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SWEARING IN CEREMONY OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL  
BY  
SUPREME COURT ASSOCIATE JUSTICE SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR  
THE INDIAN TREATY ROOM  
4:00 PM

3:20 PM OEOB Pennsylvannia Avenue Entrance. Guests start arriving and are cleared in by Kate Shannigan(ext2335). Aided by the Holocaust Memorial Council staff person Rose Andrews.

3:30 PM Mr. and Mrs. Morris Leibman arrive and are cleared in to see Max Green. Max ushers them upstairs to the event. Max stays with them and greets the guests

3:40 PM Dr. Leo Levin, Director, Federal Judicial Center arrives and is escorted to special holding area for Justice O'Connor, by Zev.

4:00 PM The event is scheduled to begin.

PROGRAM

Max Green and/or Mari Maseng  
William Lowenberg , Vice Chairman, US Holocaust Memorial Council  
Justice O'Connor  
Swearing in of the New Executive Director and New Members  
Remarks by Elie Weisel  
Max Green and/or Mari Maseng  
Reception

NOTE: Per Kate directions overflow crowd will be asked to stay in the hall way and not in the 5th floor foyer. The elevator service has been ordered. Press is being cleared in at the 17th Street entrance. The dignitaries of the Holocaust Council in order to expedite time have been asked to arrive at the SW Gate--however, they do not plan to do so. Accordingly, upon their arrival they should go to the start of the line in order to expedite their clearance.

RE WHITE HOUSE STAFF: Several members are expected to attend. Due to the nature of the event they may wish to arrive at 4:15 in order to hear both the Justice and Elie Weisel.

Sara Gordon will be coming in to aid in handling the crowd in room 474.

**Hampered by cynicism, incredulity and  
governmental pressure to downplay  
Nazi atrocities, the American press  
routinely gave little space to  
dispatches about the Holocaust or  
relegated them to  
back pages.**

# WHY?

BY DEBORAH LIPSTADT  
*Special to the BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES*

**S**ince the onset of Nazi rule, Americans had greeted almost all the news of Nazi Germany's persecution of the Jews skeptically. Inevitably, their first reaction was to question whether it was true. Before, during, and even after the war many Americans, including those associated with the press, refused to believe the news they heard.

In September 1942, Vernon McKenzie, writing in *Journalism Quarterly*, decried Americans' tendency to dismiss all reports of atrocities as propaganda. He blamed an American "attitude of cynicism" which prompted many people to declare that they would "not be such simpletons that they would be fooled again" as they had been by the much publicized but false atrocity stories of World War I. In a January 1943 Gallup poll nearly 30 percent of those asked dismissed the news that 2 million Jews had been killed in Europe as just a rumor. Another 24 percent had no opinion on the question.

Journalists who had been stationed in Germany were among those most distressed by the American refusal to believe that the Germans were engaging in physical persecution. In March 1943, William Shirer, writing in the *Washington Post*, castigated the public for thinking that the stories of the atrocities were untrue or had been magnified for "propaganda purposes." He attributed this attitude to a "silly sort of supercynicism and super-skepticism" which persisted despite the fact that there was "no earthly reason" for people not to believe. These doubts were not, of course, a new phenomenon. When Shirer was a reporter in Berlin, "most of the Americans who visited Germany in the early Nazi days used to say: 'The Nazis can't really be as bad as you correspondents paint them.'" Shirer found the persistence of disbelief particularly inexplicable in light of the fact that the Nazis had themselves admitted the truth of some of the atrocities and that many others had been committed in public view.

In January 1944, Arthur Koestler also expressed his frustration that so many

people refused to believe that the "grim stories of Nazi atrocities are true." Writing in the *Sunday New York Times Magazine*, Koestler cited public opinion polls in the United States in which nine out of ten average Americans dismissed the accusations against the Nazis as propaganda lies and flatly stated that they did not believe a word of them. How, he wondered, could Americans be convinced that this "nightmare" was reality?

