



# The secular word HOLOCAUST: scholarly myths, history, and 20th century meanings<sup>1</sup>

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Rabbi Jacob: ... You say the Jews shall burn ...  
Know ye what burning is? Hath one of you,  
Scorched ever his soft flesh ... and raises not his voice  
To stop this holocaust? God! 'tis too horrible!  
Wake me, my friends, from this terrific dream.

(Emma Lazarus, 1882)

The holocaust of war, the terrors of the Ku-Klux Klan, the lies of carpet-baggers ... left the  
bewildered serf with no new watchword beyond the old cry for freedom.

(W. E. B. Du Bois, 1903)

It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body  
a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete.

(F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1925)<sup>2</sup>

*Holocaust*, strictly a sacrifice wholly destroyed by fire ... The term is now often applied to  
a catastrophe on a large scale, whether by fire or not, or to a massacre or slaughter.

(*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn, 1910/11)

Holocaust scholars, when commenting on the word “H/holocaust,” almost invariably assert that the word carries religious/sacrificial overtones, sometimes decrying these overtones and generally leaving the impression that “holocaust” had an insignificant secular history before it became the principal American-English referent to the Nazi mass murder of Jews. For example, Michael Berenbaum, writing with the authority of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, states: “The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, translates the Hebrew word *olah* as *holokauston*. The Hebrew literally means that which is offered up; it signifies a burnt offering offered whole unto the Lord. The word itself softens and falsifies the event by giving it a religious significance.” Michael Marrus writes: “The term *Holocaust* ... serves now to separate this particular massacre from other historical instances of genocide. *Holokaustos* ... comes from the third century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, signifying ‘the burnt sacrificial offering dedicated *exclusively* to God.’ ... the designation ... connoted an event of theological significance, and perhaps as well an event whose mysteries were not meant to be understood.” Omer Bartov, citing Marrus, asserts: “‘Holocaust’ is a name that provides the

event with meaning, and the meaning carries deep religious, Judeo-Christian connotations ... Holocaust means sacrifice, God, purpose.” And the Wiesenthal Center claims: “The term ‘Holocaust’—literally meaning ‘a complete burned sacrifice’—tends to suggest a sacrificial connotation to what occurred.”<sup>3</sup>

The first objective of this essay is to demonstrate that “holocaust” was in broad secular use well before World War II and that for the last 90 years or so “holocaust”—within a secular context and unmodified by religious words—has not carried any connotations of Judeo-Christian religious sacrifice. A major claim of this essay is that much of the scholarly writing on the connotations and history of the word “H/holocaust” is perniciously misleading or perniciously incorrect. Berenbaum and others, do state that our conscious and unconscious understanding of the term “H/holocaust” affects how we understand the Jewish catastrophe, or, in other words, that the term “H/holocaust” is a subtly distorting lens through which we view the tragedy. If this statement is accepted then it follows that misrepresentations of the word’s history and connotation propagated within the Holocaust Studies community have subtly influenced the historiography of the Jewish catastrophe, distorting the lens and “falsif[ying] the event.”

Central to this essay and its attempt to overturn, refresh, and broaden understandings of the past and current meanings of “H/holocaust” is the idea that the name given to an event together with the understanding of that name significantly effects the perception and understanding of the event. An experiment in the 1970s demonstrated the falsifying effects of a name on perception. Groups of 50 were shown a film of a car accident and immediately afterwards questioned about the speed of the colliding vehicles. Those asked, “About how fast were the cars going when they *smashed* each other?” gave a mean speed 30 percent higher than those asked, “About how fast were the cars going when they *hit* each other?” A week later the viewers of the film were asked if they had seen broken glass at the accident scene. About a third of those asked the “smashed” question the week before remembered having seen broken glass; those asked the “hit” question were half as likely to remember broken glass. (No broken glass was visible in the film of the accident.)<sup>4</sup>

In the opinion of this writer, the implicit denial within the Holocaust Studies community that “holocaust” had a significant secular history prior to its employment as a referent to the Nazi Judeocide helps to support the idea that “h/Holocaust” can only be legitimately applied to the Nazi killings which, in turn, supports the pernicious ahistorical idea that since other massacres require a different vocabulary, other massacres are incomparable to the Judeocide. And the repetition of the phantasm that the word “holocaust” carries “deep religious Judeo-Christian connotations” helps to mystify the destruction of European Jewry, subtly supporting a pernicious intellectual climate in which a well-regarded Holocaust historian can wonder if “the Holocaust ... [is] an event whose mysteries were ... meant to be understood.” The statements in the previous two sentences may not resonate with some readers but they are congruent with the results of the “hit” and “smashed” experiment and they do mirror statements by scholars who, while perpetuating the idea that “H/holocaust” carries “Judeo-

Christian sacrificial overtones,” deplore what they claim are the effects of those “sacrificial overtones.” For example: “To turn the Jewish genocide into a sacrifice makes it a ‘biblical’ event rather than an event of our time—a myth rather than a reality ... ‘The Holocaust’ should not be isolated, labeled as *sui generis*, the cataclysmic event, the discontinuity in history—all those things that necessarily follow when the Holocaust is seen as ‘The Holocaust.’”<sup>5</sup>

That “holocaust” was in broad secular use before the Nazi killings is fairly easily shown, but to demonstrate convincingly the absence of Judeo-Christian sacrificial connotations in such secular use requires an extensive sample of quotations. Presented below is a complete list of secular book and booklet titles containing “holocaust” published between 1900 and 1959 as per the WorldCat data base and the British Library on-line catalogue.<sup>6</sup> This list is immediately followed by 14 quotations: every use of “holocaust” in the *Palestine Post* from December 1937 through December 1938, and a small but representative sampling of later uses in the *Palestine Post*.<sup>7</sup> (The *Palestine Post* is on searchable CD-ROMs, so every use can be readily accessed. Excluded from the 1940s *Palestine Post* selections below are instances where “holocaust” denotes Jewish suffering and death.)

## I

- The Young Turks and the Truth about the Holocaust at Adna* (1913—massacre of Armenians in 1909).
- The Holocaust and other Poems* (1914—“Holocaust” in this title refers to the San Francisco earthquake and fire).
- The Holocaust in Minnesota* (1918—great forest fire).
- Fire from Holocaust to Beneficence: The Romance of Aryano and Semita* (1918—“Holocaust” refers to a volcanic eruption; Aryano tames fire).
- The Holocaust: Italy’s Struggle with the Hapsburg* (1919—the oppression of Italy in the 1800s, suffering and dying patriots).
- The Last Ditch: ... the Minnesota holocaust ...* (1920—drainage and irrigation law, inequalities, the destruction of water resources).
- The Holocaust* (1922—poem in memory of the Armenian massacres).
- The Smyrna Holocaust* (1923—destruction of Christian neighborhoods by arson; the massacre of Armenians).
- Holocaust Poems* (1944—World War II’s effects on England and the English).
- Holocaust at the Bar X* (1952—potboiler Western).
- Holocaust at Sea* (1956—account of a 1942 naval battle, the sinking of the battleship *Scharnhorst*).
- World Law or World Holocaust* (1957—address before the Oklahoma Bar Association).
- Jungle Holocaust* (date uncertain but 1950s—World War II in New Guinea).
- Holocaust!* (1959—account of a 1942 fire. A contemporary headline description: “Boston fire death toll 440; night club holocaust laid to bus boy’s lighted match”—*The New York Times*, November 30, 1942, p 1).

## II

Whosoever shall go against this decree will ... fall under the knife ... his house will be no more, his body will perish in a holocaust. (*Palestine Post*, December 24, 1937, p. 5, col. 4. Archaeologist's translation of an Egyptian inscription of 500 BCE)

... the French press is worried lest there be some connection between the bloodless holocaust of German Generals and Ambassadors and the persistent reports that Mussolini is about to intervene in Spain ... (*Palestine Post*, February 6, 1938, p 4, Col 4. On February 4, Hitler replaced Neurath at the German Foreign Ministry, removed three key ambassadors, and announced the retirement of eighteen senior generals)

For the first time since last September Japanese aeroplanes again raided Canton ... Although the damage exceeds September's holocaust, the death toll was somewhat less ... (*Palestine Post*, May 29, 1938, p 1, Col 1)

After the Haifa holocaust ... (*Palestine Post*, July 17, 1938, p 8, Col 1. Exact referent is unclear. A series of incidents in and around Haifa earlier in July resulted in about six deaths)

Yesterday was also an anniversary of destruction. It was the day on which Great Britain entered the World War 24 years ago. Since that holocaust swept over the world, it has had no real peace ... (*Palestine Post*, August 5, 1938, p 6, Col 2)

... the holocaust of 1914–18 ... (*Palestine Post*, September 11, 1938, p 8, Col 3)

... thanks to the general dread of yet another European holocaust ... [Hitler] has brought them peace with territorial aggrandisement. (*Palestine Post*, October 11, 1938, p 6, Col 2. German troops occupied part of Czechoslovakia in early October following the Munich agreement)

... the planning system of the Bolshevist regime has broken down ... The holocaust of directors and engineers shot as "wreckers" to stimulate others has brought only spasms ... (*Palestine Post*, October 27, 1938, p 3, Col 2)

We hope and pray that the holocaust will be avoided ... There will be no war unless Herr Hitler wills it. (*Palestine Post*, August 30, 1939, p 2, Col 3. Words of Arthur Greenwood, British Labour MP)

Stalingrad is the pivot ... this prolonged holocaust ... (*Palestine Post*, October 1, 1942, p 4, Col 1)

The slaughter of their manpower is immense ... the German command must soon become appalled at the holocaust. (*Palestine Post*, January 18, 1944, p 1, Col 7)

There are women ... whose household labours resounds [with] the constant ringing of crashing china and glasses ... Those glasses that escape the holocaust of housework ... (*Palestine Post*, July 26, 1946, p 8, Cols 1–2)

After the holocaust of war, with its toll of 30 million victims of whom six million were Jews ... (*Palestine Post*, March 28, 1947, p 4, Col 2)

On May 4 1947 ... 1,200 people crowded into a tent to see the cinema. Suddenly the light bulb of the projector exploded ... the holocaust, which lasted 20 brief minutes, claimed 124 lives. (*Palestine Post*, May 9, 1947, p 4, Cols 2–3)

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The range of disaster and destruction described as a “holocaust” or “the holocaust” in the above titles and citations may seem extraordinary to those who know only the word’s most common contemporary meanings. Of the seven “holocausts” in the 1938 *Palestine Post*, three refer to World War I or a future European war, but the four others refer to events that, in comparison to world war, are trivial affairs, one even a “bloodless” holocaust. And in a 1946 *Palestine Post* the word refers to the effects of clumsiness in the kitchen (“... glasses that escape the holocaust of housework ...”). No connotation of religious sacrifice seems intended in any of the above titles and quotations—all could be rewritten, without altering meaning or connotation, by replacing “holocaust” with “conflagration,” “catastrophe,” or “massacre(s).” More generally, none of the 93 secular “holocausts” from the period 1910–1950 found and recorded by this writer carries a religious connotation.<sup>8</sup> And no dictionary definition I have consulted suggests that “holocaust,” when used to mean “catastrophe,” “conflagration,” or “massacre,” carries any sense of religious sacrifice.

Part of the foundation for contemporary scholarly assertions that “holocaust” had little secular circulation in the first half of the 20th century and that the word carries Judeo-Christian religious connotations are certain false, but unchallenged, representations by Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman in a 1988 paper, a 1989 journal article, and a 1994 book chapter. According to Garber and Zuckerman’s frequently cited “Why do We Call the Holocaust ‘the Holocaust’? ...”, previous to 1950 “the primary sense of the term [holocaust]” was “religious sacrifice,” and the “Jewish thinkers and writers who first adopted the term” were aware of the “religious/sacrificial connotations” that the term carries. To support this statement Garber and Zuckerman assert: “[T]he editors of the King James Version of the Bible ... translated the Hebrew term for whole-burnt offering, the *olah* ... ‘holocaust.’ Indeed, the adoption by the King James editors of this use of the term probably played the decisive role in fixing ‘religious sacrifice’ as the primary sense of the term in English up until the mid-Twentieth Century.”<sup>9</sup> One major problem with this assertion is that the word “holocaust” is not to be found anywhere in the King James Bible. The Hebrew *olah* is translated as “burnt offering(s)” or “burnt sacrifice(s)” in the King James Bible.<sup>10</sup> A check of concordances and a sampling of representative passages show that all of the principal Protestant and Jewish English-language Bibles of the last few centuries translate *olah* as “burnt offering(s)” or some very similar expression. Thus, contrary to what Garber and Zuckerman assert, virtually no 20th century Jew or Protestant would be familiar with any biblical employment of the word “holocaust.” (It should be noted, however, that Catholic Bibles do translate *olah* as “holocaust” and thus Catholics would be familiar with the “religious sacrifice” sense of the word.)

In addition to asserting that the King James Bible uses “holocaust” as a translation of *olah*, Garber and Zuckerman claim: “[Before World War II] most often the term was ... employed to characterize a particular sort of consumption by fire: the religious sacrifice. Thus the first definition in the OED is ... ‘a whole

burnt offering'; while the second definition applies this sense of sacrifice in a more general fashion ... *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*[']s ... first definition of 'holocaust' [is] 'a sacrifice consumed by fire.'"<sup>11</sup> This statement evidences a serious misconception as to the rationale of the ordering of definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. In both, the first definition is the oldest known meaning, a meaning that today may be archaic or infrequently encountered. Generally, dictionaries published before 1950, and contemporary updates of such dictionaries, do not indicate the frequency of use of different meanings of a word. However, two American dictionaries, one published in 1927 and the other in 1947, do indicate that the most frequently used meaning of "holocaust" is "great destruction of life" or "destructive fire," and not, as Garber and Zuckerman claim, "sacrifice" and "burnt offering."<sup>12</sup> And a third dictionary, the *Thorndike Century Junior Dictionary* of 1942, which claims that its definitions derive from an examination of word usage in an extensive sampling of texts, gives no indication that "holocaust" has any religious meaning whatsoever: "holocaust: 1) complete destruction by fire, especially of animals or human beings, 2) great or wholesale destruction."

