

# **To Remember or Not? The Memory of the Holocaust as a Part of World War II Memory**

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## **1. Is the memory about the Holocaust a part of the war memory or not?**

There is no one answer of this question. The Holocaust is perceived as a part of WWII not in all countries. Thus, for example, in Israel it is seen as a part of Jewish history, a continuum of antisemitic persecution, and it provides a moral justification for the creation of the state. In Germany the Holocaust is considered to be a part of German history. In the post-Soviet countries and in Poland the Holocaust is understood as a part of WWII, though in most post-Soviet countries the word “Holocaust” is not widely used. In the United States the Holocaust is also considered to be a part of WWII, but now it is put in a broader historical context including racism, violation of human rights, and involvement of other victims of the Nazis (Gypsies, handicapped, homosexuals, etc.). So there exist several reasons to think that the memory about the Holocaust is a part of WWII and it is possible to examine it this way.

## **2. Different Memory**

Memory about WWII was changing in different periods of time, in different historical and political conditions (immediately after the war, during the Cold War and after it, etc.). Especially striking changes we can find in the post-Soviet period. J. Wertsch was just speaking about repairing narratives about WWII in Russian textbooks. As the analysis of Ukrainian textbooks shows (E. Ivanova, 2000), besides the repairing in some textbooks on the history of Ukraine the whole narrative about WWII has been changed in comparison with the Soviet version. According to a new narrative it appeared that though the Soviet Union gain the victory over the Nazi Germany, Ukraine did not achieve its main goal: it did not win its independence.

As it was shown in James Young’s works (1988), the memory about the Holocaust was also changing both in different countries (Germany, Israel, USA, USSR and others) and in different periods of time.

## **3. History or Memory in the Textbooks**

One of the official sources of information about the historical events and of the official memory are the textbooks (J. Wertsch, 2002). In many cases, especially for students, they provide a schema that can be used for organizing forthcoming information. I will focus my analysis on the textbooks of post-Soviet Ukraine and the US, namely on the way the Holocaust is treated in them.

Before analyzing Ukrainian textbooks the situation with the treatment of the Holocaust in the Soviet textbooks should be mentioned. In the Soviet times the textbooks that were used by students were the same in all Soviet republics and the topic of the execution of

Jews was a blank spot in them. Either it was not mentioned at all, or the authors used some euphemisms like “Many peaceful Soviet citizens were killed” instead of writing “Many Jews were killed”. Or in some cases it was mentioned that many Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews and others were killed during the war.

After the break up of the Soviet Union the situation in post-Soviet countries with teaching and textbooks changed and became different. Now Ukraine has its own textbooks in history, and has two subjects dealing with history, namely “The History of Ukraine” and “The World History” and several textbooks in each subject.

In the US there is no national textbook selection system. At the elementary and secondary levels there are two approaches: state adoption systems and local school district option systems. Twenty-two states have a state adoption system. In this system the textbooks that are used should be approved by the state’s Department of Education. In the local option system a school district has the complete choice of textbooks. The state adoptive systems also vary considerably. In some states the adoption is simply a list of titles approved or recommended for local school use. In other states a particular title is selected for use throughout the state. There are some other differences in the selection and usage of the textbooks (for example, the same topic can be met in the textbooks on different subjects, etc), which cause a lot of complications for the analysis.

#### **4. How the Holocaust is presented in the textbooks of each country?**

##### ***Ukraine***

Ukraine was one of the sites of the Holocaust, a place of mass killing almost 2 million of Ukrainian Jews. So it seems that all these events both on European and native scale should find the reflection in the historical textbooks.

But the coverage of the Holocaust in the post-Soviet Ukrainian textbooks almost did not change in comparison with the Soviet times. Thus, in the textbook on the history of Ukraine we can read about the Holocaust only the following: “During 103 weeks of occupation people of different nationalities, mainly Jews were killed each Tuesday and Friday in Baby Yar in Kiev. Every large city in Ukraine had its own “Baby Yar”.

Altogether 850 000 Jews became the victims of the Nazis in the first months of occupation” (Turchenko et al. *New History of Ukraine. Part 2: 1939-2001*. Kiev, 2001, p.297). This is a part of the section about the “New Nazi Order”. Nothing more connected with the Jews is mentioned, the word “Holocaust” is not mentioned either.

