

The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship

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This article examines the debate over the uniqueness of the Holocaust as it has recently unfolded in the United States. It concentrates on two antagonistic camps: scholars such as Steven Katz, Deborah Lipstadt, and Daniel Goldhagen, who argue the Holocaust's uniqueness; and those like David Stannard, Ward Churchill, and Norman Finkelstein, who have recently attacked this notion. The latter have challenged the former in more sharply polemical terms than earlier critics, alleging that their position, among other things, reflects a Jewish ethnocentrism and implicitly denies the occurrence of other genocides (and is thus comparable to the work of Holocaust deniers). In order to elucidate this polemical shift, this article scrutinizes the origins and evolution of scholarly interest in the uniqueness concept. It concludes by evaluating the utility of the concept altogether.

[One day] Hitler's Reich will . . . be purely and simply history, no better and no worse than [other] dramatic historical epochs. . . . [The] murder of millions . . . , carried out by a highly civilized people, with organizational dependability and almost scientific precision, will be lumped with the bloody expulsion of the Armenians by the Turks or with the shameful acts of violence by the colonial French: as regrettable but in no way unique. Everything will be submerged in a general "Century of Barbarism."¹

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the prescience of Améry's pessimistic words seems to be confirmed by the heated debate now underway in the United States over the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Not in recent memory has there been a period in which scholars have fought so strenuously to assert and refute the Holocaust's singularity. In books, articles, and internet postings, those defending the Holocaust's uniqueness have battled with others who have vehemently challenged it on historical, moral, and political grounds. This debate has been characterized not only by passionate intellectual exchange, but also by sharply polemical accusations and recriminations. In the process of arguing over the similarities and differences between the Holocaust and other genocides, opponents of uniqueness have accused supporters of being worse than neo-Nazi Holocaust deniers, while some uniqueness advocates have charged challengers with antisemitism. The polemical turn in this increasingly polar-

ized debate raises a series of questions for our current understanding of the Holocaust. What explains the new concern with uniqueness? Does the mounting challenge to the concept at the end of the twentieth century in fact threaten to submerge the Holocaust's specificity in a general "century of barbarism," as predicted years ago by Améry? Or does the new challenge provide an opportunity to set aside a concept of questionable analytical and historical utility? As we shall see, the current debate poses as many dangers as opportunities for genuine historical understanding.

The debate over uniqueness has arisen in part from the accelerating pace of what may be called "bilateral historicization." At the same time that certain scholars have begun to "historicize" the Holocaust by comparing it to individual cases of genocide, others have moved to historicize such cases of genocide by comparing them to the Holocaust.² Predictably enough, the conclusions of both camps have differed substantially. While the former have strongly asserted the uniqueness of the Holocaust, the latter have emphatically challenged this position. The proponents of uniqueness, including the scholars Steven Katz, Deborah Lipstadt, and Daniel Goldhagen, have underscored the Jewish character of the event and have strongly asserted its fundamental singularity. They have defined the Holocaust as the murder of six million Jews, and have identified its uniqueness in two senses: first, in the qualitative difference between the Nazis' assault against the Jews and their persecution of other groups prior to and during the Second World War; and second, in the basic differences between the Holocaust and all previous and subsequent genocides.

In contrast, a number of scholars of genocide have vociferously challenged these claims. They insist that the Holocaust was no different from other historical acts of genocide and have called for redefining it to encompass not only the death of six million *Jews*, but the death of eleven million (and in some estimates as many as twenty-six million) *people* under the Nazis.

It is not merely the historical arguments against uniqueness put forth by these scholars, however, but also their polemical allegations about the concept's political function that have gained them attention and that merit closer scrutiny. Is it in fact the case, as they claim, that defending the Holocaust's uniqueness is tantamount to denying other genocides? Is uniqueness, in truth, nothing more than a self-aggrandizing expression of Jewish ethnocentrism, a "Zionist" tool for the express political purpose of deflecting criticism away from the state of Israel? While the inflammatory nature of these charges might tempt some to ignore them altogether, our increasing awareness of the instrumentalization of history and memory—especially with respect to the Holocaust—requires that we not dismiss them without a more considered response. To this end, it helps to historicize the question of uniqueness itself as a method of assessing the origins and significance of the current debate.

The Origins of the Uniqueness Question

The question of uniqueness is a relatively new one in Holocaust historiography. The Holocaust's singularity had long been an article of faith for many Jews, but it had

never been subjected to rigorous scholarly analysis. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the period in which the term “Holocaust” gained normative status, the uniqueness of the event was seen as deriving from its incomprehensibility.³ The relative proximity of the Holocaust in the not-so-distant past heightened its unfathomable magnitude and made it appear as something that stood outside of history altogether. Scholars as disparate as Isaac Deutscher and Elie Wiesel despaired at ever achieving any adequate historical understanding of the Holocaust, concluding that the most appropriate response was silence.⁴

With the passage of time and the increasing historical distance to the event, however, two major developments began to alter perceptions of the Holocaust. First, as the postwar era progressed there emerged a heightened tendency to *historicize* the Holocaust, turning it into a comprehensible event that could be subjected to rational historical analysis, often with the help of generalizing theories. Second, beginning in the late 1960s and intensifying in the decades that followed, there emerged an increasing tendency to *politicize* and exploit the Holocaust for partisan advantage. It was precisely these two trends that in the late 1970s and early 1980s awakened scholarly interest in the concept of uniqueness. Indeed, the widespread adoption of uniqueness by scholars in this period is best understood as part of a self-consciously *defensive* response to the perceived attempts by others to diminish the event for apologetic or revisionist purposes. This point merits particular attention, for the current critics of uniqueness have largely overlooked the concept’s defensive origins in their zeal to characterize it as an aggressive expression of Jewish political interests. For this reason, it is important to survey briefly the postwar historicization and politicization of the Holocaust.

Historicizing the Holocaust

Scholarly interest in the Holocaust’s uniqueness emerged partly in reaction to attempts to explain the event with the help of generalizing theories. This process of “historicization” (which came to be termed as such only in the 1980s) began as early as the 1950s, when scholars first began to make sense of the recent Nazi experience.⁵ The various explanations that emerged over the succeeding decades all made significant contributions to our understanding of the Third Reich, though none succeeded in integrating the Holocaust into a general explanatory framework without substantially marginalizing its significance.⁶ This becomes clear in surveying five of the more important concepts used to historicize the Holocaust: totalitarianism, fascism, functionalism, modernity, and genocide.

Totalitarianism

During the 1950s the paradigm of totalitarianism enjoyed considerable prestige as a means of explaining the similarities between the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships. This approach, which fulfilled a useful political function for the West during the early years

of the Cold War by associating the Soviet Union with its arch-enemy Nazi Germany, was pioneered by such scholars as Carl J. Friedrich and Hannah Arendt, both of whom deemphasized the significance of national histories in favor of broader modern trends as factors explaining the genesis of modern dictatorships.⁷ But totalitarianism ultimately shed little light on the Holocaust, as it focused on the common *means* used by the Nazi and Soviet states to establish and administer their dictatorial regimes—secret police, concentration camps, and other forms of state terror—rather than the very different ideological *ends* these regimes pursued.⁸ The idea of totalitarianism won its appeal only by ignoring what made Nazi ideology *sui generis*—its vehement racial antisemitism—and by marginalizing the event that grew out of it, the Holocaust.

Fascism

In the 1960s, the concept of fascism displaced that of totalitarianism for explaining the dynamics of the Nazi state. During this politically turbulent, left-leaning decade, the notion of fascism reflected a return of sorts to the Marxist interpretation of the Third Reich during the 1930s as “the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary . . . elements of finance capital.”⁹ While the notion of fascism gained radical political cachet from the prominent Frankfurt School leader Max Horkheimer—who famously cautioned those unwilling to speak of capitalism to be silent about fascism—it found a non-left-wing incarnation in the work of Ernst Nolte, whose seminal study *Three Faces of Fascism* (1966) identified the essence of fascism in its anti-Bolshevism and opposition to “transcendence.”¹⁰ Neither explanation, it turned out, was able to make sense of the Holocaust or explain why, for example, it occurred in Nazi Germany and not in Fascist Italy. Like the notion of totalitarianism, fascism was a convincing theoretical framework only when the Holocaust was bracketed off altogether.

Functionalism

Beginning in the late 1960s, the so-called functionalist or structuralist approach emerged as a new method of explaining Nazism. This approach, though generally left-liberal in character, was less overtly political and has proven a durable explanatory framework, thriving to the present day. Originally, functionalist scholars such as Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen focused on the dynamics of the Nazi state. But beginning in the 1970s and proceeding into the 1980s, they shifted their energy to explaining the Holocaust,¹¹ ultimately advancing our understanding of the Nazi genocide to a far greater degree than supporters of the paradigms of totalitarianism and fascism. By focusing on the structural factors lurking behind the conceptualization and implementation of the Final Solution, functionalist historians shed new light upon the Holocaust’s specifically modern dimensions. Still, while functionalists provided a sobering lesson for postwar society by directing attention towards the potential recurrence of mass murder in the present, their de-emphasis of the Holocaust’s

ideological underpinnings—in particular, antisemitism—left important questions unanswered.

Modernity

During the 1980s, the overarching concept of “modernity” was increasingly employed in the effort to historicize both the Third Reich and the Holocaust. This concept, whose emergence reflected an upsurge of scholarly interest in postmodernism, also partly reflected the decade’s conservative political tendencies. This was particularly evident in Germany, where the project of historicization took an apologetic direction in the work of the neo-conservative scholar Rainer Zitelmann. Rejecting claims of the Holocaust’s uniqueness, Zitelmann argued that the event did not so much reflect the allegedly deviant course of modern German history as the totalitarian potential of modernity.¹² Interestingly, scholars on the left reached similar conclusions. Götz Aly and Susanna Heim subsumed the genocide of the Jews under a broader and fundamentally rational Nazi program of capitalist exploitation in Eastern Europe, while Zygmunt Baumann reduced it to a combination of modern social engineering and bureaucracy.¹³ These scholars all deemphasized the Jewish character of the Holocaust by playing down antisemitism. Thus Arno Mayer explained the Nazi genocide as part of a larger modern ideological war between Nazism and Bolshevism, and Christopher Browning identified universal factors such as careerism, peer pressure, and conformity as responsible for the Nazis’ barbarous treatment of the Jews.¹⁴ By the early 1990s, such projects of historicization had generally diminished the Jewish dimensions of the Holocaust and universalized it into a meta-event of grand historical significance for the modern world.

