

# DEBATING THE HOLOCAUST



# Debating the Holocaust

A New Look at Both Sides

**By Prof. Dr. Thomas Dalton**



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## Author's Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book, published in 2009, underwent three initial printings, each with slight textual and layout modifications. The final version, marked 'Third printing,' has sufficed for the past six years. But recent developments in the news, in world events and in the historiography of the Holocaust have necessitated a revised second edition of this book.

The general organization and chapter structure remain unchanged. The most significant revisions are as follows: Chapter 4 on the death matrix is now based on the 6 million overall death toll, rather than Raul Hilberg's estimate of 5.1 million. Correspondingly, working (orthodox) figures for five of the six death camps have also been significantly increased; Auschwitz remains largely unchanged. Also, the sections on the ghettos and on the Einsatzgruppen have been significantly expanded in order to give appropriate space to these two important aspects. Chapter 5 on Chelmno now includes reference to three important works on that camp that were not available for the first edition. The account of the Reinhardt excavations in Chapter 8 has been updated based on recent developments at those camps. Chapter 9 on Majdanek has been significantly modified to reflect the recent writings of current camp director Tomasz Kranz. In Chapter 11, the 'revisionist Holocaust' estimate has been increased from 516,000 to 570,000, though this reflects no fundamental shift in outlook. Many of the statistics and factual data in Chapter 12 have been updated. And the epilogue has been significantly expanded.

Importantly, however, the general conclusion is unchanged: the traditional Holocaust story is deeply flawed, and its advocates continue to resort to lies, deception and heavy-handed oppression to stifle open discussion. Only an impartial and unbiased investigation can get to the root of the present debate. Here, as before, the reader is invited to be his own judge.

Thomas Dalton  
1 May 2015



## Introduction

This is a book about the Holocaust and about two competing views of that event. On the one hand we have the traditional, orthodox view: the six million Jewish casualties, the gas chambers, the cremation furnaces and mass graves. We know about the death camps. We are told about incriminating documents, photographs and hard evidence. Countless books and films reiterate the conventional view. Historians can call on thousands of surviving witnesses to give us eyewitness accounts. Traditionalists have the weight of history on their side.

On the other hand, there is a small, renegade band of writers and researchers who refuse to accept large parts of this story. They explicitly challenge the conventional view of history. Researchers who do such work are generally known as *revisionists*. They seek to revise the orthodox account of some past event. Holocaust revisionists, however, are a special breed. They challenge not simply historians, but an entire infrastructure dedicated to maintaining and promoting the standard view. They present counter-evidence; they expose inconsistencies; they ask tough questions. And they are beginning to outline a new and different narrative.

Thus has emerged something of a debate—a debate of historic significance. This is no peripheral clash between two arcane schools of thought regarding some minutia of World War II. It is about history, of course, but it also speaks to fundamental issues of our time: freedom of speech and press, the operation of mass media, manipulation of public opinion, political and economic power structures and the coercive abilities of the State. It is an astonishingly rancorous and controversial debate with far-reaching implications.

Most of the public is only dimly aware of this debate, if at all. Nearly everyone knows that “six million Jews were killed by the Nazis,” and that gas chambers were used in the killing. But few have any idea about the origins of this story, its rationale and its justification. Fewer still know of the serious questions that have been raised against the traditional view; if they have heard of them, it is in the context of “a few right-wing neo-Nazi anti-Semites” who are trying to attack the Jews by questioning the Holocaust.

And not more than a handful of individuals truly understand the depth of the revisionist attack on the mainstream view.

The fact that so few are aware of what may be called the “Great Holocaust Debate” is perhaps unsurprising. Much has been invested in the conventional story. Textbooks and encyclopedias have been written about it. Historians have staked their personal reputations on it. Politicians have passed laws defending it. And wealthy and powerful interest groups have good reasons to sustain it. In short, very few of those in positions of influence want to acknowledge any kind of legitimate debate. There is no incentive to publicize it and strong pressure to avoid it. Those in the public eye know that, should they broach this subject, they will suffer the consequences. Advertisers will drop out. Financial backers will disappear. They may be sued. They will lose access and perhaps their jobs. They will be shunned. They will be vilified. And it will all be legal.

