The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Volume I

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FOREWORD

A generation disappears a new generation arrives, says an ancient text, and the world remains the world.

And you reader, who holds this volume in your hands, make sure that the knowledge you receive becomes part of your endeavor as a member of a vast vanished human community whose fear and hope will impact your own life.

Over the years, week by week, day by day, the number of survivors of the Holocaust diminishes and those of the documents increases.

And what about its Memory? We are holding to it with our last energy. And if it does not contain all the responses it does retain all the questions.

The murderous intentions of Hitler and his acolytes towards the Jewish people and its history, their plans concerning other national and ethnic minorities, the malefic power of their imagination, the quasi-indifference of the free world, the suffering and agony of the victims as well as their solitude: how to conceive them in their totality, and how to explain them.

In between these components are those which by the weight of their horror defy human language and understanding.

Is this the reason for which, for a long time, one refused to listen to the witnesses? It is simple: one could not and did not want to understand them. What they were telling questioned all of their certainties.

But if Auschwitz interested few, with hardly any readers, especially in Germany, this is no longer true today.

I don’t think that I am deceiving myself too much by saying that since the end of the Second World War, the interest in the absolute Evil incarnated by the followers of the “Final Solution” has never been as large or quasi-universal.

Memoirs and biographies, psychological and theological studies, plays and movies, colloquiums and seminars: it is difficult to find pedagogical institutions where the subject is not taught with the intensity which is needed.

The official offenses—and there were so many—the repeated threats, the decrees preceding the ghettos, the “Aktions,” the camps of slow or immediate death—and there was such a variety of them, large and small, known and lesser known: this is a new universe that the Enemy built with its only goal: to wipe out from history even the memory of its victims.

Therefore, reader, study this Encyclopedia which you hold in your hands: say to yourself that its message comes from afar but, for the sake of humanity, appeals to the future.

Elie Wiesel
Translated from French by Radu Ioanid