Possibly underlying some statements alleging religious overtones of "holocaust" by scholars who have not read Garber and Zuckerman is the "etymological fallacy," the belief that a word's original meaning forever conditions the "true" or "correct" sense of a word. Serious students of language have long recognized that "the original sense of words is often driven out of use by their metaphorical acceptations" (Samuel Johnson), and thus etymological knowledge is often not an aid to understanding the meaning(s) or connotation(s) of a word.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps a few examples are necessary to demonstrate the unreliability of etymology as a guide to meaning. The first meaning of "revolution" probably was "astronomical motion that returns to the point of departure," a meaning that remains in current use. An early political "revolution," the English Revolution of 1688, was seen by many contemporaries as a felicitous return to the past, the replacement of a Catholic absolutist king by a monarch similar to the Catholic's predecessor in his Protestantism and respect for Parliament.<sup>14</sup> Today, "the Revolution" can refer to very different events, but events that almost invariably are believed to constitute a radical break from some aspect of past practice rather than a return to a previous condition. Another brief word history: "halo" in early Greek referred to a "threshing floor." From medieval times, a "halo" in Christian iconography symbolized sanctity. "Halo spot" today is the name of a disease affecting oats and beans. "Catastrophe," like "halo" and "holocaust," comes from the Greek. Until the 19th century the principal meaning of "catastrophe" was the denouement of a play, a denouement that might be happy. Today, "Jewish catastrophe" as a referent to the Nazi mass murder of Jews is a readily accepted phrase despite "catastrophe" originally, and until fairly recently, referring to fictional events, fictional events that respectable audiences often applauded.

In this essay's first extensive set of quotations, Jewish "holocausts" were excluded in order to avoid confusing different issues. A second series of quotations is presented below, examples of the use of "holocaust" 1919–1949 to denote Jewish persecution and death. A frequently cited scholarly article claims that "holocaust" was first used in 1957 as a specific referent to the Nazi murders of Jews; thus the quotations from the 1940s and a statement following the quotations should surprise some readers.<sup>15</sup> In none of the quotations below does "holocaust" appear to be intended to carry any connotation of religious sacrifice.

Reports reach us regarding an appalling massacre of our people alleged to have taken place in the Ukraine ... 100,000, a figure which we doubt not is vastly exaggerated ... Even this holocaust does not stand alone, and the country traversed by the troops of KOLTCHAK and DENIKIN is said to be sodden with the blood of "pogrommed" Jews. (*Jewish Chronicle* [London], July 4, 1919, editorial, p 5, Col 2. Uppercasing exactly reproduced; Koltchak and Denikin were White Russian generals)

[Millions] are dying ... through the awful tyranny of war and a bigoted lust for Jewish blood. In this threatened holocaust of human life ... In this calamity ... (*American Hebrew*, October 31, 1919, p 582)

PROPOSE YOU WITH LEADING FRENCH AMERICAN RABBIS AND OURSELVES PROCLAIM JEWISH DAY OF MOURNING THROUGHOUT WORLD FOR HOLOCAUST SYNAGOGUES GERMANY ... (I. Herzog and J. Meir, Chief Rabbis of Palestine, to J. H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, telegram, uppcased, November 16, 1938)<sup>16</sup>

The inflammatory fever which has been consuming Germany in recent years threatens a holocaust, a wholesale incineration ... The progress of the sickness can be examined in several books ... [o]ne is Mr. Warburg's account of racial persecution [of Jews] ... one of the grimmest records of inhumanity ever written. (*London Times Literary Supplement*, August 26, 1939, editorial, p 503, Col 2)

BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST. (*The American Hebrew*, October 3, 1941, front cover—uppcase caption below a photograph of two men carrying Torah scrolls through a gate topped by a Mogen David. One of the men is wearing a tallith, the other is dressed in a French uniform)

HOLOCAUST: Hitler has familiarized the world with brutality and terror ... But nothing ... is comparable to his treatment of the Jews ... more than half of Poland's three and a half million Jews have already been done to death ... Reprisals are out of the question ... We can make it plain ... those ... responsible ... for cold blooded calculated mass murders will be brought strictly to account. (*News Chronicle* [London], 5 December 1942, editorial preceded by uppcased title, "HOLOCAUST," p 2, Col 2)

... a time of great tragedy for our people ... for those who will survive this holocaust ... [we] must go forward ... (Chaim Weizmann, letter to I. Goldstein, December 24, 1942)<sup>17</sup>

The Jewish people are today undergoing a process of decimation which has no parallel in history. Is it too much to expect that those who succeeded in escaping from the holocaust should not be condemned to the same process, even though the agency of death may not be the asphyxiation chamber of Poland ... (*Palestine Post*, June 21, 1944, editorial, p 4, Col 1)

What sheer folly to attempt to rebuild any kind of Jewish life [in Europe] after the holocaust of the last twelve years! (Z. Shuster, *Commentary*, December 1945, p 10)

[A]fter the holocaust of the last few years the Jews ... have the right to expect sympathy ... (Issac Deutscher, *The Economist*, January 12, 1946, p 45, Col 2—unsigned in the *The Economist* but reprinted in Deutscher's *The Non-Jewish Jew*, p 86)

Resolution on the Jewish People ... These six million dead are beyond tears. But the survivors of that holocaust of anti-Semitism have a special claim on the conscience of democratic mankind ... (Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, 1946)<sup>18</sup>

Other nations are liberated and can rebuild their ruins, but the survivors of our holocaust languish without liberty ... (Chaim Weizmann at the 22nd Zionist Congress, *Palestine Post*, December 10, 1946, p 1, Col 3)

... in the case of Exodus 1947 ... May [the Red Cross] intervention put an end to the terrible ordeal of those survivors of the Nazi holocaust ... (*Palestine Post*, August 4, 1947, p 1, Col 3)

The Nazi holocaust which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe proved anew the urgency of the re-establishment of the Jewish state ... (Israeli Declaration of Independence, *The New York Times*, May 15, 1948, p 2, Col 3)

Franklin Littell, one of the founding fathers of what we now call “Holocaust Studies,” employed “holocaust” in a 1949 newsletter written in Germany. In 1995, Littell wrote, “I must have picked it up—as a precise reference to the Nazi genocide of the Jews—from American Jewish chaplains or from workers in the DP camps.”<sup>19</sup>

To summarize and conclude the first part of this essay before considering the employment of “holocaust” after 1948, any religious associations carried by the term “H/holocaust” today, when employed in a secular context, can only be the consequence of the nature of our understanding of the Nazi slaughters, usage of “H/holocaust” since the 1940s, and/or claims by Holocaust scholars that the word carries religious connotations. “Holocaust” cannot be assumed to carry religious or sacrificial connotations today simply because the word was first employed to denote a sacrifice wholly consumed by fire. No Protestant or Jewish translation of the Bible in 20th century use contains the word “holocaust.” Between the world wars “holocaust” was employed as a referent to a broad range of non-Jewish secular disasters and carried in this employment no religious associations. And when the word was used in 1882 by Emma Lazarus to refer to an imagined burning of Jews, in 1919 to refer to the massacres of Jews in the Ukraine, in 1939 to predict an incineration of Jews by Germans, and in the 1940s

to denote the Nazi-organized systematic slaughter of Jews, the word carried no religious overtones.

### Employment of “H/holocaust” at Yad Vashem in the 1950s and 1960s

The principal institution of the 1950s and 1960s devoting resources to the study of the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews was Yad Vashem, established in Jerusalem in 1953. Starting in 1957 and through the period in which the term “holocaust” became the dominant English-language referent to the systematic Nazi mass murder of Jews, Yad Vashem published the only English-language journals devoted to examining the Jewish catastrophe. The use of “holocaust” at Yad Vashem will be examined in some detail, partly because Yad Vashem’s adoption of “h/Holocaust” as *the* referent to the Nazi genocide of Jews presumably heavily influenced general Israeli-English usage, and this usage, together with the direct dissemination of Yad Vashem usage, contributed significantly to the adoption of “H/holocaust” as *the* American referent to the Nazi genocide of Jews.

In Israeli official and academic circles, the Hebrew *shoah* has always been the primary referent to the Nazi-organized destruction of European Jewry. (In Hebrew capitalization is not possible.) The Knesset law of 1953 establishing Yad Vashem was printed in Hebrew, English, and French. The English version translates *shoah* as “Disaster,” while the French version of the Knesset law uses “l’Holocauste” on two occasions.<sup>20</sup> In the years 1953 through 1955, *shoah* at Yad Vashem was usually translated into English as “Disaster” (capitalized with few exceptions), “the Great Disaster,” “the Destruction Period,” and “the European catastrophe” (this last usually uncapitalized). In 1954, the first of Yad Vashem’s serials, *Yediot*—initially printed entirely in Hebrew except for publication information (“Remembrance Authority of the Disaster and Heroism ...”)—began publishing a few pages of English summary. In 1955 the phrase “European holocaust” appears once in this English summary as an equivalent of *shoah*.<sup>21</sup> In the 1956 numbers of *Yediot*, the phrase “Nazi holocaust” is used on eight occasions in the seven pages of English text. (For example, “... the main task of Yad Vashem in Jewish life, the preservation of the memory of those lost in the Nazi holocaust.”) In one instance in 1956, an unmodified “holocaust” follows a “Nazi holocaust.” And in another instance, “Holocaust” is employed, as it is most commonly today, capitalized and with no modifier: “... the main ceremony of the Memorial Day of the Holocaust and Jewish Heroism ...”<sup>22</sup> In no case in these early years at Yad Vashem does “h/Holocaust” appear to be intended to convey any sense of religious sacrifice.

In 1957, Yad Vashem began publication of two journals in the English language: the *Yad Vashem Bulletin* and *Yad Vashem Studies*. The first number of the *Bulletin* (April 1957) uses “holocaust” more frequently than the whole set of other terms and phrases available as English equivalents of *shoah*. On one page, in a section noting books received in the library, “the holocaust” is employed 11 times.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere in this first issue, besides additional employ-

ment of “the holocaust,” there are references to “the Nazi holocaust,” the “European holocaust,” and in a capitalized subtitle, “... the Holocaust Period.” In the second number of the *Bulletin* (December 1957), four of five articles, in a section entitled “Writings on the Disaster Period,” use the word “holocaust” in their texts. In the third number of the *Bulletin* (July 1958), the dominance of the term “holocaust” continues, but curiously, the next three issues (October 1959, June 1960, March 1961) contain very few “holocausts.” Perhaps a translator changed or the *Bulletin* editor, Nathan Eck, developed reservations about the previous adoption of “holocaust” as the primary referent to the genocide. However, from 1962, “Holocaust,” now generally capitalized, is the dominant referent in the *Bulletin* to the European Jewish disaster.

In contrast to the *Bulletin*'s copious use of “holocaust” in 1957 and 1958, the more formal and academic *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance*, in its first two years, barely used the term. “European holocaust” appears perhaps three times in the text of the first volume, and “the Holocaust,” unmodified by “European” or “Nazi,” appears three times in the text of the second volume.<sup>24</sup> The favored word for the Hitlerite Jewish catastrophe in these first volumes is “catastrophe,” usually preceded by “European.” In the third volume of *Studies* (1959) and thereafter, however, “the Holocaust,” capitalized and unmodified, is the dominant referent to the Judeocide both in texts and titles.

The adoption of “Holocaust” by *Yad Vashem* as *the* referent to the Judeocide at *Yad Vashem* does not seem to have led to a belief among *Yad Vashem* writers and editors that it was no longer appropriate to use “holocaust” in its other, more general senses, or that a modifier before “Holocaust” might not sometimes help a reader. In the 1963 *Studies*, a reviewer commented: “[S]ome Jewish researchers have subordinated themselves to political forces ... [to] the needs and temperaments of local potentates, one shudders at the nightmare of a holocaust-on-the-Holocaust.”<sup>25</sup> And an article in the April 1966 *Bulletin* is titled, “The Jewish Holocaust in Soviet Writings.”

