

The Judeo-Bolshevist Target

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Popular memory in the West tends to separate the Holocaust from the German war against the Soviet Union, but for the Nazi regime they were two faces of the same undertaking.



Tivadar Lissák/Fortepan

Nazi propaganda posters, Budapest, 1944

Reviewed:

World Enemy No. 1: Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and the Fate of the Jews
by Jochen Hellbeck

Sometime in early 1983, toward the end of my time as a graduate student at Oxford University, I met with the military historian Michael Howard, who had served as an officer during World War II and fought in the Italian campaign. As I followed this distinguished, rather reserved scholar toward the entrance of All Souls College, where he was a fellow, he sensed my unease at walking across the immaculate lawn. Grinning discreetly, he muttered, “They’d shoot you were you to do this on your own.”

By then Howard had already read much of my Ph.D. thesis on the war crimes committed by the Wehrmacht (the German armed forces) against Red Army troops and Soviet civilians, for which I had used German army documents to demonstrate that regular combat units—influenced by a combination of intense indoctrination, orders from the high command, brutal discipline, and fierce fighting at the front—had killed civilians and prisoners of war on an unprecedented scale. The number of crimes I described, he told me, had astonished him.

Howard explained that for much of the Italian campaign his battalion had fought against the same German unit. When they captured one of the German officers, they invited him to the mess and shared a glass of cognac before sending him to a POW camp. They expected the same treatment from the Germans.

I was taken aback that Howard, one of the preeminent military historians of his time, was surprised to learn of the atrocities on the Eastern Front. But at that point few scholars in the United Kingdom or the United States seemed to understand that in Europe World War II had been conducted as two very different wars. In Western Europe the fighting was quite conventional, despite its frequent ferocity. The war in Eastern Europe, by contrast, was precisely what Adolf Hitler ordered his generals to carry out: a *Vernichtungskrieg*, or war of annihilation, against subhuman enemies to be exterminated or enslaved.

During the war Americans and Europeans paid close attention to the daily news that documented the fighting on the Eastern Front—and for good reason. For much of the war, most of the German military was fighting in the East, which is also where it sustained its greatest defeats and most of its casualties. It is hard to imagine that the Western Allies could have freed Europe from Hitler and his collaborators without the Red Army’s relentless drive to Berlin, which came at great cost: the Soviet military lost as many as 11 million men and women.

But no sooner had the fighting come to an end than competing national memories of the Eastern Front started to take shape. In the Soviet Union the war became a foundational event binding together a

vast and complex society. The collective memory of the war continues to play this role to this day: official commemoration emphasized the sacrifice and heroism of everyday Soviet citizens for freedom around the world. As the cold war began, however, the British and the Americans came to see the Soviet Union as essentially the equivalent of Nazi Germany—one totalitarian regime that replaced another. By the early 1950s the war was increasingly recalled as a struggle against tyranny by the forces of democracy, and America's "unholy alliance" with the USSR—now a bitter adversary—as a necessary evil.

Most popular accounts of the war in America fixated on those fronts where the US Army had been engaged; the war in the East, where the bulk of the Wehrmacht was destroyed, drew relatively little attention. The titles given in 1978 to a remarkable twenty-part US-Soviet television documentary on the Eastern Front—codirected by the venerable Jewish Soviet filmmaker Roman Karmen, narrated by Burt Lancaster, and produced in collaboration between the American Fred Weiner and the Soviet agency Sovinfilm—reflected these diverging perspectives. Called *The Great Patriotic War* in Russian and *The Unforgotten War* in German, it was distributed in the US under the title *The Unknown War*.

Further reshaping the legacy of the Eastern Front in the US and Western Europe were major changes in the memory of the Holocaust. Apart from stories of courageous GIs and Tommies liberating usually unidentified inmates from concentration camps, the Shoah as the Nazi genocide of the Jews hardly figured in early commemorations of the "good war," the very name of which underlined a righteous struggle against tyranny, without direct reference to Nazi crimes. Starting in the mid-1970s and reaching a peak in the early twenty-first century, the emerging perception in the West that the Holocaust marked, in the words of the historian Dan Diner, the "collapse of civilization" meant that it was seen as the single most important event during World War II.