Genocide

Concurrent with the upsurge of interest in the concept of modernity in the 1980s, there arose among scholars a new interest in the concept of genocide.¹⁵ In several wide-ranging works, genocide scholars pursued the broader goal of “contextualizing the Holocaust into Genocide Studies” by subjecting it to rigorous comparative analysis.¹⁶ These scholars argued that the Holocaust was not qualitatively different from other episodes of mass murder in human history, highlighting the similarities between the murder of the Jews and other victims of genocidal violence such as the Armenians, Cambodians, or Native Americans.¹⁷ These scholars also focused attention upon the similarities between the Nazis’ persecution of the Jews and other “inferior” groups such as Gypsies, the handicapped, and Slavs, all of whom were murdered as part of the Nazis’ broader creation of a racially-based, eugenically-engineered dystopia.¹⁸ Such efforts to analyze the Holocaust as an example of genocide have contributed greatly to the broader cause of historical understanding. Overall, however, the project has been hampered by the absence of a widely accepted definition of the term “genocide” itself.¹⁹ The inability of scholars to agree upon which groups should be

regarded as the perpetrators and which the victims has made it difficult to see how the Holocaust relates to other episodes of mass murder that may or may not be similar in character.²⁰ As a result, the Holocaust continues to resist historicization as an example of genocide.

Politicizing the Holocaust

At the same time the Holocaust was being historicized, it was being increasingly politicized as well. Broadly speaking, the “politicization” of the Holocaust refers to a process of appropriation and distortion that, beginning in the late 1960s and rapidly gaining momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, manifested itself in numerous different forms. Five of the most important may be referred to as: “dejudaizing,” “Americanizing,” “stealing,” “denying,” and “normalizing” the Holocaust. Despite their differences, each of these trends was informed by a concrete political agenda and served to reduce the Holocaust’s Jewish character.

“Dejudaizing” the Holocaust

This phrase refers to the deemphasis of the Holocaust’s Jewish dimensions within the Soviet Union and other eastern-bloc nations during the Cold War. In postwar Eastern Europe, the communist nations largely subsumed the Holocaust under the Nazis’ broader assault against communism, thus playing down the antisemitic dimensions of Nazi ideology. Jewish victims were rarely mentioned as such in memorials erected at concentration camps such as Buchenwald in East Germany, or at massacre sites where they were the primary victims, as at Babi Yar in Ukraine.²¹ This slanted depiction of history served an important domestic political function for nations like the Soviet Union by propping up the notion of “anti-fascist” resistance. But it also served the aims of communist foreign policy in the Middle East, where the Soviet regime supported the Arab states in their conflict with Israel by, among other things, disseminating anti-Zionist propaganda inflected with tendentious comparisons of the Israeli government with the bygone Third Reich.

“Americanizing” the Holocaust

Significantly, the dejudaization of the Holocaust in the Soviet sphere of influence was closely related to its nascent “Americanization” in the United States.²² This phenomenon received an important boost in the late 1970s with the commissioning of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. While this project was originally conceived to calm the fears of American Jews worried about the administration’s flagging support for the state of Israel, its future development was strongly shaped by the dejudaization of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, which the members of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust witnessed firsthand on a fact-finding mission in 1979. In response, the commission members resolved to place the Jewish dimensions of the Holocaust at the heart of the new project. At the same time, how-

ever, the characteristically American drive for inclusiveness led to the emergence of proposals to include other victims of Nazism in the museum, which threatened to expand the Holocaust into an event encompassing the death of eleven million people.²³ This impulse was resisted, but the surfacing of an American tendency to universalize the Holocaust revealed the presence of a strong and lasting challenge to its Jewish character.

“Stealing the Holocaust”

This polemical phrase, which was coined by Edward Alexander in 1980, referred to the efforts of certain groups to appropriate the “moral capital” of the Jews for their own purposes.²⁴ The application of metaphors drawn from the Holocaust to present-day political struggles surfaced during the socially-turbulent 1960s and became increasingly common in subsequent decades. Within the United States, political movements on the left as well as the right freely borrowed terminology from the Third Reich in order to draw attention to the “forgotten” or “hidden” holocausts of women, blacks, homosexuals, and the unborn, to name but a few.²⁵ This phenomenon also found expression in the hazardous realm of Middle Eastern politics, where Arab nations and their international supporters drew upon the Nazi experience to attack the Israeli government for its treatment of the Palestinians. For their part, moreover, the Israelis “stole” from themselves by exploiting the Holocaust for partisan political purposes, attacking their Arab neighbors as well as their domestic opponents with historically-charged terminology.²⁶ Overall, whether stolen or merely borrowed, the Holocaust provided a convenient, highly symbolic, and easily recognizable event many used to draw attention to their own interests.

“Denying” the Holocaust

The most strident assault against the significance of the Holocaust in the 1980s was launched by extreme right-wing Holocaust deniers. While denial of the Holocaust’s very occurrence had emerged already during the early postwar period, it gained new prominence in the 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, denial attempted to leave the lunatic fringe and set out for the mainstream in both the United States and Europe, as figures such as Arthur Butz, Bradley Smith, and Robert Faurisson, together with organizations like the Institute for Historical Review, attempted to lend academic credibility to Holocaust denial.²⁷ Central to these groups’ claims was the charge that the Holocaust was a propaganda hoax fabricated by “the Zionists” in order to justify the creation of, and compel subsequent international support for, the state of Israel. Significantly, this specific charge of fabrication, which some perceived as motivated by crass antisemitism, would resurface in milder form during the current debate over uniqueness in the accusations of certain critics that the Holocaust was being instrumentally used by “the Zionists” for political purposes.

“Normalizing” the Holocaust

A further challenge to the uniqueness of the Holocaust emerged with the eruption in Germany of the *Historikerstreit*, or Historians’ Debate, during 1986–87. This debate revolved around the subject of uniqueness as it pertained specifically to the perpetrators, rather than the victims. For Ernst Nolte and his supporters, the fact that the Holocaust was preceded (and in part inspired) by the previous “Asiatic” genocides committed by the Soviets and Turks, in addition to the fact that it was followed by subsequent genocides in places such as Cambodia, meant that the Germans hardly stood alone as the century’s sole perpetrators of genocidal violence. By rendering the Holocaust unexceptional, Germany could step out from the shadow of Auschwitz and once more become a normal nation. This project of normalization harnessed the methods of comparative history for what many saw as apologetic purposes, in the process casting shadows of suspicion upon the act of comparison itself.

Asserting the Uniqueness of the Holocaust

In reaction to the concurrent attempts to historicize and politicize the Holocaust, a number of scholars began to insist upon the event’s uniqueness. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, articles on the subject of uniqueness began to appear in conjunction with the larger debate among Jewish intellectuals over the increasingly prominent place of the Holocaust in contemporary American Jewish life.²⁸ While diverging views about the merits and risks of embracing the concept of uniqueness were expressed, a general consensus formed in support of it.²⁹ Among the many scholars who defended uniqueness, most viewed the Holocaust from the theoretical position of “intentionalism.”³⁰ Rather than embrace any generalizing theory to historicize the Holocaust, these scholars explained the event within the larger history of antisemitism, which, according to them, stood at the center of Hitler’s worldview and ultimately propelled the anti-Jewish persecutions that culminated in the Final Solution. This explanation emphasized the factors of ideology and intent rather than structure, and placed the destruction of the Jews not in a broader context, such as modernity, but in the specific contexts of German and Jewish history. For scholars sympathetic to the intentionalist perspective, the Holocaust possessed as much particularistic as universalistic significance.

During the early 1980s, these scholars defended the Holocaust’s uniqueness with diverse arguments. While some, such as Emil Fackenheim and Alice and Roy Eckart, embraced uniqueness from a philosophical perspective, Yehuda Bauer, Lucy Dawidowicz, Saul Friedländer, and others offered historical arguments in support of it.³¹ According to Bauer, who was the most prominent and outspoken proponent of uniqueness in this period, the Holocaust was qualitatively different from other cases of genocide. The term “genocide,” he argued, was best applied to the “murderous . . . denationalization” of peoples such as the Slavs and the Gypsies by the Nazis during the Second World War, as well as to the partial decimation of other groups in the

twentieth century.³² In contrast, since the Nazis' murderous assault against European Jewry entailed the "ideologically motivated planned total murder of a whole people," it represented an "extreme" form of genocide and deserved the separate designation "Holocaust."³³ This definition of uniqueness as a combination of intent and ideology was, to be sure, not the only one;³⁴ still, its succinctness earned it widespread support among scholars, as well as a more or less normative status in the larger discourse.

The upsurge in scholarly attention to the Holocaust's uniqueness at this time was meant to counter the event's increasing historicization and politicization; during the late 1970s and early 1980s, a wide range of scholars pointed to both trends. Saul Friedländer, for one, was vocal in expressing doubts about the process of historicization, highlighting what he took to be the inability of generalizing theories to explain the event.³⁵ Meanwhile Yehuda Bauer, Lucy Dawidowicz, and others advanced the concept of uniqueness as an explicit means of combating its politically-motivated "mystification."³⁶ Despite their emphatic character, however, these initial efforts to defend the Holocaust's uniqueness in the early 1980s proved incapable of halting the processes of historicization and politicization, both of which intensified later in the decade. Moreover, in the wake of the attempted "normalization" of the Holocaust in West Germany during the Historians' Debate, scholars committed to the uniqueness concept resolved to redouble its defense.

It was against this backdrop that new studies reasserting the Holocaust's uniqueness began to appear in the 1990s. Amongst the most prominent (and subsequently most criticized) were Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust* (1993) and Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996).³⁷ Although these books were dedicated to different analytical projects, they clearly highlighted the issue of the Holocaust's singularity in their broader narratives. Lipstadt's book was primarily an exposition and refutation of Holocaust denial, but it also responded to the more subtle attempts to normalize the Holocaust in Germany by demonstrating the fallacies of comparing it to Stalinist terror and the Armenian and Cambodian genocides.³⁸ Similarly, while Goldhagen's book responded to Arno Mayer and Christopher Browning's deemphasis of antisemitism as a causal factor for the Holocaust by asserting the importance of "eliminationist antisemitism," the author also stressed how the Germans' obsessive hatred of the Jews made the Holocaust unique.³⁹ Unlike other genocides, which "occurred in the context of some preexisting realistic conflict (territorial, class, ethnic, or religious)," the Holocaust, Goldhagen argued, was motivated by "an absolutely fantastical" German hatred of the Jews without basis in reality. What made the Holocaust "distinctive," he wrote, stemmed from a

demonizing German racial antisemitism, an antisemitism that produced the will for *comprehensive* killing of Jews in *all lands* despite the absence of any *objective prior conflict* with Jews; that, because of its *fantastical* construction of Jewry, demanded, unlike in other genocides, the *total* extermination of the Jews, so that no "germ-cell" would remain to spawn this eternal enemy anew; that energized the Germans' campaign of annihilation

such that they could coordinate and persist in this enormous, *continent-wide* project; and that imbued the perpetrators with a rage, a lust for vengeance, that unleashed the *unprecedented* cruelty.⁴⁰

Although uniqueness was not central to Goldhagen's study (which was controversial for many other reasons), this and other assertions ("The Holocaust was a radical break with everything known in human history") clearly distinguished him as an outspoken advocate of the concept.⁴¹

