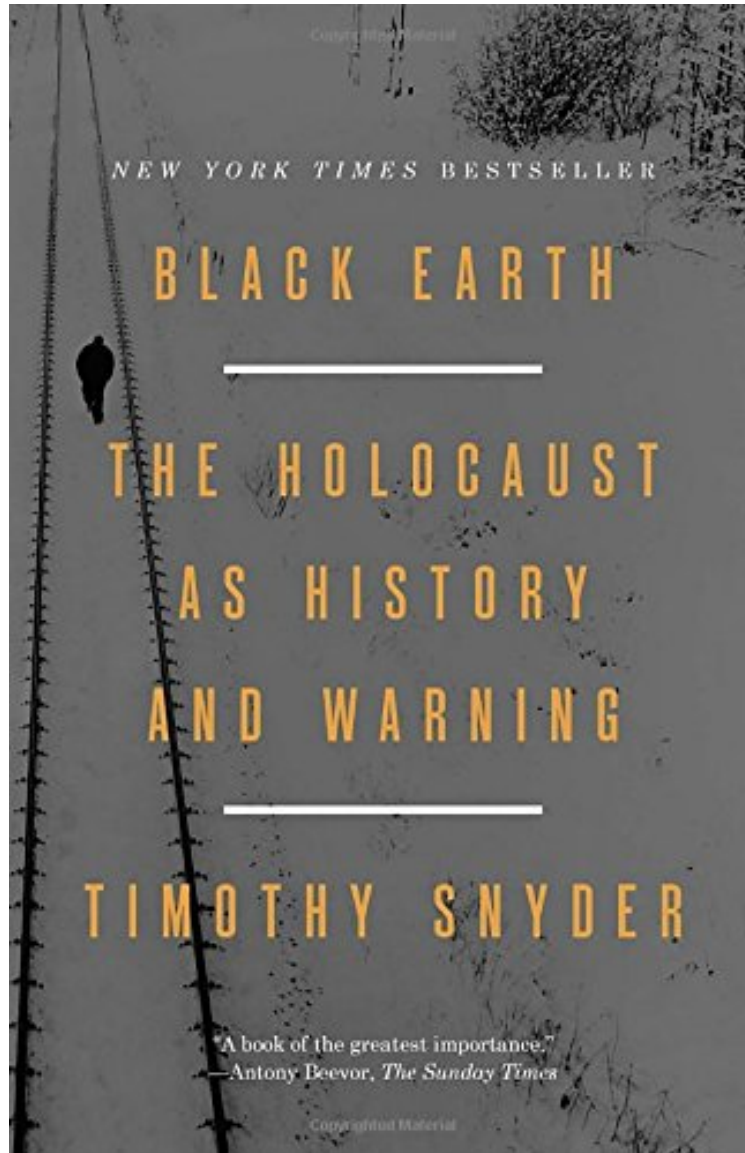


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## Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning

Timothy Snyder

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#75062 in Books Timothy Snyder 2016-09-06 2016-09-06 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.97 x 1.24 x 5.131, .81 #File Name: 1101903473480 pages Black Earth The Holocaust as History and Warning | File size: 66.Mb

**Timothy Snyder : Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning:

67 of 69 people found the following review helpful. For Informed Readers Only By Dutchman I am a Holocaust survivor and read voraciously on the topic. This book absolutely requires a solid background on the history, because

Snyder's analysis, while interesting, at times takes some flights of fancy and rejects the more widespread and accepted theories of the "Final Solution." If this is a first in-depth read on the Shoah, it would be a poor choice indeed. But for informed readers, Snyder makes some very interesting points and observations which can be profitably filtered through more conventional interpretations. One of his major threads is that the destruction of nation states by both the Nazis and the Soviet Union, such as Poland, Latvia and Estonia---anti-Semitic as they certainly were--deprived the Jews of any protection offered by even the minimal formerly existing laws, and thus, in stateless, and lawless societies, the path to mass murder was paved. Definitely not a basic text, but worth reading and thinking about.

