



KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps

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In a landmark work of history, Nikolaus Wachsmann offers an unprecedented, integrated account of the Nazi concentration camps from their inception in 1933 through their demise, seventy years ago, in the spring of 1945. The Third Reich has been studied in more depth than virtually any other period in history, and yet until now there has been no history of the camp system that tells the full story of its broad development and the everyday experiences of its inhabitants, both perpetrators and victims, and all those living in what Primo Levi called "the gray zone."

In *KL*, Wachsmann fills this glaring gap in our understanding. He not only synthesizes a new generation of scholarly work, much of it untranslated and unknown outside of Germany, but also presents startling revelations, based on many years of archival research, about the functioning and scope of the camp system. Examining, close up, life and death inside the camps, and adopting a wider lens to show how the camp system was shaped by changing political, legal, social, economic, and military forces, Wachsmann produces a unified picture of the Nazi regime and its camps that we have never seen before.

A boldly ambitious work of deep importance, *KL* is destined to be a classic in the history of the twentieth century.

KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps Details

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From Reader Review KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps for online ebook

Erik Graff says

Prior to reading this account I had thought I had a good picture of the German concentration camp system from watching the Eichmann trial on television, reading many books about the war and the Nazis and seeing many movies and documentaries on the subject. I was wrong. There was in fact no single, consistent 'system' but rather a continually changing complex of hundreds of camps ranging in size and purpose.

In order to get a handle on all of this I read a Profield's biography of Himmler concurrently and watched a number of videos featuring David Irving, the most notorious of the 'holocaust deniers'. Irving, notable for his early explorations of previously unanalyzed archives, is an impressive authority. While he doesn't deny that hundreds of thousands of Jews died of neglect and overwork in labor camps he does deny that the German state maintained a policy of murdering all Jews in Europe. How, I've long wondered, can such a contrarian picture be posited?

Wachsmann was helpful in beginning to resolve this. While the evidence is overwhelming that wholesale murder was practiced, it wasn't publicized outside of the organizations involved and it wasn't characteristic of the camps as a whole. Indeed, only a handful of camps maintained, for a period, the gas chambers and crematoria commonly referenced in terms of the holocaust. Not only were euphemisms employed in the extant documentations pertaining to the killing, but no documentation at all was produced at those camps which did actually send some new arrivals--usually those deemed too old or young, too weak or sickly to work--directly to the ovens. These prisoners simply weren't registered and thus Irving can point to the lack of any documentation for the mass of these systematic executions. Of course, given the enormous extent of the eyewitness testimony and the forensic evidence, one still wonders why Irving would be so intent on minimizing Nazi crimes.

Tony says

KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration camps. (2015). Nikolaus Wachsmann. ****.

This is an encyclopedic history of Germany's killing camps, from their beginnings to their overthrow in 1945. The camps were referred to as KL, Konzentrationslager. Much of what I read in this volume has been covered in many other books on the topic, but the analysis of what was taking place in the German hierarchy at the time was reviewed and correlated to the camp development program. This is not light reading, and serves, better, as a reference book on the whole topic. Trying to piece together a coherent story on a movement as complex as this would be next to impossible. This is a book specifically addressed to students of the period, and is also valuable for the research notes provided. Recommended.

Stephen Robert Collins says

I read this in four days that shows how good it was it was one hell of horrible book. It was my top book of 2015 but how can I say was "good book" how?

Sharn says

Wachsmann undertakes a superb, monumental examination of the German konzentrationslager system - surveying the development of the camps from their earliest iterations through to the final days in which the atrocity and slaughter of the camps became unrivalled.

The scope of Wachsmann's work is limited to concentration camps specifically, rather than extermination camps - a differentiation I had not previously appreciated. To be sure, people were exterminated purposefully in many of these concentration camps, but that was not their primary or initial aim (though that is, of course, of little comfort to any of those who suffered within the confines of these camps). This means some of the worst camps under the Nazi regime, such as Treblinka or Birkenau are not given any detailed examination in the book - though they are sometimes referenced in passing. Wachsmann uses a range of sources to paint a vivid, but ultimately grim, depiction of the horror of the KL system, using official documents, Reich-era memoirs and letters of guards and other Nazi figures, contemporaneous newspaper reports from Germany and abroad, the post-war testimonies of Nazi figures, the written records of those who experienced the horrors of the KL system first-hand (whether they survived or not) - such as Primo Levi.

