Because scientists look for continuities to explain things, and because it is widely assumed that as time passes it is easier to make dispassionate judgments about historical events, the job of explaining the Holocaust becomes harder with each passing year. Instead of clearing up, the contradictions just multiply as the scholar must reconcile one of the most brutal mass exterminations in human history with the artistic and scientific achievements of the West's most literate nation. It is to the credit of the editors of this volume and to its contributors, that they do not attempt grandiose metahistorical theories. The essays in this book treat discrete sections of the topic in modest portions and are informative without being overly technical. In the best spirit of social science research, these essays will help to pull together the many pieces of the puzzle so that someday one can come to understand why the years 1933-1945 happened the way they did.

Although explanation of the Holocaust by some grand sweep of Hegelian logic would be Quixotic to say the least, the data-rich articles in this book should be seen against a backdrop of human behavior, needs, and drives. One of the salient background elements of the Holocaust is tied to the question of its uniqueness. Was this the first such event of its kind, and if it was not, what is it about the Holocaust that makes us cringe forty years after the event?

Long before the Roman senate passed its famous resolution, "Delende Est Carthago!" the desire of one people to totally obliterate another was an established part of human behavior. Subjugation and wholesale enslavement are closely related to warfare throughout ancient history, and fossil evidence indicates that the cruder ancestors of modern human beings behaved similarly. Complete annihilation of a tribe or the inhabitants
Towards the Holocaust

of a city or region also occupied many places in written history, myth, and the grey world that lies between them. Motivated by revenge or the more complex desire to ensure sameness and uniformity, attempts to eradicate whole peoples crop up from time to time. The Basques may represent the final remnant of the most enormous holocaust of prehistory, while, on somewhat less speculative ground, the Louisiana Acadians are all that remain of a community transported two thousand miles southward to remove the danger they posed as an eighteenth-century "security risk."

The British engineered the diaspora of the Acadians, we well as a slaughter of Scottish clans which, after the disaster at Culloden, assumed genocidal proportions. While considering the long list of England's assaults on ethnic minorities, the potato famines of the 1840s probably come as close to a holocaust as the nineteenth-century imagination would permit. As history moves away from the vendetta mentality of the localized traditional world and into the cost-benefit sentiment of raison d'État, it takes on the characteristics of the industrial system. The question as to whether papal authorities would have used gas chambers and cremation mills to obliterate the Hussites, Albigensians, and Taborites if they had them handy may be intriguing, but it gets us nowhere. The point is that the machinery and organization required for the kind of holocaust that was leveled against the Jews in this century was simply unavailable in the past. It is only with the European imperium over Africa that one sees the first glimmer of the holocaust mentality wedded to the industrial model. Joseph Conrad's stygian imagery in Heart of Darkness really predicted more of the future than Jules Verne or H. G. Wells: The Western imagination grasped the fact that the assembly line could be made to produce automobiles, to dismember cattle, and to eliminate great numbers of human beings.

Because of twentieth-century events, the term "holocaust" has come to be applied strictly to the extermination of European Jews during the Third Reich. In effect, the twentieth century has witnessed any number of holocausts in which ethnic, religious, or racial groups have been systematically annihilated by legitimate government authorities. "Who remembers the Armenians?" was Hitler's laconic answer when some moderate Nazis questioned the wisdom of the final solution. Few then recalled the massacre of three million Armenians by the Turks during World War I. Only professional historians and others who keep track of such things remember them at all.

New research into German policy in occupied nations had yielded some provocative material regarding the Nazi philosophy of human extermination. It is now acknowledged that several million ethnic Poles were killed by the Germans under the explicit command from Berlin to depopulate Poland for German settlement. The mass
murder of Ukrainians has also been discovered. Although Poles and Ukrainians may have cooperated with the German occupiers in seeking out and exterminating the Jews, it was in the end to no avail since they, too, were considered racial inferiors and allotted their own spot on the Nazi timetable of annihilation or enslavement. Xenophobic hysteria was not uncommon during the 1940s, and the Allied nations were hardly immune to it.

The technological advances of the twentieth century, especially in the areas of communication, information retrieval, transport, and management have provided an impressive list of holocausts. What, then, makes the ordeal of the Jews in Europe so special? The answer lies partially in the style with which the Germans, "the most educated people in Europe," dispatched so many of their own citizens. Standing small children against a wall and shooting them for no reason other than a flimsy accusation of racial inferiority evokes a certain repulsion. But disposing of them in large factories specifically designed for the purpose is really a quantum leap in the science of death. The Holocaust involved the active participation of the industrial, scientific, and business communities. The efficiency of the whole undertaking was calculated down to the last detail. Extracting gold fillings from teeth, employing body fat for soap manufacture, and using skin for lampshades are characteristic of the expertise associated with cost-effective business enterprise. The rationalized procedures and assembly-line methods that produced goods could also be utilized to destroy human beings for the manufacture of consumer goods.

Modern industry proved itself extraordinarily versatile during the Third Reich, and one can only wonder to what lengths these techniques would have been improved had the war not turned against the Germans. Social research into bureaucracy and complex organizations can give us some clues: It is entirely possible that long after every Jew in Europe had been killed, the Holocaust machinery would have continued to function. Pressure to keep it going would have come from the industries that supplied the equipment, from the railroads that shipped the "raw material" to the camps, and from the functionaries who managed the administrative apparatus. As for victims, there is every indication that the Slav "race" would have been next and after them other candidates could be nominated for subhuman status as the need presented itself.

There are several ideological villains in the Holocaust drama, but the essays in this volume amply demonstrate the prominent role played by biological nationalism. From the curious mélange of opinion, fact, theory, and myth that constituted Victorian science, the idea of a master race emerged as one of the most powerful and compelling. Once the scientific community obliged by "proving" that some races were inferior to others and that it was perfectly reasonable to judge someone by his ancestors'
"blood," the door was open to the most fantastic abuses imaginable. Far from having been burnt up in the Götterdämmerung of 1945, biological nationalism and the doctrine of a master race are today enjoying something of a comeback.

Dobkowski and Wallimann have done us a genuine service in assembling this excellent collection. It is, sadly enough, most timely, because the intellectual forces that justified the Holocaust of the 1940s are as active today as they were then. Indians in Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina may not be openly branded as "mongrel races," but they are likely to be exterminated just the same, and with an ideological justification that bears a striking resemblance to that used during the Third Reich. Although objective conditions in today's world seem to cry out for a dissolution of national boundaries, pleas for reason are drowned out by the celebration of tribal fantasies. Threats of nuclear war, global famine, and energy scarcity seem unimportant to petty dictators and world leaders alike, who childishly beat the drum of nationalist ideology.

After the Nazi takeover in Germany, all art and literature considered non-Aryan was destroyed. In Vienna, Freud learned that his books had been burned. The founder of psychoanalysis believed that this showed progress. He reasoned that in the Dark Ages he, as well as his books, would have been burned. Freud died in England before he could find out that his opinion was not justified. Had he remained, he, too, would have been consumed by the Holocaust. Freud was not alone in his failure to imagine just how far Western "civilization" could regress. The tribal fantasies of biological nationalism can create a world more akin to that of the primal horde than the Dark Ages. Group fantasies about master races can only help to bring about the final holocaust which, if nothing else, will be considerably less sectarian than its predecessors.