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## IBM faces lawsuit over Nazi claim

February 12, 2001  
Web posted at: 11:16 AM EST (1616 GMT)

LONDON, England -- American computer giant IBM is facing a lawsuit accusing the company's technology of assisting the Holocaust.

The lawsuit, filed on Friday in the U.S., coincides with the publication of a book that revives a highly charged debate about the company's involvement with Nazi leader Adolf Hitler.



Millions died in the Nazi Holocaust

Washington-based researcher Edwin Black alleges IBM's punch-card-based tabulating machines allowed the Nazis to cross-index names, addresses, genealogy charts and bank accounts of its citizens.

Historians have known for decades of Nazi use of Hollerith tabulators but the book -- IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance Between Nazi Germany and America's Most Powerful Corporation -- spotlights IBM business dealings and the lengths to which it may have tailored its machines to meet Nazi requirements.

Black also asserts that IBM remained in control of Hollerith technology, as well as its exclusive punch cards and spare parts, throughout the 1930s and 1940s.



Numerous European companies -- from industrial manufacturers to insurers to Swiss banks -- have faced lawsuits by Holocaust victims and their descendants in recent years.

IBM's German division, which after the war became IBM Germany, has paid into Germany's government-industry initiative to compensate people forced to work for the Nazis during the war.

International Business Machines Corp. was named in a lawsuit filed on Friday in New York on behalf of five Holocaust victims, according to lawyer Michael Hausfeld.

Hausfeld, of Cohen, Milstein, Hausfeld & Toll of Washington, D.C, was one of a team of attorneys who forced Germany last year to create a nearly \$5-billion reparations fund for Nazi-era slaves.

### Gruesome allegations

The suit asserts that IBM knowingly supplied technology used to catalogue death camp victims and aided in the "persecution, suffering and genocide" before and during World War II.

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"Hitler could not have so quickly and efficiently identified and rounded up Jews and other minorities, used them as slave labourers and ultimately exterminated them, without IBM's assistance," Hausfeld said.

The lawsuit also asserted that IBM had refused to permit historians and others access to archival records that would demonstrate the company's complicit role in the Holocaust.

Ian Colley, IBM's European spokesman in Paris, said the company had not seen the book or the lawsuit and is not commenting in detail.

Colley said IBM itself has turned over all its information on the company's Nazi-era operations to universities.

"We obviously find anything to do with the Nazi regime abhorrent and will be the first to condemn the activities of anyone who was associated with the Nazi regime," he said.

In its statement to employees last week, the company said: "If this book points to new and verifiable information that advances understanding of this tragic era, IBM will examine it and ask that appropriate scholars and historians do the same."

Black's book details the complex ties and increasingly stormy relations between IBM and its German subsidiary, Dehomag, which was IBM's second-largest sales territory in the 1930s, despite an international boycott of the Nazi economy.

The German subsidiary was later taken over by the Nazis.

The book includes gruesome allegations that concentration camps used IBM punch cards to categorise victims: homosexuals rated No. 3, Jews No. 8, Gypsies No. 12.

IBM, as a nearly exclusive supplier of database equipment to the Third Reich, fed their demand not out of Nazi sympathies but from a desire to dominate global markets for its products, Black argues.

The punch-card-machine -- the mainframe computer of its day -- dates back to 1890, when Herman Hollerith, a German American, first built them to compile the U.S. population census.

IBM remains one of the world's largest suppliers of databases and Hollerith punch cards are the same technology blamed for the election counting problems in Florida in last year's U.S. presidential election.

One of the machine made by the company -- believed to have been used in the 1933 German census, the year the Nazis took power -- is on display at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

The book's promoters, Crown Publishers, a unit of German media giant Bertelsmann, have kept its contents a closely guarded secret until its Monday launch.

Several Holocaust scholars declined to comment on Black's book, saying they yet to see it.

One said he was concerned that the secrecy surrounding the project had

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denied experts a chance to evaluate the book's evidence and rebut any errors.

The [Associated Press](#) & [Reuters](#) contributed to this report.

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