of the Destruction Process*.”

The third volume of 290 pages is devoted entirely to “*Consequences*,” “*Reflections*,” “*Aftereffects*” and “*Further Developments*” before the Appendix closes the work; the latter contains Hilberg’s data on Jewish population losses. (in *DEJ*, volume 3 contains the chapter on “*Killing Center Operations*”) I summarize:

- 123 pages of the 1,351 page “*standard work on the Holocaust*” (*DEJ*, 120 pages of 1232 pages) deal with the killings behind the eastern front, which has received less attention both in the scholarly and in the popular literature, and which, if we are to go by Hilberg’s victim counts, are also numerically less significant than the claimed mass killings in extermination camps.
- A total of 19 pages out of 1,351 (*DEJ*, 18 pages of 1232) are devoted to the central fixture of the ‘Holocaust,’ the practical course of the claimed mass killings in gas chambers (plus there are eleven more pages on the related question of the “*Liquidation of the Killing Centers*”).
- The entire first and the greater part of the second volume (in particular, the 515 pages on the deportations; in *DEJ*, most of the first volume and all the second volume containing 470 pages on deportations) have no direct bearing on the subject for which Hilberg has named his work, namely *The Destruction of the European Jews*. In the third volume, only the population statistics are applicable to our subject.

Already at this point it can be seen that the Hilberg work does not contain what the title promises. Of course, this makes the work of the critic easier in that it permits him to concentrate on a relatively small part of this large work and dispense with the rest with a few comments.

### III. Remarks on the First Volume

Hilberg introduces the first chapter of his work (*“Precedents”*) with the following words:<sup>8</sup>

*“The German destruction of the European Jews was a tour de force; the Jewish collapse under the German assault was a manifestation of failure. Both of these phenomena were the final product of an earlier age.*

*Anti-Jewish policies and actions did not have their beginning in 1933. For many centuries, and in many countries, the Jews had been victims of destructive action.”* (p. 11; *DEJ*, p. 5)

There are additional remarks on ‘anti-Semitism’ in European history. Hilberg regards the *“Nazi destruction process”* as the *“culmination of a cyclical trend.”* In the beginning, there were attempts to convert the Jews; since they for the most part did not want to convert, expulsion was then tried, and lastly, the third, most radical method followed, the physical extermination of the Jews (pp. 14f.; *DEJ*, p. 8). Hilberg summarizes his theory by means of creative declarations:

*“The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.”* (p. 15; *DEJ*, p. 9)

Hilberg declares that it was no accident that enmity toward the Jews reached its most extreme pitch in Germany, since it was part of a long tradition there. In his time, Martin Luther had been a bitter opponent of the Jews, as his essay *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* shows (On the Jews and Their Lies, published in 1543; Hilberg pp. 22ff.; *DEJ*, p. 15). From Luther Hilberg goes on to the German anti-Semites of the 19th Century and to the Jew-hating ideology of National Socialism. Next he comments on the Jewish reaction to undergoing recurring persecutions:

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<sup>8</sup> To reduce the number of footnotes, whenever I cite Hilberg, the page number of the updated German version is given in parentheses. Page numbers of the English original are tagged with *DEJ*.

Jews reacted to these always with “*alleviation and compliance*” (p. 34; *DEJ*, p. 27). In the Third Reich this became their doom:

*“When the Nazis took over in 1933, the old Jewish reaction pattern set in again, but this time the results were catastrophic. The German bureaucracy was not slowed by Jewish pleading; it was not stopped by Jewish indispensability. Without regard to cost, the bureaucratic machine, operating with accelerating speed and ever-widening destructive effect, proceeded to annihilate the European Jews. The Jewish community, unable to switch to resistance, increased its cooperation with the tempo of the German measures, thus hastening its own destruction.*

*We see, therefore, that both perpetrators and victims drew upon their age-old experience in dealing with each other. The Germans did it with success. the Jews did it with disaster.”* (p. 35; *DEJ*, p. 28)

As we see, at the beginning of his large work, Hilberg provides historical, psychological and philosophical observations on the history leading to the extermination of the Jews – *for which he has at this point provided no proof, but which he assumes to be axiomatic*. In effect, he harnesses the wagon before the horse. The proper scholarly method would have been to clarify the facts before going on to philosophize over what brought them about.