By the final weeks of the war increasing numbers of reporters and columnists were complaining about the public's unshakable doubts. Syndicated columnist Marquis Childs criticized Americans who "put down to 'propaganda' the latest reports of murder factories." Henry J. Taylor of the *New York World Telegram* and *Scripps-*

## E X C E R P T

Howard newspapers, declared it "incredible that there should be any doubt at home about the truth of the Nazis' wholesale atrocities." He observed that "in the last war only a few of the German atrocity stories were true, yet most of them were believed. In this war the atrocity stories are true yet few seem to be believed."

The fact is that the public's doubts were strengthened and possibly even created by the manner in which the media told the story. During the war journalists frequently said that the news of deportations and executions did not come from eyewitnesses who could personally confirm what had happened and therefore, as journalists, they were obliged to treat it skeptically. This explanation is faulty because much of the information came from German statements, broadcasts, and

newspapers. If anything, these sources would have been inclined to deny, not verify, the news. Neutral sources also affirmed the reliability of the reports. Moreover, even when the press did encounter witnesses, it often dismissed what they had to say because they were not considered "reliable" or "impartial."

**T**he victims themselves recognized the difficulty they faced in piercing the barriers of incredulity. A Polish underground courier who, in August 1944, reached London with news of the stepped-up pace of the slaughter of Hungarian Jews was shocked to find that despite that fact that he brought news from within Auschwitz itself, "nobody will believe." As late as 1944 eyewitness accounts — particularly those of victims — were not considered irrefutable evidence even if they came from independent sources and corroborated one another. The press often categorized them as prejudiced or exaggerated.

Given this prejudicial feeling about witnesses, one would have expected that visits by journalists themselves to the massacre sites would have dissipated these doubts. But when the barriers to belief were strong enough, even a face-to-face encounter with the remains of a Nazi atrocity did not dispel doubts, as an incident in the fall of 1943 demonstrated. In October 1943, as German forces were beginning to retreat from Russian territory, Soviet officials brought a group of foreign reporters to Babi Yar, the ravine outside Kiev in which the Nazis killed thousands of Jews. The Russians told the reporters that the Germans had massacred between 50,000 and 80,000 Kiev Jews in September 1941 and the total number of Jews of Kiev who had been killed might climb to over 100,000.

By this point the Nazi threat to "exterminate" the Jews should have been understood as a literal one. There was little reason, in light of the abundance of evidence, to deny that multitudes were being murdered as part of a planned program of annihilation. But despite all the detail there was a feeling among some correspondents that the reports that Hitler and

*Excerpted with permission of the Free Press from Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945 by Deborah Lipstadt. Copyright © 1986 by Deborah Lipstadt.*

# 2,000,000 Jews Put To Death

LONDON, April 20 (INS)—The Nazis, since the start of the war, have slain 2,000,000 Jewish men, women and children and 5,000,000 other Jews are in immediate danger of extinction, the interallied information committee on occupied countries said today.

The 2,000,000, an eighth of the prewar Jewish world population, died in mass executions and through various forms of torture, the sixth report to be published by the committee said.

The press, skeptical and disbelieving, routinely placed stories of the Holocaust, no matter how devastating, anywhere but Page One. Above, an account of the slaughter of two million Jews that appeared on Page Two of the April 20, 1943 Detroit Evening News.

**War Today** Jeffers, Davis Row Over OWI Rubber Report

**Today's War Maps** ROMMEL'S AERIAL DUNKIRK

**Planes Rescue Convoy Battling U-Boat Fleet**

**CUTS** By E. Hume Carter

**U. S. Fliers Raid Japs on 2 Fronts, Blast 3 Ships**

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**LAST MINUTE REMINDER**

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**GATELY'S** 341 MICHIGAN

continued to incorporate the fate of the Jews into that of all other national groups that had been incarcerated and murdered at the camps. For example, Edgar Snow wrote that at Maidanek "Jews, Germans and other Europeans were all fed to the same ovens." *Time* correspondent Sidney Olsen, who accompanied the U.S. Seventh Army as it liberated Dachau, described its inmates as "Russians, French, Yugoslavs, Italians, and Poles." In this camp, Olsen observed, were "the men of all nations whom Hitler's agents had picked out as prime opponents of Nazism; here were the very earliest of Nazi-haters. Here were German social democrats, Spanish survivors of the Spanish Civil War." But nowhere in his article was there a Jew.