Still, no matter how emphatic scholars like Goldhagen and Lipstadt were in advancing the notion of uniqueness, none was as ambitious or exhaustive as Steven Katz, who in 1994 published the first massive volume of his projected three-volume work, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*.⁴² Katz had also undertaken his study to counter the twin trends of historicization and politicization. Unlike scholars such as Saul Friedländer, who saw the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a barrier to its historicization, Katz wanted to historicize the Holocaust specifically in order to prove its uniqueness.⁴³ Katz's notion of historicization led him to contextualize the Holocaust by doggedly contrasting it to all prior episodes of mass murder in recorded human history. In so doing, Katz, like most of the scholars who preceded him, defined the singularity of the Holocaust in the actualized *intent* of Hitler and the Nazis to exterminate the Jewish people in its entirety. For Katz, it was the

unmediated, intended, complete *physical* eradication of every Jewish man, woman, and child that defines the particular, singular nature of . . . the Holocaust . . . and distinguishes [it] . . . from prior and to date subsequent . . . acts of collective violence, ethnocide, and mass murder.⁴⁴

In the process of distinguishing the Holocaust from other episodes of mass murder, however, Katz qualitatively elevated it above them. While defenders of uniqueness, such as Yehuda Bauer, had recognized the occurrence of other cases of genocide and had defined the Holocaust as an extreme version of it, Katz narrowed the definition of genocide in such a way as to make the Holocaust the only true case of genocide ever to occur. As he wrote:

I shall use the following rigorous definition: the concept of genocide applies *only* when there is an actualized intent, however successfully carried out, to physically destroy an *entire* group (as a group is defined by the perpetrators). Any form of mass murder that does not conform to the definition provided here, though not necessarily less immoral or less evil, will not be identified [as] genocide.⁴⁵

In the process, Katz implicitly demoted other cases of mass killing—which had until then been described as genocidal in character—into something less than genocide. Although he took pains to emphasize that this process of redefinition did not entail a diminishing of other peoples' sufferings, let alone constitute an apology for them, Katz drastically underestimated the sharp critical reaction that his project would inevitably generate.⁴⁶

The New Assault upon Uniqueness

Beginning in 1996, the debate over uniqueness became heated as several scholars launched a vigorous offensive against the controversial concept. This offensive differed markedly from previous attacks. While in the early 1980s uniqueness critics had come mostly from within the Jewish community, the new offensive was predominantly led by non-Jews (but also by Jews outside the mainstream American Jewish community) and was thus more polemical in character.⁴⁷ This assault originated in books and articles and soon spilled over into academic publications, political journals, and internet discussion groups.⁴⁸ In their polemics, uniqueness critics directed their wrath less against the concept's more recognizable and established defenders, such as Yehuda Bauer and Lucy Dawidowicz, than towards younger figures like Katz, Goldhagen, and Lipstadt. The barrage of criticism was largely uncoordinated but, significantly enough, it was marked by strikingly similar substantive and polemical charges.

The most emphatic challenge to the concept of uniqueness appeared in a 1996 volume entitled *Is the Holocaust Unique?*⁴⁹ In this anthology, the opposite poles were represented by Steven Katz, who offered a defense of uniqueness, and a number of scholars who challenged him. While Katz's work was substantially criticized by Vahakn Dadrian, who discussed the Armenian genocide, and Ian Hancock, who wrote on the Gypsies, the most scathing submission came from the American historian David Stannard in an essay entitled "Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship."⁵⁰ Stannard's central argument was that the defenders of uniqueness were, in effect, denying all other genocides. Insisting that the notion of uniqueness necessarily entailed the "trivialization or even outright denial of the genocidal suffering of *others*," Stannard called it both "racist" and "violence-provoking." Not only did the advocates of uniqueness diminish the sufferings of other peoples, he argued, but they provided "a screen behind which opportunistic governments today attempt to conceal their own past and ongoing genocidal actions."⁵¹

The tone of Stannard's accusations reflected his own scholarly and political concerns. As a scholar of the genocide of Native American peoples and author of the provocative book *American Holocaust* (1992), Stannard was angered by what he perceived as a double standard in the United States towards "worthy" and "unworthy" victims. While Americans readily acknowledged the Nazi crimes against the Jews, he wrote, they continued "to turn their backs on the even more massive genocide that for four grisly centuries was perpetrated against . . . the 'unworthy' natives of the Americas."⁵² By 1996, Stannard believed that he had found an explanation for this historical oversight, charging that the notion of the Holocaust's uniqueness had supplied Americans with an easy pretext for ignoring their own nation's murderous crimes. As he argued in "Uniqueness as Denial":

The willful maintenance of public ignorance regarding the genocidal and racist horrors against indigenous peoples that have been and are being perpetrated by many nations

in the Western Hemisphere, including the United States, . . . is consciously aided and abetted and legitimized by the actions of Jewish uniqueness advocates, [whose] claims of uniqueness for their own people are . . . synonymous with . . . [the] denial of the experience of others.⁵³

Why else, if not for the efforts of the Jewish defenders of uniqueness, had Americans utterly ignored the many Native American victims of genocide during the 1992 Quincentennial celebration of the architect of genocide, Christopher Columbus, while in 1995 they readily commemorated the Jewish victims of the Nazis to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II?⁵⁴ Overturning this perceived double standard towards the catastrophes visited upon the Jews and Native Americans was thus an important reason why Stannard challenged the Holocaust's uniqueness.

In this effort, Stannard stressed the many similarities between the Nazis' persecution of the Jews and the mass murder of Native American peoples by European and American settlers. Focusing first on the outcomes of the two genocides, he pointed out that, in terms of the sheer number of deaths and the proportion of the population killed, the Native American genocide exceeded that of the Holocaust. Between fifty and 100 million persons, comprising ninety to ninety-five percent of the hemisphere's indigenous inhabitants, were killed in North America, as opposed to around six million Jews, comprising sixty-six percent of European and thirty-three percent of world Jewry.⁵⁵ The means of death used in the two genocides, he added, were also similar, ranging from massacres, forced labor, disease, starvation, exposure, and other hardships.⁵⁶ In response to the claims of Katz and others that most Native Americans had died from precisely such unintended "natural" causes, Stannard argued that just as many Jews died from such causes as were murdered outright. Since these victims, he noted, were always considered Holocaust victims, why should their comparable Native American counterparts not be considered victims of genocide?⁵⁷

Beyond drawing parallels between the outcomes of the two genocides, Stannard compared the similar intentions behind them. In order to challenge the trump card held by the defenders of uniqueness—namely the claim that Hitler had intended to kill the Jewish people in its entirety—Stannard first attempted to diminish intent as a factor for evaluating the qualitative character of a genocide. It was futile, he argued, to determine which was worse: the "failed intent to kill all the members of a given group [or] the *successful* extermination of an entire people [without] an ideology of extermination on the part of the perpetrators."⁵⁸ Why, in other words, should the Nazis' failure to achieve their goal of killing the entire Jewish people make the Holocaust a worse example of mass murder than the almost completely successful, if only partially intended, genocide of Native Americans? Yet in truth, Stannard went on to argue, the documented existence of "many pre-twentieth-century examples of unambiguous official calls by European or white American political leaders for the total annihilation of . . . individual Native American peoples" revealed that the

Jews were hardly the only people ever to have been slated for total destruction.⁵⁹ Further, Stannard asserted, while the Nazis certainly intended to kill Jews, there was no longstanding comprehensive plan to kill the people in its entirety.⁶⁰ The lack of documentary evidence for “a Nazi . . . ‘plan’ to kill every Jew on earth,” the willingness of Nazi leaders like Heinrich Himmler to spare Jewish lives near the end of the war in exchange for cash and goods, and the exemption of certain classes of Jews—those of mixed parentage, or *Mischlinge*, and small groups of Karaites—from extermination all contradicted the claim that the Jews were marked for death in their entirety. The willingness to spare Jewish lives demonstrated that the Nazis were quite capable of pragmatism and were far from beholden to a unique, “pseudo-religious mania” for killing the Jews as a people.⁶¹ Not only in a comparative sense, but on its own terms, therefore, the Holocaust was far from unique.

Beyond dismantling the notion of uniqueness from an empirical perspective, Stannard strongly criticized both its underlying political motivations and its allegedly adverse effect upon public consciousness. The defenders of uniqueness, he claimed, were not scholars but ideologues who resembled “conspiracy theorists” or members of a “cult.”⁶² Indeed, uniqueness was a kind of “religious dogma” that found a suitable home in, and aptly expressed the values of, the “theocratic state” of Israel.⁶³ For Stannard, Jews both inside and outside Israel had embraced uniqueness both for ethnocentric reasons (to reinforce the notion that they were a “Chosen People”) and power political ones (to justify the state’s “territorial expansion and suppression of the Palestinian people”).⁶⁴ Additionally, the Jewish defense of uniqueness oppressed other groups like the Armenians, whose genocide was denied by the Israeli government as part of a craven *quid pro quo* with Turkey.⁶⁵ In considering the adverse effect that uniqueness had upon public awareness of the genocides of Gypsies and Native Americans, it was unmistakably clear to Stannard that the Jews’ “manufactured claims of uniqueness for their own people are . . . synonymous with [the] denial of the experience of others.”⁶⁶

Many of Stannard’s strident assertions were subsequently amplified by his colleague Ward Churchill in *A Little Matter of Genocide* (1997).⁶⁷ This study, for which Stannard wrote the introduction, focused on the Holocaust to advance Churchill’s larger goal of historicizing the genocide of Native Americans.⁶⁸ While most of the book was devoted to chronicling the extensive sufferings of Native Americans over the last five centuries, the introductory chapters attempted to explain the continuing reluctance to confront the genocide within the American public. Like Stannard, Churchill targeted the defenders of uniqueness for this state of affairs, arguing that the most egregious deniers of “the genocide of indigenous peoples” were “a substantial component of zionism which contends not only that the American holocaust never happened, but that *no* ‘true’ genocide has ever occurred, other than the holocaust suffered by the Jews.”⁶⁹

To support his claim that uniqueness equaled denial, Churchill attempted to

provide extensive empirical support for Stannard's contention that those who defended the Holocaust's uniqueness were actually worse than those racist, neo-Nazi figures who denied its occurrence altogether. Although he strongly condemned the rise of denial literature and supported Deborah Lipstadt's response to it, he argued that her book went too far in the opposite direction. By labeling all attempts at historical comparison with the Holocaust "neo-nazi scholarship," and by describing those unwilling to concede the Holocaust's uniqueness as outright deniers, Lipstadt's book emerged, according to Churchill, as a true "exercise in Holocaust denial."⁷⁰ Similarly, Steven Katz's strict redefinition of genocide represented for Churchill a deliberate attempt to distort the concept as it was originally created by Raphael Lemkin and the United Nations, and reflected the broader agenda of Jewish scholars to deny genocide status to other groups.⁷¹ In short, Churchill believed that Lipstadt, Katz, and other proponents of uniqueness were actively involved in a "systematic assault . . . on truth and memory" more dangerous than that pursued by the neo-nazi deniers. For while "the latter content themselves with denying the authenticity of a single genocidal process, exclusivists [not only] deny . . . the validity of myriad genocides [but are] treated as academically credible."⁷²

