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The Evidence for the Holocaust

An Introduction

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I am hardly the most likely person to pen an article for the Unz Review. As a PhD student in history, I seek a career in academia, and run a modest history account on social media entitled [History Speaks](#). My politics are mainstream, as are my views on the Nazi Holocaust. But while I recognize that the mainstream historical understanding of the Holocaust is established beyond any reasonable doubt, I part ways from mainstream historians when it comes to my preferred approach to Holocaust denial. I believe that open discussion with and debate against deniers is the most effective way of combating denial, and have repeatedly engaged deniers through my History Speaks handle.

Rational discourse is hardly a foolproof antidote to Holocaust denial. Confirmation bias being what it is—particularly on such an emotionally charged topic—one can only hope to persuade a minority of the other side. Yet dialogue remains the most ethical and effective tool of persuasion at hand.

In the spirit of dialogue, I thank Ron Unz for allowing me the opportunity to write what will be a two-part piece against Holocaust denial. This first piece will outline—in highly abbreviated form—some of the positive evidence for the Holocaust. The second piece will refute the views and arguments Unz himself has made on the Holocaust.

What is the Holocaust? What is Holocaust denial?

There is often popular confusion as to what the terms “Holocaust” and “Holocaust denial” actually mean. Anyone who discusses the Holocaust and Holocaust denial on social media quickly notices how freely these terms are (mis)used. Nevertheless, both terms actually have hard-boiled and empirically specific definitions.

The Holocaust refers to the systematic extermination of European Jewry by the Germans and their collaborators during the Second World War. This policy was carried out by mass shooting,

gassing, enslavement (and overwork), and deliberate deprivation. At least five million Jews died as a result.

Holocaust denial, in turn, includes any of the following three claims:

1. The Germans had no plan or policy to exterminate Jews
2. The real Jewish death toll is far below the mainstream estimates of 5-6 million
3. Gas chambers were not used systematically to murder Jews.

Below, I will discuss evidence for the Holocaust and against Holocaust denial. My categories of evidence will include general statements by German leaders, reflecting German intent to exterminate the Jews; mass graves; documentary evidence of mass shootings; documentary & forensic evidence of gassings; circumstantial evidence; and demographic data. Owing to space constraints, I will have to omit huge amounts of evidence for the Holocaust, as well as entire categories of evidence, such as testimony given at post-war trials. However, what I present here will suffice to discredit the memes of Holocaust deniers, according to which the material and documentary evidence for the Holocaust is scant, and everything comes down to eyewitness testimony. In other words this piece is a sort of introduction to anti-denial discourse.

Statements of Intent

Statements by German leaders reflecting knowledge, an intention for, and approval of the extermination of the Jews are available in embarrassing abundance.

German leaders who made such statements include the following:

- Hans Frank, the chief administrator of the General Government (German-occupied Poland), who admonished his colleagues [on 12 December 1941](#) that “we must destroy the Jews wherever we find them, and wherever it is possible,” while noting that he had been instructed by German officials in Berlin to “liquidate them [the Jews] yourselves!”
- Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, who noted in his diary entry of [29 December 1942](#) that Aktion Reinhardt chief Odilo Globocnik—who oversaw the operations of the Sobibor, Belzec, and Treblinka death camps—was employing a “pretty barbaric procedure” to “liquidate” the Jews deported to the camps.
- The aforementioned Hans Frank, who on [24 August 1942](#) gave a speech announcing that non-working Jews in Poland would no longer be fed, and declared that 1.2 million Polish Jews would die of starvation.
- Adolf Hitler, who [on 17 April 1943](#), reported to the Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy that in Poland “if the Jews did not want to work, they were shot” and “if they could not work, they had to perish.”
- Robert Ley, director of the German Labor Front, who proclaimed on [3 May 1943](#) that “we swear we will not give up the struggle until the last Jew in Europe is annihilated and dead!”
- Heinrich Himmler, the chief of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), who reported in his infamous Posen speech of 6 October 1943, that he had exterminated not only Jewish men but also Jewish women and children, while clarifying that to exterminate (*ausrotten*) Jews meant to “kill them or have them be killed” (“[umzubringen, oder umbringen zu lassen](#)”).
- Joseph Goebbels, writing in the [14 March 1945](#) edition of his diary, that “*When you have the power to do so, you have to kill these Jews like rats*” and that “*In Germany we have . . . thoroughly taken care of that already.*”

In our [recent online debate](#), Michael Peinovich expressed what is a common response by deniers to these kinds of statements. Such expressions were just ‘fed posting,’ deniers say. That is to say, the statements of Nazi leaders referring to the mass killing of Jews—even highly specific ones that do not naturally lend themselves to any kind of metaphorical or rhetorical interpretation—are mere expressions of hatred for Jews, or merely “blowing off steam” and not to be taken literally. But this interpretation is an anachronism: it assumes that the leaders of a powerful state in the 1940s spoke in a similar manner to dissident right internet trolls in 2023. The benign representation of the aforementioned statements also privileges the interpretation of Holocaust deniers living 80 years later, who typically do not speak German, over the interpretation of the people who heard and listened to the statements at the time, and who were native or native-like speakers of German.