Three early uses of the uppercased “Holocaust” at *Yad Vashem* are suggestive of the forces encouraging capitalization of the word when used as a referent to the Jewish catastrophe. On the first page of “The Holocaust in the Consciousness of Our Generation” (*Bulletin*, July 1958), “holocaust” is used eight times lowercased and only once capitalized: “... the Inquisition, for example, is not the same as the Holocaust ...” Presumably, the lowercasing of “holocaust,” contrasting with the capitalization of “Inquisition,” appeared inappropriate to an editor or translator at *Yad Vashem*; rather than lowercasing “Inquisition,” “holocaust” was capitalized. Presumably, too, if “holocaust” was seen at *Yad Vashem* as a substitute for “European catastrophe,” it would not normally be capitalized, but if substituted for the officially favored term, “Disaster,” particularly if in an ideologically significant phrase, it would be capitalized. The first capitalization of “holocaust” at *Yad Vashem*, as mentioned earlier, was in the phrase, “the Holocaust and Jewish Heroism,” in a 1956 *Yediot*. In the *Bulletin*, the first capitalization is found in what is essentially the same phrase, “the Holocaust and

the Heroism” (December 1957). Both English phrases are translations of the Hebrew *shoah ugevurah*, a key ideologically charged phrase in the Israel of the 1950s and part of Yad Vashem’s full Hebrew title.<sup>26</sup>

A brief aside on capitalization: the rules regarding capitalization of terms comparable to “holocaust” are not absolute. *The Chicago Manual of Style* states: “Most period designations ... are lowercased ... [a]ppellations of historical ... events ... are generally capitalized ... Civil Rights movement (often lowercased) ... New Deal ... cold war ... gold rush.” And jumping ahead in this biography of a word, “holocaust,” lowercased, as a specific referent to the Nazi genocide(s) was gradually replaced in American usage by the capitalized “Holocaust” in the period 1965–1985, perhaps partly as a method of indicating that the referent was the Nazi mass killing and not another destruction. In current usage, the referent of a lowercased “holocaust” is rarely the Nazi murders, while the core referent of a capitalized “Holocaust” is almost invariably the Judeocide of the Nazi camps.<sup>27</sup>

### **The French “h/Holocauste,” the Greek *holokauston*, the Hebrew *olah*, and “sacrificial holocausts”**

Partly because of the use of “l’Holocauste” in Yad Vashem’s founding documents, this may be an appropriate moment to examine briefly French secular use of “holocauste” in the 1950s, which, in turn, will lead to a consideration of the pagan referents of *holokauston* and similar words in classical Greek and of *olah* in the Bible. Presented below is a representative sample of French secular use from the period. The 1958 François Mauriac quotation below is from an appreciation of Elie Wiesel’s *La Nuit*. This quotation is a key “holocauste/holocaust” text—translated it became part of the forward/frame text of *Night*. (All italicization of “l’holocauste” below is mine.)

Dans le souci continu d’entretenir le secret, il y a lieu de voir autre chose que le desir de ne pas ébruiter un état des choses que par ailleurs les Nazis laissaient transpercer. Il y a la volonté d’entourner l’*holocauste* d’une horreur sacrée ... (Leo Poliakov, *Bréviaire De la Haine*, 1951, pp 244–245)

Bavard intarissable et qui pencherait vers le comique si, tout le temps qu[e Hitler] pérore, nous ne considérons la toile de fond, enfumée par les crématrices, par l’*holocauste* énorme, indéfiniment ravitaillé, et auquel tous les peuples d’Europe pourvoient; huit millions d’innocents ... sans compter ce que dévore la bataille. (François Mauriac, 14 Juillet 1954, *Bloc-notes*, 1993, p 189)

Le Mémorial du Martyr Juif Inconnu ... perpétuer dans le temps le souvenir de l’*holocauste* Juive sous la Croix-Gammée. (*La Revue du Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine*, January 1956, p 2)

Dieu est mort ... le Dieu d’Abraham, d’Isaac et de Jacob s’est à jamais dissipé, sous le regard de cet enfant, dans la fumée de l’*holocauste* humaine exigé par la Race, la plus goulue de toutes les idoles. (François Mauriac, *Le Figaro Littéraire*, June 7, 1958, p 4. “Cet enfant” is Wiesel)

*L'Holocauste* de Juin dans les Facultés. (*Le Figaro Littéraire*, June 28, 1958, p 1, headline. The referent is the high failure rate in the French universities' year-end exams)

It does appear that “holocauste” in the 1950s was similar to the English-language “holocaust” of the 1930s and 1940s in its broad range of possible secular referents. In the quotations presented, “holocauste” refers to the totality of deaths in World War II, the Nazi extermination of Jews, and the failures in the 1958 French university exams. Unlike any 20th century native English speaker’s coloring of “holocaust,” however, is Mauriac’s 1958 “holocauste.” Translated in 1960, Mauriac’s words became: “For him [Wiesel] ... God is dead ... the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob ... has vanished forevermore ... in the smoke of a human holocaust exacted by Race, the most voracious of all idols.” This “holocaust,” on the third page of the foreword of *Night*, is by far the best circulated “holocaust,” employed in its now rare sense of “burnt offering,” of the late 20th century, apart from translations of *olah* in Roman Catholic Bibles.

In French, there is significant use of “holocauste” in the sense of an abhorrent immolation to honor an infernal god and/or of a destruction inspired by hate, a use encountered in writings of native English speakers rarely before 1900 and not at all in the 20th century.<sup>28</sup> Voltaire wrote: “Ces abominables holocaustes s’établirent dans presque toute la terre. Pausanis prétendent que Lycaon immola le premier des victimes humaines en Grèce.” Flaubert wrote: “Les Druids ... dans leurs criminels holocaustes.” And Baudelaire wrote: “Un homme de génie, mélancolique, misanthrope ... jette un jour au feu toutes ses oeuvres encore manuscrites. Et comme on lui reprochait cet effroyable holocauste fait à la haine ...”<sup>29</sup> This now distinctive French use of “holocauste/holocaust” perhaps reflects a greater knowledge of the deep pagan roots of the word(s) than the cited scholarly commentary on the word’s etymology and overtones demonstrates.

Before *holokauston* and similar saw employment in the Septuagint, Xenophon, in a text read by virtually all students of classical Greek, employed *holokau* ... to refer to Greek pagan sacrifices. For example: “... he offered the customary holocaust [*holokautei*] of hogs” (*Anabasis*—c.365 BCE—VII, viii, 4 and 5). In relatively recent times the educated in both France and England were often as familiar with classical Greek texts as they were with the Bible and would frequently associate “sacrifice” and “holocaust”—in the sense of “whole burnt offering”—with pre-New Testament pagan practices. The “Sacrifice” article in the 1797 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* devotes three of six pages to human sacrifice and mentions in passing the Carthaginian practice of placing live children in a statue’s hands extended over a furnace (burnt sacrifices).<sup>30</sup> The one third of a column entry under “Holocaust” in the same *Encyclopaedia* refers readers to the “Sacrifice” article and states, “Sacrifices of this sort [holocausts] are often mentioned by the heathens as well as Jews...” The 30 line entry for “Holocauste” in the Diderot and D’Alembert *Encyclopédie* (1765) makes no references whatsoever to Jews or Jewish practices, only to immolations honoring “dieux infernaux” (infernal gods).

And in the Hebrew Bible, *olah*, translated in Protestant Bibles of before 1600

as “holocaust,” and represented by Berenbaum and others as meaning an offering to “the Lord,” is not necessarily an offering to the Jewish/Christian Lord but may be an immolation performed by a non-Jew in the vain hope of pleasing a pagan god. Balak, king of Moab and fearful of the Hebrew tribes, stands beside his *olah* while waiting for his favored prophet/sorcerer, Balaam, to curse the “the children of Jacob” (Numbers 23:3). Balaam, to Balak’s dismay, blesses “the children of Jacob.”

“Holocaust”, then, is a sensitive, chameleonic instrument, whose connotations are not fixed, even when employed in its original sense of “whole burnt offering,” but highly dependent on the context of employment, and subtly dependent on the nature and depth of a reader’s exposure to scholarly commentary, classical Greek texts, and the Bible. And “holocaust,” employed in the now rare sense of “burnt offering,” a meaning conveyed by an explicit religious context, in the introduction to an early and core text of Holocaust Studies, denotes not an offering “to the Lord,” but a “pagan immolation”—“exacted by Race, the most voracious of all idols.”

### Post-1948 employment of “h/Holocaust” in the USA

This essay now turns away from its investigation of the use of “holocaust/holocauste” in Israel and France to focus on American employment of “holocaust” and the social and cultural context of that employment. In the 1950s and early 1960s American Jews, with few exceptions, avoided any public engagement with the then recent mass murder of European Jews. In 1953, *The New York Times* could refer to “6,000,000 Jews allegedly killed during the Nazi regime” without fear of complaints from Jewish organizations.<sup>31</sup> And a 1955 *Commentary* review of “the only ... comprehensive account of the Jewish tragedy” made a comparison that would be unimaginable in an American Jewish magazine today: “American Jewry[’s attitude] to the great catastrophe [is similar to that] of so many decent Germans during the war. Dimly aware of the Eastern ‘death camps,’ they were yet able to close their minds to them.”<sup>32</sup> Twenty months and one short piece on the Bialystock uprising later, *Commentary* published an essay on printed memorials to destroyed communities (*yizkor*). The essayists wrote: “The few solid works published here and abroad on the Nazi *holocaust* have not found a large audience. Massacres make bitter reading.”<sup>33</sup> (All italicization of “holocaust” in this essay is mine.)

A variety of reasons account for Jewish disinterest in/avoidance of—in the 1950s and early 1960s USA—the Nazi-led mass murder. Many American Jews were bent on assimilation and felt none too secure. (“We have buried fully six million ... A *holocaust* of such dimensions is bound to make the survivors apprehensive” [1949].) And in the context of the Cold War, memories of the Rosenberg trial, and the importance of West Germany as an American ally, it was not politic for hyphenated Americans to be overly interested in German murders of Jews.<sup>34</sup> (See the next endnote for examples of American “holocausts”

1949–1960 as a referent to the Nazi Judeocide beyond the examples incorporated in this text.)<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps the desire to avoid the subject of the mass murder of European Jews discouraged the framing of the events within a single and singular name. (“Since June 1942 a special unit had been going about carefully destroying all traces of the Nazi *holocausts*” [1954].)<sup>36</sup> And certainly American writers in the 1950s used a greater variety of names and phrases to refer to the Judeocide than did writers at Yad Vashem. But with the few writings on the subject coming from disparate sources, a disparate vocabulary to describe a set of events difficult to assimilate and with little modern precedent should not surprise.

While the word “holocaust” was used only occasionally as an American appellation for the Judeocide, the word was used, starting in the late 1940s and increasingly in the 1950s, as a referent to nuclear war. An example from 1949: “... the people of the world should know the menace of atomic warfare ... while there is yet time to avoid such a holocaust.”<sup>37</sup> After Sputnik and the recognition that Soviet missiles could reach American cities, concern about nuclear war accelerated sharply. Approximately 200 entries are listed under the heading “Atomic Bombs” in the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*, March 1959–February 1961; in contrast, eight entries are listed under the heading “World War 1939–1945: Jews.” By 1961, “holocaust,” without a contextual framework and with no modifying adjectives, was a readily understood referent for nuclear warfare within American intellectual circles. *The Reporter* of August 17, 1961 titled a review of two books on nuclear war and nuclear strategy, “A Cold Look at the Holocaust.” In the October 1961 *Commentary*, Stuart Hughes spoke of “the holocaust of a day or two ... the contemplated forty million dead ...” And a 1962 *Nation* editorial on life after nuclear war was titled “Post-Holocaust Morals.”<sup>38</sup>

But “holocaust,” in the 1950s and early 1960s, was not only a referent to the feared nuclear catastrophe and the Nazi mass murders. As in the 1930s and 1940s, the word was an occasional appellation for a diverse range of massacres and disasters, though increasingly the word was applied only to massive destruction. The JSTORE data base (texts on-line of over 100 journals) yields ten 1950 “holocausts.” Three are references to World War II, two references are to the climatic death scene in Hamlet, one a reference to a future world war, one a reference to the American Civil War, and the remaining three references are either obscure or too obscure events. For 1959 the same data base yields 11 “holocausts.” Three are references to nuclear disaster, two refer to World War I, two to the American Civil War, one to events in 12th century Flanders, and two employ the words “Hitler’s/the Hitler holocaust” and are referents to the Jewish catastrophe. Two employments of “holocaust” are from outside the JSTORE data base: a 1955 translation of Augustine’s *Confessions* referred to “the wooden horse ... and the holocaust of Troy.” And in 1961, Bernard Lewis wrote of “... the terrible holocaust of 1916 when a million and [a] half Armenians perished.”<sup>39</sup>

In the early 1960s, an intellectual climate in which American Jews could be

compared in a Jewish magazine to the “decent Germans” of World War II who “close[d] their minds” to the death camps began to shift. In May 1960, Eichmann was captured, and in the fall of 1961 put on trial in Jerusalem. The trial, as intended, significantly increased awareness of the Nazi genocide of Jews and the subject began to enter mainstream American public discourse. As mentioned earlier, *The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* has eight entries under “World War 1939–1945: Jews” in its volume covering the two year period ending February 1961. The next volume, ending February 1963, has 29 entries, 11 with “Eichmann” in their titles.

In early 1963, almost a year after Eichmann’s execution and a virtual cessation of media interest in the trial and the genocide, the *New Yorker* devoted five consecutive issues to Hannah Arendt’s “Eichmann in Jerusalem.” This *New Yorker* series was the first meaningful attempt in a prestigious non-Jewish American magazine to grapple with the Nazi destruction of European Jewry. The anger that Arendt’s tone and some of her statements provoked in the Jewish community resulted in considerable discussion, speeches in synagogues, and many critical articles. In my opinion, the reaction to the Arendt articles and to Arendt’s subsequent book marks the real beginning of American Jewry’s full engagement with “Holocaust Studies.” *The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* has 37 entries under “World War 1939–1945: Jews” in its volume that ends February 1965. Five are the Arendt articles and 10 are reviews or discussions of Arendt’s work. This new willingness to engage in some serious writing and thinking about the European Jewish catastrophe was not, however, simply a reaction to Arendt’s high-profile controversial statements, but also reflected a sea change in American culture in the early 1960s. This sea change was driven and symbolized by the election of John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights movement, and student activism. Starting around 1963, particularity, ethnicity, and identification with victims was not necessarily to be hidden in middle-class America.<sup>40</sup>

The new American Jewish willingness to confront the Nazi destruction of European Jewry was paralleled by an increasing adoption of “holocaust,” modified if context did not sufficiently elucidate meaning, as *the* referent to the disaster. The concerns of this essay demand close attention to the major disseminators of the term between January 1960 and mid-1963, but it should not be forgotten that the term had been “in the air” and in occasional use by American Jews since 1941. The four most widely circulated “holocausts” (Jewish) of the period, and the first two essay titles to employ the term in well-circulated American Jewish magazines are displayed below. Documented in the endnote is employment of the term in less well-circulated American published texts during the period.<sup>41</sup>

... one of our motives in bringing Eichmann to trial is to make the details of the case known to the generation of Israelis who have grown up since the holocaust. (David Ben-Gurion, *The New York Times Magazine*, December 18, 1960, p 62)

“... Counsel Says Mercy Might Help Avert New Holocaust [from headline]”;  
 “Eichmann ... might ... serve as an instrument against any recurrence of a Nazi holocaust.”