In the textbook of other authors we can read the following: “Horrible in its cruelty, scale and consequences was the campaign of destruction of Jewish citizens. If in the Western Europe such action were carried out secretly, not before somebody’s eyes, mainly in special “death camps”, in Ukraine, in a back seat of Europe, the Nazis did not stand upon ceremony, and thousands of people were executed directly, as on the stage” (Kul’chitsky et al. *History of Ukraine. A textbook for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade*. Kiev: Osvita Press, 1998, p. 232) (in Ukrainian).

The textbook on the world history partially replicates Soviet textbooks: “On the occupied territories fascists established death camps and concentration camps, thousand

of prisons and ghettos. Savage reprisal with local population has been carried out. Only in Baby Yar occupants executed 195 thousand people” (World History. 1939-1997. Ed. by Berdichevsky Y. A textbook for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Zaporozh’e: Prem’er Press, 1998, p. 39). The Jews here are not mentioned at all!

In the same textbook the Nazi policy is explained in the following way: “The “New order” envisaged carrying out a special race policy. The victims of this policy became Jews, Gypsies, and then Slavic population of the Eastern Europe. In 1942 German leaders made a decision about the beginning of physical destruction of all Jews in Europe. “The death industry” and concentration camps started on its territory, Auschwitz , Maidanek, Treblinka in Poland; Dahau, Bukhenvald in Germany, Mauthauzen in Austria. Prisoners of war, civil population, participants of the Resistance Movement languished in captivity there. Altogether 18 million of people appeared in the camps, 12 million of which were executed” (p.40-41).

Thus, the Holocaust as a total event that had its causes, ideology, stages, and program is not mentioned at all, not speaking about anti-Semitism, perpetrators, direct executors, those who helped them, etc. There is no integral narrative about the Holocaust, and what students can understand about it from such textbooks and remember is that during the war many people were killed, the Jews among them.

### *The USA*

The subject for the analysis:

A. The textbooks since 1942 until 1962, which differ in their coverage of the extermination of Jews. I analyzed eight textbooks, mostly in history.

The oldest analyzed textbook was “Story of Civilization” published in 1942. In the section “New World of Today” authors describe establishing Nazi State in Germany and Hitler as its leader. Certainly there is no mentioning the “Holocaust” because in 1942 this historical event was just in its developing and the word “Holocaust” in the meaning of extermination of Jews during WWII appeared considerably later (in the early 60s. The Barnhart Dictionary of New English Since 1963 introduces the “holocaust” as the destruction of European Jewry in World War II”). But the authors give such a picture of events that does not contradict contemporary view of them. Thus, they write:

“Once in power, Hitler and his party proceeded to “unify” the German people in thought and action... To achieve this object, all political parties except the National Socialists were disbanded and outlawed, ..., freedom of the press and of teaching was suppressed, and full rights of citizenship were denied to Jews and others not regarded as of true German or “Aryan” descent. Many Communists, Socialists, and Jews were deprived of their property, confined in concentration camps or executed. Many of the foremost German writers and scholars, including Albert Einstein, the world’s famous mathematician, were forced to exile. The newspapers, schools and universities, and the publishers of books were strictly supervised by the Ministry of Propaganda. No criticism of the government was permitted. These were some measures employed to create a “like-minded and like-acting Germany” (p.821).

So this abstract shows that not only the fact of prosecution was known in the US but also the existence of concentration camps and extermination of Jews. Some people in the 40s and the 50s tried to deny it and thus to explain inactivity of the American government and public opinion in the years of the war.

In the textbook “Geography of Europe, Asia, Africa with Geography and World War II” published in 1945 the picture is rather different. The author describes Hitler and his plans and notices the following:

“Many of those who objected to the Nazi plans were sent to concentration camps and kept behind high barbed-wire fences. Many of those who spoke or wrote against Hitler were killed in the night by members of the Nazi party” (p. S.3).

There is no mentioning the Jews at all. They appear in the section “Poland” which begins with the words: “Hitler hated the Poles especially” (p. S.39). And then it is written:

“Hundred of thousands of Jews and Poles were massacred by the cruel Nazis. They even murdered teachers, to make the Poles a leaderless people, without education” (p. S.40).

Certainly it is impossible to understand anything from this poor information, neither about Jews, nor about the Poles, not speaking about the Holocaust or WWII.

