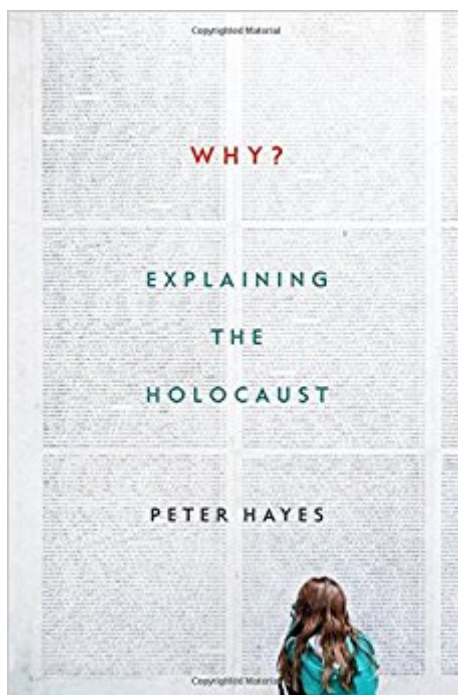


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# Why?: Explaining The Holocaust



## Synopsis

A bold new exploration that answers the most commonly asked questions about the Holocaust. Despite the outpouring of books, movies, museums, memorials, and courses devoted to the Holocaust, a coherent explanation of why such ghastly carnage erupted from the heart of civilized Europe in the twentieth century still seems elusive even seventy years later. Numerous theories have sprouted in an attempt to console ourselves and to point the blame in emotionally satisfying directions—but yet none of them are fully convincing. As witnesses to the Holocaust near the ends of their lives, it becomes that much more important to unravel what happened and to educate a new generation about the horrors inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews and non-Jews alike. *Why?* dispels many misconceptions and answers some of the most basic—but yet vexing—but questions that remain: why the Jews and not another ethnic group? Why the Germans? Why such a swift and sweeping extermination? Why didn't more Jews fight back more often? Why didn't they receive more help? While responding to the questions he has been most frequently asked by students over the decades, world-renowned Holocaust historian and professor Peter Hayes brings a wealth of scholarly research and experience to bear on conventional, popular views of the history, challenging some of the most prominent recent interpretations. He argues that there is no single theory that "explains" the Holocaust; the convergence of multiple forces at a particular moment in time led to catastrophe. In clear prose informed by an encyclopedic knowledge of Holocaust literature in English and German, Hayes weaves together stories and statistics to heart-stopping effect. *Why?* is an authoritative, groundbreaking exploration of the origins of one of the most tragic events in human history. 5 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“With his judicious, thoughtful and balanced answers to difficult and often inflammatory questions, Hayes....has provided an intellectually searching and wide-ranging study of the Holocaust.” - Nicholas Stargardt, *The New York Times Book Review* “Superbly written and researched, synthesizing the classics while digging deep into a vast repository of primary sources.” - Josef Joffe, *Wall Street Journal* “Explain? Impossible. But Hayes’s timely, accessible book sheds light on the horror. In certain circumstances it reminds us that humans can rationalize anything.” - People “This clearly written, cogently argued and researched book....courageously confronts some of the thorniest issues raised by the Shoah, making *Why?: Explaining the Holocaust* an indispensable work for specialists and informed readers alike.” - Michael N. Dobkowski, *Jewish Book Council* “Hayes has written a valuable book for today’s challenges, with perspective and sensitivity, that is, indeed, authoritative, readable and revealing.” - *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* “A fascinating, remarkably lucid, compulsively readable explanation of how the mass murder of Europe’s Jews came about and how it transpired in the middle of the twentieth century.” - David I. Kertzer, *Pulitzer Prize* - award-winning author of *The Pope and Mussolini* “Calmly argued, alert to the most recent scholarship about the Holocaust, and full of good sense, Peter Hayes’s new book carries an essential title asked universally: *Why? Why did such a thing happen?* Taking up this most difficult of challenges, his pages answer questions that many analysts dare not even ask, let alone answer. That is why this work should be required reading, both for specialists and for those who seek more recently to understand.” - Michael R. Marrus, Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies at the University of Toronto and author of *Lessons of the Holocaust* “This book is outstandingly beautifully written, with enviable clarity of argument, countless instructive details, and memorable, evocative images. On every issue around which there has been either controversy or confusion from the interrelationships between the Holocaust and the mass murder of individuals with disabilities to the motivations of the perpetrators, the economics of the killing operations, the special situation of Poland, the experiences of slave laborers, or the dimensions of Jewish resistance Peter Hayes helpfully distills the debates and provides judicious, orienting assessments. A masterful, indispensable, landmark work.” - Dagmar

Herzog, distinguished professor of history and the Daniel Rose Faculty Scholar at the Graduate Center, City University of New York