For example, Hitler’s Minister of Armaments [Albert Speer](#) attended the aforementioned Himmler Posen speech, and interpreted it as an unambiguous statement of intent to kill the Jews of Europe, as he confided in a private letter he wrote decades after the war. Moreover—both in [wartime meetings with his cabinet](#) and [in his postwar memoirs](#)—the Hungarian Regent Horthy interpreted Hitler’s aforementioned statement to him (and others like it) as a literal demand for the murder of Hungarian Jews. It should also be noted that Horthy and Speer were not being coerced (nor were they under investigation or at trial) when they expressed their interpretations of Hitler’s and Himmler’s statements.

When assessing the meaning of the aforementioned statements by Nazi leaders—whether to accept them on their face, or to interpret them metaphorically or rhetorically—it is simply irrational to privilege the interpretation of contemporary Holocaust deniers over the interpretations of men like Speer and Horthy. These men had a native (or native-like) command of German, personal relationships with the German leaders whose statements are in question, and were generally in a much better position to understand the linguistic, political, and historical context of the aforementioned statements.

Mass Graves

A hammer blow to Holocaust denial was dealt in 1997-1998, by researchers in (post-Communist) Poland. An archaeology team [led by Andrzej Kola](#) took core samples of the geological strata at the remains of the Belzec death camp, at which about 434,000 Jews were killed. Kola found 33 colossal mass graves, amounting to a total surface area of 5,919 square meters and a total volume of 21,310 cubic meters. For purposes of illustration, the area of the entire Belzec camp was 62,000 square meters: the mass graves covered nearly 10% of the entire camp!

The mass graves were loaded with ash. A conservative extrapolation by the Holocaust researcher Roberto Muehlencamp—based on the ash concentration levels identified by Kola, as well as Kola’s estimates of unburned bodies buried in the graves—shows that [at least 350,000 Jews](#) were buried in the mass graves. The “missing” ashes of the remaining ≈80,000 victims might be accounted for by the documented practice of grave robbing by some Poles, by earlier Soviet excavations, or by the German practice of using human ash as fertilizer or for other industrial purposes.

Holocaust deniers object to the Belzec digs because they were carried out through core sampling, rather than fully excavating all the graves, bodies, and ash. As conspiracy theorists, they contend, without evidence, that Kola used the core sampling method to obscure the results of his study and allow him to exaggerate how much ash was in the 33 mass graves. However,

core sampling is a foundational and empirically rigorous method of geology and archaeology. It was not invented for the purposes of a conspiracy to justify the Holocaust. In light of Jewish sensitivities about excavating graves—grounded in Jewish religious law—digging everything up and scattering all the ashes would have been an imprudent move for Kola. And so he took core samples.

Leaving aside denier quibbling, the Kola Belzec digs—and similar core-sampling digs he performed at the Kulmhof and Sobibor camps, which identified mass graves with concentrations of ash and human remains **corresponding to hundreds of thousands more victims**—by themselves establish the basic nature of these death camps.

Not only have numerous mass graves from the death camps been uncovered. Vast numbers of mass graves of Jewish and other victims of mass shootings carried out by the Germans and their collaborators have been identified. The US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad surveyed **495 mass graves** in Ukraine alone. The Baltic Mass Graves project conducted under the auspices of the UK Holocaust Educational Trust located **308 sites** in the Baltics.

It is true that Holocaust mass graves have often not been fully excavated. This is an expression of respect for Jewish religious law, which apparently forbids such excavation of the dead. Deniers commonly ridicule this fact, arguing by insinuating that the invocations of Jewish law are a sham to cover up the lack of bodies. However, when full excavations have been performed, they have yielded results consistent with the mainstream narrative. For example, when the author and clergyman Father Patrick Desbois got permission to excavate 15 mass graves at Busk, his team found thousands of corpses buried alongside German bullet cartridges.

Documentary Evidence of Mass Shootings

The first major stage of the Holocaust was the mass shooting of Jewish civilians, which began in summer 1941 after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Mere weeks after the German invasion on 22 June 1941, the German *Einsatzgruppen* had begun to kill all Jewish civilians in their midst apart from Jews preserved for labour and their families.