Wachsmann has, throughout this book, masterfully detailed the ways in which 'categorisation' of prisoners served not only to signal to the SS personnel which prisoners may be particularly 'deserving' of their wrath, but also served to signal to prisoners the differences between themselves. This meant 'asocials' and (mostly petty) criminals, adorned with green triangles, received little to no sympathy from other inmates. This focus on differences between inmates saw hierarchies formed within camp populations, and also helped to ensure inmates would not unite against the guards.

If you have only a passing interest, perhaps this will be too detailed for you - though I certainly would urge anyone who is interested in the topic in anything but the most fleeting manner to read this if they get the chance.

Particular highlights, or parts I found especially interesting, of the book included:

Wachsmann's in-depth discussions of the vicious anti-Semitism of Hitler's Germany, discussing not only their imprisonment and specific targeting within the KL system, but also the widespread and often petty restrictions placed upon German Jews in the early years of the Third Reich (such as prohibiting Jews from owning pets).

The exploration of the early tensions between the justice system and the 'regular' prison system, and how legal resistance to the KL system was eroded over time. (As an aside, this was also something we examined in jurisprudence at law school, particularly in the writings of Third Reich jurist Carl Schmitt and his view of the 'legitimate authority' of the State and what he called the 'state of exception.' This was also contrasted with the writings of Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben).

Wachsmann discussed very well the career paths and backgrounds of many 'leading' KL and Nazi figures, describing the familiar path that many of these young men were hapless, disillusioned, and crying out for a sense of belonging - something that the system reinforced and thrived upon toxic masculinity. Furthermore, throughout the book Wachsmann continues to expertly describe the building cruelty, violence, and barbarity of the KL system and the Nazi regime more broadly, describing the process as 'cumulative radicalisation'. I think this is particularly important in light of the common cry against 'the slippery slope argument' when one

expresses concerns about political dehumanisation of other groups, or increasing authoritarianism, etc - horrific regimes and events rarely start out in their most radical or violent iteration, it is often a step-by-step process that becomes more extreme over time.

The Nazi regime's clashes with and repression of Christian churches, and their particular targeting of Jehovah's witnesses - largely due to their status as 'conscientious objectors' and whose clothes were adorned with a purple triangle in the camps. Obviously, however, this repression and violence still paled in comparison to the murderous fury the Third Reich reserved for Jews.

I really enjoyed (perhaps that is the wrong word?) Wachsmann's examination of the treatment of homosexual prisoners within the KL system, and how these men were given particularly harsh treatment, castrated, and were also frequently harassed, vilified, and isolated by other inmates. Another one of the tragedies of the end of WWII, which I discovered upon my visiting Germany in 2015, was that homosexual prisoners were left in concentration camps after the liberation of other groups. Additionally, the Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism (in the park across the road from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin) was only opened in 2008. Similarly, the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism was also not opened in Berlin until 2012.

Something that managed to make me chuckle, in amongst many of the grim things recounted in this book, was the story of Hans Beimler. Beimler, a communist and political opponent of the Nazi regime, was first imprisoned in Dachau in 1933. Faced with an ultimatum from the SS troops to either kill himself (after being shown how to tie a noose with bedsheets) or to be killed upon the guards' return, Beimler managed to escape Dachau and Germany altogether. From Czechoslovakia, he sent the SS guards at Dachau a postcard, telling them to "kiss my ass."

Wachsmann also effectively challenges the view of the Nazi regime as an efficient, business-savvy regime. He examines the calamitous Nazi forays into manufacture, such as the Sachsenhausen brickworks, and reveals projects that often seemed directionless with plenty of bureaucratic waste and dramatic changes embarked upon on a whim. Similarly, Wachsmann discusses the impact of private businesses in Germany that exploited slave labour from KL prisoners - and the perverse way in which this exploitation sometimes helped save prisoners from death in the camps (but largely only where one engaged in technical/workshop manufacturing; hard labour in the fields or in construction resulted in an increased rate of deaths by both execution and exhaustion).

