A bold, groundbreaking work that provides the definitive answer to the persistent question: Why didn’t more Jews flee Nazi Europe? Flight from the Reich is a story about people at a time of crisis. As persecution, war, and deportation savaged their communities, Jews tried to flee Nazi Europe through legal and clandestine routes. In their multifaceted tale of Jewish refugees during and after the Nazi era, Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt braid the private and public realms, personal memory and official history. They probe the challenges faced by German Jewish refugees; the dispute among the Swiss on allowing Jews to cross their border; the dangers braved by covert guides who helped the hunted out of occupied France; and the creation of postwar displaced person camps, which have much to tell us about refugee camps today. Grounded in archival research throughout Europe and America, hundreds of oral histories, and thousands of newly discovered letters, Flight from the Reich shows how the lives of people thread together to form history. 50 photos; 2 maps.

My Personal Review:
This is one of those rare, beautifully written books where you learn something new on each page, and, despite the tragic subject matter, can't wait for the next page. Normally I don't like to take hardcover books on a plane, but I started it before a trip and couldn't put it down.

I have read many books about the Holocaust, and along with the Black Book and Fear, view this as a critical book to help one's broader understanding of what happened.

This book is different than the many other books on the Holocaust that I have read, in that it focuses not on what happened to those who perished as the hands of the fascists, but what happened to those who tried to escape from the ever expanding reach of the Nazis as they conquered Europe.
Rather than taking a dry approach, it illuminates the history through the lives of individuals, so you are able to appreciate and understand the human tragedy and horror of the situation, as well as the overall political climate and history.

This does not mean that the book is lightweight. It is scholarly, with endless footnotes and references, and a detailed view of the politics and the politicians, but it is approachable and human and fascinating throughout.

We all too readily whitewash history, as the victors, to view the Holocaust as being evil (Nazis) and good (Allies), but this book shows the broad anti-semitism that was omnipresent on both sides. It shows how in the early phases, the Nazis tried to export the Jews to other countries, none of whom (including the US, England and France) would accept them, and instead actively prevented Jews from escaping from certain death. And it shows how the politics and situation on the ground changed throughout the pre-war and war.

It also shows the extremely positive role the Soviet Union, despite its latent anti-semitism, played in saving the lives of many Jews, even though many were subsequently swallowed up by the Gulag. (Read Figues for more.)

In addition to showing the various paths taken to escape, some successful, some not, it also shows the overall impact of the Holocaust on those who did escape.

Altogether, a must read.

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