The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps


Among the thousands of books that have examined various aspects of the Jewish Holocaust, surprisingly few have treated the final days of the death camps in any detail. From July 1944 to May 1945, the Russian army liberated ten camps east of the Oder River; the Allied Forces liberated the five western camps in April and May of 1945. The names—Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald—form the 20th century's most horrifying litany.

Jon Bridgman's absorbing account embraces the immediate prelude to the liberation of the camps when the advancing Allied armies provoked contradictory orders from Hitler and Himmler, the circumstances of the liberation of each of the camps, the policies of the various liberators, and the consequences of liberation, in particular its effect on American and European perceptions of the war and its aftermath.

As the author points out, it was the drama of liberation more than any other aspect of the Holocaust that brought home to the West the horror of the Final Solution, ending once and for all the false belief that stories of Nazi atrocities were exaggerated Allied propaganda.