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# Hacking the Holocaust

Remembering the data pirates, forgers, and social engineers who saved thousands.

"Punch More Nazis" has fast become the call to arms under an alarming empowerment of white supremacy and Nazism under Trump, but what about Hacking More Nazis?

Within the tech industry in particular, we work every day to build systems that ingest more and more of our personal information that while it might be used to sell us products, can also increasingly be used to index and endanger our most vulnerable communities. Software engineers are often unaware of how the systems they build and maintain can either help us live better lives, or be used to commit repeats of history's most horrifying atrocities. But as Holocaust history also shows us, engineers and hackers can use their skills to take direct action too.

During that same Nazi-punching era of WWII, ordinary people used their abilities and access to proprietary systems, data, and information security knowledge to refuse to be complacent, and instead sabotage the Axis to save lives. It's my hope that sharing some stories of those who "hacked" the systems that were meant to execute the atrocities of the

Holocaust will help us remember that there are always more ways to resist.

**René Carmille—**was a punch card computer expert and comptroller general of the French Army, who later would head up the Demographics Department of the French National Statistics Service. As quickly as IBM worked with the Nazis to enable them to use their punch card computer systems to update census data to find and round up Jewish citizens, Rene and his team of double-agents worked just as fast to manipulate their data to undermine their efforts.

The IEEE newspaper, *The Institute*, describes Carmille as being an early ethical hacker: "Over the course of two years, Carmille and his group purposely delayed the process by mishandling the punch cards. He also hacked his own machines, reprogramming them so that they'd never punch information from Column 11 [which indicated religion] onto any census card." His work to identify and build in this exploit saved thousands of Jews from being rounded up and deported to death camps.

Rene was arrested in Lyon in 1944. He was interrogated for two days by Klaus Barbie, a cruel and brutal SS and Gestapo officer called "the Butcher of Lyon," but he still did not break under torture. Rene was caught by the Nazis and sent to the Dachau concentration camp, where he died in 1945.

Hacking History: Rene Carmille - CyberTraining 365 Blog

Moving away from Poland and England, there are still historical hackers to be...
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**Adolfo Kaminsky**, an Argentine Jew living in France forged his first passport in 1944 at age 18, after receiving his own falsified documents from a resister with the handle "Penguin." This document would save him from deportation to the death camps, and inspire Kaminsky to use the knowledge he acquired apprenticing at a dry cleaner under a chemical engineer, and then under another chemist at a dairy farm to add and remove the inks and stamps that would allow Jews to remain in hiding.

Throughout the war, Adolfo produced amazingly authentic-looking blank passports, without the big red J stamp for "Jew," that saved many Jews from being rounded up and deported to die. Later, he provided left-wing underground organizations with stacks of fake identifications papers to aid in their travel and activities.

In recounting his aid to children who would be smuggled by the hundreds to Switzerland and Spain, Adolfo recalls when he stayed awake for two nights straight to fill an enormous rush order. "It's a simple calculation: In one hour I can make 30 blank documents; if I sleep for an hour, 30 people will die." Though he ceased his humanitarian forging in 1971 after being convinced too many knew his identity, he said, "I did all I could when I could."

Fighting Nazis with Fakes: The Hidden Life of the Humanitarian Forger -...

Adolfo Kaminsky started forging documents after escaping deportation ...

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**Kasharyiot, the Female Couriers**— (derived from the Hebrew *kesher* or connection) was the name given to young female couriers because they were the lifeline for critical strategic information and supplies for hundreds of thousands of Jews incarcerated in ghettos.

Part human radios, part human-encryption, part transmitters, these young women barely in to their twenties leveraged expert social engineering techniques and nerves of steel to smuggle secret documents, weapons, underground newspapers, money, medical supplies, news of German activities, forged identity cards, ammunition—and other Jews —in and out of the ghettos of Poland, Lithuania and parts of Russia.

Often selected for their ability to speak accent-less Polish and German and blend in with what propaganda had come to stereotype as "Aryan" features, they gathered intelligence from the Nazis and then carried this information in to the ghettos. Their resistance activities required them to speak with, bribe and convince sometimes dozens of officers and collaborators each time as they snuck in and out of ghettos and even Nazi offices undetected. They put themselves and their families at risk hundreds of times over years to attempt to convince the Judenrat, or Jewish intermediary body the Nazis forced to administer the ghettos, that the Jews were slated for death.

While many of the Judenrat remained unconvinced, the Kasharyiot did however manage to convince the youth of the resistance in the ghettos. THey then help to arm them with weapons, information, and information security techniques to get around German suspicions. Their mass document-dumps of whatever they could find in particular helped provide the resistance with critical maps and strategic data on Nazi installations in occupied cities.

While the women of the Kasharyiot are not today often written about in our recounting of the Holocaust's heroes, it's now impossible to imagine any resistance activity would have been successful without their intelligence work.

Kashariyot (Couriers) in the Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust

The kashariyot were young women who traveled on illegal missions for the Jewis...

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**Walter Süskind**—a German Jew who was the manager of the Hollandsche Schouwburg (*Dutch Theater*), where the Jews had to report themselves for deportation to camps. He used his position to manipulate the information and transport of Jewish children, many of them infants, to save more than 600 from the death camps.

During Jewish deportations, the Nazis put the young children in a Nursery across the street instead of in the theater. The Jewish director of the nursery, Henriette Henriques Pimentel, together with Süskind and economist Felix Halverstad set up a system to rescue children by transporting them through the garden behind the nursery. Children were secretly ferried to a teacher training college with help of the head of the school, Johan van Hulst. Walter and Felix ensured that these children were not registered and removed their names from the records of the theater.

Suskind at great personal risk also kindled close relationships with SS leadership to attempt to manipulate them. He used his position of privilege to gather critical information that he could use to update and destroy records by misrepresenting the number of Jews that were expected to report to and leave from his theater, thereby saving more children. In 1945 Süskind, his wife and his daughter were sent to the Westerbork transit camp, where he attempted again, however futilely, to help Jews escape.

It's noteworthy that his good relations with the SS would have afforded Walter and his family safety if he had chosen to take it. Instead he used his inside knowledge to choose to save as many as he could right up until the very end. He died on one of the death marches through an unknown location in Central Europe in 1945. He was only 38.

Walter Süskind—Wikipedia

Walter Süskind (29 October 1906–28 February 1945) was a German Jew wh...

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Theirs are just the few of many stories of ordinary people who used the systems they had in their hands, those they were often charged with administering, to which they had been given privileged access, or rareified skill sets to maintain them, to instead undermine and refuse to continue to build systems used to categorize, find, and exterminate millions of people.

Today we again have a choice, perhaps sometimes to break the law to save lives and preserve the safety of others. But most of the time it's the choice to legally make changes to our products that will help others to protect and reclaim control of their own fates. We can choose as we build software and technology to resist by offering our users more control of this data that can be used against them.

Think hard about your product's retention and permissioning of personally identifying information. What data do you collect about users? Why do you need it? If you need it, for how long? If those in power subpoenaed user data from you, what would they find that could endanger those of a certain religion, national origin, or other marginalized group?

A few lines of code to make it easier for individuals to purge their data and assist others in doing so may not seem like resistance, but it is some of the most important work we today have in front of us. Punch more nazis, and hack them too.