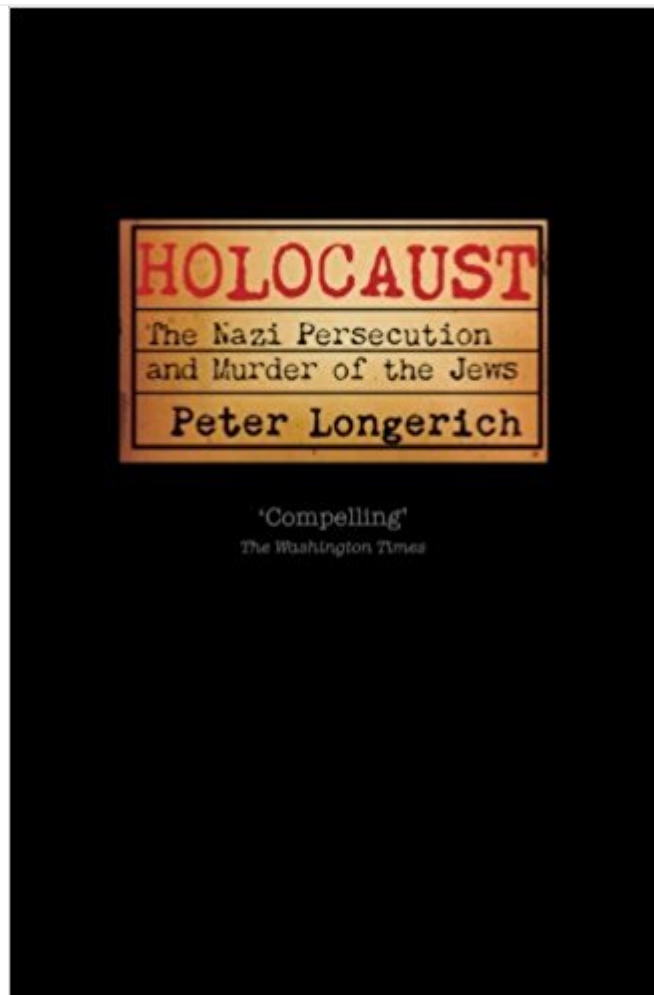


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Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews



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Reviewed Work(s)

Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews. By Peter Longerich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Pp. 645. Hardback, \$34.95.

For scholars and students of the Holocaust, an unfortunate reality is the language divide that prevents some European academic works from wider accessibility through the English language. Insightful works written in Germany, France, Poland, or Russia often have to be read in their original languages, for even when translations appear a few years after the original, the study risks being out-dated by the most recent developments in scholarship. An important work recently translated into English – incorporating fresh studies on the relevant subject matter produced in the interim – is Peter Longerich’s *Holocaust*, a translation and revision of the highly esteemed 1998 *Politik der Vernichtung*.

The work by Longerich largely focuses on Nazi ideology and the decision-making process behind the Final Solution. In order to explore the wide variety of factors that influenced these subjects and to contextualize their occurrence, Longerich uses the elastic concept of Nazi *Judenpolitik*, which he develops throughout the book starting with the Nazis’ earliest anti-Semitic actions in 1933. The German “Politik” that Longerich uses designates a more inclusive framework than its English counterpart “policy,” as it includes the numerous circumstances and factors that lead to a given policy’s implementation – pragmatic, ideological, or otherwise. Longerich sees *Judenpolitik* as a racial and imperialist component that linked entire bureaucracies, both domestically and across the European continent, during the Second World War. The aim of *Holocaust* was to sketch the role of these connections during the murder of the Jews.

While much scholarly attention regarding the Nazi decision-making process and a possible *Führerbefehl* has been limited to the year 1941, Longerich’s comprehensive approach highlights the importance of events and escalations from fall 1939 to spring 1942. This inclusive analysis works under the presumption that the development of the Final

Solution can only be effectively understood as a complex process, involving numerous decisions over a period of time that linked a continual escalation in anti-Jewish policies. Fundamental to this broad understanding is the recognition that, with the start of the Second World War, the Nazi aspirations against the Jews were inherently genocidal. Longerich notes that even in October 1939, with the start of deportations of Jews into the city of Nisko in the newly established General Government, and plans for extended deportations into the whole Lublin district, this “first version” of the Final Solution would result in the elimination of Jews as a people due to insufficient and unsustainable living conditions (154).

