



# FROM Prejudice TO GENOCIDE

**Learning about the Holocaust**

**Carrie Supple**

with a foreword by

**Revised Third Edition**

**Martin Gilbert**

Penrhyn Books

*Supple's modern classic.  
No one interested in the  
20th century can afford  
to ignore this book*

# **From Prejudice to Genocide**

## **Learning about the Holocaust**

*Carrie Supple*

Third fully revised edition



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We apologise for the occasional typographical errors in this edition of *From Prejudice to Genocide*. The author delivered her revisions accurately and all errors are due to the faulty technology of the printers.

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In April 1992, I visited the village of Amstibava in Western Belorussia, where my mother's father was born. It was not an easy trip. I believe that all the Jews there, except for one man, were murdered in 1941. The effects of finding out about the Holocaust are profound and difficult to articulate. One of them, for me, was a need for love and warmth while I was exposed to such destruction and indifference. Thanks to everyone who, by their friendship or interest sustained me, above all to my parents and brothers Dave and Tim.

During my research I met and came to know some very special people, I want to honour four of them: Esther, Harry, Liesl and Werner, whose stories are told in my book.

# **Foreword**

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This book examines the attempt by the Nazis to destroy all the Jews of Europe between 1941 and 1945. Considerable difficulty exists in explaining the origins and causes of this terrible crime. Other attempts at genocide, such as the slaughter of the Armenians at the time of the First World War, and the killing of Gypsies in the Second World War, are likewise on a scale of cruelty difficult to understand, even for adults.

Carrie Supple has sought in this book to make these terrifying aspects of recent history clear and explicable to students and teachers alike. She gives them a detailed account of the nature of what is now known as the Holocaust: the mass murder of six million people who were killed, for no other reason than because they were born Jewish.

The evidence that Carrie Supple presents, and the questions she poses, will provoke considerable thought and help students more easily understand what Churchill referred to as 'probably the greatest and most horrible crime in the whole history of the world'.

In raising wider issues such as racism and obedience, Carrie Supple has also brought the relevance of the events of half a century ago into the context of the contemporary world, and raises the issue of the involvement of people in the continuing human tragedies of our time in many parts of the globe.

**Martin Gilbert**  
Merton College, Oxford  
*September 1992*



## **Preface**

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This is a different world from 1988-1993, when I originally wrote *From Prejudice to Genocide*. The Holocaust is now an established part of the national curriculum in England. Although still only a small part of a unit on the second World War and often taught in a superficial way, there is more support for teachers and students. An important new travelling exhibition, 'Anne Frank and You' launched in June 2005, emphasises how the Holocaust links with issues of the 21st century and the pressing concerns of young people.

Inevitably, there have been new atrocities since the first edition of this book — too many to describe. The Rwandan genocide of 1994, about which I, like most people, did nothing. The slaughter of up to 8,000 Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995. And the campaign of genocide in Darfur in Sudan since 2002, which has left an estimated 300,000 dead and at least two million displaced. This catastrophe has stirred many of us to lobby those who had and still have the power to intervene for good there. I was dismayed that my book has an entire chapter on International Responses to the Holocaust yet I felt impotent in the face of another killing field. And who even talks of the 4 million people killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998?

Reactions to the mass murder on September 11 2001 heightened the fact that so many other deaths go unremarked. The wars which followed, in Afghanistan, in Iraq and 'on terror', especially since it has come so close to home, have led us to re-think words we use so freely, such as democracy, liberty, justice and power.

The obscene carnage wrought by terrorists and governments have had a devastating effect on international and communal relations. There is alarm, disquiet and backlash in the face of extremism and intolerance. We need wisdom and the time to debate these new challenges as we negotiate how on earth to preserve what is precious about sharing this land and the ties that hold us together, from the uninhibited of Newcastle's Bigg Market to the *niqabs* of Bradford.

For the world is run by those who turn up.

To Make Poverty History Campaign demonstrates the potential for positive mass action by people of all ages and backgrounds. The inclusion of citizenship education as a statutory subject for secondary schools enables all these urgent issues to be discussed by students. We can but try to nurture the instinct to act collectively, have courage and choose not to be indifferent.

Through Youth Act at the Citizenship Foundation, I support outstanding young people and adults who want to improve their communities. I am much influenced by the words of Margaret Mead: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has'.