And “[The Attorney General of Israel stated]: ‘the overwhelming majority of this country [identify] with the victims of the holocaust ...’” (*The New York Times*, March 24, 1962, p 7, Col 1)

And if the Jews outside Israel had to be shown the difference between Israeli heroism and Jewish submissive meekness, there was a complementary lesson for the Israelis; for “the generation of Israelis who have grown up since the holocaust” ... (Hanna Arendt quoting Ben-Gurion, *New Yorker*, February 16, 1963, p 42. And see n 44 for another Arendt Israeli quotation)

The Dignity of the Destroyed: Towards a Definition of the Period of the Holocaust. (Essay title: Shaul Esh, *Judaism*, 1962, p 99)

Miss Arendt Surveys the Holocaust. (Essay title: Marie Syrkin, *Jewish Frontier*, May 1963—printed on the cover of the magazine in bold letters)

These quotations and titles demonstrate significant dissemination of Israeli English usage of “holocaust” to the United States. The first of the Ben-Gurion remarks above is, to my knowledge, the first use of an unmodified “holocaust” as a referent to the Jewish catastrophe in *The New York Times*. The “New Holocaust” above is, almost certainly, the first use of “holocaust” in a 1960s *New York Times* headline.<sup>42</sup> The article was filed in Jerusalem. “Holocaust” is employed twice in the text of the article, once in what is probably an Israeli translation of German or Hebrew and once by the Israeli Attorney General. (The three pre-1960 uses of “[Nazi] holocaust” in *The New York Times* that I have found are also all quotations from Israeli sources.)<sup>43</sup> Arendt’s only uses of “holocaust” in her *New Yorker* text are quotes from Israeli sources. Arendt herself in the *New Yorker* articles uses the terms “Jewish catastrophe,” “great catastrophe,” and “Final Solution,” and not “holocaust.” Shaul Esh’s article “... Towards a Definition of the Period of the Holocaust,” was the first attempt in *Judaism* to grapple with the Jewish catastrophe. It was also the first article in an important American Jewish publication to employ “Holocaust” in a title and the first to use “h/Holocaust” as the dominant referent to the Nazi Judeocide within a text. “Holocaust,” uppercased, appears seven times in the first page of Esh’s text. Esh, an Israeli, was chief editor at Yad Vashem from 1955 to 1959 and thus a key figure in the replacement of “Disaster” by “H/holocaust” as the favored Yad Vashem and Israeli translation of “shoah.” Syrkin’s “Miss Arendt Surveys the Holocaust” title cannot be directly attributed to an Israeli source, but Syrkin, a longtime committed Zionist, had strong and important Israeli connections—she was, for example, a biographer and close friend of Golda Meir. It is doubtful that Syrkin would have used “holocaust” prominently in 1963 if her Israeli friends and acquaintances (and Yad Vashem) in the early 1960s had avoided that term and favored “D/disaster” and “catastrophe.”

Syrkin’s importance as a contributor to the establishment of “holocaust” as the primary referent in the USA to the Nazi Judeocide bears recognition. “Miss Arendt Surveys the Holocaust” (May 1963) was the first use of “Holocaust” on the cover of a well-circulated American Jewish magazine in the post-war period. Another Syrkin title, “The Literature of the Holocaust” (May 1966), was the first

use of “Holocaust” in a *Midstream* title. And Syrkin’s 1964/65 Brandeis course, “The Literature of the Holocaust,” was, I suspect, the first American university course with “holocaust” in its title.

Curiously, Elie Wiesel is occasionally credited with initiating the use of “holocaust” in the sense of the Jewish catastrophe. Wiesel himself has stated: “I am afraid I am the one who introduced the word into this framework.”<sup>44</sup> According to Wiesel and various scholars, his first “holocaust” in print appeared October 27, 1963, but, as will be seen, Wiesel’s first “holocaust” was printed in August 1963. The idea that Wiesel introduced the term is easily dismissed, but Wiesel, a writer of power and sensitivity and a key figure in the discourse on the Jewish experience in the Hitler years, certainly hastened the acceptance of “H/holocaust” as *the* appellation for the Nazi persecution and mass murder. Partly due to Garber and Zuckerman’s well-circulated claim that Wiesel adopted “holocaust” because of its “unmistakable religious/sacrificial overtones” and partly because of Wiesel’s role in disseminating the term, the cultural context in which Wiesel began to employ the word together with the triggering influences and associations that appear to have prompted Wiesel’s actual first use are germane to this essay.<sup>45</sup>

In the early 1960s, Wiesel was earning a precarious living in New York writing for an Israeli newspaper and for the Yiddish *Forward* and was beginning to be recognized as an important interpreter of the Jewish experience in Nazi-controlled Europe. By July 1963, Wiesel had read and probably heard “holocaust” used as a referent to the Jewish genocide on numerous occasions. Besides Mauriac’s use of the word in the introduction to *Night*, Wiesel could hardly have escaped seeing “holocaust” in Yad Vashem publications, Ben-Gurion’s use of “holocaust” quoted by Arendt, and the cover of the May 1963 *Jewish Frontier* on which Syrkin’s “Miss Arendt Surveys the Holocaust” essay title was boldly displayed. But Wiesel also could hardly have escaped “holocaust” used in the sense of nuclear war. And Wiesel’s first use of “holocaust,” subsequently forgotten, was immediately followed by a reference to an atomic disaster:

It has become a kind of intellectual fad to upbraid the Jews murdered in World War II for allowing themselves to be killed ... Psychologists like Bruno Bettelheim, and sociologists like Hannah Arendt, are not the only ones who have been complaining ... One finds this ... even in fiction whose theme has nothing to do with the Nazi holocaust. For example, in *Fail Safe*, the best seller about an atomic accident ... a minor character [contends that Jews] should have murdered the SS men who came to arrest them. (Elie Wiesel, *The New Leader*, August 5, 1963, p 21)<sup>46</sup>

Bettelheim’s 1961 attack on the glorification of Anne Frank in *Midstream*, an attack that Wiesel had probably read, included the words “impending holocaust,” and a key sentence in *Fail Safe*, a sentence that Wiesel had almost certainly read, ends with the words “atomic holocaust.”<sup>47</sup>

Given the context of Wiesel’s first “holocaust” and what we know of the milieu of the period, it seems that Wiesel’s first employment of “holocaust” was

driven significantly by the widespread contemporary American secular use of “holocaust” as a referent for nuclear disaster, and probably also driven by the broad use of “holocaust,” particularly in Israeli English, as a referent to the Nazi murders, but driven not at all by knowledge of biblical or theological meanings.

More generally, the adoption of “holocaust” in American Jewish circles as the primary referent to the Jewish disaster was partly driven, in my opinion, by the term’s use in the larger American culture to denote atomic warfare. Explicit comparisons between the Nazi mass murder and nuclear mass death were not uncommon in the USA of the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>48</sup> And, I suspect, even without the impetus of the previously documented dissemination of Israeli-English “holocausts,” some American Jewish writers in the 1960s wishing to better convey the horror of the Nazi slaughter would have abandoned such referents as “extermination,” “great catastrophe,” and “Jewish tragedy” in favor of that occasional 1950s referent, “holocaust,” in order to associate emotionally the Nazi Judeocide with a feared nuclear mass death.

Wiesel’s use of “H/holocaust” is a good test of whether the word in the late 20th century can or does carry theological associations in secular discourse without explicit religious modifiers. Certainly Wiesel grapples in his writing with the theological significance of the Nazi-organized genocide, “the site and occasion of [God’s] abdication,” and might have chosen a word that carried theological overtones to refer to the Judeocide had such a word been available.<sup>49</sup> Representative quotations from Wiesel are presented below. In this writer’s opinion, “destruction” or “disaster,” uppercased if appropriate, could be substituted for “H/holocaust” in any of the quotations that follow with no change in meaning or connotation.

“The experience of the holocaust in Europe defies language, and leads to a mystique of silence, or to madness itself.” And: “... a full twenty years after the holocaust ...” (October 27, 1963, *The New York Times Book Review*, pp 3, 69—Wiesel’s second and third “holocaust” in print)

And God? Where was He during those dark years? The Holocaust has had a great impact on religion ... (November 1967, Address: Union of American Hebrew Congregations)

Your entire universe is crumbling ... Yesterday’s holocaust will followed by tomorrow’s, and that one will be total! (1970, *A Beggar in Jerusalem*, p 42)

Why were the Gypsies persecuted ... exterminated? Their lot seems to me, on one level, more tragic than that of the Jews ... They are scarcely mentioned in the so-called literature of the Holocaust. An outrageous injustice ... (May 28, 1978, *Los Angeles Times: Book Review*, p 4)<sup>50</sup>

American employment of “H/holocaust” from the mid-1960s until today has been primarily driven by an extraordinary increase in interest and writing on the Nazi-orchestrated Judeocide and a decline in concern and writing on nuclear war. From the mid-1960s, books on the Jewish catastrophe began to find a ready market in the USA. Six books on the subject and with “Holocaust” in their titles were published before 1970. In September 1968, the Library of Congress created

a new category, "Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)," for material that earlier would have been categorized under such headings as "World War, 1939–1945—Jews." But an unmodified "holocaust" was not yet likely to evoke "Jewish catastrophe" outside of Jewish circles. A search of 1969 JSTOR journals yields 21 "holocausts," seven nuclear, four references to one of the World Wars or an aspect of those wars, three references to the Vietnam War, and two are references to the Jewish catastrophe. (The remainder are references to the American Civil War, to the French Revolution or are pre-1910 "holocausts" within citations of works by Zola, Hawthorne, and Stephen Crane.)

In the 1970s the Judeocide started to become of real interest within the academy. The first PhD thesis with the word "Holocaust" in its title was completed in 1972; 16 more PhD theses with the word "Holocaust" in their titles appeared before 1980. (By way of contrast, in the 1950s a graduate student exploring the possibilities of working on the Nazi period was advised by a distinguished Jewish American historian to find another topic: "No one is interested in Hitler.")<sup>51</sup> By the mid-1970s, within scholarly circles, the most frequently encountered referent of "H/holocaust" was the Jewish catastrophe, and increasingly the word, employed in this sense, was capitalized. A word search of JSTORE's 1977 journal texts yields 64 "H/holocausts." Thirty-one refer to the Jewish catastrophe; of the 31, 22 are an unmodified—except by context—"Holocaust," five an unmodified—except by context—"holocaust," and the remainder a Nazi, German, or Jewish "H/holocaust." Of the 33 non-Nazi holocausts, nine are references to nuclear destruction.

In the spring of 1978 over 100 million Americans viewed some part of NBC's mini-series titled *The Holocaust*—the screening was a major cultural event. As an immediate consequence, the capitalized and unmodified "Holocaust" became *the* recognized referent to Hitler's Judeocide in an American society newly sensitized to that tragedy. In JSTORE journals, January–June 1979, "H/holocaust" is employed 37 times. Twenty-eight of the references are to the Jewish catastrophe, and 27 of the 28 are an unmodified "the Holocaust." In 1980 *The New York Times* annual indexes abandoned "Nazi holocaust" and "Nazi Holocaust" in favor of "the Holocaust."<sup>52</sup>

A few weeks after the screening of *The Holocaust*, partly as a gesture to the American Jewish community unhappy with the intended sale of American fighter planes to Saudi Arabia, President Carter announced the American government's intention to create a memorial "to the six million who were killed in the Holocaust." Following protests by Polish-Americans and Ukrainian-Americans, who demanded that the millions of their own killed by the Nazis be recognized in any American taxpayer-supported memorial, and perhaps reflecting his own ecumenical humanism, and almost certainly influenced by Simon Wiesenthal's contemporary employment of the term, Carter in his 1979 Executive Order creating the United States Holocaust Memorial Council defined "the Holocaust" as the "... extermination of six million Jews and some five million other peoples ..." This presidential broad definition of the term was unwelcome to many Jews who feared that the extreme virulence of the Nazis' Jewish annihila-

tion campaign and the resulting catastrophic biological destruction of the Jewish people in Europe could easily be obscured if “the Holocaust” was used to refer to non-Jewish as well as Jewish death in the Hitler period. Yehuda Bauer’s 1980 reaction, however, seems strident to this writer: “The Wiesenthal-Carter definition appears to reflect a certain paradoxical ‘envy’ on the part of non-Jewish groups directed at the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. This itself would appear to be an unconscious reflection of anti-Semitic attitudes ... Jews were murdered without much effective action on the part of the free world ... Today they stand in danger of having their specific martyrdom as Jews obliterated by their friends.” Bauer also pointed out that the “five million” number in the Wiesenthal-Carter definition did not represent any meaningful historical reality. (The number “five million” may have been chosen simply because it is less, but not much less, than six million.) Today, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum follows a version of the Carter-Wiesenthal formula and defines “the Holocaust” as the “murder of six million Jews and millions of non-Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during World War II.” Within the Museum galleries, however, it is unclear which of the more significant groups of Hitler’s non-Jewish victims—beyond the Gypsies—are considered to be victims of the Holocaust, and Slavic death tolls are minimized.”<sup>53</sup>

In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the sense of “the Holocaust” in which the Nazi victims were both non-Jewish and Jewish became one important aspect of mainstream usage, while the employment of “the Holocaust” as a referent to the fate of Jews, and only Jews, in Nazi-dominated Europe continued to grow, paralleling the continual growth of interest in the subject. This growth of interest resulted in part from an increasing tendency among American Jews to derive their Jewish identity largely from the Nazi Judeocide. In 1991, according to one poll of American Jews, a sense of being Jewish was more likely to come from some feeling of connection to the Holocaust than from a sense of connection to the Torah, God, or the state of Israel.<sup>54</sup> Partly as a result and partly thanks to the significant number of wealthy Jewish survivors who, as they approach the end of their lives, are anxious to ensure that their horrific experiences in the Hitler years are not forgotten, financial resources for Holocaust memorials and education have been readily available, which, in turn, has ensured growing institutional commitment to memorialization and research and increasing employment of the word. (Consult n 74 for some statistics from a sample of employments 1980–1999.) In the 1990s interest in the Holocaust has received notable boosts among the non-Jewish American public from the opening and the continual drawing power of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (over 12 million visitors thus far), the commercial success of the movie *Schindler’s List*, and the controversy over Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*.