The book's exploration of the Nazi campaign of extermination is also incredibly interesting. Wachsmann recalls how 'Action14f13', the euthanasia campaign initially used against the disabled and those in sanitaria, was eventually expanded to concentration camp detainees between 1941 and 1942, claiming the lives of 6,500 detainees. He highlights how this campaign was particularly brutal against Jewish and homosexual prisoners. In March 1942, this policy was curtailed, with instructions insisting that only those permanently disabled or those unable to work permanently would be sent to their deaths, largely in light of Himmler's recent insistence that the KL system make a larger economic contribution to the German war efforts. Wachsmann insists, however, that this curtailment of the extermination program within Germany was really about the refocus of the organisation and doctors involved with the Holocaust, with many involved parties relocating to outside German borders to the death camps of Eastern Europe. Wachsmann also discusses how the termination of this project evolves into another with similar aims, and also details how the mass extermination of prisoners virtually 'paid for itself' via the post-mortem seizure of valuables and gold teeth fillings which were then sold off.

And finally, a figure which has stuck in my mind ever since I read it (in line with this brilliant YouTube

video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwKPF...> Between October and December 1941, an estimated 300,000-500,000 Soviet prisoners of war died *each month* in Nazi camps - largely as a result of Hitler's deep hatred of Soviets (for being Slavic, for being Jewish, and for being Bolsheviks [the latter two often being combined]).

I cannot recommend this book highly enough, though it is of course with a heavy heart. Monumental.

Omar Ali says

Skimmed, not read.

This is probably the best and most comprehensive history of the entire German concentration camp system written to date. I have read other holocaust books that focus on the holocaust itself, but the system started as soon as the Nazis took power, and the first victims were their political opponents (though political opponents who happened to be Jewish could expect extra-vicious beatings and torture right from the git-go). The details are sobering and heart-rending. But this is not a book focused on emotionalism or propaganda. It is thoroughly researched and very objective. And therefore, even more scary.

Humans. What a species.

Dimitri says

Wachsmann came to the fore with a book on a more neglected sector of the Nazi penal universe: regular prisons and prison camps*. At the time of release (2004) his next work-in-progress was already announced by the publisher. A decade in the making, would this be "the new standard" for concentration camp studies? I dare say it is.

He uses this prior knowledge to good effect in tracing out the haphazard existence of the KL system. It goes past the troika of pure death camps (Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor) and while Auschwitz inevitably retains a dominant position in the narrative, it shares in the deconstruction of popular mythology. This goes as far as correcting minor points of Hilberg's monumental trilogy through recent scholarship**.

The net result is a history of the camp system that is defined by the indecisiveness and uncertainty of a mysantropic chaos theory. The origins of the Holocaust are too complex to explain even by an expert. You can only work with transition periods, not defining moments. Largely because there WAS no singular masterplan; the SS were half making it up as they went along. To begin with, the very existence of camps was uncertain after the first year of Nazi rule. Once the improvised torture basements of the SA were swept clean and their former wardens neutered, the new regime felt consolidated enough to consider a minimalist prison system. Nor was the Wannsee conference the clear-cut starting point of industrialised genocide. The mass extermination of Soviet POWs by prussian acid (a familiar delouser) was developed just in time (autumn/winter '41) to coincide with the planning. A few months later, the tide of war perceptively turned at Stalingrad and the army's manpower demands turned foreign workers vital to keep the workforce on the Home Front up to strength. Should annihilation through labour continue indiscriminately, or were skilled Jewish workers to make a productive contribution to the war economy as the fortunes of battle waned? The dilemma was never resolved, but there was always room for guinea pigs and camp brothels as poorly chosen incentives (malnutrition kills the libido in men as effectively as it does menstruation in women).

The sum amounts to a KZ Bible, supplemented by the equally voluminous publication by Casarani of the same year and Friedländer's two volumes***, that encompass the pre-war persecution and the Einsatzgruppen.

Bibliography

* Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany

** La Destruction Des Juifs D'europe by Raul Hilberg

*** Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-49 by David Cesarani

Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume 1: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939 & Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination, 1939-1945 by Saul Friedländer

4triplezed says

While reading this harrowing but ultimately fascinating history of the KL system a newly elected senator made a speech to the Australian Senate saying “....the final solution to the immigration problem of course is a popular vote” As was pointed out to him at the time the use of the phrase by Nazi Germany had certain connotations that do not bear thinking about. The newly elected senator was unrepentant and defended the phrases use. At the time I was saddened to think that in this day and age a senator from a minor political faction had had to resort to the outrageous to get attention.

With that incident in mind, and reaching the end of this book, I am now of the opinion that the entire KL system and all the consequences of its existence must be part of the education curriculum in Australia. It is a historical event that must be told and understood.

