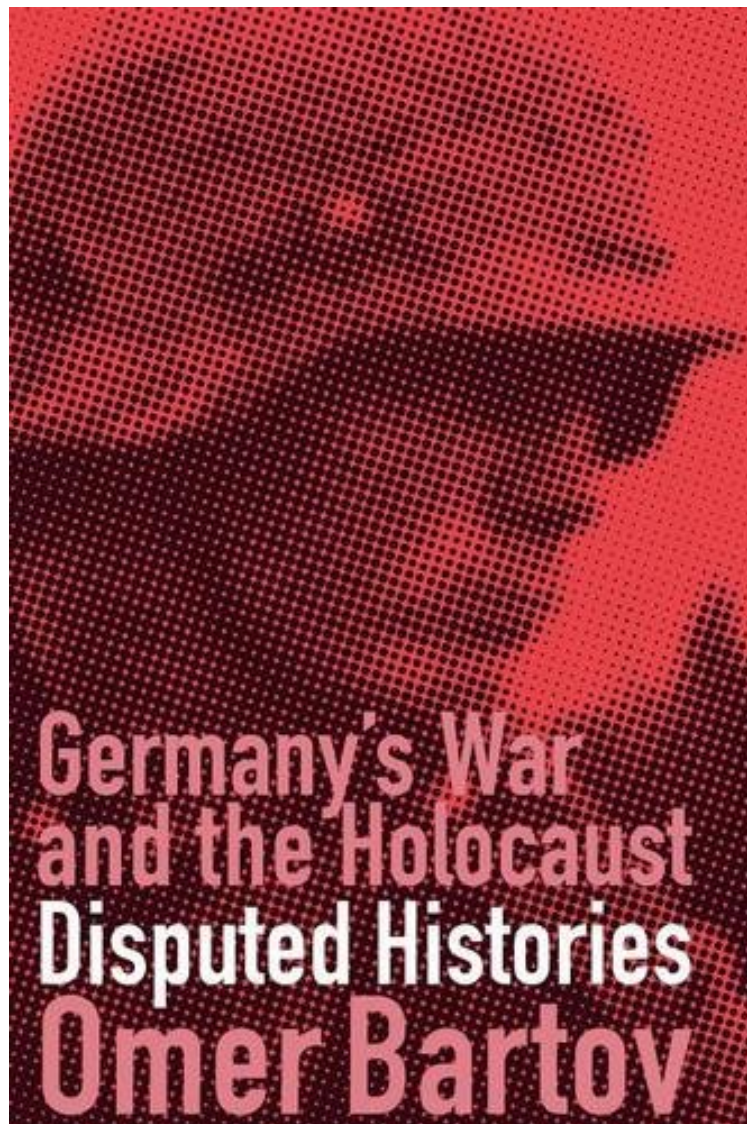


## Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories

*Omer Bartov*

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**Omer Bartov : Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories:

21 of 23 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Essays in German Historiography By Omer Belsky "Germany's War and the Holocaust" is a collection of essays about History and Historiography, action and representation, facts and biases in the history of the German war machine and its savage behavior. The underlying theme throughout all the essays is the 'Functionalist' versus the 'Intentionalist' schools of thought regarding the Holocaust. The 'Functionalist' (generally German, traditional and right wing, although there are many notable