### **Post-1978 employment of “H/holocaust” to refer to non-Jewish mass death**

Starting in the late 1970s, the increasing association between the word “holocaust” and the Nazi mass slaughter and the increasingly iconic status given

to that slaughter in mainstream Western media both encouraged and discouraged the employment of “holocaust” as an appellation for other instances of mass suffering and death. After the screening of *The Holocaust* any sensitive Western writer employing a prominent “holocaust” to refer to mass death “X” should have been aware that such employment would invite some readers to make conscious or unconscious comparisons between mass death “X” and the Jewish catastrophe. In 1979 a group pressuring the British government to grant asylum to Vietnamese boat people—at the time drowning in large numbers—used the phrase “An Asian Holocaust” in newspaper advertisements. Considerable discussion preceded the use of this phrase and the governing board of the major British Jewish umbrella organization was contacted for its opinion. The board raised no objections.<sup>55</sup> In 1983 an American Ukrainian press published *The Great Famine in Ukraine: The Unknown Holocaust*. The book explicitly compares the two mass destructions: “[T]he Ukrainian holocaust [1932/33] ... was of the same order of magnitude as the Jewish Holocaust. It was, however, a very different kind of genocide in that it was not motivated by a quest for racial purity and was not an attempt to destroy a nation by the physical murder of all its members.”<sup>56</sup> In the 1989 *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist*, Larry Kramer felt the need to defend his use of the word: “I submit there are different kinds of holocausts ... despite the Jewish insistence that the word is now totally attached to their own destruction ... [A] holocaust does not require a Hitler ... Holocausts can occur, and probably most often do occur, because of *inaction*.”<sup>57</sup>

A sampling of “holocausts” in the non-Jewish and non-nuclear senses in American book titles follow. (For “holocaust” used in its nuclear sense and some additional samples of usage in the non-Jewish and non-nuclear senses consult the endnote.) *Abortion, the Silent Holocaust* (1981); *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust* (1985); *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation, 1939–1944* (1986); *And the Violins Stopped Playing: A Story of the Gypsy Holocaust* (1986); *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (1987); *The Black Holocaust: Global Genocide* (1992); *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (1992); *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997).<sup>58</sup>

The employment of “holocaust” with non-Nazi referents by those who have some investment in guarding and perpetuating the memory of the Jewish slaughter of the Hitler period is germane to the concerns of this essay, as is the disapproval that sometimes followed such employment. Quoted earlier was a reviewer’s remark in the 1963 *Yad Vashem Studies*, “... one shudders at the nightmare of a holocaust-on-the-Holocaust.” Amos Elon in *The Israelis* (1971), employs “the holocaust” and “Nazi h/Holocaust” in a discussion of the Eichmann trial and its aftermath, but reserves “the Holocaust” for a translation of Arabic words used to denote Arab defeat at the hands of Jews in 1948.<sup>59</sup> A 1972 American book entitled *The Holocaust* is an autobiographical account of the battle of Verdun. The book’s dedication reads: “To my sister Gretel, who during

the holocaust of the Kaiser's World War dedicated herself to sending food parcels to the starving soldiers in the trenches of Russia and France yet was to perish during Hitler's holocaust in a concentration camp."<sup>60</sup> In the 1970s Elie Wiesel on occasion used the phrase "nuclear holocaust" and in 1983 the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism published *Preventing the Nuclear Holocaust: A Jewish Response*.<sup>61</sup> In 1984 Michael Berenbaum exchanged views in the pages of *Sh'ma* with David Weiss, an Israeli scientist and rabbi born in Vienna. Weiss wrote: "But the uniqueness of even these aspects of the holocaust is debatable ... Whole regions have been devastated of their Jewish communities in recurrent, earlier holocausts; I employ that denotation advisably." Berenbaum took exception to Weiss's vocabulary: "Professor Weiss ... offend[s] many by using the plural, small 'h' (holocausts)."<sup>62</sup> Four years later in *Shores of Refuge*, authored by a former editor of *Midstream* and published by Schocken Books, two chapter titles contain the phrase "The Ukrainian Holocaust," references to the massacres of Ukrainian Jews in 1919, and in the text these 1919 massacres are described as "the worst holocaust the Jewish people had ever known."<sup>63</sup> In 1994 Shimon Peres spoke at a UN "Peace Bell Ceremony" of "two holocausts: the Jewish holocaust and the Japanese holocaust" and suggested that "nuclear bombs are like flying holocausts." The *Jerusalem Post* responded in an editorial: Comparing [the Holocaust] to the atrocities of war, or even to genocidal outrages ... is a betrayal of ... the whole Jewish people ... When such comparisons are made by non-Jews, they are deemed either morally bankrupt or vicious and hateful." And Eric Breindel in the *New York Post* wrote: "[Peres indulges in a] bizarre exercise in moral equivalence ... the Holocaust was manifestly unique: the darkest moment in the history of man."<sup>64</sup>

### **The multiplicity of meanings of "the Holocaust"**

Some readers may have noted earlier in this essay the differing temporal senses of "after the holocaust of the last twelve years!" and "after the holocaust of the last few years," both references to the Jewish tragedy and both written shortly after the end of World War II (Z. Shuster, *Commentary*, December 1945; Issac Deutscher, *The Economist*, January 1946). While there is wide agreement that the Holocaust ended with the German surrender, there has been and continues to be considerable variation, depending on both user and context, in the events encompassed by the term, and thus no accepted date for when the Holocaust began. American libraries and indexes generally date the beginning of the Holocaust to 1939, perhaps because of the initial convenience of transferring all the items in a "World War II: Jews" category into a newly opened "Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)" category. (The Library of Congress in 1996 explored changing the "1939–1945" dates of its "Holocaust, Jewish ..." category but, in the absence of a consensus on an alternative, the dates were left unchanged.)<sup>65</sup> Yad Vashem in the 1950s and 1960s officially favored including within the

boundaries of the term all the Nazi government's anti-Semitic actions and thus favored a 1933 date for the beginning of the Holocaust. But usage within Yad Vashem publications is not consistent. For example, "... the Holocaust (1933–1945)" and "this fact of full knowledge of the Holocaust, and of all [the Nazi persecutions] that led up to it ... must never be forgotten" (both uses from the 1963 *Studies*).<sup>66</sup> And for some, while the early persecutions of the Nazi regime are not part of the Holocaust, the term does cover the later persecutions. A 1988 *New York Times* article states, "many say the Holocaust began" on Kristallnacht.<sup>67</sup> Definitions in encyclopedias and dictionaries reflect not only different senses of the term with respect to persecutions, but also different understandings of which groups of Nazi victims and which mass killings of Jews should be included within the term's boundaries.

The online *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines "Holocaust" as "the 12 years (1933–45) of Nazi persecution of Jews and other minorities ... climax[ing] in the 'final solution.'" *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) defines the term "h/Holocaust" as "*The* (period of the) mass murder of Jews (or *transf.* of other groups) ... 1939–1945." *The American Heritage College Dictionary* (1997): "The genocide of Jews, Gypsies, and others by the Nazis during World War II." *The Oxford Modern English Dictionary* (1996): "[T]he mass murder of the Jews by the Nazis 1941–1945." And *The Random House Webster's College Dictionary* (1997) gives a narrow, but not uncommon, meaning: "the Holocaust, the systematic mass slaughter of European Jews in Nazi concentration camps during World War II." This last definition places a significant portion of Jewish death at Nazi hands—for example the Einsatzgruppen shootings—outside the term's boundaries.<sup>68</sup> The range of meanings of "H/holocaust" in its role as a referent to events in the Nazi period has been largely ignored by scholars who do, however, engage in disputes as to the "correct," or most analytically helpful, meaning of genocide.<sup>69</sup>

### **"Shoah": the new English word (and the Hebrew *shoah*)**

Possibly in an attempt to avoid the real ambiguity as to the referent(s) of "Holocaust," and/or to avoid the imagined religious connotations of the term, and/or to vary the vocabulary, some American academic writers in the early 1990s began using "Shoah" to denote the Jewish catastrophe in Nazi-controlled Europe. "Shoah" has been used occasionally in American Jewish publications since the 1960s and the movie *Shoah* (1985) dramatically increased American awareness of the word. Today, at the turn of the century, the meaning of "Shoah" in English is more ambiguous than it was in the early 1990s. Increasingly, the term is used as a synonym for "Holocaust" in contexts where "Holocaust" is a referent to the Nazi mass murder of both Jews and non-Jews. But still the new English word "Shoah" has a clear advantage over "Holocaust" in unambiguously calling to mind Nazi slaughter, while "Holocaust," capitalized in a title, has had a large variety of referents. "Shoah" also has the advantage of

having four fewer letters than “Holocaust”—frequently in newspaper headlines in British Jewish newspapers in the late 1990s “Shoah” is employed while in the article below the “Shoah” headline, “Holocaust” is used exclusively. Possibly in a generation, “Shoah” will rival “Holocaust” as a referent to the Nazi genocide(s). The Jewish tragedy is now so central to Western historical consciousness that it no longer gains resonance and emotional weight from “holocaust’s” now rather slight association with nuclear destruction.<sup>70</sup>

(Interested readers may consult the endnote for remarks on the meanings of the Hebrew *shoah*, a 1937 description of Nazi persecution of Jews as a *shoah*, a 1939 Ben-Gurion prediction of a coming *shoah*, and a correction of well-circulated claims that *shoah* in the Bible always connotes Divine judgment.)<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

This essay began with quotations from well-known scholars asserting that “holocaust” has Judeo-Christian religious overtones and that these overtones affect our understanding of the Jewish catastrophe. The evidence presented in this essay has show that “H/holocaust” in modern secular use carries no Judeo-Christian connotations and that the word is substantially more terrestrial, more chameleonic, and more pagan than represented by Holocaust scholars.

James Young has written: “As one of the first hermeneutical moves regarding an event, its naming frames and remembers events [and] determines particular knowledge of events ... Every ... name thus molds events in the image of its culture’s particular understanding.”<sup>72</sup> However, the key “hermeneutical move” may not be the actual naming of an event but the construction by scholars of a false or misleading history of an existing name and of the name’s meaning(s) and overtone(s). This construction, if unchallenged, will then help mold a “culture’s particular understanding.” Hopefully, this essay’s challenge to scholarly misrepresentations of the last 10 years will result in a new, more accurate, sense of the history, overtones, and meanings of the word “H/holocaust” within the community of Holocaust scholars, which in turn may decrease the acceptability of any mystification of the Nazi-orchestrated mass slaughter of Jews and remove a subtle verbal obstacle to comparisons between the Jewish Holocaust and other organized mass murder.

Let me remind readers of Garber and Zuckerman’s well-circulated and heretofore uncontradicted assertion: “[T]he editors of the King James Version of the Bible ... translated the Hebrew term for whole-burnt offering, the *olah* ... ‘holocaust.’ Indeed, the adoption by the King James editors of this use of the term probably played the decisive role in fixing ‘religious sacrifice’ as the primary sense of the term in English up until the mid-Twentieth Century.” Also consider Michael Marrus’s representation: “The term *Holocaust* ... serves now to separate this particular massacre from other historical instances of genocide. *Holokaustos* ... comes from the third century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament ... the designation ... connoted an event of theological

significance, and perhaps as well an event whose mysteries were not meant to be understood.”

Contrast these representations with a summary of the evidence and argument presented in this essay: “Holocaust” came into English from the Greek by way of medieval translations of the Bible, but the word has not appeared in a Protestant or Jewish Bible since about 1600. Like many older English words, the most common meanings of “holocaust” in the 20th century differ significantly from the word’s original English meaning. For the last 100 years “holocaust” has been employed to refer to a wide variety of conflagrations, massacres, wars, and disasters, and carries, in secular use, no theological overtones. In the USA of the early 1960s, about 15 years before the word had become closely linked to Hitler’s Judeocide, the word’s principal referent was nuclear catastrophe. Common American understandings of the word in the mid-1960s are illustrated in two citations from the 1967 *Holocaust*: “Holocaust and holocaust. A few terrible deaths can be termed holocaust as can be the destruction of the vitals of a single country.” And, “I do not agree with the holocaust they plan, the holocaust here—and the all-out attack, the holocaust there.”<sup>73</sup>

The lowercased “holocaust,” usually modified, saw occasional employment in the USA, England, and Israel in the 1940s and 1950s as a referent to the Nazi persecution and slaughter of Jews. At Yad Vashem in Israel, the only institution of the late 1950s and early 1960s regularly publishing in English on the Judeocide, “H/holocaust” had become the principal English referent to that catastrophe by 1960. In the USA in 1960 the word, in its rare theological sense, was employed in the introduction to a key Holocaust text, Elie Wiesel’s *Night*. François Mauriac wrote: “the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob ... has vanished forevermore ... in the smoke of a human holocaust exacted by Race, the most voracious of all idols.” This “holocaust” is today, and has been for the last almost 40 years, the best circulated “holocaust” amongst Jews and Protestants in its original Greek and English sense of “burnt offering wholly consumed.”