In the “World History” of 1947 we can read that “Toward the Jews Hitler felt a deadly hatred”. The authors count those rights which the Jews were deprived of and mention the limitation in training and profession. They tell that anti-Semitism was common for many countries of Central Europe but especially for Germany. In this textbook there is no mentioning that Jews were executed.

In the textbook of 1948 “Europe in Our Time” the author examines the situation with Jews in Poland and rise of anti-Semitism there, influenced also by anti-Semitism in Germany:

“The Jews were declared to be the originators of Marxism, more particularly of the Social Democratic Party in Germany and of Bolshevism in Russia. They were held responsible for the occupation of the Ruhr, the inflation – in short, for all the evils of state and society. Nazi propaganda endlessly repeated such absurdities as that of a supposed international Jewish conspiracy to bleed Germany to death financially. Thus anti-Semitism was deeply sown and furiously cultivated in the minds of millions” (pp. 321-322).

The author introduces the idea of “cleansing” (p. 327) but did not write about concentration camps and execution on the territory of Poland, not speaking about the situation with the survivors in Poland after the war.

In an another textbook published in the same 1948 but by another author, Henry Elson, there is no mentioning either extermination of Jews or anti-Semitism at all. The author considers that

“The most shocking feature of this war was the atrocities in the German camps, where thousand of murders were committed; such barbarities were due to the criminal war leaders, better known as Gestapo, Nazi or SS guards, rather than German people. ... Soon after the German surrender many of the war leaders were captured and put on trial at

Nuremberg, Germany... At least a dozen of Hitler's leading henchmen were put to death" (p. 723 h).

From this narrative it is impossible to understand what were those atrocities, who were the victims and who committed crimes, why those crimes were committed, etc. All these questions remain without any answer. Besides, the author zealously avoids any mention of the Jews in general.

Examples of the distortion of historical events we can find in the textbooks of 1949. Thus, the textbook "Across the Ages. The Story of Man's Progress" of 1949 has a section "Man, the Organizer". Hitler is one of the heroes of this section. The author writes that after his rise to power Hitler destroyed the German republic and democracy in Germany. "Hating the communists, the Nazis cruelly persecuted many members belonging to that party, especially the Jews" (p.682). It is very clear from this paragraph, that Hitler persecuted those Jews who were the members of the Communist party, that is his ideological enemies but not mostly innocent people who had nothing to do with any ideology. According to this narrative Hitler wanted to establish his dictatorship and Germany for Germans.

"His plans came to naught when the United Nations defeated the Nazi forces in 1945... He [Hitler] conducted a purge of Germans who disagreed with him, during which many Jews were killed, imprisoned, or forced to flee because their names were listed as disturbers" (p.683).

The conclusion that can be drawn from it is that those Jews who were the disturbers were really treated badly; they were forced to flee, were imprisoned, or were even killed. So Hitler was cruel to his opponents, the Jews among them. It is impossible to understand from this text either scale, or causes and totality of the event.

Another book of 1949 is "Story of Nations" and it tells how Germany accepted Nazi doctrines. As it is mentioned there, Hitler had three main topics in his speeches to the nation: first, he denounced the Versailles Treaty, second, that Germany had to become the leading nation in the world, and third, "he attacked the Jews, many of whom held important positions in Germany, and said that they must give way to persons of pure German extraction. Hitler found it was convenient to blame the Jews for many of the problem of Germany, whether or not there was truth in the charge" (p.535).

From this narrative a curious reader cannot even divine what those Jews who had given the place for Germans had to do or how Hitler attacked the Jews and so on. Certainly the whole picture of that period has been distorted.

There is a gap in my analysis between 1949 and 1962. I did not find any access to the textbooks of that period. I can only suppose that 1961 could be a turning point for changing narratives concerning extermination of Jews in the textbooks. A change of international situation and especially Adolf Eichmann trial entailed a new treatment and new narratives about this "old story". The authors of the textbook "World History" of 1962 that will be analyzed further mention Eichmann trial and write that the part of Eichmann in anti-Semitic horrors shocked the whole world. So in this textbook in the section "Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany" the narrative tells about the genocide and the

word “genocide” is used for the first time among the analyzed textbooks. As the authors write,

“Genocide became a national policy as the Nazis attempted to exterminate the Jews” (p. 504). From the authors' point of view, it was a natural result of the anti-Semitic program. “Hitler blamed the Jews for most of Germany's ills ” (p.504). For the first time it is mentioned that the Jewish population was a minority in Germany and there were less than 1% of Jews there, so they could not be responsible for all misfortunes of Germany. The authors describe how step by step Jews were deprived of their rights, mention Nuremberg Law. As the authors write “the persecution of the Jews moved to nationwide violence in 1938” (p.505).