Despite this overwhelming influence of orthodoxy, the many problems of the Holocaust story refuse to be suppressed. Time and time again, in small and often unexpected ways, cracks in the traditional view appear. A surprising admission, a foolish statement, a slip of the tongue, a blatant absurdity; and those ‘troubling questions’ arise once again. Today, more people than ever suspect that all is not well with the standard view of the Holocaust—hence the need for a book such as this.

\* \* \*

The Great Debate is marked by a striking partisanship. The traditional story is defended primarily by survivors, Jewish writers and researchers, and those who suffered at the hands of Nazi Germany—in other words, by people with a self-interest in sustaining the dominant view of a genocidal Nazi regime and an innocent and victimized Jewish people. Of the thousands of books on the subject, the vast majority are by Jewish authors. The revisionist perspective, by contrast, is promoted by a very small number of people: primarily Germans, people of German origin, and those inclined to be pro-German or anti-Jewish—again, not an unbiased group.<sup>1</sup> Charges of “lies,” “conspiracy” and “hoax” are frequently launched by both sides. This leaves the average person in a quandary: he is faced with partisan advocates on both sides, and rarely, if ever, gets a complete and balanced picture.

My goal is to remedy this shortcoming. I intend to present an objective, impartial look at this debate. I will discuss the latest and strongest arguments

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<sup>1</sup> Of course there are other revisionists not among these groups. Prominent revisionist German Rudolf has argued that, proportionately, the French are the most represented group among revisionists.

on both sides, examine the replies and offer an unbiased assessment. This is a challenging task, to say the least, but I believe that I am reasonably well suited for it. Unlike the vast majority of writers on the Holocaust, I am not Jewish—either by religion or ethnicity; nor are any members of my family. I am not of German descent. No one in my immediate family suffered or died in World War II. I am neither Muslim nor Christian, so I have no religious bias. My background is as a scholar and academic, having taught humanities at a prominent American university for several years now. I have a long-standing interest in World War II and in the present conflict in the Middle East.

To anticipate my overall conclusions, let me make my stance clear at the outset. After considering all the evidence, I find that the revisionists have a very strong case. Their argumentation is solid, their sources are well-substantiated, and their research is of a high caliber. It is not ironclad, however, and where problems arise, I attempt to call them out. But overall, the bulk of their arguments point to one general conclusion: that the traditional Holocaust story is significantly flawed. Orthodox historians have largely failed to respond to the many challenges that they raise. Instead, they seem to prefer to cover up, slander or avoid engaging with revisionism. This fact alone strongly suggests that orthodoxy has nothing to say in reply.

In what follows, I attempt to be a fair judge of both sides in the Great Debate. Every judge must make determinations. I do the same. But the fact that I find in favor of the revisionists—at least for now—does not invalidate my objectivity. I came to this debate a true skeptic, and it is only by weight of evidence and argumentation that I am persuaded of the strength of the revisionist view. Conceivably this could change in the future. I remain open to new evidence and new arguments. I have done my best, here, to fairly weigh both sides. In the end, whether I have succeeded in offering an objective analysis of this debate will be for the reader to decide.

This book is targeted at the general educated reader, but it holds to a high standard of scholarship. In examining the writings of the two opposing sides, I have taken nothing for granted. To the greatest extent possible, I have verified all quotations, checked all calculations, and noted errors—though I must say that laudably high levels of scholarship are to be found on both sides. Throughout this book I have attempted to use commonly available sources, should the reader wish to confirm any statements or quotations I offer here.<sup>2</sup> I have concentrated on English-language sources; this has its

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<sup>2</sup> Wherever possible, quotations include in-text citations. For example, (Hilberg 2003: 29) refers to page 29 of Hilberg's 2003 publication (*The Destruction of the European Jews*), which can be found in the bibliography at the back. Such citations both let the reader know the time frame of the quotation, and avoid an excessive multiplication of footnotes. The end objective, after all, is to clearly cite reliable and verifiable sources, and I think I have achieved this goal. And, unlike most books on the subject (of either side), I

drawbacks, but fortunately most of the important sources are available in English, and so the problem is not too great. Where relevant, I have cited essential non-English writings as well.