This shift of emphasis at times had the effect of isolating the systematic murder of Jews from the historical conditions that shaped it. In popular memory, the Nazis' mass murder of other groups receded to a secondary place: Soviet casualties—between 26 and 27 million, including soldiers and civilians—were rarely counted among the victims of Hitler's regime (usually cited as either six million Jews or 11 million Jews and "others"). When Western historians took stock of Nazi ideology, too, they tended to downplay how thoroughly entangled antisemitism was both with the regime's anticommunism and with its expansionist designs on the East. Many of them therefore minimized or neglected the claim, endlessly repeated by Nazi propaganda and the Wehrmacht's high command and generals in the field, that fighting "Judeo-Bolshevism" was the fundamental mission of the war.

More recent scholarship has sought to remedy some of these oversimplifications, putting the genocide of the Jews in the larger setting of the Nazis' geopolitical ambitions on the Eastern Front and their obsession with "Judeo-Bolshevism."¹ The latest effort to correct the record is a major survey by the German-born Rutgers historian Jochen Hellbeck. *World Enemy No. 1* aims to decisively reorient the general reader's understanding of World War II as well as the Holocaust toward the Eastern Front and the murderous anticommunist campaign the Wehrmacht waged there. The Nazis' "crusade against Judeo-Bolshevism," Hellbeck stresses, was nothing less than "the conflict's driving force." And just as it was the Soviet Union that finally defeated Hitler's armies, he argues, so it was the war in the USSR that became "the laboratory for the German politics of mass murder."

Germany's military collapse at the end of World War I profoundly shocked the nation. Its army commanders Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg (who was president of Germany from 1925 to 1934) tried to shirk responsibility for their failures by singling out Jews and socialists as the leaders of the "November criminals" who had allegedly stabbed the army in the back by creating unrest in the German population and inciting defeatism among the ranks of the military, leading to the armistice of 1918.

This myth, known in Germany as the *Dolchstoßlegende* (the stab-in-the-back legend), made the rounds in far-right circles. Before long it was adopted by the fledgling Nazi Party, which drew on an already well-established political form of antisemitism that attributed the pains of rapid modernization to the recent emancipation of the Jews and legitimized age-old prejudices by invoking "scientific" racism that defined Jews as an immutable biological threat. The conflation of Jews and socialists had a particularly lethal salience, because it both linked the Jews to a political ideology that sought to undermine the social order and provided an explanation for the defeat of the German Empire.

As Hitler and his followers saw it, in order to make sure that Germany would not be stabbed in the back once more, it had to deal with the enemies from within before turning against its external enemies: the Communists and the Jews. The "Judeo-Bolshevist" threat became an essential ingredient of Nazi ideology, appearing in Hitler's writings and speeches both before and after he came to power. The distinction between the two targets was never clear. Although Germany after 1933 had a *Judenpolitik* (policies of economic boycott, removal from state service, racial definition and segregation, property requisition, and forced emigration that were specifically aimed at Jews), as the German historian Peter Longerich argues in his 1988 study of the extermination of the Jews (published in English in 2010), its first victims were the Communists, the Socialists, and the trade unionists,

who were incarcerated and murdered in vast numbers. (Jewish Communists, it should be pointed out, were abused even more brutally than their “Aryan” comrades.)

The Nazis persecuted Jews severely from the moment they took over. In 1935 they enacted and enforced discriminatory racial laws. In 1938 came the devastating Kristallnacht, or Night of Broken Glass. Afterward, they incarcerated tens of thousands of Jews in concentration camps to coerce them to leave the country.

By the outbreak of World War II about half of the Jewish population of the Reich had emigrated. Then the Germans marched into Poland, subjecting an additional two million Jews to their rule. Plans to expel Poland’s Jews faltered, since by that point there was nowhere for them to go, and so the Nazis forced them into lethally crowded ghettos.

