

The Myth of Jewish Complicity in the Holocaust

by Phillip W. Weiss

Before discussing the Jews, a word about Auschwitz and Birkenau, two of the places where Jews, and non-Jews, were systematically exterminated. In August 2016 I visited Auschwitz and Birkenau, two former German concentration camps located in southern Poland. Technically Birkenau was part of Auschwitz but given their vastly different layouts and the distance that separated them, about two miles, they were in effect two separate facilities. Both were designed to detain people and prevent them from escaping. That is evident by the miles of barb wire fencing mounted on thousands of concrete posts that still exist both inside and along the perimeters of both facilities.

They were also designed to be disposal centers for bodies. Auschwitz had a gas chamber and crematorium. It was housed in a mound-like structure that was built partly below ground and still exists today. Birkenau had five crematoria. They were blown up in 1945; however, their rubble remains. Judging from the immense amount of rubble, it is apparent that these crematoria were huge structures.

However, the most striking feature of Birkenau is its size. Unlike Auschwitz, which covers a relatively small area that can be traversed on foot in a matter of minutes, Birkenau is immense. What remains of Birkenau today covers least one square mile, and when it was in operation was probably much larger. Inside Birkenau are the remains of numerous barracks. For most of these barracks only their foundations remain. However, some of the barracks still exist intact.

Now, a word about the term “barracks.” I use this term loosely. Actually it would be more accurate to call them barns. That is because they were designed not to shelter people but to store people in something akin to a stable. Except for the

presence of two brick fireplaces, situated at either end of the barrack, these structures contained no amenities whatsoever. They contained no bedding, no windows, no bathing facilities and no internal plumbing. (Birkenau had a waste treatment plant, but it never became operational.) Instead, the typical barrack was crammed with wooden stalls vertically stacked from the floor to roof. This design was clearly meant to maximize the number of bodies that could be squeezed into a limited space. A single barrack held hundreds of bodies. Birkenau contained scores, and perhaps even hundreds of these barnlike barrack structures. Thus, at any given time Birkenau had the capacity to hold tens of thousands, and perhaps as many as one hundred thousand prisoners.

Birkenau also had other striking features. One was the railroad tracks that went directly into the camp. Those tracks still exist intact today. For all who arrived by train, Birkenau was the last stop on the line. From the platform where the passengers disembarked, the smokestacks of the crematoria could be seen in the distance. Another notable feature was the wooded area, located near the crematoria. It resembled a park and still exists today. It served as a resting place for the Jews who were waiting to be gassed. Auschwitz and Birkenau were not merely detention centers. They were factories of death.

Were the Jews complicit in their own destruction? No way. The situation was just the opposite. In the face of brutal adversity, the Jews demonstrated a level of courage that is immeasurable. Further, to those who claim that the Jews could have done more to stop the genocide, they are judging the Jews by a double standard.

It is easy to blame the Jews for their own victimization. A cursory search online yields an extensive catalog of photographs and films showing groups of Jews being rounded up, herded and marched off, seemingly without the slightest protest. Why didn't they resist? What was wrong with them? How could they be so feckless? These images seem to suggest that the Jews let themselves be shamelessly bullied.

But when it came to dealing with the Nazi Germans the same could be said for entire nations as well. Great Britain and France repeatedly caved-in to Hitler. Those two countries, each one a major power and each one a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles, first allowed Hitler to re-arm and then allowed him to occupy the Rhineland, annex Austria, and obliterate Czechoslovakia, each incursion a violation of the treaty and an act of aggression. Determined not to be outdone by the British and French, the Soviet Union took kowtowing to Hitler even further: to buy time, they signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, thus giving Hitler the green light to invade Poland which ignited the war. Then, after the war started, France bailed out on their British allies and then shamelessly allied itself with Germany. If these countries caved in, each a major power with access to a wide range of resources with which to defend themselves, then what more could the Jews have done when confronted by the same merciless, powerful and fanatical enemy?