I have also shown a preference for hard-copy publications—books and journal articles—over Internet publications. Web-based material is always questionable. It can change from one day to another, and disappear the next. Such sources are typically less-well-researched, and often rely on other, equally unreliable Web-based sources for their arguments. On the other hand, there are certain obvious advantages. Much controversial material can be published *only* on the Web, and this point must be noted. Also, it is very convenient, for example, that several complete revisionist texts are available free online. (This very fact should mitigate the notion of a profit motive of the revisionists.) And the rise of online video services like YouTube, Vimeo, and Hulu allow access to audio-visual material that can have a greater impact than printed works. Thus, as appropriate, I have included relevant Web page information.

Finally, I use terminology indicating the provisional nature of claims about the Holocaust. My use of “alleged,” “so-called,” scare quotes, and similar devices is simply meant to indicate that I am withholding assent until the case is fully examined. I tend to be skeptical of most things told to me by those in positions of power and influence, and this subject is no different. I recommend that the reader do the same.

As for my occasional quips, jabs and weak attempts at humor, I can only say that this is not intended as insult or dismissal. I aim to take a sometimes plodding and tedious debate and make it interesting and readable; it is a topic of profound importance, after all. But when one makes outrageous claims or puts forth obvious nonsense, *and then expects to be taken seriously...* then a sarcastic jab may be entirely appropriate.

\* \* \*

Some might question the relevance of this whole topic. They might point out that the event under discussion happened over 70 years ago, that most who experienced it are dead, and that the enmities of the war are long gone. America and the European nations are friends and at peace (with each other, at least!). Japan is an important trading partner and poses no military threat. So why bother with the Holocaust? What’s the big deal? “Yes, the Jews suffered,” some may say. “So just leave them alone. Let them have their ol’ Holocaust.”

I think it does matter, and not only to those who have a vested interest. For several reasons: First, there is the straightforward question of history. Regardless of what one may think, the Holocaust was an event of major historical significance. As with any historical event, it is important to get the facts straight and to develop consistent and coherent views about what happened. To understand what did, or did not, happen is vital for understanding the world of the mid-20th century, and by extension, the world of today.

Second, we are not allowed to forget about it, even if we wanted to. Coverage of the Holocaust is standard fare in every school curriculum. Children the world over read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Number the Stars*, *Waiting for Anya*, and *Butterfly*. Students learn about the gas chambers and the six million, about the innumerable Nazi atrocities.<sup>3</sup> We see Holocaust miniseries on television, *Schindler's List* and documentaries like *Night and Fog*. We celebrate "Holocaust Education Week," and we acknowledge January 27 each year as the "International Day of Commemoration" of Holocaust victims, as declared by the UN in 2005.<sup>4</sup> School children collect 6 million pencils, or 6 million paperclips, or 6 million pennies.<sup>5</sup> We visit Holocaust museums. We take college courses from endowed chairs in Holocaust studies.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in February 2008, French President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed strengthening an existing mandate to teach the Holocaust; his idea was that "every fifth grader will have to learn the life story of one of the 11,000 [Jewish] French children killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust (*New York Times*, Feb 16)." The proposal was rejected by the Education Ministry five months later, but even so, one wonders what could have impelled Sarkozy to propose such a thing; perhaps his own Jewish ancestry had something to do with it (a grandfather was Jewish).