Starting around 1963, burgeoning American Jewish interest in the destruction of European Jewry paralleled an increased American favoring of “holocaust” as a referent to that destruction/the time period of that destruction, a favoring driven both by dissemination of Israeli-English usage and by the utility of associating the Nazi Judeocide with the then actively feared nuclear mass destruction. Increasingly in the 1970s, “holocaust,” used in the sense of the Jewish disaster, was capitalized, and by 1979, partly as a result of the popularity and impact of NBC’s 1978 mini-series, *The Holocaust*, the predominant and readily recognized referent of “Holocaust” in American English had become the Nazi persecution and slaughter of Jews. Today, as in past decades, while there is no ambiguity about the core referent of the term—concentration camp and death camp persecution and slaughter of Jews—there is little consensus amongst users of the term on the starting date of the Holocaust and implicit disagreement as to which Nazi persecutions and murders, beyond concentration camp and death camp persecutions and slaughters of Jews, are encompassed by the term. In addition

to the Holocaust's employment as a referent to exclusively Jewish persecution and slaughter (1933/38/39/41–45), the term has seen significant employment, particularly since the late 1980s, as a referent to Nazi persecution and slaughter of both Jews and other groups of non-combatants. Users of the term in this latter sense are often vague as to which Nazi non-Jewish persecutions and slaughters are considered part of the Holocaust. The uncapitalized word, usually modified, continues to be employed occasionally as a referent to nuclear and other non-Nazi catastrophes.<sup>74</sup>

## Notes and References

1. The first part of this article relies heavily on quotations from the *Palestine Post*. I am grateful to Dr. Ronald Zweig of Tel Aviv University who directed the production of the easily searchable CD-ROMs containing the entire text of the newspaper, 1937–1949, and generously arranged for access to this rich data base. (See also n 7.) Sally Hindman's critique of an early draft of this essay added significantly to expositional clarity.
2. The first three quotations: (a) Emma Lazarus, "The Dance to Death: A Historical Tragedy" in *Songs of a Semite* (New York: The American Hebrew, 1882), pp 37–38. "Dance to death" deals with the fate of the Jewish community of Nordhausen, Germany, in the plague year of 1349. Jews have been accused of poisoning the wells. Rabbi Jacob is addressing the Nordhausen town council who have just decided to burn the town's Jews. (Lazarus is best known today for the lines on the base of the Statue of Liberty: "... Give me your tired, your poor ...") (b) W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989 [first published 1903]), p 8. (c) F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Bantam, 1974 [originally published 1925]), p 166 (Ch VIII, last paragraph). Perhaps Fitzgerald's principal working title for what became *The Great Gatsby*, "Among the Ash-Heaps and Millionaires," with its latent image of fire, suggested "the holocaust" for a summary description of the murder/suicide of Gatsby and Wilson. However, well-regarded writers of previous generations did not need an association with fire to employ "holocaust" in the sense of "destruction": "This mode of conducting ... administrative business ... is probably destined to perish in the general holocaust which the traditions of Indian government seem fated to undergo ..." John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (New York: Henry Holt, 1871 [first published 1861]), p 267 (Ch 14, Para 7).
3. Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1993), p 1. Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1987), p 3 (italization exactly reproduced). Omer Bartov, "Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Reinterpretations of National Socialism," in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck, eds, *The Holocaust and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp 79–80. The Wiesenthal Center: [www.wiesenthal.com/resource/gloss.htm#32](http://www.wiesenthal.com/resource/gloss.htm#32) (January 1999). For a series of objections by various writers to "holocaust" as a referent to the Judeocide see Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Vol 1, p 1, note 1. The Katz footnote refers readers to Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman's 1989 article in *Modern Judaism* and Gerd Korman's 1972 article in *Societas* for "the origin of the use of the term." Later in this essay key assertions in these two articles are refuted.
4. Elizabeth Loftus and John C. Palmer, "Reconstruction of Automobile Destruction: An Example of the Interaction between Language and Memory," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, Vol 13, No 5, 1974, pp 585–588.  
For more on the subtle influence of language and vocabulary on perception see Paul Kay and Willett Kempton, "What is the Saphir-Whorf Hypothesis?," *American Anthropologist*, Vol 86, No 1, 1984, pp 65–79.
5. Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, "Why do We Call the Holocaust 'The Holocaust'? An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels," *Modern Judaism*, Vol 9, No 2, 1989, pp 207–208.
6. WorldCat combines the catalogues of many major research libraries. Not in the list of the main text: *The great American holocaust by Zionism*, dated 1929 by WorldCat but probably 1979—an addendum was inserted in the work in 1980; and two religious (Catholic) works: *Little Catechism ... Child Jesus as Victim of Holocaust to the Merciful Love ...* (1935) and *Pride—Thief of the Holocaust* (1959). Capitalization in WorldCat is not always accurate; some title words not capitalized in WorldCat have been capitalized in the text.
7. Forty-eight "holocausts" in the *Palestine Post*, 1937 through 1949, were found and recorded by this writer

- using the easily searchable CD-ROMs produced under the direction of Dr. Ronald Zweig, director of Tel Aviv University's Humanities Computing Project. (See also n 1.)
8. The 1910–1950 dates were chosen to exclude: “The days of the Black Death and the Crusades are again upon us ... In one Russian town ... we are informed by an eyewitness, there was a holocaust of Jewish souls, and the martyrs went singing to their doom. Does it not recall the tragedies of the Dark Ages, when the children of Israel, led to slaughter, perished ‘as consecrated hosts of the Lord’ ...” (George Kohut, in a preface to a 1907 edition of Zunz’s *Sufferings of the Jews in the Middle Ages*, as cited in Joseph Leftwich, *The Golden Peacock: A Worldwide Treasury of Yiddish Poetry* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1961), p 22). Some might see Kohut’s 1907 “holocaust” as carrying religious/sacrificial overtones, hence my 1910–1950 dates. However, I argue (1) that the “holocaust” of the citation is not employed in a secular context but in an explicitly religious context—that the words “souls,” “martyrs,” and “consecrated hosts” create a religious context and thus a sacrificial connotation may be read into “holocaust,” a connotation that otherwise would not exist. I argue (2) that Kohut’s 1907 “holocaust” may be read and may have been intended to mean “death by fire” with no sacrificial overtones. Kohut, school principal at Temple Emanu-El, New York City, had probably read Emma Lazarus’s 1882 “Dance to Death.” In this play the word “holocaust,” used once and only once as quoted under the title of this essay, has no religious overtones, though, at the end of the play Jews aflame and dying dance in honor of God. Expressions of joy at the approach of death that will sanctify the souls of the dying and honor God are not uncommon in Jewish literature. See, for example, Leftwich, *Golden Peacock*, pp 22–23.
  9. Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman’s paper, “Why do We Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’? An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels,” was presented at the 1988 Oxford conference, “Remembering for the Future ...” and printed in Y. Bauer *et al.*, eds., *Remembering for the Future* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), Vol 2. A modified version of this paper is printed in *Modern Judaism*, Vol 9, No 2, 1989, pp 197–211 and is reprinted in Zev Garber, *Shoah: The Paradigmatic Genocide* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994). This essay cites the *Modern Judaism* text. For the claim that “holocaust” is the translation of *olah* in the King James Bible and for the primacy of the religious meaning before 1950, p 199; for the awareness of “sacrificial connotations” at the time of first employment of the term: pp 200, 202.
  10. Proof of the complete absence of “holocaust” in the King James Bible is the absence of an entry for “holocaust” in [James] Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990). (Hundreds of entries are listed in Strong’s *Concordance* under “burnt [offering(s), sacrifice].”) For a concordance of the King James Bible on the web: [www.concordance.com](http://www.concordance.com)
  11. Garber and Zuckerman, “Why do we Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’?,” p 199.
  12. *New Century Dictionary* (1927): hol-o-caust: An offering or sacrifice ... hence, anything offered or sacrificed unreservedly, as to person or cause ... more commonly ... a great and destructive fire; a great or wholesale destruction of life. *American College Dictionary*’s (1947) first definition, “usually ... the commonest meaning”: “great or wholesale destruction of life, esp. by fire.” Perhaps it should also be pointed out that the most frequently encountered meaning of a particular word does not normally color another well-established meaning. Consider: “He was the life of the party,” and “She devoted her life to the Party.”
  13. E. L. McAdam and George Milne, *Johnson’s Dictionary: A Modern Selection* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), p 16. H. W. Fowler states: “What concerns a writer is much less a word’s history than its present meaning ... etymological knowledge is of less importance to writers than might be supposed” (*A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1965), p 651). For more on the “etymological fallacy”: David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995), p 136, and Sydney Landau, *Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography* (1984), pp 98–99, 103.
  14. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1797 in its entry “Revolution” states: “That which is termed *the revolution* in Britain is the change ... when the Protestant succession was established, and the constitution restored to its primitive purity” (Vol 16, p 150). For some remarks on the tension between “revolution”’s meaning of “return” and its meaning of “extraordinary change” see Mona Ozouf, “Revolution” in Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1989), pp 806–810; and also Daniel J. Boorstin, *Hidden History* (New York: Vintage, 1989), pp 231–233.
  15. Gerd Korman, “The Holocaust in Historical Writing,” *Societas*, Vol 2, No 3, 1972, p 260. (Korman writes: “... the word holocaust had appeared now and then. In 1951 ... Jacob Shatzky of YIVO spoke of ‘the Nazi Holocaust,’ but apparently he did not mean to apply the phrase specifically to the destruction of European Jewry. Between 1957 and 1959, however, ‘Holocaust’ took on such a specific meaning.”) For a section of Korman’s article and the 1957–1959 claim see John Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds, *Holocaust Religious & Philosophical Implications* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p 46.

16. *Hartley Library: University of Southampton Special Research Collections* (information brochure, nd [1998]), p 12—MS 175/142/1 in the collection, copyright J. Schonfield.
17. Weizmann to I. Goldstein, December 24, 1942. *Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979). Vol XX, Series A (1968), p 383, letter No 360. Weizmann, in ill health and unable to leave New York, was presumably writing to Goldstein on the eve of the latter's departure to a Jewish National Fund conference in Detroit. Goldstein gave a keynote address at this conference on December 26, 1942. In early December Weizmann, Goldstein, and Rabbi Wise had promoted a program of services and mourning for the "millions of Jews threatened with complete extermination" (*The New York Times*, December 2, 1942, p 12, Col 5) Definitive news of the Nazi extermination program reached Palestine, Britain, and the USA through different channels in late November 1942.
18. E-mail posting, Gerd Korman, "Re: Holocaust," H-Judaic February 23, 1998. For this posting: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/logs/Select> "H-Judaic," select "February 1998," and sort by author or subject.
19. E-mail posting, Franklin Littell, "Re Earliest Reference to Holocaust," H-Holocaust May 3, 1995. For this posting: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/logs/>. Select "H-Holocaust," select "May 1995," and sort by author or subject.
20. "La tâche qui incombe à Yad Vashem consiste à perpétuer, sur le sol de la patrie, le souvenir de tous ceux, parmi le peuple juif, qui ont péri dans l'Holocauste ..." and "... qui ont péri lors de l'Holocauste" in "Loi Sur la Commemoration Des Martyrs et des Heros—Yad Vashem 1953" (pamphlet 1953), p 1. This pamphlet cites: *Code Civil*, Vol 132, August 28, 1953, p 144.
21. *Yediot* (Hebrew for news), Vol 4–5, 1955, p 27, Col 2—"... research into the problems of the European holocaust."
22. "... main task": *Yediot*, Vol 8–9, 1956, p 32, Col 3. *Yediot*, 6–7, 1956, p 29, Col 1 for "period of the holocaust" and p 32, Col 3; p 31, Col 3; p 29, Cols 1 and 3; and *Yediot*, Vol 8–9, 1956, p 32, Cols 1 and 3, p 30, Cols 1 and 2 for "Nazi holocaust" and "period of the Nazi holocaust" and *Yediot*, Vol 8–9, 1956, p 30, Col 2 for "the Holocaust." (Page numbers in *Yediot* run right to left.)
23. Eleven "holocausts" on one page: *Yad Vashem Bulletin*, Vol 1, April 1957, p 36. (In the 1950s and early 1960s, what we now know as Yad Vashem was frequently "Yad Washem." To avoid confusion, this essay replaces the "Washem" of serial titles from these years with "Vashem" in both the main text and endnotes.)
24. *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance*, Vol I, 1957, p 18: "survivors of the European holocaust," p 169: "survivors of the European holocaust," p 175: "memoirs written by survivors of the European holocaust, works of research into the catastrophe." *Studies*, Vol II, 1958, p 133, n 1: "archives of the Holocaust," p 295: "the study of the Holocaust," p 296: "a monument to the Holocaust."
25. *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol V, 1963, p 374.
26. "Holocaust and the Heroism" first use: *Bulletin*, Vol 2, December 1957, p 25, Col 3. For *shoah ugevurah* see Dalia Offer, "Linguistic Conceptualization of the Holocaust in Palestine and Israel, 1942–53," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 31, No 3, 1996, pp 573–577.
27. *The Chicago Manual of Style, Fourteenth Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p 260. For a 1960 American/Israeli capitalized use see the penultimate sentences of n 34. The 1980 Congressional bill that led to the establishment of the United States Holocaust and Memorial Museum did not capitalize "holocaust"—see n 52. Another 1980 uncapitalized use: "this is a study not about the holocaust—a term singularly inappropriate ..." Walter Laquer, *The Terrible Secret* (1980), p 7.
28. A native English speaker's employment of "Holocaust" that can be seen as a precedent for Mauriac's 1958/1960 "holocauste/holocaust": "ALC[IPHON] [I] shou'd like well to see the *Druids* and their Religion restored ... CRI[TO]. How wou'd you like ... that now and then, a Number of Layman shou'd be crammed together in a Wicker-idol, and burnt for an Offering to their Pagan Gods? LYS[CLES] ... And I make no doubt but these *Druids* wou'd have sacrificed many a Holocaust of Free-thinkers." (Bishop) George Berkeley, *Alciphron: or the Minute Philosopher* (London: J. Tonson, 1732), Vol I, pp 270–272 (fifth dialogue, section 3).
29. Voltaire: *Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française* (1986), "Holocauste" entry. Flaubert: *Grande Larousse* (1972), "Holocauste" entry. Charles Baudelaire: *Nouveau Dictionnaire de Citations Françaises* (Hachette/Tchou 1970), p 1004, No 11389.
30. Two meanings of "sacrifice" given in Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary*: "to destroy; to kill." And two quotations given with the definitions: "He that sacrificeth of things wrongfully gotten, his offering is ridiculous" (Ecclesiasticus). And, "Moloch besmear'd with blood of human sacrifice" (Milton).
31. *The New York Times*, June 20, 1953, p 17, Col 2.
32. Solomon Bloom, "The Great Unsolved Crime," *Commentary*, Vol 19, No 1, January 1955, pp 89, 90. The referent of "the only ... comprehensive account" is Gerald Reitlinger's *The Final Solution*; however, the

