

TUESDAY OCTOBER 12, 1999
AFTERNOON SESSION B 16:00 –18:00

Desecraters of Memory
Confronting Holocaust Denial

by
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RATIONALE

The phenomenon of Holocaust denial came into being in the late 1940s, shortly after World War II. As we shall see, Holocaust denial is in fact a post-Holocaust version of anti-Semitism it has become more prevalent since the 1970s, and has taken hold in various places around the world. Holocaust denial manifests itself in the activities of individuals and organizations that adorn themselves in pseudo-academic garb. They operate in diverse media and disseminate their own books and articles worldwide. The most prominent Holocaust deniers take part in public debates in the media, and deniers have recently made increasing use of the Internet as a powerful tool in spreading their doctrine

This unit is meant for scholars, educators, and anyone in the field of public relations. We wish to emphasize that this booklet provides a methodology to use in confronting the phenomenon of Holocaust denial whenever and wherever it surfaces. The materials in this booklet should be used not as the basis for initiating a discussion but as a way to respond to the issues that the deniers raise.

GOALS AND SECTIONS OF THE UNIT

Goals

1. To identify the worldwide phenomenon of Holocaust denial and to recognize and understand its extent, potency, and dangers.
2. To recognize the web of arguments raised by Holocaust deniers and understand its warped underlying rationale.
3. To refute systematically the arguments of Holocaust deniers and the false worldview on which they are based.
4. To enable readers to construct a firm factual and documentary basis for response to the false web of arguments posed by Holocaust deniers.

5. To present a reasoned response, firmly anchored in the diverse documentation that exists on this subject.
6. To offer students and teachers a methodology of research and historical thinking based on primary and secondary sources in Holocaust history and to avoid a simplistic picture of this episode. This booklet will contribute toward a supple and thorough understanding of Holocaust history.

Structure

The following unit outlines the phenomenon of Holocaust denial and explains its magnitude by describing major Holocaust deniers and explaining their views. The central section of the unit exposes the intrinsic falsehood of their arguments on the basis of primary sources and the copious written and oral documentation on the subject. The unit is divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction: The reader is apprised of the nature of Holocaust denial definition of the concept, where it originated, its major proponents, and the deniers' main arguments. The introduction also describes the historical problems that the deniers present with respect to the Holocaust.
2. Holocaust deniers: The readers are given information on thirteen Holocaust deniers and their main arguments. At this stage, information is also given on the deniers' sources, academic credentials, and shared characteristics.
3. Confrontation: The reader is challenged to confront the phenomenon of Holocaust denial. The proposed confrontations is based on the premise of developing proper historical thinking based upon the study of diverse source materials that elicits the historical narrative.

Notes to the User

Generally speaking, this unit is meant for teachers only and contains study material for three sessions. Only certain parts of the unit are meant for the learners. They include the following details

1. Information on thirteen Holocaust deniers and their arguments.
2. A group of documents, which creates a partial infrastructure for use in refuting the deniers' arguments. Accordingly German, Jewish, Polish, and Russian documents are used..
3. A bibliography at the end of the unit.

I. Session one

A. The phenomenon of Holocaust denial should be defined in view of its components, historical development since World War II and covert goals.

B. Video clips of the deniers and their arguments may be shown, thus giving the Holocaust denial genre more substance:

1. **"The Revisionists"** - remarks by Olivier Matthau, a disciple of Holocaust denier Professor Robert Faurisson (V-257, French with Hebrew subtitles 60 minutes Yad Vashem Archives).
2. **"Sixty Minutes"**, selection by Mike Wallace in April 1994. The program presents Ernst Zundel, a Canadian Holocaust denier and Bradley Smith, an American Holocaust denier who placed advertisements in college newspapers around the United States (V-1214, English, 20 minutes Yad Vashem Archives).
3. **Talk show with Phil Donahue** - March 1994, Donahue interviews Bradley Smith and David Cole in an attempt to refute the deniers (V-803, English, 45 minutes Yad Vashem Archives).

II. Session Two

I. The teacher screens various segments of footage showing deniers from different countries and different periods and explains their arguments .

II. A discussion may be held with the learners on the historical problems arising from the deniers' arguments and the inherent dangers of their modus operandi.

III. Session Three

The teacher presents a "response" to the deniers by having the learners peruse a wide variety of historical sources that collectively form the historical mosaic of the Holocaust. This session may be enriched, and the "response" given added substance, by inserting excerpts of video cassettes available at the Yad Vashem Archives in order to refute the deniers' arguments.