Not to be outdone, the British then proposed that "every secondary school [in the UK] is to get a Holocaust specialist to ensure that the subject is taught comprehensively and sensitively" (*Times Online*, 7 Nov 2008). Ten percent of these specialists will receive a master's degree in "Holocaust education." "The scheme is part of a wider Holocaust education project funded by the Government" and a national charity. The project will also "send two sixth-formers [ages 16 and 17] from every school to Auschwitz" each year. More recently, in late 2010 it was reported that Australia will include the Holocaust, for the first time ever, in their national education curriculum (JTA, Dec 19).

<sup>4</sup> In 2011, the United Nations agency UNESCO signed an agreement with Israel "to promote Holocaust education and combat its denial" (JTA, Mar 8). This, after passing a 2007 General Assembly resolution that "condemns without any reservation any denial of the Holocaust" (A/Res/61/255).

<sup>5</sup> On 20 September 2004, the AP reported on a middle school in Tennessee, where, back in 1998, "students hoped to collect 6 million paper clips—one to remember each person killed in the Holocaust." Thanks to global publicity, they ultimately collected some 30 million clips. In that same year *Paper Clips*, an "award-winning" Miramax documentary, was released. Regarding the pencils, a Texas junior high school issued a press release on 15 May 2007: "Six million pencils for Holocaust project." In May 2011, High Tech High School in Chula Vista, California, began a project to collect 6 million pennies. Not to be outdone, in September of that year a Canadian high school undertook to collect "13 million pennies, one for each person who died in the Nazi genocides, including six million Jews" (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, Sep 4).

This is not by accident. It is a deliberate plan, to make sure we “never forget.” And if we can never forget, then we should at least get the story straight.

Third, there is the drama of the debate itself. It is unlike anything else—the name-calling, the suppression of ideas, the jailing of dissenters, the burning of books. It is a debate that can scarcely be mentioned in polite company. It is, in a real sense, one of the last taboos in Western civilization. But as we know, taboos never last. They are the product of a given era, of specific social and political forces. When those forces shift, as they inevitably do, the taboo is lifted. Now is perhaps such a time.

Fourth, we have the underlying issue of free speech. I take a radical position in support of free speech. Speech is an (almost) absolute right. There is virtually no topic that should be out of bounds. Barring only such obscure cases as an immediate threat to human life, no words or ideas should be beyond discussion. I support vigorous and open debate on every conceivable topic, the Holocaust included. Suppressing speech only drives thought and expression underground; it can only lead to unethical and reprehensible manipulation of the public’s ability to think for itself, and perhaps even violent response to the suppression. Those in power always have reason to fear free speech—all the more reason to defend it.

Fifth is the monetary angle. Billions of dollars have been given as restitution to Israel, to individual survivors and to Jewish organizations. These are tax dollars, provided by the workers of the affected nations—primarily Germany and Switzerland, to date. Restitution claims have not ended, and will likely not end in the foreseeable future. As recently as 2008, the Belgian government agreed to pay \$170 million to survivors, their families and the “Jewish community.” This is rather astonishing, given that Belgium was a *victim* of the war, not an aggressor. (The official reason: Belgium “failed to resist hard enough” against Nazi deportation of Jews.) Germany, though, suffers a seemingly unending parade of reparation deals. In late 2014, they were compelled to establish a new \$250 million fund “for child survivors”; this fund is intended “to recognize psychological and medical trauma caused during their deprived childhoods.” Compensation money, arising directly from the conventional Holocaust story, in turn flows back to sustain it. Restitution money buys political clout, where—in the US at least—it ends up as campaign contributions and issue ads. It encourages lawmakers to legislate in support of Israel and against revisionism—and they do.

Sixth, the State of Israel itself was a direct result of the Holocaust. In November 1947, two and a half years after the end of the war in Europe, the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 181, calling for independent Arab and Jewish states in Palestine. Jewish leaders immediately began formation of a political infrastructure, and declared the establishment of the



State of Israel in May 1948. There were precursor events, of course. The Zionist push for a Jewish homeland began in the late 1800s, and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 promised “a national home for the Jewish people.” The process was thus in motion several decades before the end of World War II, but the Holocaust was the last straw. This is widely acknowledged today. In 2009, Israeli ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, declared the Holocaust to be Israel’s “raison d’être.”<sup>6</sup> A 2012 survey found that fully 98% of Israelis consider it fairly or very important that a “guiding principle” for Israel is “to remember the Holocaust.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, if the Holocaust is called into question, so is the legitimacy of the Jewish state.