- review also covers Leon Poliakov's *Harvest of Hate*. In 1955 these two books were the only comprehensive accounts of the Jewish catastrophe.
33. William and Sarah Schack, "The Books of Doom," *Commentary*, Vol 22, No 4, October 1956, p 336. An unusual appellation in this article, "Third Destruction" (exactly reproduced, p 336) and a more typical referent from the same article, "the massacres" (p 337). Books on the Jewish catastrophe were not economically viable before the mid-1960s—Hilberg's *Destruction of European Jewry* (1961) was rejected by numerous publishers and printed only thanks to a subsidy from the Petschek Foundation. Wiesel's *Night* (1960) had poor sales in its first years. (See Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1995), p 325.)
  34. "We have buried ..." is from Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Jewish Survival* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p 183. For a discussion of American Jewry's avoidance of any engagement with the European Jewish catastrophe see L. Jick, "The Holocaust: its Use and Abuse within the American Public," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol XIV, 1981, pp 304–310; and David S. Wyman, "The United States," in David S. Wyman, ed., *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), pp 719–722. Other chapters in this book briefly discuss the unwillingness of Jews in France and Britain during the 1950s to confront the Holocaust. For the avoidance of the Jewish tragedy in American classrooms see Gerd Korman, "Silence in American History Textbooks," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol VIII, 1970, pp 183–202.
  35. Additional American, and one British, use of "holocaust" as a referent to the destruction of European Jewry: "Jews of Poland ... Those of us who survived that holocaust are freaks of nature" (Bernard Goldstein, *The Stars Bear Witness* (1949), p 295). "But the White Paper (limiting immigration to Palestine) added greatly ... to the number ... who perished in the immeasurable holocaust ..." and "Holocaust in Europe" (chapter title) and "Tzivyva Lubertkin, 'the mother of the ghetto,' who survived the holocaust ..." (Rufus Lears, *Israel: A History of the Jewish People* (1949), pp 645, 654). "Haggada on the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt" (I. Schwarzbart, *Remembering and Rebuilding* (mimeographed pamphlet: The World Jewish Congress) (1955), p. 13, heading). "The Israeli Government opposes transferring the ashes of Nazi concentration camp victims ... to a projected tomb in Paris for Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust ..." (*The New York Times*, June 30, 1956, p 3, Col 7). "American Jews ... principal heirs to the Jewish norms and values whose bearers perished in the European holocaust." (I. Jakobovits [British Chief Rabbi], *Journal of a Rabbi* (1967—the quoted words date from April 1957), p 68). "The Nazi 'calculations' of the number of victims of the holocaust are not worthy of serious reply (e.g. ... only 300,000 murdered Jews)" (Hans Lamm, "Note on the Number of Jewish Victims of National Socialism," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol 21, No 2, April 1959, p 132). "[A]t least the material written after 1945, is practically unanimous in the condemnation of the Holocaust" (Salo W. Baron in a foreword to Jacob Robinson and Philip Friedman's *Guide to Jewish History under Nazi Impact* (Series No 1, 1960), p xix. This work, a joint project of YIVO and Yad Vashem, was the first comprehensive bibliography on the Jewish experience in the Nazi period. The uppercased "Holocaust" appears occasionally in the main text, e.g. pp 3, 15, but "Catastrophe" is the primary referent.)
  36. Leon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate* (Philadelphia: Jewish publication Society, 1954), p 117 (italics added).
  37. "... such a holocaust": Carl O. Dunbar, "The Menace of Atomic Warfare," *The Yale Review*, Vol 38, Spring 1949, p 538. Per Richard H. Minear, "Atomic Holocaust, Nazi Holocaust: Some Reflections," *Diplomatic History*, Vol 19, No 2, Spring 1995, p 356, n 27, leaders of the Manhattan project used the word "holocaust" to refer to nuclear destruction. I have checked Minear's citation and believe he misreads his source.
  38. *The Reporter*, Vol 25, No 3, August 17, 1961, p 52. *Commentary*, Vol 32, No 4, October 1961, p 283. *Nation*, No 194, January 20, 1962, p 43. The cover of the November 4, 1961 *Nation* advertises two article titles in uppercasing, the first title: "SHELTERS WHEN THE HOLOCAUST COMES."
  39. Augustine on-line: [www.concordance.com/augustine.htm](http://www.concordance.com/augustine.htm), Ch 14, section 22 of Albert Outler's 1955 translation. And Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p 350. (1915, not 1916, was the year of the principal massacres; Lewis corrected the date in the 1965 reprinting.)
  40. Arendt's *New Yorker* articles preceded by a couple of months Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Per *The New York Times Book Review*, May 19, 1963, p 1, "The series of [Arendt] articles ... stirred controversy as a strong wind agitates the waters of a lake. The book ... follows the articles as a gale succeeds a rising wind ..." For more on the reactions to the articles and book see *Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers Correspondence 1926–1969* (1992), pp 510–511, 515–516; and Amos Elon, "The Case of Hannah Arendt," *New York Review of Books*, Vol 44, No 17, November 6, 1997, p 25, Col 4, p 29, Col 1. Arendt on the sea change in American culture: "Kennedy's election has worked a major change in the atmosphere ... Lowell ... wrote me: The world is green again. This new atmosphere is also making itself felt among students ..." (*Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers Correspondence*, pp 421–422.) "The Deputy," a play questioning the Pope's unwillingness to publicly condemn the Nazi slaughter of Jews, stirred controversy and additional engagement with the Nazi Judeocide after the reaction to the Arendt articles

- had peaked. “The Deputy” was first staged in Germany in 1963 and in the USA in 1964. The apparent threat to Israel’s existence in 1967 and the Arab Israeli war that followed the threat prompted renewed Jewish identification amongst many secular Diaspora Jews and partly as a consequence, greater interest in the Jewish experience in the Hitler years.
41. A sample of “holocausts” employed to refer to Jewish destruction in American serials and texts January 1960 through June 1963: “Dr. Wertheimer ... was fortunate enough to die a natural death a few weeks before the holocaust” (Alfred Werner, “Before the Flood,” *Jewish Frontier*, Vol 28, No 8, August 1960, p 22). “[W]hen the great holocaust had ceased, the principal Jewish concentrations ... were no more” (Ira Rosenswaik, “The Jewish Population of Argentina,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol 22, No 4, October 1960, p 205). “God ... has vanished forevermore, beneath the gaze of this child, in the smoke of a human holocaust exacted by Race, the most voracious of all idols” (Alfred Kazin quoting Mauriac, “The Least of These” (review of *Night*), *The Reporter*, Vol 23, No 7, October 27, 1960, p 56). “[W]ith the onset of the mobile killing operations, the armed forces found themselves suddenly in the very center of the holocaust.” And, “As the holocaust came closer only a handful of Jews could afford to buy their lives” And, “... Jewish action machinery ... was at a standstill ... The holocaust was unopposed” (Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry* (1961), pp 178, 370, 719—Hilberg’s primary terms of reference are “Jewish catastrophe,” “catastrophe,” and “destruction.”) “It is perfectly true that the policy of destroying the European Jews ... was Hitler’s. Without Hitler, the holocaust would not have happened.” (H. R. Trevor Roper, “Nazi Bureaucrats and Jewish Leaders,” *Commentary*, Vol 33, No 4, April 1962, 351). “The holocaust, then, was a product ... [of] a bureaucracy of ... irresistible efficiency” (Oscar Handlin, “Jewish Resistance to the Nazis,” *Commentary*, Vol 34, No 5, November 1962, p 401). And a well-circulated “holocaust” not included in the main text to avoid overcrediting: “... history of the holocaust” (Arendt quoting “witnesses in Jerusalem,” *New Yorker*, Vol 38, No 40, February 16, 1963, p 42).
  42. Re “to my knowledge” and similar phrases in this essay: perhaps they should have been employed more often. The text of *The New York Times*, *Commentary*, etc. from the 1950s and 1960s is not on CD-ROMs or on-line and thus without the expenditure of months it would be impossible to be confident that every use of “holocaust” in the publications cited is known. I have spent days checking *New York Times* indexes and reading *New York Times* articles on Holocaust-related subjects, and extensively browsed through journals cited, but I am unable to assert definitively that a particular “holocaust” was a first use or, for example, that three and only three “holocausts” appear within 100 pages of a Yad Vashem journal.
  43. “The Nazi holocaust which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe ...” (from the Israeli Declaration of Independence), May 15, 1948, p 2, Col 3); “The Israeli Government opposes transferring the ashes of ... camp victims ... to a projected tomb in Paris for Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust ...”, June 30, 1956, p 3, Col 7; and a report on the dedication in Israel of a shrine “to the memory of our six million brothers and sisters who perished in the Nazi holocaust ...” (May 30, 1959, p 5, Col 5).
  44. “I am afraid I am the one who introduced the word into this framework ... I cannot use it anymore ... Whatever mishap occurs now, they call it ‘holocaust’” (Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, p 1, n 1). Katz introduces this Wiesel comment with the remark: “Wiesel ... is usually credited with introducing the term into the discussion.” And Norman Davies in *Europe: A History* (1997, p 1025) states: “Elie Wiesel is credited with turning the term ‘Holocaust’ to its present usage.” Garber and Zuckerman (p 202) assert that *The New York Times* credited Wiesel with “coining of the term, ‘The Holocaust’ to characterize the Jewish genocide.” *The New York Times* article cited by Garber and Zuckerman makes no such claim.
  45. For the claim of “unmistakable religious/sacrificial overtones” see Garber and Zuckerman, “Why do we Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’?,” p 202.
  46. Garber and Zuckerman, p 202, cite a private communication from Wiesel “recall[ing]” his first use in *The New York Times* of October 27, 1963. Wiesel made a similar statement in an interview reprinted in Irving Abrahamson, ed., *Against Silence. The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985), Vol I, p 185.
- The reprinting in *Against Silence* (Vol II, pp 267–270) of Wiesel’s August 1963 *New Leader* and October 1963 *New York Times* book reviews could mislead: “holocaust” was not capitalized in the original printings but is capitalized in *Against Silence*. The *Against Silence* versions of Wiesel’s 1960s *Forward* articles could also mislead (e.g. Vol II, p 181). These articles were originally printed and written in Yiddish and the “Holocausts” of the translations presumably date from the 1980s.
47. “Anne Frank ... I have no criticism ... of the Franks. But I do have [of the glorification] of such passive acceptance ... Hertzl did not passively accept the position into which his time had projected him, but ... transcended it ... This we all need to do ... if we want to escape an impending holocaust” (Bruno Bettelheim, “Comment,” *Midstream*, Vol 7, No 2, Spring 1961, p 86). “When [the President] resumed speaking his voice was so slow that each word seemed to dangle. ‘Those of us on this hookup are the only

