THE WAR AGAINST THE JEWS 1933-1945

The premise of Lucy Dawidowicz’s book* is the annihilation of European Jewry, an event that “has resisted understanding,” and has defied human reason in three aspects, as formulated by the author:

1. How was it possible for a modern state to carry out the murder of a whole people for no other reason than that they were Jews?
2. How was it possible for a whole people to allow itself to be destroyed?
3. How was it possible for the world to stand by without halting this destruction?

After completing the narrative part of the holocaust—the what and how it happened—the author attempts to explain the more complex question: why it happened. The book refers to the millennia-old distortions of the Jewish image in religious dogmas and philosophies of the Western World, as formulated in the dictum of Luther: “... Next to the devil thou hast no enemy more cruel, more venomous and violent than a true Jew” (p. 23). These concepts were augmented in Germany by the deep-rooted opposition to the ideals of the Enlightenment and Emancipation stemming forth from the French Revolution. German patriotism in the “Wars of Liberation” against the invading armies of Napoleon was wedded to a new type of racial anti-Semitism. It assumed venomous potentialities by postulating the mythical ideas of Volkssthum and the nostalgia for the “golden epoch” of the Teutonic tribes in the swampy marshes of Germany.

*The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* by Lucy S. Dawidowicz (Holt, Rhinehart & Winston & Jewish Publication Society).
Against this background the author sees the formation of the “Final-Solution” concept in Hitler’s paranoic mind. The mind of Hitler becomes the focal point in tracing the origin and the fruition of the holocaust. Everything else is reduced to insignificance in comparison with Hitler’s demonic power.

Hitler himself had developed his plan to annihilate the Jews as early as 1918, or in the beginning of the twenties:

Once Hitler adopted an ideological position . . . he adhered to it — with limpetlike fixity, fearful lest he be accused if he changes his mind, of incertitude or capriciousness on “essential questions.” He had long-range plans to realize his ideological goals, and the destruction of the Jews as at their center (p. 108).

According to Dawidowicz’ the “War against the Jews” constituted the backbone of Hitler’s domestic and foreign policies. All political and military decisions were geared toward this central aim. The “Munich” deal that became a synonym for capitulation to the aggressor is described by Dawidowicz as a deterrent for Hitler because it “thwarted” his primary “plan to expropriate the Jews” (p. 161).

Dawidowicz refutes all evidence that casts a shadow on her theory, or that suggests that the gas-chambers and crematoria “ideas” may have evolved gradually, drawing their succor from the passivity and indifference of the Western powers.

To substantiate her hypothesis she employs a unique method in selecting and documenting her data. While the book abounds in footnotes, corroborating irrelevant and trivial events, it conspicuously and consistently lacks footnotes when dealing with the shocking and novel propositions of the author.

The book cites two documents where Hitler refers to the need to “remove” and “eliminate” the Jews and argues that these are ambiguous words that Hitler used because at that time he was compelled to camouflage his plan. In a letter to Gemlich (1919) Hitler wrote:

Rational anti-Semitism, however, must lead to a systematic legal opposition and elimination (Beseitigung) of the special privileges that Jews hold . . . Its final objective must be the removal (Entfernung) of the Jews altogether (p. 153).
Her argument runs as follows: Hitler decided in 1918 to solve the Jewish problem by extermination; knowing however, how unacceptable this plan would be even to Germans he used ambiguous language. The usage of ambiguous words should therefore not disprove his resoluteness to exterminate the Jews. Having thus stated that ambiguity does not disprove her theory, she proceeds to turn the same ambiguity into evidence for her theory, arguing that if despite his ability to “express himself clearly and unequivocally” he chose to speak ambiguously, he must have already then decided to exterminate the Jews. Dawidowicz cites one more excerpt from Hitler’s speech in 1920.

Removal of the Jews from our nation, not because we begrudge them their existence — we congratulate the rest of the whole world on their company — but because the existence of our nation is a thousand times more important to us than that of an alien race (p. 153).

The author concludes, “Here Hitler has introduced the very question of whether the Jews are to live or die” (Ibid.). Dawidowicz is not even concerned, or perhaps even aware, that she has incorrectly translated the German terms entfernung and beseitigung. The German entfernung may yet have some connotation of removal (although more precise is: to distance or move farther away) but beseitigung has no relationship with the English term elimination; in its strongest connotation it means removal. Dawidowicz introduces falsely the English term elimination for beseitung to substantiate her theory about the earlier date of the “Final Solution.”

