

Dr. Raul Hilberg (1926-2007)

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This is a brief tribute to the life and work of Raul Hilberg, who died on August 4th. Dr. Hilberg was, at his death, professor *emeritus* of political science at the University of Vermont and author of numerous books. His first and perhaps most important book is the monumental THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWS, now available in its third edition.¹

For many years following his military service in World War II, Raul Hilberg was, as a student and United States government employee, among the first serious readers and scholars of the documentary record that Justice Robert H. Jackson and his colleagues gathered, developed, presented and preserved through their work at Nuremberg during 1945-46. Hilberg's resulting product, THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWS, first saw print, with difficulty, in 1961. It inaugurated the field of Holocaust studies and made that topic, in scholarship and, in time, in general public knowledge, a central, enduring and undeniable aspect of Nuremberg's legacy.

On July 26, 1946, Justice Jackson gave his summation to the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. In that historic, memorably eloquent speech, Jackson described some of the overwhelming record of documentary evidence that had been presented during the trial.² He

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For a selected archive of Jackson List postings, see my homepage at www.law.stjohns.edu. To subscribe, send a note to barrettj@stjohns.edu.

¹ See RAUL HILBERG, THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWS (New Haven: Yale University Press, 3d ed., 3 vols., 2003).

² In his summation, which immediately followed Jackson's, British chief prosecutor Hartley Shawcross gave this description of the documentary evidence at the Nuremberg trial:

Within the space of a year, evidence far exceeding that previously presented to any tribunal in history has been collected, sifted, and placed before you. Almost all of that evidence consists of the captured records and documents of the government to which these men [the defendants] belonged, and much of it directly implicates each one of them with knowledge of and participation in one or other aspect of the crimes committed by the Nazi State. This evidence has not been refuted and it will remain forever to confront those who may hereafter seek to excuse or mitigate that which has been done.

recognized, however, that he was giving a speech with time limits, and that his task as the chief prosecutor of the former Nazi leaders was concluding. He was, Justice Jackson said explicitly in that summation just days before his return to the United States and Supreme Court work, “leav[ing] it to experts to comb the evidence and write volumes on their specialties....”³

With regard to the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg took up, majestically, that challenge and responsibility. You can learn more about Dr. Hilberg in published obituaries,⁴ and in his very engaging, candid 1996 memoir, *THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: THE JOURNEY OF A HOLOCAUST HISTORIAN*.⁵

XIX TRIAL OF THE MAJOR WAR CRIMINALS BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL, NUREMBERG, 14 NOVEMBER 1945 - 1 OCTOBER 1946 (“The Blue Set”) at 434 (proceedings of July 26, 1946).

³ *Id.* at 400.

⁴ See, e.g., Douglas Martin, *Raul Hilberg, 81, Historian Who Wrote of the Holocaust as a Bureaucracy, Dies*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 7, 2007; Elaine Woo, *Raul Hilberg, The “Dean of Holocaust Studies,” Dies at 81*, L.A. TIMES, Aug. 7, 2007; *Historian Traced Apparatus of Murder*, THE AUSTRALIAN, Aug. 9, 2007, at 11.

⁵ RAUL HILBERG, *THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: THE JOURNEY OF A HOLOCAUST HISTORIAN* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996).