exceptions such as Hannah Ardent) sees the Holocaust as a consequence of inter-German politics, of the escalation of violence in Totalitarian regimes, and of bureaucrats following orders. The 'Internationalist' school (often Jewish, left wing in the German context - although serving multiple political purposes abroad) focuses on the effect of anti-Semitism both among the Germans, the nations cooperating with the Germans (mostly in East Europe and Russia), and the Nazi leadership. Bartov puts himself in the moderate Intentionalist camp, recognizing that the Holocaust was created as part of the German social, political and military policies, but also sees racist ideology as important. Indeed, Bartov's objection to monocausal explanation is commendable. Most of the book is evaluation of different works published in the field recently. The level of the articles (and the quality of the prose) was unequal, from the very good to the damn near unreadable. Among the worst, is the final essay 'Germans as Jews' a nearly incoherent discussion of the roles of Jews in German post war representations. On the other hand, discussions of Blitzkrieg and of Gotz Aly's thesis that the Holocaust was the only part the Nazis managed to execute from a much grander policy to completely change the racial nature of the Europe, are very interesting. Much of the book is a discussion of Daniel Goldhagen's now infamous "Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust". Bartov's critique of the book is interesting but hardly unique, as Bartov more or less follows the standard historian's consensus of valuing the refocus on anti-Semitism as a cause for the Holocaust, and of interesting reports on some lesser known aspects of the Holocaust, while rejecting the overall thesis as far too sweeping. A full chapter on the public controversy regarding the publication of Goldhagen's book is interesting but shallow. There are better studies of the perception of the Holocaust in some countries, which present a much more nuanced view - among them Peter Novick's wonderful "The Holocaust in American Life" and Tom Segev's "The Seventh Million: Israelis and the Holocaust". My favorite essay was the one about Victor Klemperer's diary "I will bear witness". Bartov describes Victor Klemperer, a middle aged academic and a German patriot, who finds that Germany abandons him. Strangely, instead of feeling hatred and alienation from Germany, Klemperer sees himself as virtually the last German, the only preserver of German values and ethics, and most of all a cultural tradition that the Germans abandoned, and that he, the Jew, had to keep for them.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. ... Bartov is an outstanding historian who brings a very useful point of view to the controversy. By Daniel W. Blackmon Omer Bartov is an outstanding historian who brings a very useful point of view to the controversy. I have students who are now using it for their research papers. 38 of 41 people found the following review helpful. 3.4 stars. A collection with many useful insights. By pnotley@hotmail.com This is the third collection of essays by Omer Bartov since the publication of his major work, "Hitler's Army," more than a decade ago. Much of it works around his reviews for "The New Republic" of works by Gotz Aly, Wolfgang Sofsky, and Daniel Goldhagen as well as the diaries of Victor Klemperer. The first two chapters recapitulate much of "Hitler's Army" while looking at the nature of the army and historical debates over the nature of blitzkrieg. In the next three chapters Bartov looks at Aly, Sofsky, and Goldhagen. Throughout his discussion he tries to balance an emphasis on the importance of anti-Semitic ideology while not descending to crude teleological explanations. The final three chapters look at interpretations. The first one, and the best chapter of the book, looks at the reception of Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners." There is then a moving chapter on Klemperer and a final chapter on the "Representations of Absence" of Jews in post-war German culture. Some criticisms are in order. Bartov has emphasized the internalization of Nazi ideology in German society, especially among German soldiers. But this does not so much answer the question of why the Holocaust happened as to lead to more questions. We still have to ask ourselves why people accepted not only anti-Semitic ideology but an ideology that was patently mad. Many cultured and civilized ruling classes in the twentieth century are rife with snobbery and smugness. How does one get from the endemic prejudices of Kaiserreich Germany to the genocidal fantasies of the Third Reich? A second problem arises from the last chapter. I find his discussions of the apparent absence of Jews overly abstract and vague. That there are relatively few portraits of Jews in post-war German literature and films is not surprising. Most writers, everywhere, write about what they know best. After all, there are very few white American portraits of African-Americans or slavery, and the exceptions, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and "The Confessions of Nat Turner," are not encouraging. Nor is he fair to Gunter Grass who, after all, was only 12 when the second world war started and therefore not likely to know any Jews personally. And why concentrate on "The Tin Drum," when the equally important "Dog Years" has a half-Jewish protagonist? Thirdly, there is a problem with his discussion of French debate over the Holocaust, since the participants involved are actually dealing with different questions. Bartov is dealing with the nature of the Holocaust, while many of his French participants are looking at the political manipulation of genocide. Likewise it strikes me as questionable to say that Holocaust denial is "respectable" in France. Certainly none of the eccentrics had the international reputation of the disingenuous David Irving. Fourthly, I would also like to criticize a point about military discipline in the Wehrmacht. Bartov points out that few, if any, of the thousands of German soldiers executed on the Eastern Front showed any moral or ideological opposition to the war. Perhaps, but then people on trial for their life during an ideological crusade are not going to make their position worse by adding treason to their malingering. On the other hand much of the book is valuable and informative. The discussion of Sofsky makes the invaluable point that the extermination camp was not the concentration camp writ large and that the origins of Treblinka are to be found less in Dachau than in the euthanasia campaign. Bartov astutely points out the flaws in Goldhagen's argument that the Germans murdered the Jews because