1. **"Nazi Designers of Death"** - a BBC program on the German corporations that built the crematoria and gas chambers in Auschwitz (V-801, 60 minutes).

2. A four-minute videotape showing the execution of Jews on the Lipau Beach in Latvia, filmed by a sailor in the German navy Reinhardt Wiener, in August 1941 (V-449/4, no soundtrack).
3. Excerpts from Claude Lanzmann's film Shoah - Lanzmann's interview with Suchomel, an SS guard at the Treblinka death camp, and testimonies of survivors of Auschwitz and Treblinka (V-355, English and Hebrew).
4. A Russian film on the liberation of Auschwitz in January 1945 (V-45, English).
5. "A Painful Reminder" - a British film depicting the liberation of the concentration camps in Germany in 1945. (V-794, English)

6. INTRODUCTION

What is "Holocaust denial"?

How can the Holocaust be denied? Who are the Holocaust deniers? Are they intellectuals? skinheads? anti-semites? academics? ordinary people? Are they a small and inconsequential cluster of socially marginal fanatics or a large group of mainstream players? Is Holocaust denial a localized phenomenon, restricted to Germany, France, Great Britain, or the United States, or is it more serious and comprehensive? What are the deniers' main arguments and what motivates them in their denial?

Can they be fought intellectually? Should one argue with them, or are they better ignored?

These are only some of the questions and perplexities that arise in connection with Holocaust denial in this unit, I shall attempt to answer these questions in so far as is possible.

First, what is "Holocaust denial"? Why do I avoid the term "revisionism" that the deniers strongly prefer, and the expression minimization of the Holocaust, a term commonly used in Germany to denote comparison of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe to similar acts of genocide in the twentieth century until the distinctiveness of the Jewish trauma is obfuscated and dwarfed?

Any person or organization that denies the Holocaust or doubts the number of Jewish victims, or the existence of concentration camps and gas chambers, is in my opinion a denier of the Holocaust and not a "revisionist," " however ardently they wish to be known by the latter term. To call Holocaust deniers "revisionists" is to give them a distinguished place within a legitimate school of historical research that has roots in both the United States and Europe.' The truth is that these people are engaged not in an innovative alternative interpretation of history but in the outright denial of history. All serious historians are in essence revisionists, for they attempt to fathom the truth on the basis of

their findings and interpret these findings in view of the accepted criteria of historical scholarship. Holocaust deniers do not seek to reveal the truth. On the contrary: theirs is a massive onslaught against truth, a repudiation of fact.

Who are these people and where do they live? When did the phenomenon of Holocaust denial come into being? What are their main arguments?

It is important to answer these questions in order to understand the phenomenon and its scope. In this unit, however, I shall focus specifically on how to devise appropriate intellectual weapons for use in the war on denial. As part of the unit, I have included a collection of 13 individual and organizations that deny the Holocaust (pp. 11-23)- a non-inclusive but representative sample that illustrates the contours of Holocaust denial and serves as a guidebook of sorts on deniers.

When did the phenomenon of Holocaust denial begin? Paul Rassinier of France is usually cited as the first Holocaust denier . His book *Le Passage de la Ligne* (Crossing the Line), first published in 1948, sets forth the main arguments that have become the stock in trade of all subsequent Holocaust deniers:

- There had never been a plan for the systematic annihilation of European Jewry.
- The number of Jewish victims was about one million only.
- It was the Jews who had declared war on Germany.
- The survivors' testimonies are inflated and unreliable.

In my opinion, however, Professor Yisrael Gutman correctly traces the origins of Holocaust denial to the Nazis themselves. In Gutman's opinion, the Nazis' attempts to obscure their acts of murder sowed the seeds of denial. The following examples illustrate this point:

1. The absence of any written orders from Hitler (Fuehrerbefehl) concerning the annihilation of the Jews, and the use of verbal commands.
2. The use of code words (Sprachregelung) to denote the annihilation of European Jewry:
 - . Ausiedlung (evacuation);
 - . Endloesung (the Final Solution);
 - . Sonderbehandlung (special treatment);
 - . Umsiedlung (relocation);
 - . Abschiebung (deportation);
 - . Aktion (operation).