“Toward the end of the World War II, as the Allied troops pushed into Germany, the greatest of Nazi crimes were uncovered. In the vast concentration camps to which Jews were herded like cattle during the war, they found the gas ovens in which millions of lives have been taken, the bodies of slave laborers who had evidently starved to death, and living dead who had been tortured or used as the victims of medical experiments. When the final count was made after the war, it was clear that between 1939 and 1945 the number of Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe had slipped from 9,739,200 to 3,505,800. Thus a horrified world accused the followers of Adolf Hitler with murdering more than six million Jews” (p.505).

Certainly this narrative does not give a full account of the Holocaust (not still using this word, but using the word “genocide”). Though it shows the causes of the Holocaust, the period of pre-war oppression is described quite in details, it mentions camps and the number of executed Jews and non-Jews. Besides, the narrative is rather sympathetic towards the victims.

So we can see that the treatment of the Holocaust in American textbooks of the war and post-war period and the narratives about it did not develop in the straightforward way of giving more and more information. There are quite different narratives about it. Even in the textbook of the war period (1942) it was written about Nazis atrocities toward the Jews. So, it was known about it! It can be also an argument in the discussion whether the American public knew or not about the extermination of Jews, concentration camps, and the situation with the Jews in Europe in Nazi occupied countries. Then later on (mainly in the period of the Cold War) there appeared new narratives where the events of the Holocaust are hidden or not reflected at all. Only the change in international situation and policy both in the United States, Europe and Israel led to a revival of this topic and creation of new narratives about the Holocaust.

B. The analyses of the textbooks published in the 60s. (Friedlander, Henry. “*On the Holocaust. A Critique of the Treatment of the Holocaust in History Textbooks accompanied by an Annotated Bibliography*”, 1973). He points out that in the textbooks of the 50s and 60s the treatment of Nazism was brief, bland, superficial, and misleading. The information about the Holocaust is often submerged in other information and is spread across a number of different pages.

C. The analyses of the textbooks published in the 70s, several in the beginning of the 80s and at the end of the 60s. (Pate, Glenn. “*The Holocaust in American Textbooks*”, 1987).

All the analyzed textbooks even of the elementary level mention somehow the killing of Jews. One textbook uses the term Holocaust. No books explain why Jews were killed, name or describe camps, use the term genocide, refer to resistance, to Nuremberg trial and the role of the US.

As the author concludes, the textbooks of the secondary level used in American schools do not adequately treat the Holocaust. They are especially faulted by their lack of explanation of the causes of the events – they seem to have just simply happened. They are faulted for omitting any role of the US, especially the immigration policies.

The secondary world history texts give a better treatment than the United States history texts.

Though I should say that some of these textbooks do explain the causes of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism among them, mention the period of pre-war oppression, camps, the role of the US (though most textbooks give the impression that the Americans were unaware of the Holocaust), use the words “Holocaust” or “Genocide”.

D. The analysis of the American history textbooks and World history textbooks of the 90s was given by Kanter Leona (“Forgetting to Remember: Presenting the Holocaust in American College Social Science and History Textbooks”, 1998).

She analyzed college textbooks and showed that they give rather a detailed narrative about the Holocaust, beginning, for example, with the story of the “Night of broken glass” which presaged the violence to come. In the following pages this text recounts the story of the Holocaust including a critical analysis of the failure of the Roosevelt administration, the Congress, and the American public to respond to known atrocities being perpetuated against Jews and other undesirable populations by the Nazis. They strip away any myths about American ignorance of the concentration camps. They tell about debates in the Congress about amending US immigration laws to allow for increased Jewish immigration.

Certainly some textbooks include more information about some fragment of the Holocaust and less about others, or even do not mention some of them but the attitude to the subject and the whole narrative have been changed tremendously.

As it could be expected, the textbooks in World history give more profound and detailed account of the Holocaust than textbooks in American history. They offer a comprehensive review of the Holocaust period; take a strong moral stance against the Nazis. They also raise a wide variety of moral and ethical questions about the enthusiasm with which the Germans and other Eastern European nationals embraced, executed and celebrated “the final solution”. Besides, they are critical to democratic Western states that failed to use their power to assist millions of victims of Nazi violence.