Convinced of the threat to truth and memory posed by the defenders of uniqueness, Churchill challenged the concept on historical and empirical grounds. Like Stannard, he not only underlined the parallels between the Holocaust and the Native American genocide, but also stressed the similarities between the Nazi persecution of Jews and non-Jews alike.⁷³ In this latter context, Churchill hoped to reverse what he took to be the deliberate downgrading of other victim groups by Jewish "exclusivists," including the "invisible victims"—Gypsies, Russian POWs, civilians from Poland, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, and other parts of the Soviet Union—as true Holocaust victims. Casualties usually labeled "war deaths," he argued, needed to be included under "nazi extermination policies," since there was little or no difference between the Nazis' plans for the Jews and their ultimate plans for other "inferior" groups.⁷⁴ Churchill thus drastically expanded the definition of the Holocaust upward, concluding: "the true human costs of nazi genocide came to twenty-six million or more, six million of whom were Jews, a million or more of whom were Gypsies, and the rest mostly Slavs. Only with these facts clearly in mind can we say that we have apprehended the full scope of the Holocaust."⁷⁵

Churchill also shared Stannard's views on the political motivations and implications of the uniqueness claim, arguing that it served

to compel permanent maintenance of the privileged political status of Israel, the Jewish state established on Arab land as an act of international atonement for the Holocaust, . . . to forge a secular reinforcement . . . of Judaism's theological belief in itself as comprising a . . . "chosen" people, entitled to all the prerogatives of such, . . . and to construct a conceptual screen behind which to hide . . . Israel's ongoing genocide against the Palestinian population.⁷⁶

In this way, Churchill did not merely echo but radically amplified the charges leveled by Stannard, concluding that the one-time victims of genocide, the Jews, had now become perpetrators of the same crime against their Palestinian neighbors.

Stannard and Churchill's highly politicized accusations against the defenders of uniqueness, moreover, were hardly isolated cases, as was demonstrated by Norman Finkelstein's polemical critique of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. In a long article that appeared in the *New Left Review* in the summer of 1997 and was subsequently revised and re-published in the book *A Nation on Trial*, Finkelstein attacked both the conceptual and political dimensions of the uniqueness concept.⁷⁷ According to him, Goldhagen's depiction of the Germans' chronic, "eliminationist" hatred of the Jews as the motivating force behind the Holocaust mirrored one of the central tenets of "Holocaust literature"—that "Jews suffered uniquely in the Nazi holocaust and that the Nazi holocaust was unique in the annals of human suffering."⁷⁸ This claim of uniqueness was, in turn, an integral part of "Zionist ideology," which cited the eternal nature of gentile antisemitism and Jewish suffering as justifying "the necessity of the state of Israel." Further, inasmuch as this view supported the notion that "all critiques of Zionism are simply disguised forms of anti-Semitism," it "immunized" the Jewish state "from legitimate censure of its policies" and provided justification for "whatever expedient Jews might resort to, even aggression and torture [as] legitimate [acts of] self-defense."⁷⁹ As Stannard and Churchill, Finkelstein asserted that those scholars who viewed the Holocaust as a distinctly Jewish and a fundamentally unique event were part of a larger "propaganda enterprise" to exploit the past for political purposes.⁸⁰

The assault upon uniqueness led by Stannard, Churchill, and Finkelstein generated a lively debate among scholars. As a flurry of articles and internet postings on *H-Holocaust* revealed during the summer of 1996 and spring of 1997, scholars seemed to split evenly on the issue. Among the uniqueness concept's critics, some, such as Henry Huttenbach, criticized Steven Katz for major errors of logic, while others, like Jonathan Petrie, charged Goldhagen with ignoring the non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust and practicing "a subtle form of genocide denial."⁸¹ Still other critics challenged the special significance accorded the Holocaust by drawing attention to the mass killings undertaken by Mao Zedong in China and Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union.⁸² Among the defenders of uniqueness, David G. Myers criticized both Petrie and Stannard, highlighting how the latter's polemical observations in particular resembled "classic antisemitic accusation[s] against the Jews."⁸³ Other defenders also questioned the motives behind the critics of uniqueness and suggested blocking their further participation on the list-serve.⁸⁴ This call for censorship surfaced in far more sensational fashion in early 1998, when the Anti-Defamation League tried to halt the publication of *A Nation on Trial*.⁸⁵ As indicated both by these contributions and a growing interest in the subject in Europe, the uniqueness issue has sparked nearly as much political controversy as intellectual engagement.⁸⁶

Evaluating the Debate

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the recent debate has done little to advance our understanding of modern genocide and much to hinder it. The critics of uniqueness, Stannard and Churchill in particular, have made some important points and should be praised for their efforts to increase public awareness of the past and present-day sufferings of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. To read Churchill's disturbing accounts of the recent sufferings of native peoples in Central and South America further underscores the political importance of increased awareness of the ongoing threat of genocide.⁸⁷ A comparison of the genocide of Native Americans and the Holocaust is not only a potentially useful scholarly tool for clarifying the important similarities and differences between the two events, but one with obvious political significance as well. Finkelstein's work, for its part, should also be accorded a degree of recognition for its rigorous, although far from the first or most original, critique of Goldhagen's flawed bestseller.

This being said, the work of Stannard, Churchill, and Finkelstein is also seriously marred by careless research, historical errors, and recklessly tendentious political barbs.⁸⁸ Stannard's attempt to fashion the sufferings of Native Americans into a genocide on par with the Holocaust fails in several respects. Even if his impressive statistics regarding the decimation of Native American populations following the arrival of European colonists are accurate—and there is evidence to show they are inflated—the issue of intent remains a crucial difference between the two cases.⁸⁹ While it is true that both Jews and Native Americans died from many causes—massacres, hunger, disease, and exhaustion among others—there is no escaping the fact that *all* Jewish deaths in the Holocaust, regardless of how they occurred, were intended by the Nazis.⁹⁰ In contrast, while Native Americans were also killed intentionally, a far higher proportion died from diseases contracted through simple contact with Europeans, who did not, it should be stressed, arrive in the New World bent upon extermination.⁹¹ Jewish deaths in ghettos and concentration camps through “natural” causes thus cannot be equated with the allegedly similar “natural” deaths of Native Americans, since the former would have been killed in the extermination camps had they survived long enough to be sent there.

Furthermore, Stannard and Churchill encounter difficulties in their attempts to disprove the notion that the Nazis planned to kill the Jewish people in its entirety. Stannard is correct in pointing to the absence of documentation for the Nazis' explicit plans to eradicate the Jewish people. The strong likelihood, of course, is that such documents never existed in written form and will never be discovered. In their absence, the best proof of the totality of the Nazis' genocidal project is the single-mindedness of their pursuit of the Jews across the European continent—from Finland to Salonika to the Channel Islands—even into the last days of the war. This obsessive pursuit certainly bears out Yehuda Bauer's claim that the Nazis tried to kill as many Jews as “they could lay hands on.”⁹² The alleged examples of Nazi pragma-

tism cited by Stannard are exceptional incidents that do not disprove this larger point. Himmler's apparent willingness to spare Jewish lives near the end of the war was less a reflection of official policy than its unraveling. Indeed, it mostly reflected the SS leader's idiosyncratic attempt, in view of the impending defeat, to save his own skin—for which he was famously disowned by a furious Hitler who never wavered in his pursuit of the Final Solution.⁹³ Additionally, the alleged exemption of certain “Jews”—whether Mischlinge or Karaites—from extermination can be explained by the fact that the Nazis did not consider such persons to be Jews in the first place. In other words, such exemptions should not be interpreted as an easing of ideological tenacity.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the exemption of these “Jews” differentiates the Jewish fate in the Holocaust from that of the Gypsies, whom Stannard, Churchill, and Ian Hancock also claim were slated for total extermination.⁹⁵ Official Nazi policy towards the Gypsies was marked by far less consistency than that towards the Jews. So while certain racially “pure” German Gypsies were not targeted for death, and while some Gypsies in other Nazi-occupied countries were left unmolested, *all* Jews whom the Nazis viewed *as* Jews (and the definition was quite broad) were designated for destruction.⁹⁶ Finally, Churchill's claim that Slavic groups would have been targeted for *eventual* total extermination remains a hypothetical, not an historical argument—one, moreover, that is not convincingly supported by the evidence.⁹⁷

Apart from the historical deficiencies of their critiques of uniqueness, both Stannard and Churchill err gravely in claiming that uniqueness *necessarily* implies denial. While both scholars equate the two throughout their work, they rarely provide much convincing evidence for the linkage. The closest they come to doing so is in arguing that the “exclusivist” position provides ammunition to those *who are already eager* to ignore past and present-day occurrences of genocide. While the concept of uniqueness does potentially permit such instrumental usage, as demonstrated by the Turkish government's support of it in their denial of the Armenian genocide, such a practice clearly represents a case of abuse. It is driven by apologetic motives and does not reveal any flaws in the concept itself.

The fact that uniqueness is not inherently linked to denial is further illustrated in the American context. Stannard and Churchill are manifestly wrong to blame the notion of uniqueness for the widespread ignorance of the Native American genocide, for our knowledge of this shameful period of American history was hardly more widespread *before* the Holocaust. Indeed, a growing sense of shame for this dishonorable legacy, and horror of genocide in general, has been advanced, not inhibited, by our growing attention and sensitivity to the Nazi slaughter of European Jewry. Lingering difficulties in confronting America's own past, therefore, should not be blamed upon Jewish Holocaust scholars but upon those members of the American historical and political establishment who have been truly responsible for the chronic neglect of the full dimensions of Native American history.