3. The formation in 1942 of Unit 1005, a secret unit commanded by Paul Blobel in order to destroy evidence of the slaughter of Jews in the death pits of the east by burning the corpses.
4. Martin Bormann's order of July 11, 1943, in Hitler's name, banning the use of the term *gesamtloesung* ("comprehensive solution for the Jewish people").
5. Orders concerning the dismantling of three extermination camps (Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka) and destruction of evidence concerning the mass murder of Jews there.
6. Himmler's speech to SS officers in Poznan in October 1943.

These are just several of the many examples that point to systematic efforts by the Nazis to conceal and camouflage the murder of Jews. It seems contradictory: if the annihilation of Jewry was the product of Nazi ideology, why would the Nazis wish to conceal their actions? Why did they not speak of the Final Solution openly? Although this is a rational question regarding an utterly irrational phenomenon, I will attempt to answer it. Part of the answer, I believe, lies in Himmler's October 1943 speech to SS officers in Poznan. The destruction of the Jews, Himmler explained, is a glorious page in our history that has never been recorded and never shall be. It was clear to him that people at large would not understand these murderous actions, which therefore had to be concealed.

This is a foundation stone in understanding the Holocaust, its denial and the close relationship between them. In my opinion, no one today can contend with the theme of the Holocaust without touching upon its denial if at times unwittingly.

The seeds of Holocaust denial were sown here. The furtiveness and obfuscation that the Nazis used to camouflage their actions during the war created fertile soil for the postwar Holocaust deniers. The death camps Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were destroyed and all traces of their having been mass extermination camps were obliterated. The gas chambers in Birkenau and Majdanek were dismantled and detonated in order to obfuscate the mass murder perpetrated there; Unit 1005 was sent to the eastern territories in order to destroy all evidence of the slaughter at the firing pits. Nearly all the prisoners who removed corpses at the extermination camps and for Unit 1005 were murdered once their work was completed, and many documents attesting to the lethal crimes disappeared.

Who are the deniers of the Holocaust? Do they have something in common?

Until the late 1970s it was hard to speak of denial as a phenomenon with firm research conclusions.

The denial publications that had appeared up to that time were of rather poor quality and terse and crude in their approach. App's 37-page pamphlet is very cheaply made and Christopherson's 24-page treatise is extremely cheap and crude.

A new and more dangerous turning point occurred in the late 1970s. Professor Arthur Butz's 300-page book *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, with in 450 footnotes, provides lavish details from various documents that Butz interprets in novel ways. Butz teaches at Northwestern University in Illinois. Although his field of expertise is not history but electrical engineering, his erudition and academic status elevated Holocaust denial several notches. Thus his work should be treated differently from that of its predecessors.

In 1979, Professor Robert Faurisson, a lecturer in French literature at Lyon University published a series of articles in *Le Monde* on Holocaust denial and legitimized the subject in France.

In the 1980's the British historian David Irving joined the denial camp. Until that time, Irving had been considered a legitimate but extremist historian.

Butz, Faurisson, and Irving managed to give the subject of Holocaust denial what it had lacked in the 1950s and 1960s the status of "serious" scholarship. The basic arguments presented by Rassinier and others in the 1950s and 1960s had not changed in essence, but the academic researchers of the 1970s managed to clothe their arguments in "scholarly" attire.

Do the various Holocaust deniers have anything in common?

Rachel Hodara, in her article on Holocaust denial concludes that the common denominator of most Holocaust deniers is anti-Semitism in one form or another. ***Hatred of Jews, I believe, is the primary motive of the 'revisionist' school in Holocaust research.***

Deborah Lipstadt, in her book *Denying the Holocaust*, notices a difference between the "first generation" of deniers (Rassinier, App) and the "second generation" (Butz, Faurisson). According to Lipstadt the "first generation" sought to cleanse the Nazis by justifying Nazi anti-Semitism and argued that the Jews deserved the treatment they had received because of their hostile behavior toward Germany. The "second generation" used different tactics. Its exponents acknowledged the Germans' anti-Semitism and declared their own rejection of and dissociation from it, but argued that, notwithstanding Nazi Germany's deleterious behavior toward the Jews there was no Holocaust. By using this vague phraseology, they were viewed as "learned," unprejudiced men who sought nothing but historical "truth."

How may these attitudes be combated? To answer this question, we must understand how these Holocaust deniers operate. Here, I believe is where their big lie resides instead of exploring the truth of the historical event that the Holocaust represents by uncovering various documents - German, Jewish, Polish, Russian, including material from the trials

of Nazi criminals - they totally disregard the vastness and complexity of the Holocaust and focus on several details of this enormous event, such as:

- proof of the existence of gas chambers, especially those at Auschwitz;
- proof of the use of Zyklon B on human beings;
- proof of a systematic plan to annihilate the Jews;
- dearth of testimonies on the actual perpetration of genocide.