Seventh, the mere existence of Israel has far-reaching consequences. Its creation sparked the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs, which led to several wars and ultimately to the present Israeli occupation of the West Bank and other Palestinian lands. This occupation in turn is a crucial factor in the global “war on terror,” which is in reality a war on Islam. The influential group of people who promote and defend the Holocaust are by and large the same people who push for war against Muslims worldwide. The same ideology—militant right-wing Zionism—is a major factor in both. In the United States, this same Jewish lobby also coerces the government to send roughly \$6 billion per year to Israel in the form of military and economic aid.

Eighth: If we can be misled—or fooled, or deceived, or lied to—about the Holocaust, what other events might we be misled about? The same social forces that could give rise to and sustain a deficient Holocaust story could produce countless other stories that might be exaggerated, embellished, distorted or falsified.

Finally, the Great Debate tells us something important about the power structure of Western nations. Revisionists challenge not only orthodoxy; they challenge the power of the State. The leading advocates of the conventional view are in positions of great influence. They are wealthy. They have many supporters and virtually unlimited resources. They are able to turn the power of the State, and public opinion, against revisionism. The revisionists, few in number and poor in means, have only ideas. But as the masked man once said, *ideas are bulletproof*. They have a power of their own, unmatched by money, military or government. Ideas can penetrate to the heart of truth. This is the promise of revisionism. Whether it succeeds, time will tell.

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<sup>6</sup> *New Republic* (6 Oct 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Ha'aretz* (30 Jan 2012).

To repeat, I attempt here to take an impartial look at this clash of views. My role here is not that of a revisionist. I am a bystander in this debate, observing and commenting on a collision of ideas. This book is not a book of revisionism. It is a book *about* revisionism, and about two competing views of the truth. It assesses the ability of each side to marshal evidence, and to create a clear and consistent picture of the past.

The revisionist view of events is so far from what has been portrayed that we may have a hard time comprehending its possibility. A colleague once told me that he would be no more shocked to find no Eiffel Tower in Paris than he would to learn that the revisionists were right. Yet we can scarcely avoid asking ourselves this question: *Is it really possible that the traditional Holocaust story is wrong?* And not merely a little wrong, but significantly and fundamentally flawed? This is for each reader to decide. My objective is not to impose an overall conclusion, but rather to illuminate and articulate the main points, and to comment on their validity. I expect the reader to take nothing I say for granted. He is invited to check my sources, verify my quotations, and check my math. Ultimately, the reader must decide.

In such a complex issue as this one, it is wise to avoid making hasty judgments. My own journey was rather long. The present work was, in a sense, 30 years in the making. For roughly the first 10 years of my adulthood, I fully accepted the orthodox view. After all, the consensus was nearly universal, and I had no good reason to question it. During the next 10 years, doubts began to creep in. I started hearing stories that sounded odd, little points of conflict or contradiction, and strange gaps in the conventional storyline. About 10 years ago, I decided to begin a serious inquiry into the topic. I tracked down dozens of books on both sides, and spent many long hours in careful research. The results of my investigation are presented below.

I sense a turning point in the debate. It seems to be moving out of the shadows and into the realm of serious and legitimate discourse. Revisionists have strong arguments in their favor, and, despite book burnings and jail terms, they are not going away. Traditionalists seem of late to have lost their momentum. Perhaps they have no more counterarguments. Perhaps they have tired of defending the conflicting stories of survivors and witnesses. Perhaps they have reached the limit of their ability to fashion a comprehensible picture of those tragic events of 70 years ago. The debate will surely reach a new resolution, and I suspect that the result will be something different than what we presume today.