“I recommend this book for a lucid, well-crafted introduction to the history of the Holocaust. Unlike most works on the history of the Holocaust.... Hayes’s book concentrates.... on helping readers to understand why the Holocaust occurred when it did, in the manner it did and with the results it produced. It offers readers a window onto how historians go about finding answers to these questions.” - David Engel, professor of Holocaust studies and chair of Hebrew and Judaic studies at New York University, Jewish Telegraphic Agency

“An original, informative and essential addition to the field of Holocaust Studies. It should be required reading for every introductory course on the Holocaust.” - Lawrence L. Langer, author of *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory and Using and Abusing the Holocaust*

“The book breathes the spirit of serious learning but is at the same time extremely well written and readable.... Hayes gives conclusive, well considered, and persuasive answers to many Holocaust questions. In the introduction, he promises a ‘comprehensive stocktaking.’ In that he has succeeded.” - Wolfgang Benz, Director of the Center for Research on Antisemitism of the Technische Universität Berlin

“A short review cannot do justice to the breadth and depth of the scholarship exhibited in each chapter. This authoritative volume is mandatory for scholars and armchair historians interested in the origins, course, and outcomes of the Holocaust. Essential for all levels/libraries.” - Choice

“Peter Hayes poses eight key questions about the Holocaust and then analyzes and answers them with enviable mastery, succinctness, and clarity. Hayes’s arguments are presented with a scholarly authority that is judicious, compelling, and accessible. A gem of a book.” - Christopher R. Browning, Frank Porter Graham Professor of History Emeritus, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Peter Hayes is professor of history and German and Theodore Zev Weiss Holocaust Educational Foundation Professor of Holocaust Studies Emeritus at Northwestern University and chair of the Academic Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

One of the signature strengths of this book is its construction. Each of the eight chapters addresses one of the most-asked questions about the Holocaust: Why the Jews? Why the Germans? Why murder? Why this swift and sweeping? Why didn’t Jews fight back more often? Why did survival rates diverge? Why such limited help from outside? What legacies, what lessons? The result of this approach is an explanation both broad and deep. Anchored in

rigorous scholarship and punctuated with human narratives, the book makes understandable the incomprehensible. As a member of the general reading public, I am grateful that this book neither condescends nor complicates. The author is clear in his presentation of information, concise in his style, and compelling in his arguments and conclusions. The book shattered a number of my personal misconceptions and gave me a greater understanding of the political, geographical, cultural, and ideological underpinnings of the Holocaust. Given the current political climate in our country, the lessons and legacies Dr. Hayes identifies are particularly poignant. We must mind the beginnings. Fellow classmates at Northwestern University during my undergraduate years describe Dr. Hayes as legendary. He was so popular, in fact, that his classes were nigh impossible to get into. This book shows why.

Beautifully written and arranged in carefully crafted chapters that analyze the most important and debated issues in Holocaust studies. A major publication: learned, useful, and written in a clear, illuminating language both for scholars and a general audience.

Brilliant and comprehensive analysis of how the Holocaust developed. Mr. Hayes details the perfect storm of circumstances giving rise to the Nazis and the genocide of millions. He also opines on the psychological and sociological environment that resulted in unimaginable atrocities. Parallels can be made with the political climate in the U.S. Mr. Hayes ends with the warning: "Beware the beginnings." A must read!

This is an outstanding work by a 1st rate scholar. It is accessible not only to the historian but also to us armchair would be historians. The work is intense, objective, with often profound insight. It is simply remarkable. A book like no other. It is a must read and deserves to be placed on everyone's bookshelf.

This book is amazing. I have only read the first three chapters and so far this is the most thorough book I have ever read on the topic of the Holocaust. The way the chapters are laid out offers a great explanation of each step the Nazis took. If you are a teacher and want to get more information about the topic before you teach students...this is the book for you.

This is a shocking book, mainly because its examination of a much-examined history seems so fresh. The writing is straightforward, almost dry, but what it says is so provocative that I thought

about more between readings than during. Incidentally, this analytical book is a fine companion to David Cesarini's "Final Solution," which addresses the Holocaust almost as serendipity.

This is very precise information not only about the history of the Holocaust but also the history of antisemitism. I believe it is an important book for anyone interested in the early foundations of what became the Holocaust and its profound effects. The latter part of the book is also quite informative as it puts this is the best introduction, explanation, and exploratory examination of the Holocaust I have come upon. It examines how antisemitism was born and how it grew historically, culturally, and religiously. It also examines its profound and everlasting effects philosophically and religiously with long term questions to examine for the future.

Chilling ! Beautifully written and easily understood. Every American should read how such a horror could occur in an intelligent, educated country such as Germany. Can that history be repeated in our intelligent, educated society? Every American should read this book--please!

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