As we know from the work of Christopher Browning, some Nazi officials wanted to let the Jews incarcerated in the ghettos die of “natural causes,” while others preferred to put them to work for the Reich. The latter temporarily won out; nonetheless hundreds of thousands of Jews perished in the ghettos from starvation and epidemics. But no decision had yet been made to murder them all. There was still talk of transferring them somewhere, even as far as Madagascar.

Then, on June 22, 1941, more than three million German and Axis soldiers launched Operation Barbarossa, a surprise attack on the USSR. The single largest military campaign in history, it confirmed that Joseph Stalin’s nonaggression treaty with Hitler—the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact, which enabled Hitler to conquer Poland and then turn to the West and defeat France—had for the Soviet leader been a convenient and yet shortsighted move. Stalin signed it to give himself more time to prepare for war. But nonaggression had always been incompatible with the central ideological tenets of Nazism, which called for the creation of *Lebensraum*—“living space”—for Germans in the East and saw Bolshevism as a mortal enemy.

Hitler’s forces were determined to put that ideology into practice. At its peak in late 1942, the Germans occupied up to a million square miles of Soviet territory, which had contained over 40 percent of the pre-war Soviet population. The Wehrmacht was at that moment besieging Leningrad, where a million citizens ultimately died, mostly of starvation. It was conducting “hunger politics,” as the historian Christian Gerlach has elaborated, by stripping the inhabitants of Belarus, the poorest region under its control, of food and livestock for use by its own soldiers, while also undertaking brutal antipartisan operations, which devastated the land for a generation. It was deporting vast numbers of civilians from Ukraine for forced labor in Germany. And it was in the process of flattening Stalingrad, where it eventually sustained its greatest defeat. Many, if not most, Soviet

citizens, united against a common enemy, pushed away memories of their own regime's brutality. Hellbeck quotes a joke people told in Ukraine in 1942: "What did Hitler manage to accomplish in just one year that Stalin couldn't in twenty-four? Getting us to like Soviet rule."

It was a few weeks after the invasion of the USSR in late June that the mass murder of Jews began. Four Einsatzgruppen (task forces), which included SS men and police personnel, marched behind the advancing military, first shooting mostly Jewish men, and then murdering entire communities from the Baltic states to Ukraine—at times in vast massacres, such as the slaughter of over 23,000 Jews in Kamianets-Podilskyi in late August, up to 12,000 Jews in Stanyslaviv in mid-October, and 33,000 Jews in Babyn Yar, on the outskirts of Kyiv, at the end of September. The orders for the invasion explicitly grouped together Bolsheviks, Red Army commissars, partisans, and Jews, all of whom were to be killed on sight.

At the time there was still talk in the SS of eventually pushing the Jews beyond Germany's anticipated *Lebensraum* east of the Urals. But after a number of catastrophic defeats, the Red Army finally stopped the Wehrmacht's onslaught and launched a counterattack at the gates of Moscow in early December 1941. From that point on Germany could no longer plan to expel the millions of Jews who had come under its rule into the depths of the Soviet Union, or for that matter anywhere else outside the lands under its control, since the seas were firmly ruled by the British and the Americans.

The Nazi identification of Jews with Bolsheviks only intensified as the Soviet counterattack took a devastating toll on the German army. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda, delivered his notorious "total war" speech in February 1943, reiterating that the "goal of Bolshevism is Jewish world revolution" and announcing that the country would "take the most radical measures."

The speech was made after the German debacle at the Battle of Stalingrad, which heralded the Red Army's long and bloody march to the West that culminated in the capture of Berlin. In Europe and North America we tend to remember D-Day as a turning point in the war. In fact, it was Stalingrad. Even after the Western Allies landed in Normandy, between June and December 1944 the Wehrmacht lost ten times as many troops fighting the Red Army as it did fighting the Anglo-American forces in Western Europe. Long before that, the Nazi leadership had warned the Germans of the fate they could expect in case of defeat. "Behind the onrushing Soviet divisions," screamed Goebbels in his speech, "we already see the Jewish death squads, and behind them, complete anarchy and famine for millions." Nazi propaganda had perfected the art of projection: the retreating Wehrmacht pursued a scorched earth policy that ravaged vast stretches of Soviet territory. Soviet troops never engaged in a policy of genocide and enslavement in Germany remotely like that of the

Germans in the USSR. However, brutalized by years of war and the ruin of their own land, they did commit mass violence against German citizens, especially mass rapes on an unprecedented scale.