After what happened—the total success of Hitler’s genocide policy against the Jews—it is easy, even tempting to endow it with the appearance of a “demonic” inevitability, as the consumption of a “grandiose” plan. However, in doing so, the author defies all historic evidence—some of it recorded in her own book. The period between January 1933, Hitler’s ascendance to official power, and December 10, 1941, the commencement of the “crematoria-actions,” abounds with facts illustrating Hitler’s early plans to enforce a mass-exodus of the Jews from Germany. Eichmann’s role in compelling the emigration of Jews was confirmed at his trial in Jerusalem. Germany allowed a Jewish delegate to
negotiate Jewish emigration at the conference in Evians, the conference that was torpedoed by Roosevelt's callous machinations. Dawidowicz herself cites the case of about 15,000 Jews arrested for parking violations, released under the condition that they leave Germany. In 1938, 20,000 Jews were forced out over the Polish border. During the Crystal-night (Nov. 1938) Heydrich ordered mass-interment of Jews, making their release conditional on their immediate leaving German territory.

An official letter from Heydrich, written in July 1941, mentions a decree of January 24, 1939, “to solve the Jewish problem by emigration and evacuation” (pp. 100-1).

In the decisive years between September 1939 and December 1941, persistent rumors circulated about a “reservation for Jews” in Lublin or Madagascar.

Hitler himself had mentioned that as a possibility . . . The Jews would be “imprisoned in a territory where they can disport themselves according to their nature” . . . The plan seemed to have been approved by Goring, Himmler, and Frank in early 1940 . . . Himmler in a memorandum . . . submitted to Hitler in May 1940, wrote: “I hope to see the concept of Jews completely obliterated with the possibility of a large migration of all the Jews to Africa or else a colony.”

But Dawidowicz doesn’t yield; she defends Hitler’s uncompromising image against Hitler himself. She argues that “everything we know of National Socialist ideology” precludes our accepting any plan except annihilation. One expects to hear the innermost secrets the author knows about the Hitleristic ideology, secrets hidden from Hitler, Goring, Himmler, Heidrich and all the others. Here Dawidowicz reveals it:

Hitler’s . . . policy for the Slavs was “depopulation” . . . to provide a continuous supply of slaves to serve the Germans. Hence, if justice was to be rendered according to . . . National Socialist racial values, then clearly a more sanguineous fate than that of the Slavs was intended for the Jews (p. 118).

Dawidowicz introduces here three propositions: a) “Depopulation of Slavs” means “Reservations for Slavs”; b) National socialist ideology imposed on its adherents an absolute morality
of behavior from which even their “Fuhrer” could not deviate; 
c) All “reservations” must have the same structure; none could 
be better than the others (those who are familiar with the radical 
variations in Hitler’s concentration-camps can especially appre-
ciate the last proposition . . .). Hence, if Slavs were assigned for 
a “reservation,” Jews must undergo a worse fate. All this is sub-
stantiated by one paramount argument: “everything we know of 
National Socialism”!

Dawidowicz’s theories move on a dual track: 1) The “Final-
Solution” idea was the genesis of Hitler’s political activities; 2) 
Hitler’s racial concepts, among which his will to exterminate the 
Jews assumed a central position, were the cause of the Second 
World-War.

Hitler had embarked on an ideological war to achieve ideological/
racial goals, but to win that war he needed also to fight a conventional 
war. Yet the rational interests of the latter often were sacrificed to the 
racial imperatives of the ideological war (p. 142).

Dawidowicz argues that whenever there was a conflict between 
military exigencies and the needs to exterminate Jews, the latter 
gained priority. The author demonstrates this by quoting several 
cases when trains were requisitioned from the army, against pro-
tests by the military, to facilitate transportations to the death-
camps.

The author conveniently forgets that at war-time all resources 
are militarized, anything needed for another purpose had to be 
taken away from the military. Any organization assigned for a 
specific purpose was bound by its own inertia to fight for its pri-
orities. It was unavoidable that the mammoth apparatus erected 
to destroy Jews should have had its disputes with the army, each 
defending its needs.

That Hitler’s zeal for military requirements outweighed his 
paranoic craving to annihilate the Jews is amply illustrated by 
Dawidowicz, when she relates how Hitler swallowed the refusal 
of some of his subordinates to cooperate with his Final Solution. 
Hitler chose to overlook the existence of the Jews rather than 
cause a conflict that would reduce the military assistance of his 
allies. Following are some examples:
The War Against the Jews 1933-1945

At the end of 1942, Antonescu (in Rumania) informed the Germans that instead of deporting Jews... he will allow them to buy their way out... to Palestine. Negotiations even started to that effect. Antonescu even repatriated Jews deported to Transylvania (p. 370).

