



IBM and the Holocaust

by Edwin Black

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Twenty years ago last week, my book, [*IBM and the Holocaust*](#), exposed—backed up by a tower of documentation—that [IBM knowingly organized all six phases of the Holocaust](#): identification, exclusion, confiscation, ghettoization, deportation, and even extermination. All of this occurred under the micromanagement of IBM’s celebrated CEO, Thomas Watson, Sr., operating from his New York office on Madison Avenue, and later through European subsidiaries. In view of what IBM was able to accomplish on behalf of the Nazis prior to the era of the computer, the thought of what big tech can now do to surveil, censor, and control human lives is sobering indeed.

Without IBM, there would still have been a Holocaust killing hundreds of thousands. Einsatzgruppen murder squads and their militia cohorts would still have murdered East European Jews bullet by bullet in pits, ravines, and isolated clearings in the woods. But it was IBM that helped the Third Reich create the industrial, high-speed, six million-victims Holocaust—metering ghetto residents out to trains, then carefully scheduling the moving of those trains to concentration camps for mass murder and cremation within hours, clearing the way for the next shipment of victims, day and night.

Custom IBM programs controlled the census and registration processes, organized the pauperization of the Jews, and ensured that the trains ran on time. There was an IBM customer site—the [*Hollerith Abteilung*](#)—in almost every concentration camp, some with tabulating [machines](#) and some with card organizers. IBM even engineered Germany’s odious extermination-by-labor campaign, where skills were matched to slave labor needs and Jews were called up to be worked to death. IBM’s code for a Jewish inmate was “6” and its code for gas chamber was “8.” The evidence indelibly proves that IBM

was an indispensable and pivotal partner in the greatest crime in history. But to IBM, the Holocaust was just another business project.

Watson, a sociopath and narcissist lacking any moral compass, was no stranger to crime in pursuit of his business aims. He had been [convicted of extortion](#) in the infamous National Cash Register scandal before he was ever handed the reins of IBM. An evidence technicality allowed his conviction to be overturned and Watson to escape prison time.

Watson received a percentage of every Reich transaction and in 1937 was [honored by Hitler](#) in Berlin at a [grandiose award ceremony](#).

How did IBM get involved? When Hitler came to power, he wanted to locate and destroy the Jews of Germany, Europe, and the world. That required the resources of a computer, but in 1933, no such computer existed. What did exist at the time was the IBM punch card. The punch card was invented at the end of the 19th century for the US Census Bureau, from which IBM stole the technology. The card was a people tracker from its inception.

It was the IBM punch card's use in Nazi Germany that gave birth to "information technology." Invented by a German American named Herman Hollerith, this card, about the size of a dollar bill, could store for retrieval detailed information about a person, place, or process depending upon the arrangement of holes on the card, which were punched into rows and columns. The card would be fed into a high-speed reader, and out would come personal information.

Prior to the invention of the punch card, you could count on your fingers, your toes, or an abacus, but you could not derive information about the people, processes, or places you counted. But with punch cards, you could count not only the number of people in a room but how many of them were men, how many were women, how many were Jews, how many were Christians, how many were blonde, how many brunette, how many were bankers, how many were tailors, how many were born in Westphalia or born in Warsaw—every trait. IBM punch cards thus not only delivered total counts, but also detailed personal information about those counted. The Information Age—meaning the era of the individualization of statistics, or the identifying and quantifying of a specific person within an anonymous count—was born not in Silicon Valley, but in Berlin in 1933.

The IBM alliance with the Third Reich was no rogue corporate operation run out of a basement. Day in and day out, it was Watson who personally micromanaged all aspects of the 12-year Nazi relationship. The relationship

began just after January 30, 1933—the first moments of the Third Reich—and ended in the first week of May 1945, the last gasp of Hitler’s regime.

Under Watson, IBM eagerly contacted the Hitler regime and made clear that it was “the solutions company.” Indeed, IBM would supply the means to any solution the Nazis needed, including the Final Solution.

The first thing Hitler wanted to know was exactly how many Jews resided in Germany. IBM hired thousands to execute a [door-to-door racial census](#). Once Hitler had the names and locations of Germany’s Jews, IBM created systems to tabulate that data against professional and employment databases as well as financial institutions to help Germany systematically pauperize them. Location data was then used to organize the mass transfer of Jews from their homes into ghettos. Ghetto residents were then systematically forced onto trains to the camps.

Those [trains ran](#) on IBM punch cards, and owed their punctual timetables to special IBM scheduling programs. All the work and prisoner data from all the concentration camps was fed into a central nerve center in the [T-Building](#) at Oranienburg known as [Section D-II](#) and powered by custom-wired IBM machines. Everything IBM did was [custom](#), specific, and tailored to the Nazis’ specific needs.

All IBM machines in Nazi Europe were leased, with monthly payments. They were insured by American and German insurance companies at their Reich locations and serviced by repairmen twice monthly on-site, whether the noisy, syncopating machines were located in downtown Berlin or at Auschwitz. Hollerith machines were incapable of operating without IBM’s custom punch cards, and each card could be used only once. Without a continuing card supply from IBM, the machines would have been like rifles without bullets.

In the 20 years since *IBM and the Holocaust* was published, IBM has never asked for a single change to the text nor rebutted a single fact.

Today, fear of what big tech can do to surveil, censor, and control our lives—from China to California—has heightened interest in the book and its revelations. The connection is clear. To get a glimpse into our perilous future, we need only look back at what IBM helped Hitler do during the Holocaust, in the era before computers existed. What could a Hitler-type regime do today, and how quickly could it do it with today’s high-speed, hand-held technology?

It is also worth asking why a company like IBM chose to participate in genocide. It was never about Nazism; it was never about antisemitism. It was about money. "Business" is, after all, the company's middle name.

IBM has proven that some corporations can get away with murder.

Edwin Black is the author of the New York Times bestselling and award-winning [IBM and the Holocaust](#) and many other books. He can be found at [EdwinBlack.com](#) and seen at [TheEdwinBlackShow.com](#).