With that in mind this may not be the book to be part of that curriculum and that is not criticism. The reality is that this amazing work of scholarship is for the individual that is aware of the Holocaust and the treatment of those that the Nazis deemed as enemies of their moribund ideology. The depth of research is superb. The mix of analysis, statistics and first-hand accounts make a compelling, though very tough read. I admit to having a rest several times from when I first began this in early May to finishing now in late September. The subchapter "Killing the Weak" was profoundly mind numbing and I repeat what I have said before to others, man's inhumanity to his fellow man never ceases to amaze. As I get older I am still none the wiser.

Author Wachsman has written his history in chronological order. I found his footnotes excellent and was constantly scurrying to research the new information covered in this book. There is a very good abbreviations section to assist with the various acronyms. The sources section covers archival, electronic and printed sources and if at this point in time I wished to read further on the subject it would be the ideal resource to refer to.

To quote goodreads friend Sharn 'I cannot recommend this book highly enough, though it is of course with a heavy heart. Monumental.' With that I also recommend Sharn's superb review that has articulated this brilliant tome far better than I could ever conceive.

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Jonny Ruddock says

A very dense, thorough work, charting the rise, near fall, and rise again of the Nazi concentration camps through their inception as political prisons to metamorphosis into killing factories and death camps. Bachmann spares no punches (and nor should he) and provides insight into every aspect of the camps - making in places for some difficult (and occasionally surprising) reading. Nonetheless, the academic style of writing made this an easier read than Gilbert's *The Holocaust*. Highly recommended, so long as you have time to set aside.

Michael Flanagan says

KL delivers an exhaustive study of Nazi Germanys concentration camp system that is easily accessible by the reader. This highly examined part of the Third Reich gets a refreshing coat of paint with some great research and insights by those who survived, worked and died in these pieces of hell on earth.

The author takes great care in giving the reader a very rounded view of these camps from all angles. His extensive research for this book shows in every nook and cranny as he weaves together a narrative that chills you to the bone.

As holocaust books go this is up there as one of the best as the author paints a comprehensive picture of this low point in human history. But the most important part of this book for me is that he has given the dead a voice and in that he has let them live on in the readers memory.

Andrew says

KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps, by Nikolaus Wachsmann, is an intricate look at the Concentration Camp system that the Nazi's used in Germany from the 1930's to 1945. Right off the bat, I will say this book is dense and difficult to read. The subject matter is horrifying, detailed to the extreme, and tackled in an academic way. Wachsmann is chronicling the history of camps used as points of destruction for political prisoners in Germany, as collection points for those deemed to be inferior races by the Nazi government, and slaves.

Wachsmann's book, however, is important to read. Much has been written on the Nazi's political experiments with mass extermination, but KL chronicles the camps themselves. The growth of the camps, from thrown-together collection points for political prisoners who were opposed to the Nazi regime in the 1930's, is detailed, with the likes of Dachau, Mauthausen, Auschwitz, and the dozens of other camps that sprang up in Europe examined. For example, Ravensbruck was originally a concentration camp for women. Other camps were for high ranking Jews and political prisoners to be used as hostages later on, and of course camps like Auschwitz, which were constructed as collection points for slave labour and extermination of invalid and sick prisoners.

Wachsmann also details the Camp SS, a division of the SS which ran the concentration camps. Figures like Theodore Eicke, Hoss, and Himmler - bigwig Nazi's with extremist racial ideals, are detailed. These figures had a massive influence on the management structures of the Camp SS, with martial violence as a tool for terror and control, slave labour as a means to encourage war time production, government-industry partnerships which saw slaves working in BMW, VW, Siemens, and IG Farben factories, to name a few. These attitudes trickled down to Camp SS guards and administrative staff. Casual violence was common,

abuse widespread, and political extremism the norm in the SS. These men and women saw themselves as the front line soldiers of a racial war, which pitted Germans against "inferior races" like Slavs, Jews and Sinti (Gypsies) as well as unwanted parts of German society like the "asocial," "work-shy," criminals, homosexuals and those who did not believe in Nazi ideology, or who challenged the state.