The fact that any Jews were able to survive anywhere in Nazi-occupied and Nazi-allied Europe is a testament to their fortitude, courage and strength. Unarmed noncombatants, many of whom were infants, young children, pregnant

women and the frail elderly, the Jews' only weapon was their determination to survive. They could have panicked and fled, but to where? There was no place for them to hide, no place to gain sanctuary, no place where they could organize a defense. Adrift and isolated, they would have been utterly defenseless in enemy-controlled territory and become the perfect prey for their tormentors who would have hunted them down without mercy.

Instead, the Jews maintained their self-control. By doing so, they bought time which in turn increased their chances to survive. To have done otherwise would have given the Germans the pretext they needed to initiate an immediate slaughter, which they were known to do whenever they felt provoked, in places such as Babi Yar and Warsaw (in the case of the latter, twice, the second time against the Polish army which the Germans utterly crushed). That was the precise reason why the Germans formed the Einsatzgruppen: to round up and kill Jews (and non-Jews too) under the pretext of conducting anti-partisan operations. The more Jews they found, the more they killed. For the Jews trapped behind enemy lines there was no avenue of escape and to have acted rashly would have meant instant death.

The same disparaging questions meant to impugn the character of the Jews could be asked of entire national groups as well. How could millions of Germans have allowed themselves to be forcibly expelled from their native countries in Eastern Europe after the war? Why didn't they resist? Why did the entire German people let themselves suffer the ignominy of the Berlin Wall? Why did they wait almost thirty years before tearing down that wall? Why did they

allow the wall to be built in the first place? How could sixty thousand German POWs, including nineteen German generals and field marshals, allow themselves to be publicly humiliated when they were paraded through Moscow on July 18, 1944? Why didn't they, men trained to fight, resist? Why did they not refuse to march? Why did millions of Soviet POWs let themselves be led into captivity? Why didn't they resist? Why didn't they refuse to go into captivity? How could the British forces in Singapore have allowed themselves to be so thoroughly humiliated by a Japanese force half their size? Why didn't the British in Singapore resist? Why did the French stop fighting after six weeks and allow their country to become a satellite of the Third Reich? Why didn't American and Filipino prisoners of war refuse to participate in the Bataan Death March? If, in the aforementioned examples cited, the Germans, the British, the Russians, the French, the Filipinos and the Americans had been wearing large yellow Jewish Stars, they would have been indistinguishable from their Jewish counterparts.

To hold the Jews to a different standard of behavior therefore is unfair. Like many other groups in the war, including entire nations, the Jews were victims of aggression and, like many other groups, did what they thought was best to survive in hostile circumstances not of their making. Did some Jews behave dishonorably? Yes, some did. But the same can be said for the leaders of entire nations, e.g., Petain, Quisling, Horthy. But that in no way makes the victimization of the Jews any less egregious or less serious, nor is it sufficient grounds to impugn the character of an entire people. The Jews wanted to survive and whenever possible they did. Their decision to survive was act of courage which deserves our respect, gratitude, praise, and above all our thanks.

Sources (all online):**Jews being rounded up**

<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Jews%20being%20rounded%20up&qs=n&form=QBIRMH&pg=jews%20being%20rounded%20up&sc=1-21&sp=-1&sk=>

Jews being deported

<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Jews+Being+Deported&FORM=IRIBIP>

Parade of 60 000 German prisoners of war in the streets of Moscow Under escort 1944

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC6oJURg6Pk>

WWII Footage - Wehrmacht - Prisoners of War

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpxX4cg9JqY#t=217.3534813>

Fate of Soviet Soldiers in WWII

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The Fall of Singapore World War II Pacific Theater

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXQqe3iUVZA>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyt-2z15FrY>

France Surrenders / Terms of Surrender (World War II)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jve60OM2drE>

German Displaced Persons (1945)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zCBNFk9v1M>

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