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**The Four Torture Memos, Eichmann,
and the Obama Administration - Part 2**

National Affairs

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[On April 30th, BC published the first part of a three part essay that deals with the torture practiced by the American government. Since then I have been preoccupied with other matters; thus Part 2 was not written until now. [Click here](#) to read Part 1.]

I recently read the 2009 book by Neal Bascomb called [Hunting Eichmann: How a Band of Survivors and a Young Spy Agency Chased Down the World's Most Notorious Nazi](#). I learned a lot I had not previously known; the lack of knowledge was due both to my own failure to read (or to remember if I did read) and to the failure of the mass media to focus on or write about matters it *should* focus on and write about (or broadcast).

So it was all news to me that after World War II the Church participated in sneaking Nazis out of Europe - getting them to Argentina, for example - via so-called "ratlines." The very worst of the worst, like Eichmann and Mengele, escaped Europe this way. The idea that the Vatican was involved in this is mind boggling, hardly believable. Yet it apparently happened.

It was also news to me that there was a large, a huge, number of Germans in Argentina after the war, many apparently being Nazis and many apparently being involved in hiding Nazis or helping them to hide. From reading Bascomb's work, it seems obvious, moreover, that lots of the Germans in Argentina knew Eichmann was there and exactly who he was. Eichmann even had weekly meetings for awhile with one fellow, a Dutch writer who had been in the SS, to extensively relate (and, where necessary, dredge up) his recollections for purposes of an eventual biography and

magazine series.

One sort of understood, previously, that there were a lot of fascists in Peronista Argentina, but one did not know that the Argentine government was aware of but denied that Mengele was there.

Being weaned on a diet of propaganda about the greatness and value of Konrad Adenauer and his West German Government, one did not know that former Nazi officials were one-third of his cabinet, a quarter of the legislature (the Bundestag), much of the civil service, the judiciary and the foreign ministry, numbered eight ambassadors, included Hans Globke, who was Adenauer's national security adviser, a major figure in West German intelligence, and its chief liaison with the CIA, but who had also been the writer of the Nazi interpretation of law that had "stripped German Jews of their citizenship," and also included Theodore Oberlander, a former Waffen SS officer "who had once demanded the extermination of the Slavic people" but (ironically) was now Adenauer's minister for refugees.

Perhaps it is little wonder that there had been an outbreak in anti-Semitic acts in Germany in the late 1950s and a party with pro-Nazi sympathies was gaining ground then.

Naturally, Adenauer, and Germany had no interest in revelation of the Nazi pasts of so many German officials. So, though one hadn't known it until now, the German government had no interest in catching Eichmann or in seeing him brought to trial. For this might have caused all the German Kurt Waldheims to be revealed (if you remember Waldheim).

Nor did one know that the United States had absolutely no interest in catching Eichmann. During the 1950s the U.S. was completely absorbed in the Cold War and in stopping the Russians. Many former Nazis who had worked for Eichmann were spying for us, the CIA had ties to Globke, and though Bascomb doesn't mention it, we were using the Nazis' rocket scientists, like Wernher von Braun, to build our ICBMs. (One wonders what future historians will one day say about this. Do you, by the way, remember Tom Lehrer's lines: "I just send them up. It's not my business where they come down, says Wernher von Braun.") There was no American desire to catch a horrendous Nazi war criminal whose arrest and trial might put a spotlight on America's ties to Nazis.

Nor, remarkably enough, did Israel have much of an interest in trying to find Eichmann. Its clandestine service, the now feared Mossad, was at the time relatively new and tiny. It could not check out every rumor which arose - there were many, mostly wrong - about the alleged whereabouts of Eichmann, Mengele, Bormann and other Nazi criminals. Israel faced existential threats from Egypt and other Arab countries; the state and the intelligence service had to deal with those. The Holocaust was a subject too painful to discuss for the quarter of the population who were survivors; they rarely spoke of it and did not want to focus on it.

That a few people - Simon Wiesenthal, German prosecutor Fritz Bauer (who was Jewish) and some others - persevered in looking for Eichmann in the face of the disinterest of various countries is a fairly remarkable story. But they did persist, and

eventually word reached Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, of a solid tip that Eichmann was in Argentina and of precisely where he was located. Ben Gurion authorized the Mossad to capture him and bring him back to Israel to stand trial.