Thus by attempting to challenge the veracity of various details without combining these details into one "big story" they try to cast doubt on the factuality of the event itself. In practice in arithmetic terms they argue that $1 + 1 + 1 + 1$ add up not to 4 but to 1.

Worse still, this 1 is in fact zero. Not only does the logic fail to hold, but the deniers make a travesty of the discipline of historical research. In this fashion, one cannot prove that any historical event has occurred!

Practically speaking, the thought processes of the Holocaust deniers teach us - by way of negation - what correct historical thinking is. By invalidating their techniques, we may learn how to think correctly.

In our battle against the Holocaust denier we may provide ourselves with correct tools of historical thinking; Any historical event, of course, is made up of numerous details, great and small, that form one large mosaic. We do not always possess the entire mosaic but our role as historians is to fill in the minutiae until the picture of the event at hand is as near to completion as possible. Our mosaic - the account of the Holocaust - is composed of the following sources:

1. German documents that explicitly mention the murders and the murder process:
"They were liquidated," "They were killed," "They were exterminated."
2. German documents that describe the planning and implementation of the Final Solution with euphemisms or synonyms for the murder of Jews.
3. Jewish documents - diaries, memoirs, collections of writings - in various localities such as ghettos and death camps.
4. Testimonies of survivors of the ghettos, concentration camps and death camps:
5. Documents and testimonies of Poles who lived near the extermination sites and reports by the Polish underground to its government-in-exile in London.
6. Russian documents from the commissions of inquiry that were established upon the liberation of the German-occupied territories.

7. Legal material from the trials of Nazi criminals held in Nuremberg at the end of the war, and other trials on German soil in the 1960s during which German perpetrators were brought to justice.

Only by linking these materials appropriately can one obtain an accurate historical picture and expose the cunning and illegitimate tactics of the Holocaust deniers.

Most researchers consider World War II the most heavily documented historical event in twentieth-century history and in general. The director of the Yad Vashem Archives, Dr Yaacov Lozowick, reports that his repository contains between fifty to sixty million pages of documents on the Holocaust of European Jewry. The Yad Vashem library contains more than 70,000 books on various aspects of the Holocaust. The national archives of the United States, Germany and Eastern European and former Soviet countries hold innumerable documents describing various stages of World War II and the Holocaust. This vastness of documentation actually hinders our work as historians in seeking and piecing together the details of the Holocaust mosaic because no single document tells the whole story. The deniers are fully aware of this fact and exploit it. They also exploit the psychological difficulty people have in accepting such an atrocity as real. Terrence Des Pres, in his book *The Survivor*, relates:

A survivor of the Dachau concentration camp told us the following: The SS guards were fond of telling us that we had no chance of leaving the camp alive... They said that after the war, the rest of the world would not believe what had happened; there would be rumors and speculations, but no clear proof, and people would think that such evil was inconceivable.

Thus, the Nazis themselves acknowledged the inability of the human mind to fathom the story of the Holocaust. This also explains the relative success of the Holocaust deniers. Because human beings find it psychologically difficult to confront absolute evil and questions on the essence of humankind ("If This is A Man?" - Primo Levi), they prefer the explanations of Holocaust deniers over historical research.

Terrence Des Pres mentions this issue of psychological incredulity in connection with hearing survivors' testimonies. In his opinion, two parallel mechanisms are at work: the wish to hear these accounts and the wish to reject them. We prefer to regard the world as a pleasant rather than a threatening place, and therefore we suppress the survivor's voice. By so doing, we become participants in the "conspiracy of silence."

Persons ensnared by the Holocaust deniers' arguments are not necessarily anti-Semitic. The opposite is probably the case. The deniers succeed in sowing doubt in many people's minds due to this incredulity.

Nor are the documents easy to confront. How can we explain the Holocaust in detail without spending years in archives and libraries?

The following educational unit is a modest attempt to cope with these issues. I will attempt to present and explain some of the major documents that tell the Holocaust story and shall describe how they interrelate in order to construct an overall picture of the Holocaust. There is one proviso: it is impossible to be absolutely certain of what happened in every locality. The mosaic is not complete. Nevertheless, these documents illuminate, explicitly and unequivocally, the planning, magnitude, and implementation of the Final Solution of the Jewish problem in Europe.