Kally rejected (in Hungary) German demands to introduce yellow badges and, in a public speech, rejected "resettlement of the Jews"... as long as the Germans were giving no satisfactory answer about where the Jews were being resettled (p. 385).

In Bulgaria, too, the counterpressure of public opinion, and that of the Orthodox Church, brought the government to refuse deporting Jews (p. 389).

Had Hitler given priority to the "Final-Solution" instead of to his military goals he would have had sufficient means to make his satellites comply. No matter how deeply ingrained Hitler's hate for Jews was, he would never have endangered his global policies to satisfy this hate.

Hitler's success in exterminating European Jewry was due to the placid acquiescence of the entire world — friends and foes alike — and because the conspiracy of silence before and during the war communicated to him their unwillingness to interfere in his "internal" policy toward the Jews. The clearest testimony to this is given by Hitler himself, as quoted in Dawidowicz's book:

Always I am concerned only that I do not take any step from which I will perhaps have to retreat... I always go to the utmost limits of risk, but never beyond. For this you need to have a nose... to smell out... (p. 93).

His nose did not deceive him! The indifference to his anti-Jewish policies was signaled from all corners of the Western world.

Following the principle that Hitler's paranoid mind was the sole architect of the holocaust, Dawidowicz complements her psycho-historic view with the following:

What the Germans hated and feared most in themselves they projected onto the Jews, endowing the Jews with those terrible and terrifying attributes they tried to repress in themselves... One was the image of the Jew as vermin... The other was... the Jew as the mythic and omnipotent... Also the counter-images that the Germans held of
themselves were dual and inconsistent . . . the Aryan German was the wholesome vigorous Superman . . . destined to rule the world. According to the other scenario . . . the Germans believed themselves to be innocent and aggrieved victims, outwitted by the machinations of a supercunning and all-powerful antagonist, engaged in a struggle for their very existence (p. 165).

Even those familiar with the esoteric would have difficulty recognizing in these two sets of traits (one allegedly Jewish, the other German) a source for psychological conflict.

Even if we were to accept Dawidowicz’s descriptions of the Jews and those of the Germans, one still wonders what the duality of the vermin and the superman, ascribed by the Germans to the Jews, has in common with the duality of the Germans — their intrinsic qualities of superhuman virtues outwitted by a supercunning antagonist? As a matter of fact, there is a perfect integrity in each one of these allegedly dualistic types: a bacillus is a vermin and may be deadly potent; on the other hand, an individual or group, may be endowed with superhuman qualities and simultaneously fettered by the torments of a cunning adversary. It is a normal scenario for a Volkish-Teutonic drama. There is nothing “disparate and mutually contradicting” in either of these images. It is also logical that the possessors of the second set of traits should envisage themselves as the adversaries of those who personify the first set. There is no trace of affinity of “those terrible and terrifying attributes” that compels one group to repress and project them on the other.

In the disparate histories of Jews and Germans there was never a psychic or intellectual common denominator. The Germans hated Jews not for their alleged similarities but for their representing the total antithesis to everything innate and innermost in the German Volkish mentality. In fact, the National Socialists sharply criticized even Christianity for its retaining Jewish elements that led to the “degeneration of the Hellenic attributes of the Aryan race.” (Some of them openly advocated the return to the Teutonic god “Wotan.”) It is therefore obvious that there was no history of a psychosis due to a Judaeo-German affinity and no room for any psychohistory a la Dawidowicz. Furthermore, doesn’t such a revolutionary thesis require some his-
toric expounding, some documentation? Do we have to accept it only on the authority of the author?

In dealing with the internal problems in the ghettos, the author commits other errors. For example, she states:

The young people . . . rejected the traditionalist values . . . Contemptuous of the long tradition of Jewish accommodation [sic!] they sought ways . . . to combat Jewish powerlessness . . . they were fired by the medieval virtues of Christian Chivalry that prescribed the defense of honor by arms (p. 312).

The conferment of Virtue et Armis of Christianity on the skeletons of the ghetto heroes is permeated with the peculiar aroma of masochism. But letting this aside, where does Dawidowicz find evidence for this inordinate statement? Just a few lines before, and in an entire chapter afterwards, she argues that the tactic of the Judenraate no less than that of the ghetto-fighters had been rooted in Jewish historical soil and both aimed actively to the same goal. The prime value that the Jews attached “. . . to Jewish survival generated an activist tradition that influenced the behavior of the individual and the organized community. The pervasiveness of activism among Jews, especially in defense of their rights and their existence, derived from the exceptional responsibility that traditional Judaism placed on every individual Jew” (p. 342). Therefore the transformation in the ghetto from trying to survive the enemy to “choosing death through armed resistance” did not represent a rejection of “traditionalist values”; rather, it was inspired by historic Judaism equal to the “zealots of Masada.”

