their sources and always to give full credit where credit is due. My impressionistic survey of major Holocaust and Nazi-era studies published over the past two decades has revealed that not all historians have actually lived up to their professional obligation.

One can of course find *The Nazi Doctors* listed in the bibliographies of many standard works on the Holocaust and on the history of the Nazis. Yet, there are far too many other studies, including those with indexed references to "medicalized killing," that fail to list *The Nazi Doctors* at all. Even in those instances where Lifton's book is listed in the historical study's bibliography, his findings have too often been missing from the narrative. If only half of the historians who should know better continue to ignore Lifton's important work, it constitutes a gross injustice to psychohistory, genocide studies, and to the histories of the Holocaust and of Nazi Germany.

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Lifton on Healers Turned to Killers

Allan Mohl—Psychohistory Forum Research Associate

A unique contribution to Holocaust literature is Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors* (1986). In it he describes in detail the Auschwitz death camp, including the selection process and the disposal of bodies after gassing. But what is most intriguing is his exploration of the question, "How could physicians, trained as healers, become killers?" It is this question that engaged Lifton for nearly 10 years in interviews with former Nazi doctors and Auschwitz survivors, as well as in extensive historical research. Lifton illuminates the Nazi "biomedical vision," whereby mass murder was committed to "heal" the racially "diseased" body of the German nation. He shows that from the Nazis' little understood early program of sterilization and "euthanasia" to the death camps, doc-

tors were indispensable to Hitler's Final Solution. These physicians went far beyond performing grotesque experiments to directly involving themselves in the entire killing program.

Robert Jay Lifton's description of the doctors' behavior in psychological detail was striking, especially in the specific environment of Auschwitz, where they routinely engaged in killing. The doctors became murderers through "doubling," forming a second, relatively autonomous self—a process enhanced by the Nazi vision of a revitalized German people. Using portraits of SS physicians, including Josef Mengele and the chief doctor of Auschwitz, Lifton described the polarity of the Auschwitz self that wavered between the sense of omnipotent control over the lives and deaths of prisoners and the seemingly opposite sense, of being a powerless cog in a vast machine controlled by unseen others (Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 1986, 447). These polarized feelings were undoubtedly widespread among death-camp personnel, but they had special meaning for doctors, who ordinarily experience both extremes of feeling in everyday confrontations with disease and death—accompanying struggle with their own death anxiety. The polarity took on outrageous dimensions in Auschwitz, as Nazi doctors called forth feelings of omnipotence and related sadism on the one hand, and masochism on the other, in order to reduce this death anxiety.

Lifton saw doubling as the psychological vehicle for the Nazi doctors' Faustian bargain with the evil and diabolical environment: in exchange for his contribution to the killing, he was offered various psychological and material benefits on behalf of privileged adaptation. Beyond Auschwitz was the larger Faustian temptation offered to German doctors in general, that of becoming the theorists and implementers of a cosmic scheme of racial cure by means of victimization and mass murder. Humans are always ethically responsible for the bargains they make—a responsibility in no way abrogated by the fact that much doubling takes place outside of awareness. In exploring doubling, Lifton engaged in psychological probing on behalf of illuminating evil. For the Nazi doctor in Auschwitz, doubling was likely to mean a choice of evil. He provides considerable analysis of the five characteristics involved in this process (Lifton, 419).

Toward the end of the book, Lifton describes two images,

among many, that continue to reverberate with him. The first is from Auschwitz itself, when he visited the camp many years after the Holocaust. He was shown the many exhibits that emphasize the evil that human beings can do to others. The room that left the most profound impression on him was the simplest of all; a room full of shoes, mostly baby shoes.

The second image is from a talk with a Jewish doctor who survived Auschwitz incarceration and described doing what he and a few other prison MDs did under these extreme circumstances. While dispensing what few aspirins were available, they also "made a point in the process of offering a few words of reassurance and hope." It helped. "He concluded that by maintaining one's determination to try to heal, even under the most extreme conditions, [he] was impressed with how much one could do" (Lifton, 504). Hope in Auschwitz was life preserving.

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Using Lifton's Work in Teaching the Holocaust

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Ever since I started teaching my Jewish Literature of the Holocaust class and publishing on the Shoah 19 years ago, I have been influenced by the insightful and poignant writings of Robert Jay Lifton. But of all his publications, the one that has influenced my students and me the most is *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (1986). In this short essay, I will discuss how I have used this seminal book in my teaching of Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

The focal point of my course is *Night*. Wiesel discusses selections several times in his narrative, particularly how the selections frightened him and his father Shlomo, making them fear that they would be sent to the gas chamber and that their strong, interde-