The timing of the decision to carry out the Final Solution—the Nazi regime’s resolution to murder all the Jews of Europe—remains disputed. Was it made in the “euphoria of victory” over the USSR in the fall of 1941, as Browning has argued? Or was it made, as Gerlach suggests, only after Hitler declared war on the US after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, which plunged Germany into precisely the kind of worldwide war that, according to the Führer’s logic, called for the extermination of the Jews? Did the Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942, when high-ranking officials were informed of a “final solution to the Jewish question,” actually indicate a recent high-level decision at the top, or was it merely an attempt to coordinate the actions of state agencies after the policy had already been implemented? We know that the construction of extermination camps had begun in the fall of 1941 in former Polish territory, but there are indications that these camps may have been originally intended only to resolve local “problems” of large populations of Jews.

At a meeting in the summer of 1941, Hitler told Heinrich Himmler to treat the Jews “like partisans,” making precisely the analogy that appeared in the orders for Barbarossa. This was a drastic shift from violent persecution, ghettoization, and forced labor to the outright extermination of men, women, and children. By the end of 1941 the Germans had murdered nearly 100 percent of the Jews detained in areas that had previously been under Soviet rule, and 15 to 25 percent of the Jews—most of them men—in areas previously under Polish rule. As Hellbeck puts it, “The mass murder of all Jews—young and old, male and female—began with the murder of Soviet Jews” and then “radiated out,” first to the “occupied Western peripheries of the Soviet state, then spreading farther west.” We cannot say what would have happened had Hitler decided not to invade his erstwhile ally, but we can say that the war in the East and the increasing ferocity of the Holocaust were inextricably linked.

Popular memory tends to separate the Holocaust and the German war against the Soviet Union, but for the Nazi regime they were two faces of the same undertaking. General Erich von Manstein, commander of the Eleventh Army, instructed his troops on November 20, 1941, that “the German Volk is in the midst of a battle for life and death against the Bolshevik system.” “This battle,” he stressed, is conducted “not only in a conventional manner according to the rules of European warfare.” The troops should understand that “Judaism is the mediator between the enemy in the rear and the still fighting remnants of the Red Army and the Red leadership.” Hence, “the Jewish-Bolshevik system must be eradicated once and for all.”

Manstein was hardly alone. General Walter von Reichenau, commander of the Sixth Army, appealed to his troops on October 10, 1941, reminding them that “the essential goal of the campaign against the Jewish-Bolshevik system is the complete destruction of its power instruments and the eradication of the Asiatic influence on the European cultural sphere.” The task of the troops, he insisted, must “go beyond the conventional unilateral soldierly tradition,” since in the East the soldier is “a carrier of an inexorable racial conception and the avenger of all the bestialities which have been committed against the Germans and related races.” Soldiers must have “complete understanding for the necessity of the harsh, but just atonement of Jewish subhumanity.” Indeed, as the commander of the XLVII Panzer Corps reminded his troops on the eve of the invasion, “We have never forgotten that it was Bolshevism which had stabbed our army in the back during the [First] World War and which bears the guilt for all the misfortunes our people has suffered.” Now, as General Erich Hoepner, commander of Panzer Group 4, told his troops, it was time to engage in “the defense of European culture against the Muscovite-Asiatic flood, the warding off of Jewish Bolshevism.”

These citations come from German documents I used for my dissertation and were later printed in my book *Hitler's Army*, published thirty-five years ago. What was new at the time came to be an accepted historical fact in the following two decades. But scholarly history is one thing, public perceptions another, and the connection between Germany's war in the East and the launching of the Holocaust remains unknown in much of the West.