The idea of self defense had never been extinguished in the ghettos, but everyone . . . knew that even a limited armed action . . . would incur German reprisals whose cost to the ghetto . . . would surpass any benefit. But when it became clear . . . that no option but death existed . . . the Jewish paradigm was the suicidal stand of the Zealots at Masada against Rome’s imperial legions. Masada had been incorporated into modern Zionist myth under the influence of Yitzhak Lamdan’s epic poem . . . (p. 313).

The proposition so suddenly introduced that the ghetto uprisings manifested a rejection of Judaism and an embracing of Christian
chivalry is in flagrant contradiction to the entire theme of the au-
thor. The reader looks in vain for some substantiation of this
thesis — a footnote referring to spoken or written statements.
Instead the author proceeds to quote Bialik who called for the
restoration of the Maccabean spirit; or Zionist and secular organi-
izations that vigorously opposed Christianity, etc. How unfortu-
nate that the ghetto fighters were unable to acquire a copy of
Lucy Dawidowicz's book. It would have spared them the travails
of Masada; it would have been so much simpler to get a sampling
of the virtues of Christian chivalry from one of the Germans,
Poles or Ukrainians who were just around the corner extermin-
ating the last Jews in the ghettos.

The Pharisees, 2000 years ago, dealt with the dilemma that
became crucial in Hitler's ghettos. The Talmud states, "If heath-
ens say to Israelites, 'hand us out one from among you to be
killed, if not we destroy you all,' they should suffer death rather
and not give out even one."

Now the author's evaluation:

In many [sic] ghettos the rabbis wrestled with the Maimonides' rul-
ing, some accepting his authority, others citing variant readings of the
text and different cases. Kovno's Chief Rabbi Shapiro, was one of the
few rabbis who rejected the Maimonides position, though he left no
record of the legal precedents on which he based his decision (p. 285).

First of all, the rule not to "select" part (or even one) of the
community under the threat of complete destruction is a Tal-
mudic Law. Maimonides who lived a thousand years later only
systematized these laws and in no way originated them. Perhaps
Dawidowicz did it unintentionally, but the difference is a qualifi-
tative one. With Maimonides it would be possible, although very
rarely, for "some Rabbis" to disagree; but no rabbi, deserving
his title would presume to dispute a Talmudic Law. Furthermore,
if the one "disagreeing" Chief Rabbi mentioned by Dawidowicz
"left no record of the legal precedents on which he based his de-
cision," where does the author derive her knowledge about the
"citing of variant readings of the text and different cases" of the
other allegedly deviating rabbis?!

But the most significant improvisation Dawidowicz accom-
The revealing words in this passage are: "the notices should therefore be posted." The Germans in Kovno did not — as yet — demand selecting by Jews of other Jews for "deportation." They ordered, under threat of destroying the entire ghetto, to post their order that "the entire ghetto population would have to assemble for a mass roll." Although it was still October 1941 (before the opening of the extermination camps) the Judenraat was uneasy about the outcome of this "gathering." What the Chief Rabbi Shapiro of Kovno ruled is therefore completely different from the issue discussed by Dawidowicz.

Lucy Dawidowicz's toying around with the footnoting and documenting of her propositions reaches its culmination when she "answers" the last of her three basic questions: How was it possible for the world to stand by without halting this destruction?

At the start, while defining the structuring of the book, the author acknowledges the theoretical existence of a world-opinion. Generously assigning it as one of the three pillars of her discussion, she assures the reader that "a partial answer to this question can be found in Appendix A" (XIII).