The annual Holocaust Memorial Day has provided opportunities to reflect on how prejudice can lead to genocide in far too many ways. So maybe there is less complacency now and Primo Levi's haunting words will, if they are taught well enough, at least be heeded:

There is no rationality in the Nazi hatred ... It is a poison fruit ... We cannot understand it but we can and must understand from where it springs and we must be on our guard.

November 2006



## PREFACE

- Who are the people being arrested?
- Which country are they in?
- When did this happen?
- Why are they being arrested?
- Who is arresting them?
- Where are they going?
- Why did it happen?

Are there any other questions you would ask about the picture opposite?

There is a long tradition in world history of regarding certain groups of people as less than human. Racism\*, prejudice and discrimination have led to persecution and murder, and sometimes even to attempts at genocide.

But never before had there been an attempt to kill every man, woman, child and baby of a particular group of people in this way — with factories built for the killing and plans to make use of the hair, skin and gold teeth of the dead. Never, until the Holocaust.

Today, most people define the Holocaust as the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their helpers during the Second World War (1939-1945). Death camps were specially built for the murder of Jews. But there were thousands of other people gassed and burned with them, including half a million Gypsies.

Millions of Soviet prisoners-of-war suffered on a terrible scale, most left to starve and freeze to death in vast barbed wire enclosures. Poles, communists, trade unionists, gays, disabled people, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics and anti-Nazis from all over Europe were also considered 'unworthy of life'.

The numbers are beyond comprehension. We can perhaps only begin to imagine something of what they experienced by hearing the voices of individuals who lived and died through those times.

*From Prejudice to Genocide* combines an historical account with themes and questions which encourage students to think about the events described in relation to their own lives and choices. It provides a wide range of written and visual sources, many of them original, such as translations of interviews with ex-SS men, applications for immigration to the UK and USA, and the memories of a British woman who was a guard at the Belsen trials. Every chapter contains the words and pictures of named individuals, including perpetrators, victims, collaborators, 'bystanders', resistance workers and rescuers. The stories of four survivors: Esther Brunstein, Werner Mayer, Harry Nahelsztajn and Liesl Silverstone are included in the book. They speak of their lives before, during and after the Holocaust in the video *Where Shall We Go?* (see p.303).

\* Certain concepts are explained in the text, but a Glossary on pages 293-295 clarifies some of terms relating specifically to the period.

Research for this book began in January 1988 and involved consultation with educationalists in Britain, Germany, Austria, Holland, the USA and Israel.

The text and tasks have been written to fulfil the requirements of GCSE and the National Curriculum History attainment targets, with specific reference to Key Stage Three Core Study Unit, *The Era of the Second World War*. It includes sources and questions relating to the study of English, Citizenship, RE, Personal and Social Education and Social Studies. Guidelines on p.300-1 include suggestions for implementing key skills, dimensions and themes of the National Curriculum. Having been entirely left out of the original proposals, the Holocaust now forms a part of a larger topic, using the flexibility which will inevitably emerge, and with staff ingenuity, time can be made for in-depth and cross-curricular study.

The book is written for use in the classroom or for staff reference and has been widely tested by pupils in the 13-18 age range and staff of all the above disciplines. It is born out of frustration with the textbooks which cover the Holocaust in half a page accompanied by a photograph of corpses.

We cannot begin to understand the origins of the Holocaust without reflecting on Europe at the turn of this century, in particular the position of Jewish people in European society. And to understand that, we need to look back at least four hundred years, if not three thousand. You can be sure about very few things in history. But you *can* be sure that the Holocaust did not happen simply because 'the Germans hated the Jews' or because 'Hitler was mad'. The story is much, much more complicated than that.

We need to know what motivated those who planned the Holocaust and those who carried it out. Although it was called the Nazi Holocaust, they could never have achieved it alone. Nazis were nowhere in the majority. So why did so many ordinary people, from France to Russia, make the Nazis' genocidal plans easier? What about those who knew what was happening, hated it, but did nothing to prevent it? What made their neighbour risk her or his own life by becoming a rescuer of victims of the Nazis? And how did the victims respond to being hunted, herded and wrenched from family and friends?

The Holocaust is part of the history of not just these people nor, as many think, of Jewish history. The Holocaust is part of the history of humankind. As such it should be part of the education of all children.

*Note: The letters CE and BCE which appear after dates in this book denote Common Era and Before the Common Era. They refer to the period starting in AD1, as the Christian Era.*