Ben Gurion knew that it was necessary not to allow the world, or the Israelis themselves, especially the young, to forget what the Nazis had done, and to remind the world to be on guard against future repetitions. "The world," as Bascomb puts it, "would be forced to remember the assembly line of death that the Jews had faced - and it would be reminded that such horrors must never be allowed to be repeated."

When the Israelis had Eichmann in captivity, he made some points (as he had to the Dutch writer) that stick with one. As has become proverbial for the Nazis, he insisted he had done the right thing because he was simply following orders. He did not himself make the decisions for death, he insisted, but was commanded to carry them out and did as he was ordered. "[A]s a recipient of orders, I had no choice but to carry [them] out." He had thereby served the cause of the German people, and was proud that he had done his job well. As he told his Dutch biographer with regard to Holland: "I sent my boxcars to Amsterdam and most of the 140,000 Dutch Jews were directed for the gas chambers at Bergen-Belsen, Sobibor and Auschwitz ... It went beautifully!"

Eichmann's trial had various effects, some perhaps foreseen by Ben Gurion. Let me quote from Bascomb:

David Ben-Gurion had achieved his ambition. The trial had a profound impact on Israel. It unified the country in a way it had not been unified since the 1948 war. It educated the Israeli public, particularly the young, on the true nature of the Holocaust. And, after sixteen years of silence, it allowed survivors to openly share their experiences. The trial also reinforced to Israelis that a sovereign state for Jews was essential for their survival.

As for the rest of the world, the Eichmann affair rooted the Holocaust in the collective cultural consciousness. The intensive coverage and the wave of Eichmann biographies and fantastic accounts of his capture contributed to the process.

The Holocaust was finally anchored in the world's consciousness - never to be forgotten - by the outpouring of survivor memoirs, scholarly works, plays, novels, documentaries, paintings, museum exhibits, and films that followed in the wake of the trial and that still continues today. This consciousness, in Israel and throughout the world, is the enduring legacy of the operation to capture Adolf Eichmann.

Bauer and his fellow West German prosecutors arrested a host of former Nazis implicated in the atrocities, including several of Eichmann's deputies. Right up to his death in 1968, the Hesse attorney general cracked down on German fascist groups and campaigned vigorously to unseat former Nazis from power, including Globke. He continued to prosecute war crimes, most famously in the 1963 Auschwitz trials.

I would add my understanding (which is correct, is it not?) that the Eichmann trial caused German youth to begin asking their elders the now proverbial question "What did you do during the war?" i.e., began the questioning, of prior actions, which helped importantly in making Germany the free, peaceful and democratic nation it is today.

In America, the Eichmann trial seems to have had an enduring legacy, comprised of vastly increased attention to the Holocaust by both Jews and non-Jews. This is captured in the second of the two quotes above, the one which begins "The Holocaust was finally anchored in the world's consciousness." Perhaps it has not been *sufficiently* anchored in the world's consciousness, because we have since had other mass slaughters in the former Yugoslavia, Darfur and Rwanda. And those who oppose Israel for going too far seem not cognizant that the "race memory" of destruction - for millennia, actually - is likely one of the things driving Israel (at least in my (perhaps limited) opinion). But notwithstanding that its memory was not sufficient to stop later holocausts in Yugoslavia, Darfur and Rwanda, the Holocaust is lodged deeply in much of the world's memory now, as is the idea that the Eichmannesque justification, the Naziesque justification, that one was just following orders is not permissible, is *no* justification, when people do evil.


Thus, one of the lessons of [Hunting Eichmann](#) is that much that was valuable occurred when something was done which several nations had had no desire to see done - neither Germany, nor the US, nor even Israel had had much of an interest in catching and trying Eichmann and, in some instances, as Bascomb discusses, had resisted or declined efforts to pursue him because leaders or officials of the nations had thought pursuit, trial and punishment of Eichmann would not fit national interests. History has shown, I believe, that the leaders and officials who thought this, who resisted or declined efforts to bring this evildoer to justice, were wrong.


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