Knowledge about the war as it was happening naturally depended on where one lived. The genocide of the Jews remained hidden in the back pages of newspapers and was rarely mentioned in newsreels, even after information became readily available. This was even the case with the Hebrew-language press in Palestine.

In the immediate aftermath of the Great Patriotic War, Hellbeck writes, Soviet citizens “were presented with more detailed knowledge about the German mass murder of Jews than audiences anywhere else in the world.” But the Soviet authorities had always been ambivalent about highlighting that the Nazis' genocidal fury against the Jews exceeded their brutality toward other groups under their occupation. (“At no point during the war,” according to Hellbeck, “did the genocide of the Jews make nationwide headlines in the Soviet media.”) Though Soviet leaders subsumed the Shoah under the general category of Soviet tragedy, many Soviet Jews responded to this erasure of the genocide by recovering their Jewish identity, including by demonstrating greater sympathy with Zionism and the newly established State of Israel. Thousands, for example, cheered Golda Meir, Israel's first ambassador to the Soviet Union, during her visit to the Moscow Choral Synagogue

on Rosh Hashanah in 1948. The aging, progressively paranoid Stalin reacted with vengeful suspicion, undertaking an anti-Jewish campaign that came to a halt only with his death in 1953.

In the decades just after the war, mainstream Western depictions of World War II, in films and documentaries and popular novels, had two distinguishing features. The first was the glorification of national heroes and the demonization of the enemy. (West German films and popular fiction, for instance, often portrayed German soldiers as the innocent young victims of a few nasty Nazis sending them to die in a war they never wanted to fight.) The second was the strict separation between the war and the Holocaust. Early documentaries on the horrors of Nazi concentration camps, such as Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1956), depicted an insulated "concentrationary universe," to use the French survivor David Rousset's term, whose inmates were an international assortment of resistance fighters rather than Jews. In fact, while the former had been deported for what they did, the latter were incarcerated for who they were, and they suffered a much higher death rate.

Beginning perhaps with Lucy Dawidowicz's *The War Against the Jews*—a 1975 best seller that presented the Holocaust as the Nazis' chief goal, predetermined years before it occurred—this separation began to collapse.² The genocide of the Jews soon assumed a more central place in the popular understanding of the war, especially after the broadcast of the 1978 NBC miniseries *Holocaust*, which shocked viewers—both in the US and Germany—by stressing that the victims and the perpetrators alike had been ordinary neighbors and families. In this depiction, the political backdrop to the genocide—the Nazis' fantasies of world conquest and their brutal campaign against the enemy to the East—disappeared from view, and before long the violence of the Holocaust came to be seen as singularly motivated by racial hatred, a unique event that bore comparison to no mass murder in history. A popular view took hold, especially among Jewish Israelis and Americans, that the Holocaust could be explained only as the culmination of centuries of antisemitism, that "longest hatred," as the historian Robert Wistrich called it in his eponymous 1991 book. Many scholars have since rejected this account as simplistic and unhistorical, but in a range of public settings it remains so firmly established that any other interpretation appears scandalous, if not antisemitic.

At the same time, recent revisionist historians who see the "unholy alliance" with the USSR as a grave error by the Western Allies—for instance, Sean McMeekin in *Stalin's War* (2021)—tend to have their own reasons for downplaying the Soviet contribution to ending the Holocaust: after all, if we concede that the Red Army was essential to defeating the Nazis and liberating the camps, we would also have to admit that by spurning an alliance with Stalin, the Allies would have acquiesced to genocide. Fortunately, over the past four decades the

historiographical trends have moved in the other direction. Such books as Antony Beevor's *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege, 1942–1943* (1998) and Gerhard Weinberg's *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (1994) helped gradually convince historically minded readers to recognize the sacrifice of the Soviet Union and the centrality of the Red Army in winning the war, although the Western Front still looms larger in the popular imagination.