After the second chapter (“*Antecedents*”) in which the anti-Jewish measures undertaken after the seizure of power of the NSDAP are described, Hilberg turns to “*The Structure of Destruction*” (pp. 56ff.; *DEJ*, pp. 51ff.). As components of the “*Destruction Process*” he includes:

- The definition of the concept ‘Jew’ by the National Socialists (pp. 69-84; *DEJ*, pp. 63-80) and the prohibition on the mixing of Aryans and Jews;
- The dispossession of Jews (pp. 85-163; *DEJ*, pp. 81-154);
- The concentration of Jews in designated dwelling quarters, mainly ghettos, which first affected Jews living in the area of the prewar Reich and in the Protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia and subsequently affected Jews from the Polish territories conquered in 1939.

In this chapter Hilberg relies almost exclusively on solid and accessible sources, so the facts he describes here are mostly not disputable. This part of the work constitutes a useful documentation of the step-by-step disfranchisement of the Jews under NS rule. However, there is a swindle as to names going on here that is somewhat offensive. Discrimination, dispossession and ghettoization of a minority are not compo-

nents of an “*annihilation policy*.” The Blacks of South Africa had no political rights under the Apartheid system and mostly lived in separated districts, yet no reasonable person would assert that they were *annihilated* by the ruling White minority. The Palestinians are tyrannized and harassed any number of ways in Israel and even more in Israeli occupied territories – they were by no means *annihilated*. Hilberg is creating a deliberate confusion of ideas.

This is not the only example of dishonesty that we encounter in the first volume. On pp. 221f. (*DEJ*, p. 212), in connection with the removal of German Jews to the East, Hilberg writes:

*“In October 1941, mass deportations began in the Reich. They did not end until the destruction process was over. The object of these movements was not emigration but the destruction of the Jews. As yet, however, there were no killing centers in which the victims could be gassed to death, and so it was decided that, pending the construction of death camps, the Jews were to be dumped into ghettos of the incorporated territories and the occupied Soviet areas further east. The target in the incorporated territories was the ghetto of Łódź.”*

Hilberg still owes his readers a proof for this assertion. While the entire process of the removal of German Jews to the East can be documented up one side and down the other – and Hilberg mostly relies on German original documents in his numerous footnotes – he does not cite any document as source for the above assertion, nor even any witness testimony.

The passage just cited is one of the first clear examples of a dishonest tactic that Hilberg employs frequently in the second volume: He embeds undocumented assertions (or assertions supported only by questionable witness testimony) on *annihilation of Jews* among properly documented statements on *persecution of Jews* or *deportation of Jews* and may have hoped that the reader will not catch him. In the case above the illogic of his assertion can be grasped with both hands, especially when regarded in context. On pages 215-225 (*DEJ*, 205-214), Hilberg describes the logistical and organizational difficulties caused by the improvised mass removals of German Jews to the West Polish territories incorporated into the Reich in 1939 and to the *Generalgouvernement* and how furiously the local NS authorities opposed these removals. For example, Werner Ventzki, Chief Mayor of the city of Łódź, renamed Litzmannstadt, protested vehemently against the plan *Reichsführer* SS Heinrich Himmler was considering in September 1941 to deport

20,000 Jews and 5,000 gypsies to the Łódź ghetto, from which they were to be shipped further east the following year. Ventzki insisted that the arrival of 25,000 more persons in the ghetto, which was already full to overflowing, would raise the density of occupation to seven persons per room, that the new arrivals would have to be lodged in factories, which would disrupt production, that people would starve and that it would be impossible to prevent epidemics (pp. 222f.; *DEJ*, pp. 212f.). Nevertheless, the removal went forward.

If the purpose of the deportations was “*not emigration but the destruction of the Jews,*” as Hilberg asserts, the National Socialist policy of removal of the Jews to the East before the completion of the ‘death camps’ becomes senseless. According to Hilberg’s book, the two first ‘death camps,’ Chešmno and Bełżec, became operational in December 1941 and in March 1942, respectively (p. 956; *DEJ*, p. 893). In that case, I ask: why would the Germans send massive numbers of Jews into the ghettos starting in October 1941 to wait for the ‘death camps’ to become operational, instead of holding off on the deportations for three or four months to save themselves the organizational headaches and the chaos in the ghettos? Hilberg does not bother to discuss obvious questions of this sort.

Nevertheless, the first volume of *The Destruction of the European Jews* represents a well-researched documentation on the destiny of the Jews in the Third Reich from 1933 to 1941. People may disagree as to the interpretation of the facts – but we are interested only in the facts themselves, and, unlike Hilberg, we refrain from random philosophizing. It is an abuse for Hilberg to classify the measures taken by the NS regime during this period as “*annihilation policy*” – they clearly do not fall under that heading.