The systematic character of the massacres is illustrated by the unquestionably authentic Einsatzgruppen reports, which show that the Einsatzgruppen—as well as other bodies, such as German police battalions, the Wehrmacht, and local collaborators—were shooting the vast majority of Jewish civilians they could get their hands on. By 1 December 1941, the SD Einsatzkommando III Karl Jäger, who had been stationed in the Baltics, **could boast**:

Einsatzkommando 3 has achieved the goal of solving the Jewish problem in Lithuania: There are no more Jewish in Lithuania, apart from working Jews and their families. I wanted to eliminate the working Jews and their families as well, but the Civil Administration and the Wehrmacht attacked me most sharply and issued a prohibition against having these Jews and their families shot.

The Einsatzgruppen reports and other German documentation—such as Himmler's report to Hitler on 29 December 1942, which noted that **363,211 Jews had been "executed" within just the last three months**—attest to the German practice of shooting the vast majority of

Jews they could get their hands on in the occupied Soviet Union.[1] The mass graves mentioned in the previous section of this essay bear out the mass shootings at a material level. (As noted, nearly 500 have been identified in Ukraine alone, and over 300 have been identified in the Baltic states.) As I will discuss in the demographics section, the documentary and other evidence indicates that nearly 2,000,000 Jews were killed by bullets.

Documentary & Forensic Evidence of Gassing

Abundant documentary evidence exists for the use of homicidal gas chambers at Nazi death camps. Consider for example Auschwitz Birkenau. Let us examine the documentary evidence regarding the nature of the rooms in the Krematorium II and Krematorium IV buildings that were identified by the eyewitnesses as homicidal gas chambers.

These rooms were also referred to as gas chambers in multiple German construction documents. For example, a 29 January 1943 letter from SS Captain Bischoff referred to the relevant room in Krematorium II as a “gassing celler” (Vergasungskeller). A 2 March 1943 report by a foreman who helped fit gas-tight windows on a gas chamber in Krematorium IV literally described the relevant room as a “gas chamber.” There are also orders for gas-tight doors with peep holes for multiple gas chambers, orders for gas-tight windows for the gas chamber in Krematorium IV, and orders for hydrogen cyanide detectors for the gas chamber in Krematorium II.

As to forensic evidence, the holes in the roof of Krematorium 2—through which, according to eyewitnesses, the Zyklon-B pellets were introduced via wire-mesh columns—were identified by independent investigators in a 2004 archaeological study. It should also be noted in this connection that contemporaneous documentary evidence referring to the wire-mesh introduction columns in Krematorium II has been found in the Auschwitz construction records.

Finally, chemical testing confirms that there is on average more hydrogen cyanide in the remains of the homicidal gas chambers of Auschwitz than in any other type of building in the camp apart from the delousing chambers. This finding is supported by Dr. Avi Bitterman’s meta-analysis of all samples taken from the ruins of the gas chambers, including those taken by Holocaust deniers such as Germar Rudolf and Fred Leuchter. Bitterman analysed the mean levels of hydrogen cyanide residue from samples taken from the homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz, and samples taken from any other type of building. Bitterman found that the mean level of HCN in the gas chambers was higher by a statistically significant margin than the average level in any other type of building, except the non-homicidal gas chambers (commonly referred to as “delousing chambers”).

This is a remarkably corroborative finding. Today the homicidal gas chambers are—with the exception of the seldom-used gas chamber in Krematorium I—blown-up ruins and have been exposed to the elements for generations. Yet they still have more HCN than various intact buildings: indeed, they have more HCN than any other type of building studied apart from the non-homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz. Hydrogen Cyanide is water-soluble, so one would expect all else equal the gas chamber ruins to have by far the **least** amount of HCN (given their complete exposure to the elements over literal generations). Yet, as noted, and by a statistically significant margin, a greater average level of HCN was found in the gas chambers than in any other type of building other than the delousing chambers.

That (much) more HCN was detected in the delousing chambers than the homicidal gas chambers is easily explained and poses no problem for the mainstream narrative. Unlike the homicidal gas chambers, the delousing chambers are physically intact, so the lack of exposure to the elements means (all else equal) the latter will retain more HCN. Moreover, the delousing chambers were used for a greater period of time than the homicidal gas chambers (the main gas chambers at Auschwitz, in Krematoria II, III, IV, and V were only used in 1943 and 1944). Finally, the delousing chambers also experienced longer periods of exposure to HCN in a given round of gassing. (This can be inferred not only from the witness testimony, but from the fact that it takes much more HCN exposure to kill lice than to kill warm-blooded animals like human beings.)