Appendix A consists of forty-four pages densely packed with details and minute facts about dates and numbers of Jews sent to various annihilation camps from each of the Hitler controlled countries. Not one single sentence is devoted to the cynical spectacle presented by Roosevelt at the refugee conference in Evian; or to the hypocrisy in Bermuda and in Teheran where the leaders of the allied anti-Hitler world stubbornly and with callous indifference refused to undertake any steps to mitigate the mass-slaughterings. Not a word is mentioned concerning the appeals of the Jewish underground to bomb the railroad lines transporting the victims to the crematoria. No reference is made of sa-
botaging the numerous negotiations and missions that could have saved millions of Jews: The Weissmandel Rescue Committee in Slovakia; the Valenberg Letter to the Pope and to Roosevelt, etc. For years, the leaders of England and America turned down the passionate appeals to publish an ex-officio warning that all those who participate in extermination of the Jewish populace will be punished. In 1944 Brand was sent out by Eichmann to offer the release of a million Jews. He pleaded that by just starting negotiations the first group would be sent abroad. Brand was arrested and held until after the annihilation of Hungarian Jews. In a letter to America, England's foreign-office pointed out that taking care of a million refugees would jeopardize the war-machine of the Allies. In 1943, tens of thousands of Jews could have been smuggled out via Turkey for the price of $50 per capita — the answer of the allies was negative. The Catholic clergy in Poland refused to condemn the Polish "schmaltzovnikes" who rounded up thousands of hidden Jews outside the ghettos for one pound of "schmaltz" (fat) per Jew. The Polish government in exile refused to discipline its A.K. (Resistance Army) for its mass murders of Jewish partisans in the forests.

None of these or numerous other events were even alluded to in the pages dealing with the question of how the world reacted during the holocaust. Perhaps Dawidowicz did not consider anything the world did, or rather did not do, as relevant, believing that the holocaust was completely in the domain of Hitler's mind and it was, therefore, not within the power of anyone to alter anything. Why then ask the question at all and mislead the reader?

The only possible justification is that she is simply remaining consistent with the inconsistent structure of her book about the fateful years 1933-1945. By narrowing the problem to locate it exclusively in the domain of Hitler's "ideological position," the author adapts a method similar to those who evaluate all human activities as determined by the omnipotent and rigid laws of matter. Together with them she reduces the multiplicity of man's motivations, the multicolored spectrum of human volition. The only difference is that instead of accepting the omnipotence of material, Dawidowicz pays homage to the monstrous fatalism of
a paranoic’s mind.

Because of Dawidowicz’s methodology in localizing the origins and mechanism of the holocaust in Hitler’s paranoic mind, she ignores her own questions about Germany and the world, so prominently displayed at the beginning. Actually, the book exonerates the whole world, and, to a degree, also the Germans from any guilt. By channeling the comprehensive plans of Hitler-Germany to subjugate the whole world into a “War against the Jews,” Dawidowicz sidetracks the crucial ramifications of this portentous epoch. This method, seemingly accentuating and emphasizing a Jewish problem, actually denigrates the paramount lesson of the holocaust for Jewish and universal history.

The Second World War brought the third mass destruction of Jewish life on the European continent: the first and second took place during the Crusades (1096) and the Cossack’s revolt (1648). All of them reveal an ominous peculiarity of Jewish existence. Neither one of them originated, or was planned, as a war against the Jews — nonetheless, all of them resulted in more tragedies for the Jews than for those who were the primary objects of those conflicts.

The tragic vulnerability of Jewish existence amidst a conflict-torn world is that the promulgation to hate them can become the mortar to cement allies as well as a lethal weapon against adversaries. The task of the historian is to elucidate these ramifications, rather than document the tragic minutes of the Hitler epoch. Dawidowicz not only obscures those primary conclusions but with her disparaging remarks about the Zionist activities in Germany, as well as her sympathetic reviewing of the activities of the “Dasein” groups she clearly displays a tendency to eliminate these paramount inferences.

Dawidowicz quotes H. Stahl, one of “the most persistent advocates of Dasein” in German Jewry, who at the end accepts the view of his life-long Zionist opponents: “There is no future for Jews in this country. Whatever changes may be forthcoming for us will . . . not be for the better” (p. 196).

But several decades later and with an entire Holocaust experienced, Lucy Dawidowicz counters:
Had Hitler died or been assassinated . . . then in the end Jewish policy would have been successful. With such alternatives any call for the dismantling of the Jewish community in Germany would have appeared cowardly and hysterical (p. 346).

In the first part of the book the author analyzed Germany's deep-rooted hate for Jews and concluded:

Generations of anti-Semitism had prepared the Germans to accept Hitler as their redeemer. Layer upon layer of anti-Semitism of all kinds . . . Church teachings, Volksist anti-Semitism, doctrines of racial superiority, economic theories about the role of Jews, a half-century of political anti-Semitism, were joined with the soldier of German nationalism (p. 164).

How wonderful that all this could disappear by just one fateful event. All Zionist traumas together with their "cowardice and hysteria" would fade away for the return of Lucy Dawidowicz's nostalgic "Dasein."

Lucy Dawidowicz spans the surface of the abysmal ghetto territories as one who swims on the top of fathomless waters and believes that what his body touches constitutes the real depth of these waters.

The book begins with three questions. At the end all the three questions remain unanswered — and the reader remains a little more confused.