- people who can save the world from an atomic holocaust” (Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, *Fail-Safe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), p 230).
48. *The New York Times Book Review* of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (June 15, 1952, p 1) compared the Franks’ fear of the “Gestapo’s knock on the hidden door,” to the American family’s fear of the “knock of [atomic] war.” Norman Mailer in *The White Negro* (City Lights, nd, pp 1–2; first published in *Dissent*, Summer 1957) wrote: “... we shall never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camp and the atom bomb on the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive ... A stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life.” And A. Alvarez in *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 1962, p 70) wrote: “[P]erhaps the concentration camps have kept a tight hold on our imaginations ... because ... we see them as a small-scale trial run for a nuclear war.”
  49. “[T]he site and occasion of [God’s] abdication”: Naomi Seidman, “Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol 3, No 1, Fall 1996, p 2.
  50. Wiesel, despite his 1978 protest about the neglect of the Gypsy experience in Holocaust literature, generally has resisted any employment of “Holocaust” to denote the Nazi murder of Jews and non-Jews. See Abrahamson, ed., *Against Silence*, Vol I, pp 42–43 and also Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing* (1995), p 276. The source for the 1967 “The Holocaust has had a great impact ...” is Abrahamson, Vol I, p 235. Possibly “h” should be substituted for “H,” Abrahamson is not scrupulous in his reproduction of casing—see n 46.
  51. “No one is interested in Hitler”: Jick, “The Holocaust: its Use and Abuse within the American Public,” p 306. For the use of “Holocaust” in thesis titles see “Dissertation Abstracts International on CD-Rom.” Per this data base, 15 theses in 1997 had “Holocaust” in their titles. According to Garber and Zuckerman, 21 PhD thesis titles 1970–1975 contain the word “Holocaust” (p 210, n 14). The figure per “Dissertation Abstracts” is four. Garber and Zuckerman’s figures for “Holocaust” in thesis titles after 1975 are also incorrect.
  52. For a short account of the impact of the TV series *The Holocaust* see Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory* (New York: Viking, 1995), p 12. For the change in *The New York Times* annual indexes see the subheading “Nazi Policies Toward Jews and Foreign Nationalities.”
  53. For the 1978 and 1979 Carter definitions of “Holocaust” and the political background see Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, pp 17–20, 27–28, 38–41. Congress, in its 1980 Museum enabling legislation, had a less inclusive view of the referent of “H/holocaust” than that of the 1979 Executive Order: “The holocaust has been recognized as the systematic act of extermination of nearly 6 million Jews in Europe before and during World War II. During this same period millions of people suffered death and destruction at the hands of those who embraced the Nazi philosophy.” (P.L. 96–338, 1980, p 4). One mid-1940s ecumenical employment of “holocaust”: “Millions of surviving victims of the Nazi holocaust, Jews and non-Jews, will stand before us in the years to come” (Morris Cohen in the foreword to Siegfried Goldschmidt’s *Legal Claims Against Germany* (New York: Dryden Press, 1945), p vi). (Cohen dates his foreword September 1944.) And Chaim Bermant, in his 1977 *The Jews*, wrote: “Not only did six million Jews die in the holocaust, but twenty million Russians, and millions of others ...” (London, Sphere printing of 1978, p 1).  
 For Wiesenthal’s employment of an “eleven million” definition before the Carter formulation see Yehuda Bauer, “Whose Holocaust,” *Midstream*, Vol 26, No 9, November 1980, p 43. For Bauer’s, “The Wiesenthal-Carter definition appears ... to be an unconscious reflection of anti-Semitic attitudes ...,” pp 45–46. According to The Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Web site “the recognized figure [of non-Jewish civilians murdered during World War II] is approximately five million ... Gypsies, Serbs, Polish intelligentsia, resistance fighters ...” (motlc.wisenthal.com/resources/questions/#3—May 1999). An e-mail to the Simon Wiesenthal Center requesting a breakdown of the five million figure was not answered. Some figures of non-Jewish deaths during World War II: Soviet non-Jewish civilian deaths as a result of German actions, probably over 10 million; Soviet POW deaths in German hands, over three million; ethnic Polish civilian deaths, about two million (revised downward in the last few years from about three million); Serb dead, probably over a million; Gypsies murdered, perhaps half a million. Jews were murdered, for the most part, in concentration camps and death camps, non-Jews, for the most part, outside of the camps. (For additional figures see n 68.) For the Memorial Museum definition of “Holocaust”: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1996), p 9. For the Museum’s minimization of Slavic death tolls see my “Numerus Clausus” in *The Genocide Forum*, Vol 2, No 5, January 1996. For a somewhat heated discussion of the subject: H-Holocaust, “FW: Jewish ‘exclusivism’ and the representation of genocide,” March 11, 1997 (various authors and also other March 1997 dates with similar titles). For this (these) posting(s): <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/logs/>, select “H-Holocaust,” select “March 1997,” and sort by subject.
  54. “1991 ... 85% of American Jews were reporting that the Holocaust was ‘very important’ to their sense of being Jewish—a higher figure than those attributing a similar degree of importance to the Torah, God, or the state of Israel.” Elliott Abrams, “Faith and the Holocaust,” *Commentary*, Vol 101, No 3, March

- 1996, p 68. For a critical short consideration of assimilated American Jewish “sacramentalizing of the Holocaust” see Phillip Lopate, “Resistance to the Holocaust,” in David Rosenberg, *Testimony* (New York: Times Books, 1989), pp 304–305.
55. William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust, and Modern Conscience* (London: Fontana, 1985), p 421.
  56. R. Hadzewick *et al.*, eds, *The Great Famine in Ukraine: The Unknown Holocaust* (Jersey City: Svoboda Press, 1983), p 9.
  57. Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist* (London: Penguin, 1990—first published New York, 1989), p 265.
  58. A sampling of titles with “holocaust” referring to nuclear destruction—if a British publisher “UK” before publication date: *Holocaust* (1967); *Specter of Middle East Holocaust: ... Israeli Nuclear Weapons ...* (1973); *Holocaust 2000* (1978—a book and a movie—nuclear Armageddon); *Invitation to a Holocaust: Nostradamus Forecasts World War III* (UK, 1981); *The Chosen Few: Surviving the Nuclear Holocaust* (1982); *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (UK, 1983); *How to Eliminate the threat of Nuclear holocaust: A Policy Proposal* (1983); *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895–1984* (1987). An alliterative 1997 headline from a San Francisco political tabloid: “Housing or Holocaust Weapons?” (*Street Spirit*, Vol 3, No 9, p 1). Another headline from a Bay Area newspaper: “Oil Pipeline Holocaust in Nigeria [more than 250 killed]” (*Oakland Tribune*, October 19, 1998, p 1). An Indian book title: *Environmental Holocaust in Himalaya* (1989). (The online *Encyclopaedia Britannica* employs the phrase, “the uninhabited site of the holocaust,” referring to the site of a massive Alaskan volcanic eruption—see [www.eb.com](http://www.eb.com): “Ten Thousand Smokes, Valley of ...”) And a headline from the front page of a Flemish newspaper’s book review section: “Holocaust in Belgisch Congo” (*De Standard* [Antwerp], September 24, 1998). (“Holocaust” is a new word to the Flemish language. King Leopold’s exploitation of the Congo resulted in six to eight million deaths.)
  59. Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), pp 215–217, 220.
  60. William Hermanns, *The Holocaust* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p v.
  61. Elie Wiesel (1979): “Memory may perhaps be ... our only hope to save the world from the ultimate punishment, nuclear holocaust” (Abrahamson, ed., *Against Silence*, Vol III, p 155).
  62. John Roth and Michael Berenbaum (eds), *Holocaust*, pp 72, 77.
  63. Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), chapter titles: p viii; “worst holocaust”: p 358. In David Roskies’ 1989 *The Literature of Destruction*, a Yiddish *khurbm*, denoting World War I massacres of Jews in Galacia, is translated as “holocaust” (p 212).
  64. Minear, “Atomic Holocaust, Nazi Holocaust,” p 356.
  65. Phone conversation with Lynn El-Hoshi at the Library of Congress. The Library also considered broadening the category to include non-Jews.
  66. *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol V, 1963, pp 191, 373.
  67. Kristallnacht and the start of the Holocaust: *The New York Times*, November 1, 1988, p 20, Col 2.
  68. The limiting of “Holocaust” to concentration/death camp slaughter may reflect a surprisingly common misapprehension as to the extent of mass slaughter beyond the barbed wire of the camps. Garber and Zuckerman (p 208) write of “eleven million people ... killed by the Nazis in the concentration camps.” About four and a half million people—perhaps 85 percent of these Jewish people—were killed in Nazi concentration and death camps. (See the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, pp 313, 463.) Mass murder of Jews—as I understand the term “mass murder” in this context—began with the Einsatzgruppen shootings in the summer of 1941. Assuming a “Jewish mass murder” definition of “Holocaust,” the Holocaust started in the summer of 1941. If “Holocaust” is defined as “concentration/death camp mass murder of Jews,” the Holocaust began in December 1941. (Assuming that the limited facilities at Chelmo are seen as a “camp.”) If “Holocaust” is defined as “systematic mass murder of Jews and non-Jews,” then arguably the Holocaust began in 1939 with the euthanasia program. And if “Holocaust” is defined as “Nazi organized mass killings with genocidal intent,” then arguably the German decimation of Polish elites in 1940 began the Holocaust.
  69. Gavriel Rosenfeld writes: “[E]fforts to analyze the Holocaust as an example of genocide ... [have] been hampered by the absence of a widely accepted definition of the term ‘genocide.’” And in an endnote Rosenfeld refers readers to 15 pages of a book text—a “brief survey” of genocide definitions. “The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections of the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol 13, No 1, Spring 1999, pp 32, 51, n 19.
  70. “Shoah” in a mid-1960s title: *Bibliography ... on the teaching of the Shoah* (Los Angeles: Bureau of Jewish Education, 1966). The first use of “Shoah” as a reference to the Judeocide in a PhD thesis abstract, per *Dissertation Abstracts*, was in 1989, the first use in a PhD title was in 1992. Per *Article 1st data base*,

- in 1997 seven article titles contain “Shoah” (but two are references to Lanzmann’s movie) and 170 titles contain “Holocaust,” virtually all references to the Nazi murders. In 1994 two titles used “Shoah” and 115 “Holocaust.” Katz uses “Shoa’h” occasionally in his 1994 *Holocaust in Historical Context*, e.g. p 491. For “Shoah” used as a synonym for “Holocaust” in contexts where “Holocaust” is a referent to both Jewish and non-Jewish Nazi slaughter see the inside of the dust jacket of Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck’s, eds, *The Holocaust and History*. An example of British Jewish newspaper practice: “NATION’S SHOAH DAY: The Jewish community welcomed the ... proposal to hold a national Holocaust day ...” (*London Jewish News*, December 4, 1998, p 1).
71. In secular Hebrew, the meanings of *shoah* are similar to those of “holocaust” in its late 20th century secular senses, but the Hebrew word also has the sense of “desolation” and “devastation.” (Again a reminder that capitalization is not possible in Hebrew.) With a modifier, *shoah* is used occasionally to refer to major economic catastrophe, nuclear war, and aspects of the Arab Palestinian history. (See Shabatai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), p 72 for this last use.) To denote the Nazi catastrophe *shoah* is normally preceded by *ha*, the Hebrew equivalent of “the.” Like “the Holocaust,” *ha-shoah*, unmodified, can refer to the Nazi mass murder of Jews or the Nazi mass murder of both Jews and non-Jews. In Hebrew, to make an unambiguous reference to the Judeocide when context might lead to ambiguity, one writes *shoat h’am h’juydit*. Like “holocaust,” the etymology of *shoah* is biblical. And, as perhaps by now might be expected, the prevalent scholarly representation of *shoah*’s biblical use is incorrect. For example, “[a]ll biblical meanings of the term [shoah] clearly imply Divine judgment and retribution” (Uriel Tal, “On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol XIII, 1979, p 51 and quoted in Roth and Berenbaum, eds, *Holocaust*, p 44. And for a similar statement see Ofer, “Linguistic Conceptualization,” p 568). A truer statement: most biblical uses of *shoah* imply Divine judgment but in Job 30:3 and 30:14 the word is used with no such implication.
- Perhaps the first use of *shoah* in reference to events in Nazi Germany is in the 1934 Jewish Agency’s translation of a Chaim Weizmann remark to the Zionist Actions Committee. In the context of a prediction of a new world war, Weizmann, speaking in German, described Hitler’s rise to power as a *Katastrophe*. *Katastrophe* was translated into Hebrew as *shoah*. In 1937, Moshe Sharrett referred to the Nazi persecution of Jews as a *shoah*. And in June 1939, Ben-Gurion spoke of the possible destruction of European Jewry: “... a war will visit upon us a *shoah* ... [Hitler will destroy] first of all the Jews of Europe” (Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust*, pp xxix, xxxvi). Teveth argues (p 98) that *shoah* as late as 1943 did not have the meaning of mass murder, and thus by implication that Ben-Gurion in 1939 was not thinking of mass murder when he used the word *shoah*. I find Teveth’s reasoning unconvincing. Ben-Gurion had read *Mein Kampf* in 1933 and in 1934 warned that “Hitler’s rule places the entire Jewish people in danger ... perhaps only four or five years ... stand between us and that day of wrath” (Teveth, pp xxxv, xxxvi).
72. James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp 87–88.
73. Anthony McCall, *Holocaust* (New York, Trident, 1967), pp 162, 190. The “holocaust there,” a planned pre-emptive nuclear strike against China is triggered by the “holocaust here,”—a planned assassination, bombing of an American installation, and destruction of an aircraft carrier, all, per planted evidence, organized by the Chinese government.
74. Of 25 employments of “H/holocaust” in *Christian Science Monitor* headlines between January 1980 and September 1986, three were “nuclear holocausts,” one a “hidden holocaust” (the Ukrainian famine), and 21 were references to the Judeocide and associated events. Of 25 employments in the same paper’s headlines between February 1990 and February 1999, all were references to the Nazi slaughter of non-combatants and 24 would probably have been understood by most readers as referring to the slaughter of Jews, and Jews only. (Data compiled using the user-friendly search engine at [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com).) Of 30 newswire stories containing the word “H/holocaust” in the Northern Light data base for the period February 18 through February 26, 1999, one contained a reference to an “environmental holocaust,” and another referred to the destruction of the American Indian peoples as “a holocaust.” The remaining 28 stories dealt with such events as Swiss banks releasing funds to Holocaust survivors and the establishment of a new Yad Vashem data base of Holocaust victims. The term “Holocaust” was used, on average, approximately three times in each of these 28 stories; thus in the sample of 30 news stories only about 2 percent of the uses of “H/holocaust” refer to events unconnected to the Jewish catastrophe. In the 28 stories employing “Holocaust” as a referent to the Nazi slaughter, three employed the words “Nazi Holocaust” and 25 an unmodified “Holocaust.” (Data compiled February 27, 1999 from [www.northernlight.com](http://www.northernlight.com).)