This conclusion unit has presented a modest selection of documents from different sources that together form parts of the historical mosaic of the Holocaust. Every historical event is composed of numerous parts; our function is to link these parts together into a coherent account. Is it accurate to say that World War II claimed approximately 6,000,000 Jewish victims? Although an estimate, this figure is backed by voluminous documentation: German documents on transports to the camps, construction of the crematoria and gas chambers, murder perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen, testimonies of Jews and Poles, and much material from the postwar trials. Do we know everything that happened in every location? No, but each day we discover new details that corroborate the overall picture that has existed for fifty years. It is our duty to continue merging the new parts until the entire picture becomes clear.

Although we have not attempted to cite the total number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust the estimates of several scholars who explored this issue should be mentioned:

1. Raul Hilberg (*The Destruction of European Jewry*, USA, 1985, vol. 3, pp. 1219-1220) estimated the number of Jews murdered at 5,100,000.
2. Jacob Leshinsky (*The Postwar Diaspora*, Tel Aviv, 1948, p. 31, in Hebrew) computed the number of victims at 5,957,000.
3. Wolfgang Benz (*Dimension Des Volkerlmords*, Munich 1991, p 17) speaks of between 5,290,000 and 6,000,000.
4. Jacob Robinson (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1972, vol. 8, p. 890) estimates their number at 5,820,000.
5. The *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust* (vol. 4, pp. 1797-1802) estimates the number of Jewish victims at 5,596,000-5,860,000.

Epilogue

Is Holocaust denial a marginal phenomenon or a real danger?

This unit has attempted to provide a methodological scholarly answer as is conventional in the field of historical research.

Have I used a sledgehammer to crack a nut?

Is it desirable to honor such a superficial phenomenon with such a detailed and serious answer? Should we perhaps simply ignore these madmen and avoid lending them more importance than their public status warrants! The answer to these and other questions is rooted in our very understanding of Holocaust denial. If we wish to regard Holocaust denial as the crazy delusions of a handful of mentally ill people who should be seeing psychiatrists, then this unit is indeed totally unnecessary. If however, we view Holocaust denial as anti-Semitism in new or old guise, then we must subject it to utterly different treatment. If we let the matter pass in silence, we shall enable the Holocaust deniers to sow further seeds of doubt in the minds of people who are unfamiliar with source literature on the events that occurred fifty years ago. With the passage of time and the Holocaust survivors, the deniers will succeed in sowing new doubts.

Take Bradley Smith, for example. He has managed to enter college campuses around the United States even where his methodology and arguments have been subjected to serious criticism, and has touched off ostensibly academic debates in institutions of higher learning.

Here we must distinguish between Holocaust deniers who are motivated by anti-Semitism and the general public, which, although not fundamentally anti-Semitic, is willing to listen and even be convinced by their arguments. Any Holocaust denier is surely anti-Semitic, but not necessarily so is anyone who expresses doubt about the actual murder of six million Jews!

How ignorant are people about the recent past? It is hard to compute this precisely, but according to the findings of a public-opinion poll conducted by Roper and cited on Phil Donahue's television program in March 1994, 22 percent of Americans think it is possible that the Holocaust never took place at all, and another 12 percent do not know!

It is very difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions from this opinion poll. Nevertheless, one may assume that ignorance is indeed very widespread and that the Holocaust deniers are succeeding in sowing doubt especially among the naive. What should we do? Obviously we cannot defeat anti-Semitism with guns and tanks; our main effort must focus on education for the masses. The Holocaust museums such as those in Israel, Washington, Los Angeles, (soon) New York and London are barriers against the dissemination of the deniers' notions. They provide a satisfactory response for a mass educational effort. However, we should also invest in the mass media, i.e., general television, cable television, radio, and the press. I do not consider it possible to disregard Holocaust deniers who appear on television talk shows on the grounds that their basic attitude rules out a head-on confrontation. If we evade the confrontation or conduct it with the help of people whose knowledge and comprehension are faulty, we will have done our cause a disservice. Today the media customarily summon Holocaust survivors to refute the deniers' claims, but the survivors find this mission hard to accomplish.

Instead we should mobilize top-caliber historians who can expose the deniers' frauds and fakes and place the historical account in its proper context.

It is my hope that I have made some contribution toward this cause.

**"Oblivion lengthens the exile
and in memory lies the secret of redemption. "
The Baal Shem Tov**