Further, the claim that Jewish scholars of the Holocaust have actively or inten-

tionally promoted the denial of other genocides is simply unsustainable. This is primarily due to the fact that, for better or worse, most of these scholars have seldom given extended attention to other genocides. Even if Churchill is only exaggerating slightly when he describes this lack of attention as a “thundering silence,” his equation of this silence with the outright “denial of the American holocaust” is wholly unwarranted.⁹⁸ It is true that most Holocaust scholars have not investigated the comparative dimensions of the Holocaust and other genocides at great length, but the ignorance imputed to them (epitomized by Stannard’s unfair criticism of Yehuda Bauer’s typographical error referring to the “Pierce Nez,” rather than the Nez Percé Indians) cannot fairly be equated with denial.⁹⁹ Thus even a scholar as widely criticized as Bauer explicitly stated as far back as 1980 that “the term genocide is appropriate . . . for what the Americans did to the Native American population, for the attempt of the Nazis to destroy Poles and Czechs, . . . and so on.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, it is important to note that Jewish scholars (Bauer included) have been well represented among those who have studied the Gypsy and Armenian genocides.¹⁰¹

The purported lack of Jewish interest in other genocides certainly cannot be compared to the politically-motivated agendas of Holocaust deniers, who willfully deny the Holocaust’s very occurrence. Far from actively denying other genocides, many Jewish scholars as well as major Holocaust institutions, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, have asserted the historical specificity of the Holocaust and also directed attention toward the mass murder of other groups.¹⁰² The best example is the much-maligned Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, whose commitment to the lessons of the Holocaust prompted him not only to express his shock over the genocide of the Aché Indians in Paraguay in the 1970s, but also motivated his more recent admonishment of President Clinton to stop the “ethnic cleansing” in war-torn Yugoslavia.¹⁰³

Stannard, Churchill, and Finkelstein all err, moreover, in their zealous attempts to uncover a political agenda lurking behind the notion of uniqueness. To begin with, they are mistaken in their essentialist description of uniqueness as “Jewish” in character.¹⁰⁴ Although they pointedly cite the Jewish identity of scholars defending uniqueness to prove that its currency reflects Jewish ethnocentrism and Zionist political aims, they fail to acknowledge that the thesis enjoys widespread support among prominent non-Jewish scholars.¹⁰⁵ More specifically, their charge that the notion of uniqueness is part of a larger Zionist plot to legitimize the actions of the state of Israel is wholly unsubstantiated. To be sure, there is no denying the fact that individual Israeli politicians and Jewish leaders in the United States and Europe have often invoked the Holocaust for political purposes. Stannard may be justified, moreover, in criticizing the Israeli government for its collusion with the Turkish government in denying the Armenian genocide.¹⁰⁶ But he is wrong to blame this *Realpolitik*-influenced behavior on the notion of uniqueness, as is demonstrated by the fact that many other governments besides Israel (including that of the United States) have wilted under

Turkish pressure and remained silent about the Armenian genocide for reasons unrelated to the Holocaust's singularity. More generally, there is absolutely no evidence that a "Zionist" political agenda is behind the work of current Jewish scholarship on the subject. As indicated above, scholars like Bauer, Katz, Lipstadt, and Goldhagen have largely asserted the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a defensive reaction against prior attempts to normalize, relativize, or otherwise diminish it; even scholars who have openly asserted the Holocaust's political utility have done so in response to real abuses of the event, not to prevent its comparison with other cases of genocide.¹⁰⁷ While the notion of uniqueness can clearly serve diverse political agendas, there is no evidence that its many defenders have embraced it for purely political reasons.¹⁰⁸ Accusations to this effect are not only grossly unfair, but dangerous, as indicated by the recent surfacing of Norman Finkelstein's arguments against the Holocaust "industry" on the websites of extreme right-wing Holocaust deniers.¹⁰⁹

Finally, the credibility of the charges leveled by the critics of uniqueness is undermined by the double standards underlying their own arguments. It is ironic to see Ward Churchill criticize Jewish scholars for asserting the Holocaust's uniqueness and then claim uniqueness for his own people's sufferings. When he asserts that "The American Holocaust . . . remains unparalleled both in . . . its magnitude and the degree to which its goals were met," he employs categorical statements that weaken his own criticisms of the notion of uniqueness.¹¹⁰ Likewise, his critique of how Jews have extracted moral capital from the Holocaust rings hollow in light of his assertion that because "American Indians [are] demonstrably one of the most victimized groups in the history of humanity, [we] are entitled to every ounce of moral authority we can get."¹¹¹ Such comments indicate that Churchill emulates the very practices he claims to oppose.¹¹²

Taking Stock of the Debate: Explanations and Conclusions

However flawed these criticisms of uniqueness are, it is worth pondering the reasons for their sudden appearance. The current debate seems to be the product of a propitious constellation of cultural, political, and scholarly trends. One crucial precondition is the tendency—traceable to the upsurge of "multiculturalism" in the late 1990s—of ethnic groups to justify present-day demands by citing past wrongs. In this atmosphere of victimization, a genocidal past is an obvious political asset, and Stannard and Churchill's attempts to raise awareness of the "American Holocaust" merely mirror those of other groups to draw attention to their own "Holocausts."¹¹³ The fact that Stannard and Churchill encountered difficulties—the upbeat celebration of the Quincentennial of Columbus's landing revealed the indifference of most Americans to the darker side of their past—seems to have caused them great frustration and directly prompted their investigation into the reasons for the persistence of American ignorance. A convenient, if mistaken, answer presented itself in the increasing American fascination with the Nazi destruction of European Jewry, which reached its apex

in 1993–94 with the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and the release of Steven Spielberg’s Oscar-winning film *Schindler’s List*. That growing media attention to the Holocaust coincided with the campaign of Jewish scholars such as Steven Katz to assert the Holocaust’s uniqueness may have confirmed Stannard and Churchill’s suspicions that ignorance of the Native American genocide was partly due to the enormous attention devoted to the Holocaust. Added to these cultural and political trends in the United States was the seemingly never-ending crisis in the Middle East, where following Benjamin Netanyahu’s election as prime minister of Israel, the new government’s lack of enthusiasm for the previously-outlined peace process provided added incentive for Churchill, Stannard, and especially Norman Finkelstein—a scholar sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and harshly critical of Zionism—to claim that a Zionist agenda lay behind the defense of the Holocaust’s uniqueness. Much of the debate over uniqueness, therefore, seems to be an overt product of partisan politics.

The emphatically politicized tone of the debate has diminished its contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust and genocide. Yet the debate itself has raised important questions concerning the utility of the uniqueness concept. In many ways, the controversy has resulted from the concept’s very ambiguity. “Uniqueness” not only suffers from a lack of linguistic clarity—it suggests both “unprecedented” and “unrepeatable”—but yields very different conclusions depending upon the analytical perspective: historical, philosophical, theological, and so on. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust has been defined in a variety of ways.¹¹⁴ Yet even if there were a consensus, it remains unclear what the significance of this would be. That such an event can never occur again? That German and Jewish history are singularly and forever burdened? By all indications, this problem still awaits its answer. Indeed, it is significant that the scholar most engaged in exploring the issue of uniqueness, Steven Katz, has done more to provide empirical support for it than to elucidate its significance.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, “uniqueness” is a concept of questionable utility given the misunderstanding it has provoked as a qualitative concept carrying a moral judgment. This connotation, to be sure, is not implicit in the term: there is no reason why empirically distinguishing the Holocaust from other genocides is synonymous with declaring it a greater evil. Steven Katz has made this point convincingly, but unfortunately he has undercut its persuasiveness by adopting a highly restricted definition of genocide, rendering the concept politically inflammatory. To be sure, Katz could have pursued the same comparative research agenda, argued that the Nazis’ intent to kill the entire Jewish people made the Holocaust different from all other cases of mass murder, and referred to these cases (as did Yehuda Bauer) as “genocide.” By failing to do so, his book needlessly offended groups extremely sensitive to the neglect of their historical experiences, opening its author to the charge of establishing a “hierarchy of victims.” Katz’s opponents have impugned his scholarship unfairly, but he might have antici-

pated the reaction and considered more carefully the pursuit of scholarly conclusions the potential fruits of which were destined to be outweighed by the risks.

Given the ambiguity attending the concept of uniqueness and the tendency for it to cause serious misunderstandings, what, if anything, speaks for retaining it as a category of historical analysis? We have seen that the concept originated as a defensive and rhetorically powerful response to those who have attempted to normalize, universalize, or otherwise distort the Holocaust. As such, it deserves to be held in reserve as a means of responding to those who would seek to violate the historicity and minimize the significance of the Nazi's destruction of European Jewry. However, as the considerable costs of the concept's rhetorical power have become increasingly apparent, uniqueness has come to be regarded by some as a truth-in-itself, to be guarded vigilantly against any perceived "assault." Yet not all "assaults" against the Holocaust's uniqueness are equally threatening: scholarly projects of historical comparison are not all the same, and they should not all be misinterpreted as politically-driven acts of normalization. Given the drawbacks of uniqueness, might the concept not be replaced by a less attention-grabbing but more precise term, such as "distinctiveness" or "particularity?" However imperfect, these alternate terms would not inhibit exploration of the historical *differences* between the Holocaust and other genocides, and might even help allay the suspicions of those who view Holocaust studies as an intolerant, hegemonic project.

A deemphasis on the term "uniqueness" would appear to be particularly timely, moreover, in view of the Holocaust's ongoing historicization. As the significance of the Holocaust is increasingly conceived in universal terms, those who continue to advocate its uniqueness will be seen as pursuing a quixotic task. Their battle against universalization is destined to be a losing one, as the term "Holocaust" has already become an ideal-type construct. As demonstrated by the continual (re)discovery of "forgotten Holocausts," it should be apparent that the term is no longer understood as a referent solely to the Nazi destruction of the Jews. Its inflation has complex causes, but however one understands this change, the following seems certain: over time, the specifically Jewish connotation acquired by the word "holocaust" in the post-war period will fade, facilitating the restoration of its original, universalistic meaning. Given this likely eventuality, the choice for the defenders of uniqueness is a difficult one: to lay monopolistic claim to a term increasingly understood in a broader sense, or to abandon it in favor of a more particularistic designation such as "Shoah," a term which has recently come into its own as an alternate designation for the Holocaust in its specifically Jewish dimensions. This practice of linguistic ethnicization, paralleled in the increasing usage of "*Porrajmos*" to refer to the genocide of the Gypsies, may satisfy those who wish to retain an exclusive claim to "their" Holocaust. Others, however, will surely oppose the abandonment of "Holocaust" as an act of surrender, the premature relinquishment of a resonant, widely-recognized term that has come to refer to a crucial historical experience of the Jewish people.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, however,

both options will probably yield the same result. Just as adhering to a term of increasingly universalistic significance will gradually erode awareness of its Jewish dimensions, so too will adopting a particularist designation such as “Shoah.” Either way, the fate of the Jews in the Third Reich will likely be remembered with decreasing clarity by the public at large.

Jean Améry thus appears to have been more correct than not in forecasting the submergence of the Holocaust within a larger “century of barbarism.” As the process of historicization advances, the term “Holocaust” will become an increasingly generic one. Not only will it become progressively indistinguishable from “genocide,” but it likely will be taken as a broader designation for victimization itself. This long-term eventuality no doubt will be disheartening to those committed to defending what they see as the Holocaust’s uniqueness. But it is a trend that cannot be halted, only subjected to continuous scrutiny. The importance of such scrutiny, however, should not be underestimated, for it alone can nullify the effects of the polemical excesses that, as the current debate over uniqueness demonstrates, will inevitably accompany the Holocaust’s ongoing historicization. In the end, it will not be through polemics, but rather through continued research, scholarly debate, and public engagement, that the Holocaust’s historical specificity has any hope of being preserved.