## **5. Why the scholars were rather reluctant to write about the Holocaust and give a ground for its remembering?**

### **In the USA:**

Prior to the beginning of the 60s American Jews tended to avoid confrontation with the history of the Holocaust. Very few historical works on this topic were published in the late 40s and 50s, this topic was rarely discussed publicly. As L. Jick points out (1981), the socio-historical context of that time, namely the beginning of the Cold War,

rehabilitation of Germany as an ally of the United States, the rise of McCarthyism, the fear among the American Jews of a resurgence of anti-Semitism after the trial of the Rosenbergs did not assist in making the past that showed Jewish insecurity and vulnerability a topic of a wide public discussion. In addition, the situation of promoting heroism in Israel also was not appropriate for putting the victims in the center of some periods of the past.

In the 60s the situation began to change. Due to such events as the Eichmann trials in Jerusalem, the Civil Rights Movement in the US, the wars of 1967 and 1973 in Israel American Jews overcame their resistance to identification with the victimization of the Holocaust. Besides, a certain period of time after the end of the Holocaust passed, and survivors became able to speak about their traumas and experience. The remembrance of the Holocaust became a part of “Jewish civil religion” (L. Jick) and a part of a project of Jewish identity (P. Novick). After it there appeared a lot of articles, books, etc. on this topic, and gradually it became being reflected in the textbooks.

Speaking about the difficulties of narrating the Holocaust in the textbooks, we should keep in mind, that it was necessary to include the position of the US toward the Holocaust. And it demands a lot of efforts to acknowledge injustice of the position of the own country, especially if one identifies with it, to recognize Congressional and public opposition to assisting Jewish victims. Besides, the explanation of the causes of the Holocaust immediately raises the question of anti-Semitism, racism, Christian Church that can be rather painful for the society. The more horrible the atrocities are, the harder might be the acknowledgement of own indifference.

The analysis shows how the treatment of the Holocaust has been gradually changing. The authors of the textbooks began to speak about the role of the US in the events connected with the Holocaust, about being bystanders, discuss the necessity (or not) of bombing Auschwitz, restrictive immigration rules that remained immutable not only before and during the war but three years after it ended and other painful fragments of the history. So, the textbooks present narratives about the Holocaust, its causes, main atrocities and their evaluation, and consequences of it for the world and national history.

### **In Ukraine:**

Ukraine was one of the sites of the Holocaust, the place of mass killing the Jews, destructions of the towns where they lived, selection them and sending to slave labor and concentration camps. It seems that these pages of the Second World War should be described here in detail. It was not done in the Soviet times. From my point of view, the main reason of it was state anti-Semitism and the overt anti-Semitic policy of the Soviet state after the war. But it has not been done now, in post-Soviet times when state anti-Semitism seems to be gone. So what are the reasons of this silence and non-remembering?

New Ukrainian textbooks changed their narratives about the national history in terms of underlining own struggle for independence. The Holocaust is not a part of this struggle, so there is a tendency to remain the reflection of this part of the history according to the Soviet traditions, may be only with some details that do not change the whole narrative itself. As J. Wertsch names it, just repairing the old narrative. Certainly, the Holocaust

does not fit at all the Soviet (or now Russian) narrative about WWII created on the basis of the "triumph-over-alien-forces" schematic narrative template (J. Wertsch, 2002). I suppose that there are other reasons of silence. First, it is true that some people in Ukraine helped the Jews and rescued them. But it is also true that some Ukrainians helped the Nazis during their actions of mass killing, and killed Jews themselves, and readily betrayed Jews to Germans, either because of economical or anti-Semitic reasons. Now, in post-Soviet times, it is easier to recognize the sins and fault of the Soviet Union but it is much more difficult to recognize the involvement of the own ancestors and fellow-citizens to this crime. It is necessary to acknowledge not only being bystanders, but the direct involvement of a number of people in the actions against the Jews. Secondly, the years of state anti-Semitism left traces in people's minds and everyday anti-Semitism does exist in Ukraine now. One of my researches shows it quite clear. The recognition of these facts, and moreover, the moral responsibility demands time, courage and rethinking of the past. It has been already done in Germany and in the United States; hopefully it will be done in Ukraine, too.

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