152 of 169 people found the following review helpful. An original and nuanced contribution to Holocaust history

By Ashutosh S. Jogalekar

Every time there's a new upcoming book on the Holocaust one is compelled to ask what could be different about it. While no amount of literature on this unspeakable tragedy can suffice to truly allow us to comprehend it, it's worth asking whether we can potentially learn new insights about it that could lead to understanding and wisdom. Fortunately historian Timothy Snyder's book answers this question with a resounding yes. Snyder has produced an original and nuanced interpretation of the Holocaust that goes beyond almost every single simplistic and overarching belief that we may harbor about it. It is a valuable addition even to the vast literature on the topic.

The principal argument of Snyder's book is that the Holocaust was made possible by the obliteration of the identity of the state in various countries. While it wouldn't have been possible without Hitler's murderous racial beliefs, it would have been far more difficult to implement had not the right political conditions existed in the various countries which the Nazis conquered. Where the state retained its prewar political, bureaucratic and legal machinery far fewer Jews were killed; where it did not Jews saw almost complete obliteration of their communities. And it is this emphasis on the state as the enabler or disabler of the Holocaust that leads Snyder to see both disturbing complicity and hope in human nature. This is because the state is yours; it is not foreign. Your own state abandoning you is far damner than any kind of foreign invasion.

The key role that the preservation or destruction of the state played in saving the lives of Jews is apparent in the fact that the vast majority of Jews including German Jews - were killed by the Nazis in stateless zones. These zones were either actively created by them or already existed in Eastern European nations because of previous Soviet occupation. Where the Soviets had already caused destruction of the state the Nazis found a pliable population that was more willing to aid them in identifying, deporting and murdering Jews. This non-Jewish population was motivated in many cases by simple greed or a yearning to return to a more affluent way of life by encroaching on Jewish assets or Jewish property, and they could act out their unsavory desires precisely because no state existed to intervene. The removal of the Jews removed competition and made it convenient for them to climb a social and economic ladder that was previously inaccessible to them. Resentment against the Soviet Union further fueled their complicity. That's the disturbing part: the fact that human nature can cause ordinary people to engage in misdeeds for very human and practical reasons.

One of the outstanding features of Snyder's book is the set of comparisons that he uses to illustrate his principal hypothesis. For instance he compares Estonia to Denmark and makes a convincing case that it was only the latent anti-Semitism and the double occupation of the former by first the Soviets and then the Nazis leading to the destruction of the state that made it such fertile ground for the Holocaust. In contrast, Denmark's occupation was relatively peaceful and the state stayed intact, leading to life for almost all Danish Jews. Similarly Snyder points out various forms that the state took or failed to take in countries like Latvia, Poland, Greece, Italy, Ukraine and Hungary and shows us that the destruction of Jewry in these countries was remarkably proportional to the degree to which the state and its various manifestations survived. Poland of course is the outstanding and the most horrific example of the Holocaust and this is exactly where there was a complete destruction of the state, first through the cleansing of the Polish intelligentsia by the Soviet NKVD and then through the Nazi occupation. It was Poland's status as a truly stateless zone of occupation that allowed the Nazis to construct their infamous death camps there. It was in Poland that the large numbers of Jews from almost every other country were transported and murdered, precisely because this stateless environment could completely deprive them of citizenship, language, means and finally life.

This discussion of statelessness also allows Snyder to demolish the myth of Auschwitz as somehow being the exemplary symbol of the Holocaust. First of all, the Holocaust was really initiated by the SS Einsatzgruppen death squads who fanned out into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, killing millions by shooting them over pits. The case of the Einsatzgruppen also illustrates the power of the state; in places like France where the army (an instrument of the state) had a firm hold over the population, the death squads could do lesser damage than in areas where they were the first to enter. Auschwitz came later, but while the infamous camp was undeniably instrumental in the story of the Holocaust, as Snyder points out, the vast majority of Jews were actually killed outside Auschwitz in other stateless zones. As Snyder rightly asserts, the deification of Auschwitz as the overarching symbol of the Holocaust allows us to conveniently mark it apart as a special location where humanity somehow ceased to exist, making us forget the disturbing fact that the Holocaust was largely carried out outside that location by ordinary people who were more similar to us than we think.