Even in Germany, where the Eastern Front was “the unforgotten war,” attempts to link the Holocaust with the other crimes of the Wehrmacht have encountered major obstacles and resistance. In 1985 the *Historikerstreit* (historians' controversy) pitted German conservative scholars such as Ernst Nolte, who argued that the only difference between Soviet and Nazi crimes was the German invention of the gas chambers, against liberals such as the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who rejected the attempt to relativize the Holocaust and portray the Nazis' crimes as merely responses to and emulations of those of the Soviets. Germans also continued to believe that while the SS and Gestapo were responsible for the Holocaust, the Wehrmacht had acted honorably, not least in defending the Reich from the Bolshevik onslaught. In 1999 the roving exhibition “Crimes of the Wehrmacht,” visited by almost a million Germans and Austrians over the previous four years, closed down because of a public outcry after a few of the thousand-plus photographs it displayed were found to have been mislabeled, presenting Soviet crimes as German army crimes. Indeed, linking the Holocaust to the war in the East remains difficult in Germany; having accepted responsibility for the Final Solution, Germans still find it exceedingly hard to admit that regular soldiers, rather than just the Gestapo and the SS, had taken part in mass murder.

Hellbeck, who has written previously on the Battle of Stalingrad and on the inner lives of Soviet citizens in the early years of the regime, draws for his densely documented book not only on the German sources that I and others cited years ago but also on a rich trove of Soviet materials. These include previously unknown political and military directives, journalistic reports, personal writings, photographs, wartime interview transcripts, hundreds of letters written by Red Army soldiers, and, not least, a vast collection of interviews with Soviet soldiers and citizens conducted during the war under the leadership of the Moscow historian Isaak Izrailevich Mints. Hellbeck aims to firmly reorient the general public's understanding of the Holocaust around the history of the war in the East. Nazi Germany, he insists once more, was fighting a genocidal war against what it imagined to be a Bolshevik system ruled and controlled by the Jews and aimed at world domination.

Until the start of Operation Barbarossa, he argues, “German violence against Jews remained of a lesser scope compared to the mass murder of ethnic Poles.” Before June 1941 the “mistreatment of Jews was fed

by racial hatred, not a political calculus; expulsion, not annihilation, was its ultimate goal.” Conversely, after the invasion, Jews and Bolsheviks became synonymous as targets for total annihilation. Communist resistance to Nazism in occupied Europe—which was revived only after Hitler reneged on his pact with Stalin—was similarly construed as Jewish, just as Jews were redefined, in Hellbeck’s words, as “racial-political enemies who needed to be destroyed,” rather than “racial aliens who could simply be expelled from Germanic soil.” Defining Jews as Bolsheviks dictated that the Jews had to be murdered wherever they could be found, even if they appeared to be entirely assimilated Europeans whose mistreatment had initially provoked some discomfort.

It is thus not surprising, Hellbeck argues, that starting in the summer of 1941 we find SS officers invariably listing those they had “finished off” as “Bolsheviks, Jews, and asocial elements,” or “functionaries, agents, saboteurs, and Jews.” The Holocaust, he suggests, evolved and spread not from any “single top-down order in 1941” but from “the cumulative violence of Germany’s attack on the Soviet system, the vicious anti-Bolshevik propaganda dating back to the 1920s, and the failure to win the quick victory Hitler had foretold.”

Hellbeck also reminds us that Germany “took aim at millions of non-Jewish Soviet citizens,” typically referred to as “Bolsheviks,” leading to the death of 15 million civilians (of whom 2.6 million were Jews). Plans for the postwar colonization of the Soviet Union, he notes, “foresaw the extinction” of additional “tens of millions of Soviet citizens,” in large part by starvation. In this respect the genocide of the Jews, the mass slaughter of other Soviet civilians, and the murder of over three million Red Army prisoners of war were all a consequence of the same genocidal worldview.