they were essentially fanatical anti-Semites from the beginning. (1) Such an explanation really does not explain the pre-1933 period, nor does it explain why "eliminationist" anti-Semitism vanished after 1945; (2) Goldhagen's account uses killers who were not only not "Ordinary Germans" but were not German at all, while it ignores those Germans who occasionally tried to help Jews. Bartov also provides a moving and intelligent account of Victor Klemperer as he points out Klemperer's courage and considerable power of detail as well as his dogmatic anti-Zionism and his increasingly desperate protestations of his own "Germanness," at a time when he was abandoned and ignored by the rest of Germany. Most impressive is his discussion of Holocaust consciousness in Israel, as cursed by "overexposure," and the fear that it has been manipulated to serve the interests of national identity. Bartov then goes on to discuss Stanley Milgram's famous behavioural experiment, in which subjects were told to "electrocute" people who pretended to be shocked, even to the point of death. While not rejecting the experiment altogether Bartov points out, first, Milgram's rather stunning prejudices against his poorer, female and in one spectacular case, Jewish subjects, who in general agreed to electrocute people to death. Bartov then points out that the wealthy, well educated people whom Milgram praised for not blindly following the experiment were precisely those who in Germany were more likely to support the Nazis and who staffed the key exterminationist positions. All in all, Bartov's new collection, while somewhat repetitive, is also intelligent, thoughtful and well-worth reading.

Omer Bartov, a leading scholar of the Wehrmacht and the Holocaust, provides a critical analysis of various recent ways to understand the genocidal policies of the Nazi regime and the reconstruction of German and Jewish identities in the wake of World War II. *Germany's War and the Holocaust* both deepens our understanding of a crucial period in history and serves as an invaluable introduction to the vast body of literature in the field of Holocaust studies. Drawing on his background as a military historian to probe the nature of German warfare, Bartov considers the postwar myth of army resistance to Hitler and investigates the image of Blitzkrieg as a means to glorify war, debilitate the enemy, and hide the realities of mass destruction. The author also addresses several new analyses of the roots and nature of Nazi extermination policies, including revisionist views of the concentration camps. Finally, Bartov examines some paradigmatic interpretations of the Nazi period and its aftermath: the changing American, European, and Israeli discourses on the Holocaust; Victor Klemperer's view of Nazi Germany from within; and Germany's perception of its own victimhood.

"Bartov's book . . . is among the most accessible books for the layman hoping to understand the contours of the current historiography on the Holocaust. . . . Bartov draws nuanced but crucial distinctions between wartime atrocities generally (including those of the other combatant states of the Second World War) and those that Germany committed, especially on the Eastern Front, which were, as he shows with precision, uniquely terrible. Although Bartov is an innovative military historian, in his essay on the diaries of the great German conservative, patriot, and Jew, Victor Klemperer, he also displays a subtle grasp of social and cultural developments, especially the growing, and in the end nearly total, Nazification of German society under the Third Reich." *The Atlantic Monthly* "Bartov is wise when wisdom is required, hard-hitting when scholarship is inaccurate or inadequate to truly understand the Holocaust, and open to learning from each discipline. He is firmly rooted in history, but not held back by it. He is open to new ideas and new means of presenting the Holocaust, but certainly not uncritical. These essays solidify his growing reputation." *The Forward* "Bartov has been in the forefront of historians who have debunked the myth of the innocent, professional, correct German Wehrmacht. He demonstrates that the German army in Russia violated all norms governing the rules of war." *International History* "Bartov's arguments are always interesting, sometimes brilliant. His writing is elegant. He never forgets the moral implications of the scholarly arguments he dissects with such clarity and verve." *H-German, H-Net* s "Omer Bartov is internationally recognized as a leading expert on the Holocaust. I greatly welcome this collection of his most important essays on this defining issue of the twentieth century." *Sir Ian Kershaw, Sheffield University* "From the Inside Flap" "Omer Bartov is internationally recognized as a leading expert on the Holocaust. I greatly welcome this collection of his most important essays on this defining issue of the twentieth century." --*Sir Ian Kershaw, Sheffield University* About the Author Omer Bartov is the John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History, Professor of History, and Professor of German Studies at Brown University.