

HISTORY

THE HOLOCAUST ENCYCLOPEDIA.

Edited by Walter Laqueur.
Yale Univ. Press. 816 pp. \$60

Though the Nazi murder of six million European Jews was obscured or ignored by Allied governments and newspapers while it was happening, and though it registered hardly at all in the public consciousness of the United States, Britain, and other countries at the time, the Holocaust has come to occupy a central place in the popular memory of World War II, in some ways even eclipsing the fighting itself. The impact isn't surprising. As a military operation, the war differed from its predecessors principally in its gargantuan scale. By contrast, the Holocaust—what the late historian Lucy Dawidowicz termed “the war against the Jews”—differed from previous mass killings in its fundamental nature, its focus, and its ferocity.

The effort to murder every Jew who could be found constitutes one of the defining events of the 20th century, the underside and mockery of our march toward modernity, and a moral and social touchstone for the new millennium. Small wonder, then, that the number of histories, memoirs, works of fiction and art, musical compositions, and memorials that focus on the Holocaust continues to multiply. It's as if the years render us increasingly desperate to examine the Holocaust, plumb its depths, and represent its meaning for this and future generations.

All of which makes the appearance of *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* both timely and propitious. The subject is so large and varied, with dimensions that fall under so many academic disciplines, that it is well served by an encyclopedia. An earlier, four-volume *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (1990), edited by Israel Gutman, was a breakthrough achievement, and it remains indispensable for those who want information, often in significant depth, about one or another aspect of the event. This new encyclopedia not only offers its material within a single volume, but also deepens and complements the previous effort by taking into account information that has become available during the past decade. Laqueur, cochairman of the International Research Council of the

Center for Strategic and International Studies, deserves considerable gratitude, as do associate editor Judith Tydor Baumel, the many contributors, and the staff of Yale University Press.

Unlike most encyclopedias, this one can actually—and profitably—be read. With the context provided by Laqueur's fine preface, and with the assistance of the chronology that opens the encyclopedia, even someone with little knowledge of the Holocaust can delve into individual topics and get a sense of their relationship to the subject as a whole. Some entries offer particularly good, if necessarily brief, expositions on important matters: Raul Hilberg on Auschwitz, the late Sybil Milton on art, Wolfgang Benz on the death toll, Nechama Tec on resistance in Eastern Europe. Entries on topics that could have been overlooked, such as “First-Person Accounts,” which covers diaries, memoirs, and oral histories, are also especially useful. In this time of Holocaust denial, the entries “Gas Chambers” and “Final Solution: Preparation and Implementation” have particular value. And the comprehensive bibliographical essay points the interested reader to books on many of the topics that an encyclopedia can cover in only a few pages or paragraphs.

Indeed, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* is full of fine contributions, some of them quite original. Libraries and schools, as well as individuals interested in an event that has sobered humanity's sense of its possibilities, should welcome this authoritative, illuminating, and accessible volume.

—WALTER REICH

WHEN WE LIKED IKE: Looking for Postwar America.

By Barbara P. Norfleet. Norton.
159 pp. \$35

I find it difficult to accept the title's past tense, for I continue to like Ike, who employed me at the White House Conference on Education in 1956. And the whole idea of looking for a postwar America confuses me a little—after all, postwar America still surrounds us. I do appreciate, however, the many photographs of my Aunt Liz (or did I just make her up?) assembled by Norfleet, a photo archivist