The lives of prisoners is also examined in detail. This is one of the toughest parts of the book to read. The different camps did develop for particular purposes, so camp life could be better or far worse depending on the location, the ideological zeal/sadism of the staff, and the presence of various types of forced labour. For example, some of the worst camps, like Dora, were work camps where slave labour was employed to try and construct underground factories for airplanes and V2 rockets. These camps, with construction or manual labour production, often had the highest casualty rates, as SS maximized construction efficiency by reducing rest time, rations, and other necessities for life. Indeed, as the war progressed the SS began to implement "destruction through labour" with prisoners literally worked to death. Those who were broken, starved or sick were sent to gas chambers to be liquidated.

Conflicts between various prisoner groups is also examined in detail. It is a misnomer to think that prisoners did not have a hierarchy, and indeed this was actively encouraged by the SS. The most famous example is of the Kapos, usually German men who were placed in positions of power amongst prisoners. These Kapos received extra rations, comfortable living quarters and so on, in exchange for keeping the prisoners in line. A system of identification badges, like yellow stars for Jews, pink triangles for homosexuals, black triangles for workshy, green for asocial and so on, was used. This made it easy for SS to target their most hated groups, with abuse often targeted at certain groups throughout the camp system. During the early war years, asocials and political prisoners like communists were particularly harshly treated, often being worked to death, beaten randomly and summarily executed. As the years moved on, the targeted groups shifted to Poles, Soviet POW's, and Jewish inmates.

Death and violence was an integral part of the camp. The early camps were characterized by sadistic SA brown-shirts lynching old Weimar politicians. After Ernst Rohm's fall from grace and the destruction of the SA, the extremist SS units took over the camps. This was the beginning of the rise of radical racial ideals, extremist economic thought and systemic violence. Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, saw them as perfect ideological soldiers, fighting against the internal enemies of the German Reich. They utilized brutality to break prisoners spirits from the beginning. Extra-judicial killings were common at the beginning of the camp system, but systemic death was not yet the norm. At the beginning, these camps were collection points for unwanted elements of German society. As time went on, they grew into collection points for forced labour and eventually full, brutal chattel slavery. The movement from political to ideological radicalism saw growing casualty rates among prisoners. At first, this was because of lack of adequate shelter, with disease and epidemics becoming rampant. This began to change, however. Reductions in rations and growing corruption in SS ranks encouraged starvation. Prisoners also began to work as forced labour and slaves, in camp construction, maintenance and eventually, in war production and industry. Those who were broken by the work, or starved beyond the brink, became known as "Muslims." These were often rounded up and destroyed.

Extermination of unwanted elements of society began in the early 1940's, and began to take on its terrifying shape during the run up to wars end. Camps grew exponentially as prisoners from Poland, the USSR and other conquered territories flooded in. At this time, unwanted elements of German society were also targeted for arrest by police, and sent to camps. The Nazi's then implemented directives to destroy unwanted elements and those not fit for labour. Clearing out the camps became a priority. Sadistic bureaucrats began to experiment with methods of destruction. Mass killings by firing squad, death through labour, gas chambers, death trucks, medical experimentation and starvation began to kill hundreds, thousands, and eventually

millions. Poles and Soviet POW's were the guinea pigs for these mass-killing implements, and eventually the destruction of Europe's Jewish population, the Gypsy's and Slavic peoples became a priority. Trainloads of those condemned in Nazi "selections" were carted straight to gas chambers. Experimentation on crematorium locations came from the study of killing efficiency. Truly, this terrifying system of mass death is unique in history.

Clearly, this book is something else. The causal brutality of mass death that the SS implemented during the years of the Third Reich seems almost unprecedented. Wachsmann examines this in detail using cold, clinical academic research. The book is not heartless, with Wachsmann's scholarly professionalism cracking at times due to the brutality of the subject matter. Individual stories are woven along with the narrative of events to give concrete and real examples of ideas and facts that seem so inhuman that they are often difficult to comprehend. Even so, Wachsmann chronicles the history of the camps themselves. This is an interesting and original way to examine this period of history. Often, the camps are seen as just instruments of death, but their growth and movement toward this climax needs to be examined closely. The mentality of this system is also examined. It is important for this to be done, as clearly systemic racism is not something that will disappear overnight from humanity. The depravity of the SS and the Third Reich, the complacency of many German civilians, and the casual racism, slavery and genocide that took place need to be understood to ensure they never happen again. The economic utopianism of SS leaders lead to chattel slavery not seen since the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and indeed surpassed it in its ultimate aim: the destruction of entire people groups.