It is this similarity to people who we would like to conveniently think were very different from us that leads Snyder to an epilogue in which he issues a warning: while the extermination of entire races may seem like a completely alien idea to us right now, the factors motivating Hitler and those who surrounded him - a craving for Lebensraum or living space, a simple desire for agricultural and industrial resources, belief in the

perceived superiority or inferiority of people, an unshakable conviction that the currents of history must flow a certain way are still very much among us. The motivating factors of political differences, pseudoscientific reasoning, resource scarcity, and religious strife that existed in 1935 still saddle the world in 2015. While we may continue to find it very hard to comprehend the Holocaust, a recognition of its history and its legacy can certainly help us understand. The last chapters of Snyder's book are what allow us to see hope in the midst of despair. They speak of the thousands of individuals of all creeds, nationalities, economic classes and moral sensibilities who sheltered and rescued Jews from all over Europe. These peoples motivations were often as complex as human nature itself. Sometimes they were motivated by their religion, sometimes in spite of it. Sometimes simple greed played a role, and sometimes it seems to have been genuine altruism. Sometimes the driving force was childlessness (as when people adopted orphaned Jewish children), sometimes it was simple neighborliness. Sometimes the characteristics of the rescuers defied rationalization, as in the case of the German policeman who helped a Jewish family escape to America in 1938 and then later killed Jewish children in Ukraine in 1942. Interestingly the actions of these people also mirror the importance of the state; for instance it was diplomats who were successful in saving the largest numbers of Jews, often just as the countries in which they were operating were losing the last vestiges of state identity. In addition, and perhaps not surprisingly, there were stark differences in peoples behavior depending on whether they were operating under conditions of lawfulness or lawlessness. The neat classification of rescuers into good and bad is as problematic as any other binary analysis of human nature, but what's crystal clear is that people saved other people even if their actions defied reason. That's the one take-home message from the book that should stay with us. Even in the middle of a world gone mad there existed pockets of sanity and humanity that defied comprehension. And while the ordinary facets of human nature and the state which Snyder documents hopefully allow us to understand and remember, it is the sometimes incomprehensible but very real actions of the righteous few that allow us to hope. Sometimes kindness and courage cannot be explained; they simply are. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Jerzy K Brilliant and Terrifying!

A brilliant, haunting, and profoundly original portrait of the defining tragedy of our time. In this epic history of extermination and survival, Timothy Snyder presents a new explanation of the great atrocity of the twentieth century, and reveals the risks that we face in the twenty-first. Based on new sources from eastern Europe and forgotten testimonies from Jewish survivors, *Black Earth* recounts the mass murder of the Jews as an event that is still close to us, more comprehensible than we would like to think, and thus all the more terrifying. The Holocaust began in a dark but accessible place, in Hitler's mind, with the thought that the elimination of Jews would restore balance to the planet and allow Germans to win the resources they desperately needed. Such a worldview could be realized only if Germany destroyed other states, so Hitler's aim was a colonial war in Europe itself. In the zones of statelessness, almost all Jews died. A few people, the righteous few, aided them, without support from institutions. Much of the new research in this book is devoted to understanding these extraordinary individuals. The almost insurmountable difficulties they faced only confirm the dangers of state destruction and ecological panic. These men and women should be emulated, but in similar circumstances few of us would do so. By overlooking the lessons of the Holocaust, Snyder concludes, we have misunderstood modernity and endangered the future. The early twenty-first century is coming to resemble the early twentieth, as growing preoccupations with food and water accompany ideological challenges to global order. Our world is closer to Hitler's than we like to admit, and saving it requires us to see the Holocaust as it was -- and ourselves as we are. Groundbreaking, authoritative, and utterly absorbing, *Black Earth* reveals a Holocaust that is not only history but warning.