Bitterman's meta-analysis exposes serious errors and bias in the chemical analysis of Germar Rudolf, one of the few Holocaust deniers with a scientific background. For example, Rudolf included in his study an extreme outlier sample which he admitted was likely switched with another sample, or contaminated. The effect of Rudolf's inclusion of this corrupted sample was to increase the average level of hydrogen cyanide in non-gas chamber buildings, thereby giving the false impression that there was more HCN in these buildings than in the homicidal gas chambers. Bitterman also discovered the fact that Rudolf was guilty of "unprincipled repeats" in his analysis. That is to say, Rudolf double-counted some samples that on the net favoured his case, while failing to double-count samples that on the net hurt his case. Rudolf provided no scientific criterion to justify this practice of selective double-counting, and Bitterman excluded the double-counts from his analysis.

Circumstantial Evidence: The Disappearance of Millions of Jews in Nazi Custody

American courts adjudicating homicide cases recognize that the disappearance of people is circumstantial evidence for their deaths. For example, in 1982, the court in the murder case *Epperly v. Commonwealth* [held that](#) the disappearance of a person was "circumstantial evidence entitled to the same weight as bloodstains and concealment of evidence." If the disappearance of one person is probative evidence, what to make of the disappearance of millions of people? Or, more specifically, what to make of the disappearance of millions of Jews from Nazi custody in the camp system—enclosed spaces from which they could not leave under penalty of death?

We have firm documentary evidence—in the form of the [Höfle Telegram](#) and the [Korherr Report](#), among other documents—that 1.4 million Jews were sent to the Aktion Reinhardt camps alone. Substantially all of these Jews disappeared in the camps shortly after their arrival. (The few thousand survivors of these camps either escaped, or were selected for forced labour and sent to other camps.) The disappearance of over 99% of these 1.4 million people, and the disappearance of a total of about 1.6 million more Jews at other camps, constitutes compelling circumstantial evidence of their death, at least until an alternative explanation for their disappearance is established.

Recognizing the need for an alternative explanation, Holocaust deniers such as [Carlo Mattogno](#) and [Jürgen Graf](#) have advocated the "resettlement theory," according to which the 'disappeared' millions of Jews—or at least those sent to the Reinhardt camps and Auschwitz—were resettled in some kind of permanent reservation. The problem with this theory is that it is ridiculous, due to the lack of evidence. There is no evidence of such a massive population transfer (Jews in camps sent elsewhere) being carried out, and deniers cannot even clarify where precisely the millions of Jews were supposedly resettled. Nor is there a shred of testimonial, documentary, physical, or economic evidence attesting to the existence of

settlements of ‘disappeared’ Jews, settlements which would have collectively amounted to a population larger than Estonia and many other contemporary European countries. Instead, the millions of Jews the Holocaust deniers claimed were resettled all disappeared forever after entering the Nazi camps.

Demographic Data

From the documentary evidence provided by the Germans and their allies—such as the aforementioned Einsatzgruppen reports, which discussed the mass shooting of well over one million Jewish civilians—we can infer nearly two million deaths by mass shooting. I detailed how I arrived at this figure of nearly two million (including the specific documentary evidence on which I relied), in a [highly detailed appendix](#) to my debate with Thomas Dalton a few months ago. I will not repeat my analysis here, but I recommend [that appendix](#) to any curious readers.

In addition, we know from German documentation that about 3.3 million Jews were deported to German death camps and concentration camps—including the Aktion Reinhardt camps and the main concentration camp (KZ) system. Of these Jews, at most 300,000 survived and were found after the war. Therefore, at least three million Jews died in the camps. Combining the death toll from the camps and mass shootings, we reach a figure of approximately 5 million Jewish deaths. We must add to this figure hundreds of thousands of Jews who perished in ghettos. (We have good data on ghetto deaths from the Jewish councils as well as German documents.)

All in all, the wartime demographic data establish a Jewish death toll of at least 5 million, and probably hundreds of thousands beyond that. The mainstream estimate of the death toll is fortified by a postwar study by the [Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry](#), which estimated a decrease of 5.7 million in Europe’s Jewish population. The denier claim that the death toll was much lower is so contrary to the demographic evidence that one must infer it is politically motivated.

Conclusion

This was a highly abbreviated summary of the evidence for the Holocaust. As a catalogue of the extant evidence, this piece is very much incomplete, and should be treated as a merely introductory text to the anti-denial genre. But it alone puts the lie to the Holocaust-denier meme that the evidence for the Holocaust is exceedingly frail and limited to “eyewitnesses.” As I have shown, various other categories of evidence—from statements of German leaders, to mass graves, to documentary and forensic evidence for mass shootings and gassing, to the circumstantial evidence of the disappearance of millions of Jews in Nazi custody, to the demographic data—support the narrative that the Nazis murdered at least five million Jews by gassing, shooting, and other means.

Notes

[1] It should be noted that about 36,000 of these murdered Jews were not shot, but sent to Treblinka and gassed.