To sum up, this book was difficult to read, due to its shocking and terrifying subject matter. No matter how many times I read about the Holocaust, it never gets easier to try and comprehend. Even so, it is important to try and do so. This stuff can never be forgotten. The ideals that led to this dark period in human history can rise again. Racism has not left us. Concentration camps still exist in some forms, for example. When one reads a book like *KL*, one can understand how important it is to ensure we never go back. Do I recommend this book? Wholeheartedly yes. Everyone needs to read about the Holocaust and *KL* is one of the best books to do so. It is long and dark, clinical in its approach, and all the more effective for it.

Célia | Estante de Livros says

Há coisas que não deveriam nunca cair no esquecimento. Primo Levi, escritor italiano que dedicou grande parte do sua obra à divulgação dos horrores que viveu no campo de concentração de Auschwitz, fez sempre questão de alertar para o perigo de tudo o que se passou nos campos de concentração acabar por ser esquecido e que a humanidade nada aprendesse com o potencial terrível do ser humano. Primo Levi é um dos vários sobreviventes citados em *KL – A História dos Campos de Concentração Nazis*, um trabalho de pesquisa e documentação notável levado a cabo pelo alemão Nikolaus Wachsmann, atualmente professor de História Europeia Moderna em Londres.

Ao longo de mais de 600 páginas (uma boa parte do livro consiste em notas, referências e bibliografia), Nikolaus Wachsmann propõe-se a contar a história dos primórdios dos campos de concentração, ainda nos primeiros anos da década de 1930, percorrendo todas as alterações de conceito e objetivos da criação destes campos e, fundamentalmente, destacando a sua natureza dinâmica, ao longo do tempo, bem como a vida do dia-a-dia nos campos. Como afirma o autor, faltaria um “estudo que capte a complexidade dos campos sem fragmentar e que os coloque no seu contexto político e cultural mais lato sem se tornar redutor“, e essa foi a principal motivação para o seu trabalho.

A história dos KL – ou *Konzentrationslager* – é aqui contada de forma cronológica, dando ao seu leitor perspetivas sobre a ligação que esta teve com os desenvolvimentos políticos, económicos e militares, desde a sua génesis até ao seu final. Na verdade, a população inicial dos campos era, em grande parte, composta por alemães com visões de esquerda, e por pessoas que não se integravam nas normas sociais que o nazismo determinava serem normais, ou seja, os marginais. Nikolaus Wachsmann refere que “*estes homens oriundos das franjas da sociedade constituíram o maior grupo de vítimas dos KL no período imediatamente anterior à guerra*“. Outro aspeto que o autor destaca é que os campos “*nos finais dos anos 30 não foram matadouros em larga escala. As condições de vida não eram letais para a maioria dos reclusos e o extermínio em massa sistemático ainda não estava na agenda da SS*“, constatação que sinceramente me surpreendeu.

O que também me surpreendeu foi perceber que no início da Guerra havia apenas cerca de 1.500 judeus nos campos, tendo em conta que residiam cerca de 300.000 no território do Terceiro Reich. O anti-semitismo, na génesis do conceito de nazismo, assumiu toda uma nova dimensão com o começo da Guerra e em 1941 as condições letais já existentes nos campos transformaram-se no extermínio em massa que assumiu proporções assustadoras nos final da Guerra e que deu corpo ao Holocausto.

KL – A História dos Campos de Concentração Nazis não é um murro no estômago, são vários; por isso o li ao longo de vários meses. O que mais gostei, para além da óbvia aprendizagem acerca de um tema que me fascina, foi a forma desapaixonada e factual que Nikolaus Waschmann utiliza, juntamente com a extensa fundamentação dos factos apresentados, contribuindo os dois fatores de forma decisiva para a credibilidade deste livro. Ainda que a narrativa se suporte bastante em histórias reais e casos concretos, que facilmente mexem com o leitor, o estilo cativante e direto do autor tornam esta leitura extensa um pouco mais fácil de suportar.

No final do livro, Waschmann afirma que “*continuará [...] a nossa demanda de um significado mais profundo dos KL, embora os esforços para extrair uma essência única estejam condenados ao fracasso*“; eu diria que *KL – A História dos Campos de Concentração Nazis* é uma peça importantíssima neste gigantesco puzzle que é a compreensão do que foram os campos de concentração.

Catherine says

Searingly accurate and deeply researched, this book taught me a lot. I've studied the Nazi terror regime for years, but I learned a huge amount I had not known from this book. The author looks thoughtfully and deeply at the question of why this happened, too, and does not flinch from some very difficult moral questions, which are discussed with insight, balance, and humanity, but no pulled punches. Everyone who thinks it is important to make sure this never happens again, or who wants to honor the victims, should read this book.