Notes

1. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 79–80.
2. The term “historicization” was adopted in the 1980s to describe the attempts of scholars to arrive at a more objective view of the Third Reich by abandoning the moralistic perspective towards the period that kept it in a kind of protective isolation from the broader sweep of German history. See Martin Broszat, “A Plea for the Historicization of National Socialism” in Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians’ Debate* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), pp. 77–87. The historicization of the Holocaust, in turn, was directly dependent upon the historicization of Nazism, which Saul Friedländer insisted could “be completed only if the crimes of the Nazi regime are entirely integrated within a complex historical context.” Saul Friedländer, “Some Reflections on the Historicization of National Socialism” in Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past*, p. 99.
3. On the origins of the term, see Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, “Why Do We Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’? An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels,” *Modern Judaism* (May 1989), pp. 197–211.
4. Isaac Deutscher wrote that “for the historian trying to comprehend the . . . holocaust, the greatest obstacle will be the absolute uniqueness of the catastrophe. . . . The fury of Nazism, which was bent on the unconditional extermination of every Jewish man, woman, and child within its reach, passes the comprehension of a historian. . . . [We] are confronted here by a huge and ominous mystery . . . that will forever baffle and terrify mankind.” Isaac Deutscher, “The Jewish Tragedy and the Historian” in Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 163–64. In his “Plea for the Dead,” Elie Wiesel wrote: “Answers: I say there are none. . . . The subject matter . . . is made up of death

and mystery. . . . It is not by playing with words and the dead that we will understand and know. Quite the contrary. As the ancients said: "Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know. . . . So, learn to be silent." Elie Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), pp. 182, 197.

5. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the vast majority of scholars engaged in this de facto process of historicization examined the Holocaust in little detail and only in the context of larger studies of Nazism. Lucy Dawidowicz highlighted the fact that many English, American, and German historians failed to mention the Holocaust or modern antisemitism in their broader studies of German history. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), chapters 2–3. For purposes of distinction, I exclude here the larger body of "intentionalist" scholarship, examining the Holocaust from the more narrow perspective of the history of antisemitism.

6. In this context, I should like to point to the work of Saul Friedländer, who has done more than anyone else to illuminate the shortcomings of general theories in explaining the Holocaust. For a recent discussion, see Saul Friedländer, "The Final Solution: On the Unease in Historical Interpretation" in Peter Hayes, ed., *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 31–32, 35.

7. C. J. Friedrich, *Totalitarianism* (New York, 1954); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, 1979).

8. Arendt explained the Nazi extermination camps in abstract terms as the product of the totalitarian state's desire for "absolute domination" and a laboratory where "everything is possible." *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 437–40.

9. This was the definition coined by Georgi Dimitroff at the 1935 Congress of the Comintern. Quoted in Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: E. Arnold, 1985), p. 11.

10. Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966). Nolte distinguished between fascism's opposition to "theoretical" transcendence and "practical" transcendence, the former generally referring to Enlightenment universalism, the latter to the dissolution of particularistic ties caused by such modern phenomena as industrialization.

11. Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State* (New York: Longman, 1981). Hans Mommsen, "National Socialism: Continuity and Change" in Hans Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 141–62; and "Hitler and the Genesis of the 'Final Solution': An Assessment of David Irving's Thesis," *Yad Vashem Studies* 13 (1979), pp. 73–125.

12. Zitelmann and his colleagues rejected the claim by scholars such as Dan Diner that the Holocaust's incomparability prevents its historicization, arguing that this placed "an unacceptable limit upon historical inquiry" (Frageverbot). Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse, and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit: Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1990); and Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991).

13. Götz Aly and Susanna Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1991); Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

14. Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). Mayer declared his intention to historicize the Holocaust by examining it in the context of the “General Crisis and Thirty Years’ War of the twentieth century.” Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1992).

15. The term genocide was coined by the Polish-Jewish writer Raphael Lemkin in 1944.

16. This is the stated goal of the newsletter, *The Genocide Forum*. See Henry R. Huttenbach, “A Look Ahead,” *The Genocide Forum* (June 1996), p. 1, and “The Convergence of Holocaust and Genocide Studies,” *The Genocide Forum* (September 1994), pp. 1–2. Among the more important works are Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Uses in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). See also Henry R. Huttenbach, “Locating the Holocaust on the Genocide Spectrum: Towards a Methodology of Definition and Categorization,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3:3 (1988), pp. 289–303; and Mark Levene, “Is the Holocaust Simply Another Example of Genocide?” *Patterns of Prejudice* (April 1994), pp. 3–26.

17. See, for example, Vahakn Dadrian, “The Convergent Aspects of the Armenian and Jewish Cases of Genocide: A Reinterpretation of the Concept of Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3:2 (1988), pp. 151–69.

18. Sybil Milton, “Holocaust: The Gypsies” in Samuel Totten, et al., eds., *Century of Genocide: Eyewitness Accounts and Critical Views* (New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 171–88. Some scholars have pursued this line of inquiry without utilizing the concept of genocide in any systematic fashion. See, for example, Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

19. Definitions of genocide range from the overly inclusive to the needlessly vague. For a brief survey, see Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, pp. 12–27. Chalk and Jonassohn provide one of the clearest definitions of genocide, describing it as “a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator;” p. 23. Far more vague is Henry Huttenbach: “any act that puts the very existence of a group in jeopardy;” “Locating the Holocaust on the Genocide Spectrum,” p. 297.

20. It is unclear, for example, whether the state alone can be charged with genocide, or if lesser agencies can be so charged as well; similarly, there is a lack of clarity about the type of targeted group (ethnic, racial, religious, political, gender, others?) and the size of the group (is there a minimum threshold for categorizing a collection of similar individuals as a group?) as well as what proportion has to be killed (one-tenth, one-third, three-fourths, all?) in order for mass murder to be considered genocide.

21. Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), introduction and chapter 1. See also Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, chapters 4 and 5, on the USSR and Poland; and Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), chapter 5. The memorial at Babi Yar does not refer to the 33,000 Jews of

Kiev murdered over two days in September 1941, but rather the 100,000 citizens of Kiev and prisoners of war killed from 1941 to 1943.

22. See Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," *David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs* (University of Michigan: Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, 1995), pp. 1–45.

23. President Carter referred to the Holocaust on some occasions as the killing of six million Jews and on others as the killing of eleven million people, six million of whom were Jews. For their part, the members of the President's commission (most of whom were Jewish) were well aware of the tension between the Holocaust's particularistic significance for Jews and its more universal importance. They tended to restrict their definition of the Holocaust to the six million Jewish victims, however, especially in the face of lobbying for inclusion by representatives of other Eastern European ethnic groups who, while having been victimized by the Nazis, had themselves participated in the victimization of the Jews during World War II. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, pp. 38–51.

24. Edward Alexander, "Stealing the Holocaust," *Midstream* (November 1980), pp. 46–50.

25. Betty Friedan in the 1960s compared the plight of the American housewife to that of a concentration camp inmate. *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 305–7. On the "Black Holocaust," see Samuel G. Freedman, "Laying Claim to Sorrow Beyond Words," *The New York Times* (December 13, 1997). For other "Holocausts," see Günter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933–1945* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1995); Richard C. Lukas, *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939–1944* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986); and Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997). More broadly, see Michael Marrus, "The Use and Misuse of the Holocaust" in Peter Hayes, ed., *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, pp. 106–19.

26. Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); and Marrus, "The Use and Misuse of the Holocaust," pp. 113–15.

27. See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

28. At this time, the Holocaust was assuming a place of unprecedented centrality in both Jewish and American popular culture. The showing of the NBC docudrama *Holocaust* (1978), the aestheticized depiction of the Holocaust in literature and film, the academicization of the event in college courses and by private research foundations, and its commemoration in monuments and museums (capped by plans for a national Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. in 1978) all illustrated this trend. Jewish intellectuals discussed the consequences of the Holocaust's new prominence in such journals as *Commentary*, *Midstream*, and *Modern Judaism*. For a bibliographical survey of relevant articles, see "The Issue of the Holocaust as a Unique Event" in Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions* (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1992), pp. 47–65.

29. Among the dissenting observers, Ismar Schorsch criticized the notion of uniqueness as "a distasteful secular version of chosenness" that "impedes genuine dialogue" and "alienates potential allies from among other victims of organized human depravity." For a broader overview,

see Robert Alter, "Deformations of the Holocaust," *Commentary* (February 1981), pp. 48–54. See also Michael Berenbaum, "The Uniqueness and Universality of the Holocaust," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2 (September 1981), reprinted in John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds. *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 82–97.

30. The term was first used by Hans Mommsen to describe the work of Karl Dietrich Bracher. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986), pp. xxix–xxx. While many Jewish scholars embraced this paradigm, non-Jews did as well, including the German scholars Karl Dietrich Bracher, Klaus Hildebrand, and Eberhard Jäckel.

31. Alice and A. Roy Eckardt, "The Holocaust and the Enigma of Uniqueness: A Philosophical Effort at Practical Clarification," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 450 (July 1980), pp. 168–69. Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1982).

32. Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), pp. 35–37.

33. Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: F. Watts, 1982), p. 332. In "Whose Holocaust?" Bauer wrote: "what makes the Holocaust unique is the existence of two elements: planned total annihilation of a national or ethnic group, and the quasi-religious, apocalyptic ideology that motivated the murder." *Midstream* (1980), p. 45. It is important to note that Bauer's stance on uniqueness was not a dogmatic but an equivocal one. By 1982, he had expanded the term Holocaust into an ideal-type event that applied to the genocide of the Armenians and that could potentially recur in the future. *History of the Holocaust*, p. 332.

34. Henry Feingold saw the Holocaust's uniqueness in its significance for the history of Western civilization, which was radically impoverished by the destruction of the Jews; "Determining the Uniqueness of the Holocaust: The Factor of Historical Valence," *Shoah* (Spring 1982), pp. 3–11, 30. Lucy Dawidowicz identified it as a rupture that "utterly destroyed the continuity of modern Jewish history"; *The Holocaust and the Historians*, p. 14.

35. Saul Friedländer wrote: The "absolute character of the anti-Jewish drive of the Nazis makes it impossible to integrate the extermination of the Jews not only within the general framework of Nazi persecutions, but even within the wider aspects of contemporary ideologico-political behavior such as fascism [or] totalitarianism." "On the Possibility of the Holocaust: An Approach to a Historical Synthesis" in Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich, eds., *The Holocaust as Historical Experience* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), p. 2.

36. Bauer referred to the politicization of the Holocaust as a process of "mystification"; "Against Mystification" in Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, pp. 30–49. Dawidowicz's *The Holocaust and the Historians* was intended as a response both to the ideologically-motivated distortion of the event in the communist eastern bloc and to its scholarly neglect in Western European historiography.

37. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust*, and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996). Other recent defenses of uniqueness include Avishai Margalit and Gabriel Motzkin, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Winter 1996), pp. 65–83; and Alan Milchman and Alan Rosen-

berg, "Two Kinds of Uniqueness: The Universal Aspects of the Holocaust" in Rochelle L. Milten, ed., *New Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Guide for Teachers and Scholars* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 6–18. Yehuda Bauer has restated his position in his introduction to Jonathan Frankel, ed., *Studies in Contemporary Jewry, XIII: The Fate of the European Jews, 1939–1945: Continuity or Contingency?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 3–8. In this volume, Gavin Langmuir sides with Steven Katz, asserting that "the Holocaust . . . was the first, and is so far the only, instance of genocide": "Continuities, Discontinuities, and Contingencies of the Holocaust," p. 26.