A New York Times Bestseller  
A New York Times Editors' Choice  
Selected as one of the Best Books of 2015 by The Washington Post, The Economist, and Publishers Weekly  
Finalist for the Samuel Johnson Prize  
Shortlisted for the 2016 Mark Lynton History Prize and the Council on Foreign Relations' Arthur Ross Book Award  
Praise for *Black Earth*: "Clear-eyed . . . Arresting . . . An unorthodox and provocative account . . . Snyder is admirably relentless." The New Yorker  
"Black Earth is mesmerizing . . . Remarkable . . . Gripping . . . Disturbingly vivid . . . Mr. Snyder is sometimes mordant, often shocked, always probing." The Wall Street Journal  
"Revelatory . . . Evocative . . . Most relevant today." The Atlantic  
A very fine book . . . Snyder identifies the conditions that allowed the Holocaust  
conditions our society today shares . . . He certainly couldn't be more right about our world.  
The New Republic  
An unflinching look at the Holocaust . . . Mr. Snyder is a rising public intellectual unafraid to make bold connections between past and present. The New York Times  
Snyder's historical account has a vital contemporary lesson . . . It's a testament to his intellectual and moral resources that he can so deeply contemplate this horrific past in ways that strengthen his commitment to building a future based on law, rights, and citizenship. The Washington Post  
"Black Earth elucidates human catastrophe in regions with which a Western audience needs to become familiar. The New York Times Book Review  
An impressive reassessment of the Holocaust, which steers an assured course [and] challenges readers to reassess what they think they know and believe . . . Black Earth will prove uncomfortable reading for many who hew to cherished but mythical elements of Holocaust history. The Economist  
Excellent in every

respect . . . Although I read widely about the Holocaust, I learned something new in every chapter. The multilingual Snyder has mined contemporaneous Eastern European sources that are often overlooked. Stephen Carter, Bloomberg  
In Black Earth, a book of the greatest importance, Snyder now forces us to look afresh at these monumental crimes. Written with searing intellectual honesty, his new study goes much deeper than Bloodlands in its analysis, showing how the two regimes fed off each other. Antony Beevor, The Sunday Times "Snyder is both a great historian and a lively journalist . . . If we understood the Nazi horror more clearly, we might be less susceptible to those who misremember the past to mislead us in the present. Snyder's Black Earth, like Bloodlands before it, is an indispensable contribution to that clearer understanding." Commentary Snyder writes elegant, lucid, powerful prose. He has read widely in literatures not widely read. In Black Earth he has synthesized previous work into a narrative of the Holocaust that recasts the familiar in unfamiliar terms that challenge the thinking of experts and non-experts alike. Haaretz No matter how many histories, biographies, and memoirs you may have already read, Black Earth will compel you to see the Holocaust in a wholly new and revelatory light. The Jewish Journal "Timothy Snyder is now our most distinguished historian of evil. Black Earth casts new light on old darkness. It demonstrates once and for all that the destruction of the Jews was premised on the destruction of states and the institutions of politics. I know of no other historical work on the Holocaust that is so deeply alarmed by its repercussions for the human future. This is a haunted and haunting book erudite, provocative, and unforgettable." Leon Wieseltier "In this unusual and innovative book, Timothy Snyder takes a fresh look at the intellectual origins of the Holocaust, placing Hitler's genocide firmly in the politics and diplomacy of 1930s Europe. Black Earth is required reading for anyone who cares about this difficult period of history." Anne Applebaum Timothy Snyder's bold new approach to the Holocaust links Hitler's racial worldview to the destruction of states and the quest for land and food. This insight leads to thought-provoking and disturbing conclusions for today's world. Black Earth uses the recent past's terrible inhumanity to underline an urgent need to rethink our own future." Ian Kershaw "Part history, part political theory, Black Earth is a learned and challenging reinterpretation." Henry Kissinger "Black Earth is provocative, challenging, and an important addition to our understanding of the Holocaust. As he did in Bloodlands, Timothy Snyder makes us rethink those things we were sure we already knew." Deborah Lipstadt Timothy Snyder's Black Earth is not only a powerful exposure of the horrors of the Holocaust but also a compelling dissection of the Holocaust's continuing threat. Zbigniew Brzezinski "Timothy Snyder argues, eloquently and convincingly, that the world is still susceptible to the inhuman impulses that brought about the Final Solution. This book should be read as admonition by presidents, prime ministers, and in particular by anyone who believes that the past is somehow behind us." Jeffrey Goldberg From the Hardcover edition. About the Author Timothy Snyder is the Housum Professor of History at Yale University and a member of the Committee on Conscience of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He is the author of On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century and Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin, which received the literature award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Hannah Arendt Prize, and the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding. Snyder is a frequent contributor to The New York Times and the Times Literary Supplement and a former contributing editor at The New Republic. He is a permanent fellow of the Institute for Human Sciences, serves as the faculty advisor for the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, and sits on the advisory council of the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research. He lives in New Haven, Connecticut.