Lara says

This book was a very hard read. There were times when I had to walk away from the horrors contained in its pages. But, having read it, I think "KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps" is a book that everyone SHOULD read. Until now, there has been no comprehensive history of ALL the Nazi concentration camps during WWII. While people are most familiar with the names Auschwitz and Dachau or Ravensbrook, no one talks about the smaller satellite camps that surrounded each of the larger death machines like bees around their queen. As you turn the pages, you see a small system grow, becoming larger and feeding on

mens' baser instincts, their ignorance, their cruelty, until you realize that the German concentration camp system turned not just the Nazis themselves but often the prisoners into beings that forgot decency and began to act like animals.

The prodigious research that has been done by author Nikolaus Wachsmann has produced something that has been long overdue: a chronological, amazingly detailed and horrifying history of how pure evil can be conceived and carried out, of how obsessed men put their twisted ideas into play and, above all, a history of how something as huge, as incomprehensible as the Holocaust germinates from the minds of a few sick and hate-filled individuals into a system that gluts its maw on the blood and bones of the innocent.

Reading "KL", you are shown that the Nazi concentration camp system didn't just spring up, full-fledged, from the twisted minds of Hitler and his right-hand man, Himmler. Its beginning was rather small, and hesitant, and there were very many men involved, eager to learn how to kill to please their masters and, at last, killing to please themselves. And people knew, but they didn't REALLY want to know. "KL" reveals that, despite the protests of so many ordinary Germans during that time, the camps and their killing fields were often not so far away from villages and towns. They knew. And that's only one of the chilling revelations contained and confirmed in this well-written, long-overdue tome.

Wachsmann has complied not only facts, but eyewitness testimony from those who lived through the horror, and those who did not. Many inmates kept secret diaries, burying them all over the camps, hoping against hope that someday someone might find them and know the truth. So many who did not survive have had their say in this way, in this book. Their hopes, as they scratched out a hole deep enough to conceal their work, were realized in the end.

This book is 865 pages of things that often left me, literally, sitting with my mouth open and once again asking myself the question that will never be answered in full by anyone: HOW could a thing like this have happened? Is there a word for men like Himmler, Speer, Rudolf Hess and the other Nazi men (and women, too) that could even hope to adequately express the evil they conceived and perpetuated?

No. There isn't. But that should not be a reason to not know this complete history because don't kid yourselves: it could happen again and, this time, the methods used will be much more sophisticated and much more deadly than cans of Zyklon-B and ovens that human corpses were shoved into at Auschwitz.

It's a hard read, but worth it. Wachsmann brings his deep familiarity to this subject as he did in "Hitler's Prisons: Legal Terror in Nazi Germany" and his history of fluent and gripping. READ. THIS. BOOK.

Saba Imtiaz says

An incredibly detailed history of concentration camps, this book is a must read because it breaks down - in clear, unemotional detail (and this is a good thing here) - the structures of the camps and how the idea of mass killings began and led to the 'final solution' as well as the hierarchies within prisoners. It's also a very good book in trying to understand the idea of responsibility in mass killings, particularly as it explains the lower tiers of the Nazi regime and the camp management, and the section on kapos is a good example of that.

Paul says

I thought I knew a lot about Concentration Camps - I was wrong.

The history of the Concentration Camps has never been told so clearly as Professor Wachsmann's book. Written in chronological order, the author writes from the perspective of the planners, the guards and, above all, the prisoners, in a manner that engages the novice and the expert alike. Be prepared for some some heartbreaking true stories from inside those camps.

I particularly liked Nikolaus Wachsmann's focus on the main, oldest, camp of Dachau, as he shows its transformation in the 12 years of its existence, showing the changes in staffing, prisoner population, purpose, size and murderous intent. No KL stayed the same for even two years, and Prof. Wachsmann shows how stark the differences were between a camp in 1933 and twelve years later.

This book has been sitting on my shelf unread for some time. After a five star review and personal recommendation from a friend (thanks Michael), a booking to visit Auschwitz next August and then meeting the author a few weeks back (a very nice fellow), I thought it time to read KL. I was not disappointed, but it has been, despite the author's easy writing style, a hard read due to the content. Thoroughly recommended.
