

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*  
(2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Verso, New York, 2003. ISBN:1-85984-488-X, 150 pp)

**Norman G Finkelstein**

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*The Holocaust Industry* was hailed as the most controversial and provocative book of the year when initially published in 2000. Finkelstein provides insight into issues regarding the Holocaust, which most authors would shy away from and asks all the hard hitting questions. He seems to be an overseas version of South Africa's Carte Blanche team; he is not afraid to ask all the uncomfortable questions and presents the evidence to support his findings through his extensive research and impeccable references.

Finkelstein, a political science lecturer at the DePaul University in Chicago, attempts to provide a platform of information regarding The Holocaust which seems to have been swept under the carpet from the public. This second edition of *The Holocaust Industry* is a short 150 page read which documents the shocking cover-up of the blackmail of Swiss banks among other things. While the scandalous Swiss banks saga is the feature of this book, Finkelstein also deals with how the Holocaust has been capitalised, as a tool for political support.

*The Holocaust Industry* comprises of three, well sourced and documented chapters. The first, "Capitalising The Holocaust", takes a closer look at how powerful and useful the memory of The Holocaust can be as part of political ideologies and propaganda particularly in the United States. Finkelstein carefully unpacks the role each of the various Jewish organisations play in capitalising The Holocaust and in doing so, exploiting Jewish suffering to benefit their modus operandi.

The second chapter, “Hoaxers, Hucksters and History”, explores authors of prize-winning books and memoirs on The Holocaust. Authors who profess to be survivors of this historical event but, who turn out to be nothing more than fame seeking frauds. Finkelstein’s painstaking attention to detail and referencing ensures that while his writing may be polemic, what he produces as facts cannot be easily disputed.

The final chapter, “The Double Shakedown”, investigates the Swiss Banks ordeal. Finkelstein uncovers the disgraceful extortion of Swiss Banks by Jewish organisations in the United States, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) to name but one. While some may question Finkelstein’s firm and critical stance on these organisations, once it is revealed what was done with the monies extorted, one becomes very suspicious of whose interests these organisations have at heart.

*The Holocaust Industry* is extremely thought provoking and the notions Finkelstein poses should be considered. The memory of The Holocaust is a powerful tool that can be used for instance, to gain political support for an alliance with Israel and thus benefit the American Jewry who by implication have huge influence in White House affairs. *The Holocaust Industry* illustrates how this has been done in the United States. Finkelstein is an iconoclast who exposes some uncomfortable issues like the Swiss banks scandal, which the wider public should know about.

In light of this, teaching The Holocaust can be a daunting task for any teacher whether an experienced or first year teacher. The nature of the Holocaust is contentious and should thus be approached with great care and caution. The information provided in textbooks is often the only source on this historical event which learners read and use. I need to stress the importance of teachers being well prepared to tackle a contentious issue. Therefore, it is quintessential that further reading needs to be done and that preparing a lesson solely from the information present in textbooks could be detrimental to learners.

As a learner of History myself, I was unaware that this information even existed. Reading Norman Finkelstein’s book, *The Holocaust Industry*, opened me up to asking more questions and not accepting everything at face value; one of the things that all History teachers should instill in their learners.

*The Holocaust Industry* is not necessarily an easy read and it may be difficult to get into the material at first. The first chapter is heavily referenced and sourced which could be interpreted as a highly academic text. The latter two

chapters are far easier to come to grips with. Once you grasp what Finkelstein is trying to prove with this book, the reader becomes curious about the scandal and drama. The intended audience thus, would be, in my opinion, from a matric (grade 12) level onwards. The language used is not a walk in the park as it is rather academic therefore, grade 12 learners may be the best level to start at. I would recommend that *The Holocaust Industry* is a must read for all History teachers, any tertiary scholar of History as well as anyone who has an interest in the Holocaust.

It is clear to see how *The Holocaust Industry* fits into the field of History teaching and research. Finkelstein is one of the few scholars who have dared challenge the norm of how the Holocaust is viewed. His basic argument that the memories of the Holocaust are being desecrated, should be taken seriously and thus further research needs to occur. It is clear that when *The Holocaust Industry* was first published, Finkelstein hit many a nerve if the very public outcry by elite American Jewry was anything to go by. Included in *The Holocaust Industry* are the reviews written to discredit Finkelstein and by default *The Holocaust Industry*.

Seeing as the Holocaust, as a historical event features prominently in the National Curriculum Statement, Finkelstein's book offers a different view. I am not suggesting that the content of *The Holocaust Industry* be taught however, it should definitely be read by teachers, especially, as background reading. Nonetheless, Finkelstein's argument would make for an interesting debate as to what should be believed when it comes to the Holocaust and the industry that has seemingly been created.