After discussing the shooting of Jews in the occupied Soviet territories during the summer and fall of 1941, Longerich turns his attention to other events that were taking place across Europe during the same period. These included the onset of the deportation of some Reich Jews into the General Government and the occupied Soviet territories, as well as preparations for several local extermination camps to make room for the incoming Reich Jews. On the basis of recent publications and research by other historians, Longerich emphasizes that these camps and shootings were regionally focused in their destructive aims, were brought about through independent actions by officials in the field, and did not yet represent part of a continent-wide extermination plan against the Jews by the Third Reich. As Longerich aptly declares, by late 1941 the “plans to murder people with gas concerned hundreds of thousands, not millions of people” (283). To support the lack of a centralized plan, Longerich cites, among other points, Heinrich Himmler’s November 30, 1941 order to Reinhard Heydrich ensuring that a trainload of Berlin Jews deported to Riga was not to be liquidated. Though the order was unsuccessful, Longerich views it as clear evidence that Reich Jews were not marked for extermination at that point by the Nazi leadership.

Perhaps one of the more controversial aspects of *Holocaust* is Longerich’s analysis of the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, which sets up his understanding of the genocidal developments against Jews later that year. As Longerich does not accept that the Final Solution had been decided by the Nazis in 1941, he suggests that Heydrich’s remarks in the document, which detail a post-war deportation program transporting Jews to the East and working them to death (the fate of Jews unfit for

labor is not recorded) should be taken literally. As Jewish slave labor increased in value to the Nazi war effort in late 1941 and early 1942, with enormous construction projects also planned for the occupied eastern territories at the time, Longerich sees Heydrich's remarks as fitting for the context. The Wannsee Protocol thus serves as a "snapshot" in the development of the Final Solution, illustrating the Nazi plans as of January 1942, but prior to the decision to exterminate all Jews during the war (309).

While the Wannsee Protocol detailed a scenario that could be implemented after the war, 1942 witnessed the extension and coordination of regional extermination activities into a centralized, European-wide policy. While those unfit for work would be immediately murdered, "extermination through labor" would also be incorporated into the destruction process for those Jews selected for work. Longerich views the development of such an extermination plan within three stages: in the first stage, from December 1941 to January 1942, the Nazi leadership solidified its wish to kill all Jews under its control, including through forced labor, while allowing certain Jews (Soviet and some Polish) to be murdered immediately; in the second stage, in March 1942, the extermination camps in the General Government began murdering Jews unfit for work living in the districts of Lublin and Galicia; in the third stage, from late April through June 1942, regional murders were finally linked into a continent-wide program to immediately exterminate all Jews. This final stage was achieved through an expansion of the killings across the General Government, an increase in the number of Central and Western European Jews who were shot or gassed following their deportation, and a renewal of the shooting campaign against Soviet Jews. From June 1942 onward, the exterminations progressed as fast as the SS could negotiate the deportation of Jews from foreign countries and organize sufficient transports to the death sites.

Despite the inclusive approach to contextualize the Nazis' murderous escalation process over a period of years, the book is heavily unbalanced towards 1941, which is the focus in six of the eighteen chapters, totaling nearly a third of the main text. Unfortunately, all of the developments and events from mid-1942 to spring 1945 are surveyed only briefly by Longerich. Such a hasty analysis results in important subjects being treated only cursorily, such as the 1944 deportation of Hungarian Jews

which is discussed in five pages (405-410). In such a brief treatment, Longerich ignores the newly discovered transport list by Leo Glaser, which substantially increases the accepted figure of Hungarian Jews selected for work at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and thus not gassed upon arrival at the camp.^[1]

Despite the imbalance of the narrative, Longerich's *Holocaust* is a crucial work that helps to synthesize many of the research developments over the past decade regarding the progression of the Final Solution.

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[1] Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel: Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), 286, 293. This work is cited and even criticized by Longerich in the section on the Hungarian deportations (568, fn 200).



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