38. Lipstadt insisted that these cases, while horrific, were fundamentally different since neither was "part of a process of total annihilation of an entire people." Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust*, p. 212.

39. Although Goldhagen opposed Mayer and Browning's approach to historicization, he did not reject historicization as such. This is clear from his opposition to the notion that the Holocaust was "inexplicable," and his simple affirmation that his book aimed "to explain why the Holocaust occurred, to explain how it could occur"; p. 5.

40. P. 414. Goldhagen added: "The geographic scope of the Germans' exterminationist drive . . . has no parallel, certainly not in the twentieth century. The Germans sought to uncover and kill Jews everywhere they could, outside their country and the territories that they controlled, ultimately throughout the world. Not just the spatial reach but the comprehensiveness of the Germans' extermination of the Jews is also distinctive. Every last Jew, every Jewish child, had to die"; p. 412.

41. Goldhagen, p. 28.

42. Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context, Volume I: The Holocaust and Mass Death Before the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Katz's interest in the question of uniqueness dated back to the late 1970s and early 1980s. See, for example, Steven Katz, "The 'Unique' Intentionality of the Holocaust," *Modern Judaism* (September 1981), pp. 161–83.

43. In writing "It is my intention to establish the uniqueness of the Sho'ah precisely by historicizing it," Katz particularly aimed to refute the work of Ernst Nolte: "It is my firm belief that concluding for uniqueness . . . provides the most appropriate . . . response to . . . Nolte's historical revisionism"; *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p. 25. Beyond challenging Nolte's attempts to "normalize" the Holocaust, Katz also sought to counter its conceptual inflation by scholars of the Native American, Armenian, Gypsy, Homosexual, and African "Holocausts," among others (p. 18).

44. *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p. 10. Katz declared that he had framed his "definition of uniqueness in terms of intentionality," arguing that "only the element of intentionality can serve as the individuating criterion by which to distinguish the Sho'ah from other instances of mass death" (pp. 13–14). The Holocaust, he argued, represented "a phenomenological and historical novum," "an event without real precedent or parallel in modern history" (p. 24). And further, that "the Holocaust is phenomenologically unique by virtue of the fact that never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate physically every man, woman, and child belonging to a specific people" (p. 28).

45. *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, pp. 128–29. Katz later modified his definition of “group” by adding the adjectives “national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender, or economic” (pp. 131, 133).
46. With respect to the Armenian case, for example, Katz wrote, “The fact that I choose . . . to deny the term genocide to the Armenian case is not meant to entail any diminishment of Armenian suffering or death”; *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p. 22.
47. A few important non-Jewish critics of uniqueness wrote in the early 1980s, particularly John Cuddihy and Pierre Papazian. Significantly, their observations that the issue of uniqueness had an instrumental function for American Jewish identity and tended to deny other genocides anticipated those of (and may have been borrowed by) Stannard, Churchill, and Finkelstein. See John Cuddihy, “The Holocaust: The Latent Issue in the Uniqueness Debate” in Philip Gallagher, ed., *Christians, Jews, and Other Worlds: Patterns of Conflict and Accommodation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), pp. 62–79; and Pierre Papazian, “A Unique Uniqueness?” *Midstream* (April 1994), pp. 14–18.
48. See Christopher Schea, “Debating the Uniqueness of the Holocaust,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 31, 1996). Ward Churchill’s book was excerpted in *Z Magazine* under the title, “Assaults on Truth and Memory” December 1996, pp. 31–37, and February 1997, pp. 42–47. The website *H-Holocaust* ran a series of exchanges on the subject in summer 1996 and spring 1997.
49. Alan Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives in Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).
50. Vahakn Dadrian, “The Comparative Aspects of the Armenian and Jewish Cases of Genocide: A Sociohistorical Perspective,” pp. 101–36; and Ian Hancock, “Responses to the Porrajmos: The Romani Holocaust,” pp. 39–64; David Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” pp. 163–208 (all in Rosenbaum, *Is the Holocaust Unique?*).
51. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial,” p. 167.
52. David Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 256. Stannard’s angry and graphic book ironically resembled Daniel Goldhagen’s equally passionate *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. As Goldhagen focused upon the sadistic dimensions of the Germans’ genocide instead of the bureaucratic factors, Stannard rejected older, more comfortable explanations of the Native American genocide—such as that Native Americans were killed off by disease—and emphasized the brutal violence that conditioned such “natural” deaths.
53. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial,” p. 198.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–66.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 172–80.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 192.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 195–96.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
67. Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997).
68. Churchill wrote: “the book seeks to contextualize the American holocaust through direct comparison to other genocides—most especially the Nazi Holocaust—to an extent not previously undertaken on such a scale”; p. 8.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 31. Like Stannard, Churchill showed considerable scorn towards the defenders of uniqueness, placing the word “scholars” in quotation marks in referring to Bauer, Katz, and Lipstadt (p. 35).
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–75. A concrete example of this, according to Churchill, was “Jewish exclusivism’s . . . concerted effort to expunge the Porrajmos [the genocide of the Gypsies] from history”; p. 42.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 64. Churchill wrote that “Yehuda Bauer’s *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, Steven Katz’s *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, and Lucy Dawidowicz’s *The Holocaust and the Historians* are really only variations of Arthur Butz’s *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century* written in reverse” (p. 50).
73. Churchill compared the fate of Jews and Native Americans in a more fleeting fashion, often in the footnotes of his text. To cite two examples: he describes the “exterminationist” rhetoric of Colorado settlers towards Native Americans in the late nineteenth century as “a direct prefiguration” of the rhetoric used by Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler (p. 229n); and asserts that “the mission slave system of North America [was] indistinguishable from that administered for the Third Reich by Albert Speer” (pp. 142–43).
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–48.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
77. Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York: Metropolitan, 1998). The article version was entitled, “Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s ‘Crazy’ Thesis: A Critique of Hitler’s Willing Executioners,” *New Left Review* (July/August 1997), pp. 39–87.
78. Finkelstein and Birn, p. 88n.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

80. Finkelstein uses this phrase to refer to the field of Holocaust studies, an “industry” that, established upon the conviction that “German anti-Semitism was the mainspring of . . . the Jewish catastrophe,” is “largely devoid of scholarly interest”; “Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s ‘Crazy’ Thesis,” p. 83. Finkelstein omitted this reckless phrase from the book.

81. Henry R. Huttenbach, “The Katz Fallacy: The Art of Procrustes,” *The Genocide Forum* (January 1997), pp. 1–2. Katz replied to Huttenbach in “A Reply,” *The Genocide Forum* (September 1997), pp. 5–7. Jon Petrie, “Jewish ‘Exclusivism’ and the Representation of Genocide,” Internet posting, *H-Holocaust* (March 6, 1997). Writing in *The Genocide Forum*, Petrie attacked Goldhagen’s “glossing over the [Nazis] mass murder of Gentiles,—Soviet POWs, Poles, etc., concluding that his “privileging [of] Jewish life over Slavic life [and his] privileging [of] eliminationist antisemitism over . . . rabid anticommunism is part of the air that American scholars breathe, part of the spirit of this age and country”; “Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Privileging Jewish Lives, Privileging Antisemitism,” *The Genocide Forum* (June 1996), pp. 2–3.

82. Michael Levin, “Enough Already,” *The Genocide Forum* (October 1997), pp. 2–5. Levin argued that the leftist sympathies of American academics explained why the mass murders of communist states continued to receive less attention than the quantitatively milder Holocaust.

83. D. G. Myers, “Jewish ‘Exclusivism’ and the Holocaust,” Internet posting, *H-Holocaust* (March 5, 1997). Myers concluded that while “the motives of Stannard and his ilk may not be antisemitic, . . . their effect will be. For they throw suspicion upon Jewish arguments as such . . . and put a chill on anyone who might wish to speak out as a Jew.”

84. Alexander Soifer wrote that “Petrie . . . ought to unsubscribe without or with the aid of the moderator.” “Jewish ‘Exclusivism’ and the Representation of Genocide,” Internet posting, *H-Holocaust* (March 11, 1997).

85. See “Cries to Halt Publication of Holocaust Book,” *The New York Times* (January 10, 1998).

86. It is worth noting that at the same time the debate was heating up in the United States, it was emerging in Europe as well. In France, Stéphane Courtois’ *Black Book of Communism* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1997) attempted to direct attention towards the genocidal crimes of communist regimes—which he estimated produced the deaths of between eighty-five and 100 million people—by criticizing the widespread tendency to view Auschwitz as “unique” and “give the genocide against the Jews the monopoly on crimes against humanity.” Quoted in “Der rote Schrecken,” *Focus* 48 (1997), p. 170. Jean-Michel Chaumont, meanwhile, has tackled the issue of uniqueness in *La Concurrence des victimes* (Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 1997). At a more general level, the revival of the paradigm of totalitarianism in recent years provides a further indication of the turn away from what made Nazism specific, namely its antisemitic ideology, to what made it more universal. See, for example, Ian Kershaw, “Totalitarianism Revisited: Nazism and Stalinism in Comparative Perspective,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* (1994), pp. 23–40.

87. Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, pp. 110–16.

88. Among many examples are three cases of selective quotation: (1) Both Stannard and Churchill berate Yehuda Bauer for what Stannard terms “[defying] all connection with reality by proclaiming that ‘total physical annihilation . . . is what happened to the Jews’” (Stannard, p. 171; Churchill, p. 34). Both scholars cite this sentence to suggest that Bauer misleadingly

exaggerates the sufferings of the Jews (who, as is well known, were not exterminated in their entirety). Significantly, both misquote and distort the meaning of Bauer's original sentence, which does not include the word "the" before "Jews" ("total physical annihilation . . . is what happened to Jews."). Given that Bauer defines the term Holocaust as "the *planned* total annihilation of a whole people (emphasis added)," it is clear that his intention was to refer to the totalizing agenda *behind* the Final Solution, rather than its results. "Is the Holocaust Explicable?" in Yehuda Bauer, et al., eds., *Remembering for the Future: Working Papers and Addenda, Volume II* (Oxford, 1989), p. 1,973.

(2) Churchill falsely accuses Lucy Dawidowicz of having "sweepingly accused those suggesting that the U.S. transatlantic slave trade was genocidal—or by extension, that U.S. extermination campaigns against American Indians were the same—not only of antisemitism but of 'a vicious anti-Americanism.'" Churchill, pp. 50–51. In fact, Dawidowicz's remark about anti-Americanism refers neither to the slave trade nor to American Indians, but to a general tendency of Americans (such as "extremist blacks" and "antiabortionists") to apply the term genocide to contemporary American ills such as urban slums or abortion. It is against this background that Dawidowicz wrote "when they equate National Socialist Germany with the United States, they bespeak a vicious anti-Americanism." Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, p. 17.