While I agree with the bulk of Hellbeck’s argument, some qualifications are in order. *World Enemy No. 1* might have done more to acknowledge that Germany had an alliance with the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1941, with major consequences for the course of the war; that Hitler also separately wished to expand to the West and crush France, a longtime German nemesis; that the *Generalplan Ost*, intended to create *Lebensraum* for the Germans in Eastern Europe and Western Russia, was conceived of separately and before the Final Solution of the Jewish question; and that the Nazis tried or planned to kill all the Jews they could lay their hands on, wherever they could be found, even in Palestine.

We should bear in mind that even before the invasion of the Soviet Union the violence against the two million Jews in German-occupied Poland was already accelerating and spilling over to German-occupied Southern, Northern, and Western Europe, and North Africa, consigning Jews throughout those lands to ethnic cleansing, enslavement, or mass murder. The Germans were stoking local

antisemitism independently of the fight against Bolshevism; ironically, had Germany not attacked the USSR, the rest of Europe would likely have remained under German occupation for decades, sealing the fate of the Jews throughout those lands. In other words, while attacking the Bolsheviks was a fundamental part of Hitler's worldview, so too was his obsession with the Jews.

Additionally, one must stress that the roots of antisemitism, even in its modern form, which evolved in the last third of the nineteenth century, predate Bolshevism, even if Jews came to be associated with Socialists—and then Communists—almost as soon as these political movements emerged. Communist regimes in the USSR, Poland, Hungary, and many other countries have hardly been innocent of this prejudice themselves, but while it could turn murderous, it was never genocidal. Another aspect of anti-Jewish sentiment (which may again be on the rise today) was anticapitalist, portraying Jews as plutocrats controlling the finances and therefore also the politics of the West—although it must be said that the Nazis never found it difficult to portray the “eternal Jew” as both a revolutionary and a money-grubbing billionaire.

World Enemy No. 1 also arguably pays too little attention to the crimes of Stalin's regime in the 1930s, from the genocidal collectivization campaign in Ukraine—which claimed the lives of millions—to the Great Purge, which ended with the execution of up to another million Soviet citizens, including Stalin's closest former associates, and decapitated the Red Army's leadership. The 1939 pact between Hitler and Stalin not only ensured that the Red Army would not be deployed against the Wehrmacht; it also divided Poland between the two tyrannies, allowing Germany first to destroy western Poland, then to conquer the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Norway, Greece, and Serbia without any threat to its eastern flank. Meanwhile the pact facilitated the mutual Nazi and Soviet takeover and subjugation of Eastern Europe, including the imposition of Communist rule over eastern Poland (now West Ukraine) and the Baltic states, leading to murder and mass deportations of the Soviet regime's political and social enemies, real or imagined. This “revolution from abroad,” as Jan T. Gross has called it, is remembered to this day in these lands as a major national trauma, even as it tends to overshadow the memory of local collaboration in the Holocaust under the German occupation that followed. There is plenty of denial and erasure to go around.

But Hellbeck has done an important service in reminding us of the ideological, demographic, and historical background against which the Holocaust took place. Early in *World Enemy No. 1* he points out just how often our memory of Nazi violence obscures the anti-Soviet animus that drove it. When the theologian Martin Niemöller wrote his famous text on the complicity of silence and the cost of indifference, he had in mind the sacrifice of tens of thousands of German Communists—the first victims of Hitler's regime. Opening with “First

they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist—so I said nothing,” it ends with “Then they came for me, but there was no one left who could stand up for me.”

For decades a translation of Niemöller’s words has stood near the exit of the main galleries at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, inaugurated in 1993. And yet in this version, Hellbeck points out, the Communists have been “erased from the record” in favor of a softer alternative, as if to avoid the embarrassment of admitting how central communism was to the fight against the Nazis. “First,” it begins, “they came for the socialists.”

—*This is the first of two articles.*

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1. See, for instance, Paul A. Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Harvard University Press, 2018), reviewed in these pages by Christopher R. Browning, February 21, 2019. ↩
2. Arno Mayer made precisely the opposite argument in *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (1988), asserting that Nazism was primarily focused on an ideological war against Bolshevism and that the Holocaust was a mere product of this obsession. Both studies have been dismissed by now as too tendentious. ↩