(3) Churchill's book reveals numerous errors reflecting sloppy or hasty scholarship. These include, among others, his mistaken references to "Robert" (instead of Michael) Marrus (p. 14, n. 18; p. 258, n. 82) and to John "Cuddly" instead of Cuddihy (p. 79, n. 48); his reversal of the first and last names of Yitzhak Arad and Uriel Tal; his inclusion of Sebastian Haffner among the ranks of Jewish scholars (pp. 77–78, n. 24); and his misdating of the Wannsee Conference, which he implies took place in April 1942 (p. 39).

89. See Richard White's review of *American Holocaust*, entitled "Morality and Mortality," *The New Republic* (January 18, 1993), pp. 33–36.

90. Stannard is sorely mistaken in claiming that as many Jews died through "natural" causes as were killed by the Einsatzgruppen or murdered in the extermination camps. Stannard drew upon Arno Mayer's *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, which asserted (without empirical support) this claim. Stannard's attempts to provide statistical support for Mayer are unconvincing. He arbitrarily uses the death rate at Buchenwald (where around 56,000 people died) as a basis of comparison with death rates suffered by Native Americans in Spanish missions, concluding that "by the time the mission camps were shut down, starvation, disease, torture, and . . . murder had killed a proportion of the native inmate population more than three times larger than . . . at Buchenwald." "Uniqueness as Denial," pp. 179–80. Why Buchenwald, which was hardly the most deadly of the camps—indeed, not an extermination camp at all—should be a basis of comparison remains unclear. The following statistics reveal the flaws in Stannard and Mayer's work: Of 1.3 million people deported to Auschwitz, of whom 1.1 million—approximately eighty-five percent—were Jews, only 400,000 were given prisoner status and permitted to live temporarily. Around one-half of these prisoners were Jews, the other half mostly Poles. The remaining 900,000 (mostly Jews) were gassed shortly after arrival. In other words, only 200,000 of the 1.1 million Jews deported to Auschwitz (eighteen percent) had even the possibility of dying of "natural" causes. For recent figures, see Franciszek Piper, "The Number of Victims," pp. 61–80; and "The System of Prisoner Exploitation," pp. 34–49; both in Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

91. Steven Katz plans to devote part of his vol. 2 to this issue.

92. Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, p. 36.

93. Himmler's machinations in 1944–45 reflected his hope of negotiating a separate peace with the Western Allies and launching a grand final crusade against "Bolshevism." When Hitler learned of Himmler's intrigues, he upbraided him severely and threatened with death any German who let Jews escape. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (New York: New American Library, 1989), p. 186. The fantastic nature of Himmler's schemes, especially his belief in the possibility of a separate peace, reflected the SS leader's tenuous grasp on reality by the end of the war, and should caution us from evaluating his behavior in regards to the Jews as part of a rational or non-ideological mindset.

94. Given that most scholars define the victims of genocide as members of a group as defined by the perpetrators, it is misguided for scholars such as Stannard, Churchill, and Hancock to retrospectively consider Jews persons whom the Nazis did not so define. See Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, pp. 23–25. Mischlinge represented a category of part-Jews towards whom the Nazis never developed a consistent policy. The Karaites, meanwhile, were not considered Jews at all according to Nazi racial law (the Karaites themselves, denied they were racial Jews). Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 273. Churchill, p. 40; and Hancock, p. 47. The Nazis' exemption of Jews married to non-Jews was only temporary in nature and reflected their desire to avoid creating discord within the German population,—e.g., the famous Rosenstrasse incident of February 1943, when women in Berlin protested the planned deportation of their husbands; this exemption would likely have been rescinded had the Nazis won the war.

95. While Ian Hancock makes a convincing case for increased scholarly attention to the Romani genocide, he is less convincing when equating it with the Holocaust. Hancock makes the misleading claim, on the basis of no empirical evidence, that "in terms of overall percentage, the losses of Roma and Sinti almost certainly exceeded those of any other group." He bases the percentage of Jews killed in the Holocaust on the total number of Jews in the world in 1939 (17.4 million), a standard obviously ahistorical given that the Nazis were only able to target European Jewry. In any case, he cites no reliable figures on the prewar Romani population (admittedly hard to estimate) for the purposes of comparison. "Responses to the Romani Holocaust," p. 49.

96. For ideological reasons, SS-Chief Heinrich Himmler wanted to spare a small minority of "pure" German Sinti and Lalleri Gypsies, eventually to be concentrated on a reservation somewhere in the General Government. The existence of this plan, agreed to in December 1942 by the previously skeptical Hitler and Martin Bormann, explains why, on January 29, 1943, certain categories of Gypsies (those of "pure racial stock," in addition to those who were "socially adapted" and working, fulfilling military service, or veterans) were exempted from the larger deportation of German Gypsies to Auschwitz, originally ordered on December 16, 1942. To be sure, these exemptions (which scholars like Hancock, Stannard, and Churchill either do not mention or misinterpret) were not always adhered to by the police, who sometimes deported exempted Gypsies. See Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische 'Lösung der Zigeunerfrage'* (Hamburg: Christians, 1996), pp. 297–315. Given that racial purity was an asset for *some* Gypsies but a fatal liability for *all* Jews, it is clear that the Nazis conceived of the Jewish "race" as far more dangerous than the Gypsies.

97. While there is no denying that the Nazis' plans for the Poles were genocidal (insofar as they aimed to end the nation's existence), they did not envision the physical elimination or murder of all Poles. Unlike the Jews, denied any place at all in the Nazis' racial order, Poles exhibiting "healthy" Aryan racial features were deemed salvageable and not to be killed. While statements by leading Nazis such as Heinrich Himmler (in March 1940) that "all Poles [must] disappear from the world" may well have reflected a long-term goal of official policy, the Nazis felt comfortable deferring any final reckoning with the Poles at least until the end of the war. In contrast, the Nazis regarded the Jewish "problem" as one requiring immediate solution. In the end, while they regarded the Slavs as an inferior breed of humanity, the Nazis denied that the Jews were human at all. See Uriel Tal, "On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide," *Yad Vashem Studies* XIII (1979), pp. 7–52; and, more broadly, Bauer, "The Place of the Holocaust in Contemporary History" in Berenbaum, ed., *Holocaust*, pp. 21–25.

98. Churchill elides oversight and denial. As he writes: "Even among intellectuals who have [studied] the Nazi genocidal campaigns . . . there has been a thundering silence with regard to the genocide . . . of American Indians. Indeed, it appears that there is . . . a confluence of interest . . . underlying denial of the American Holocaust." *A Little Matter of Genocide*, p. 119. The accusation that Holocaust scholars have neglected other genocides reflects the highly questionable premise that they are somehow obliged to study them in the first place.

99. Stannard, pp. 194–95. The fact of the matter is that Bauer correctly wrote "Nez Percé" in an earlier essay, "The Place of the Holocaust in Contemporary History," originally published in 1984. See Jonathan Frankel, ed., *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington, 1984, reprinted in Berenbaum, ed., *Holocaust*, p. 30), p. 213.

100. Yehuda Bauer, "Genocide: Was it the Nazis' Original Plan?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 450 (July 1980), p. 44.

101. See Bauer, "Gypsies" in Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 441–55. Dadrian, "Convergent Aspects," pp. 156–57.

102. Daniel Goldhagen, for example, has written elsewhere that "while the Germans' genocide of the Jews remains singular," the sufferings of "gay victims," the "Sinti and Roma peoples," and "Slavs," have "not been sufficiently recognized." "There Is No Hierarchy Among Victims," *The New York Times* (January 18, 1997).

103. Both Stannard and Churchill cite Wiesel's shock at the genocide of the Aché Indians in order to criticize the notion of uniqueness, which they imply had earlier prevented Wiesel from speaking out. It remains unclear why Wiesel should be singled out for (temporarily) ignoring a genocide ignored nearly everywhere else as well.

104. Stannard describes uniqueness as "the hegemonic product of . . . a handful of Jewish scholars and writers"; "Uniqueness as Denial," p. 167.

105. They do make an effort, however, to show that many Jews include themselves as critics of the uniqueness thesis. Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, p. 78, n. 24. Non-Jewish supporters of uniqueness have included Karl Jaspers, Alice and Roy Eckart, and Eberhard Jäckel. Jäckel wrote: "the National Socialist killing of the Jews was unique in that never before had a state with the authority of its responsible leader decided and announced that a specific human group, including its aged, its women, its children and infants, would be killed as quickly as

possible, and then carried through this resolution using every possible means of state power.” Quoted in Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 53.

106. This being said, Stannard overlooks the complicated factors driving the Realpolitik of the Israeli state. See Israel W. Charny, “The Turks, Armenians, and Jews” in *The Book of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide: Book One: The Conference Program and Crisis* (Tel Aviv: Institute of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, 1983), pp. 269–315. See also Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, pp. 230–40.

107. Edward Alexander, who openly spoke of the Jews’ “moral capital” in his essay “Stealing the Holocaust,” was unfairly criticized as attempting to prevent “any effort to place the . . . Jewish experience at the hand of the Nazis within the context of comparative genocide analysis.” In fact, nowhere does Alexander address the question. “Uniqueness as Denial,” p. 192.

108. Steven Katz adamantly denied embracing the concept of uniqueness for reasons of “ethnocentric glory” or “to promote some unjustified claim to moral precedence for the Jewish victims of Nazism.” *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p. 19, n. 19. See chapter two, *passim*, for other such disclaimers.

109. David G. Myers pointed this out in a *H-Holocaust* posting of May 15, 1998.

110. Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, p. 4.

111. *Ibid.*

112. Churchill complains that Jewish “exclusivists” such as Lucy Dawidowicz manipulate numbers of Jewish victims—for example, counting war-related deaths of Jews as Holocaust deaths, but excluding war-related deaths of Slavs. Yet Churchill cites figures for Gypsies in Nazi-occupied Europe (two million) and those killed by the Nazis (one million plus) at the upper ceiling the currently accepted. *A Little Matter of Genocide*, p. 37. This parallels Stannard’s use of high pre-Columbian Native American population figures.

113. A recent extreme example of the attempt to draw attention to a “Black Holocaust” appears in a CD entitled *Da Holocaust* by the rap group “Concentration Camp.” “The Rap Flap,” *The Jewish Journal* (May 22, 1998), p. 19.

114. While this is not the place to expand upon the many ways in which the Holocaust has been defined as unique, the following brief listing gives an idea of the variety: the totalizing intent of the perpetrators; the industrialized means of execution; the event’s significance for Western civilization and modernity (refutation of the Enlightenment project); and the event’s significance for Jewish history.

115. Berel Lang has highlighted this issue in his review of Katz: “The Holocaust in Historical Context,” *History and Theory* (October 1996).

116. The Holocaust’s wide-recognition is confirmed by a recent study showing that eighty-one percent of American respondents agree that the Holocaust remains “very important” as an instrument for teaching the lessons of history, second only to the American Revolution. “What Americans Know About the Holocaust,” *The Jewish Journal* (April 24, 1998), p. 15.