Throughout the war the press had tended to ignore or minimize the specific fate of the Jews, and even now that correspondents were witnessing the grim results of the Final Solution, they could not grasp what they were seeing. None of the reporters who toured Maidanek — even those who mentioned Jews as among the victims — associated what they saw there with the Nazi plan to annihilate the Jewish people.

Press inability to understand the all-encompassing nature of the event that Maidanek and other places like it represented would become painfully apparent in the final moments of the war when a group of America's most influential publishers and editors visited German concentration camps. The group included, among others, publishers and editors of the *New York Times*, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, *Reader's Digest*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Los Angeles Times*, the Hearst papers, and the Scripps-Howard papers. The reports by these editors and publishers, who visited Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau, as well as the reports by correspondents accompanying the Allied forces in the weeks before V-E Day, were widely featured in the press. Many were conspicuously placed on the front page.

Now that these top members of the press corps were face-to-face with the victims, their doubts about the atrocity reports disappeared. But even now they were unable to grasp what the Final Solution had been. They did not seem to



In 1933, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in New York against Nazi Germany's racist policies. At the same time, the press softpedaled reports of Hitler's anti-Semitism.

understand that the fate of the Jews had been unique in both ideology and scope. Joseph Pulitzer, in an address to the Missouri Legislature upon his return, described the camps as full of "political prisoners" including "Jews, Poles, and Russians." Malcolm Bingay, editor of the *Detroit Free Press*, explained that the prisoners he saw at camps were there because

*they refused to accept the political philosophy of the Nazi party. . . First Jews and anti-Nazi Germans, then other brave souls who refused to conform.*

**J**ournalists still seemed reluctant to admit that much of what they were seeing was part of a program to systematically wipe out an entire people. They had been unable to link Maidanek, Babi Yar, or the fact that in every place reached by the Allies the Jews were gone. The way in which the issue was dealt with was typified by an official army report on Buchenwald which noted all prisoners were treated brutally and "Jews were given even worse treatment than the others." It was the same theme that had been ap-

parent in so many of the previous press reports: everyone suffered and the Jews probably a bit more than everyone else. The persistence of this theme raises the question of whether journalists believed or had been convinced by government and military officials that the public would be less aroused if it thought that only Jews had been mistreated.

When the camps were opened in the spring of 1945, the chaos of war and postwar confusion reigned supreme. But enough information had previously emerged to enable Allied journalists, had they been inclined, to see the larger picture. The Hearst papers were among the few that were willing to explicitly acknowledge that "the Jews of Europe have been the principal victims of this bestiality." There were some reporters who understood that the philosophy which led to the destruction of the Jews was inherently different from that which resulted in the destruction of so many others. For example, Paul Ghali, correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News-Post Dispatch News Service*, recognized that Germany had won its war against the Jews.

*At least one point in Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" program has been carried out thoroughly — the bestial extermination of European Jews. Of the total of eight million Jews living in Germany and German occupied countries before the war, 6,200,000 have died from either execution, cruel treatment or starvation.*

But such observations were exceptions to the rule.

Responsibility for the confusion about the Jewish identity of the victims lies not only with the Americans and the British but with the Russians as well. At first the Russians were not that inclined to avoid mention of the Jews as victims. In January 1942 they released a detailed account of "monstrous villainies, atrocities and outrages committed by the German authorities in the invaded Soviet territories." Jews were cited as one of a series of groups who had been persecuted, including Russians, Ukrainians, Letts, Armenians, and Uzbeks. In the report the victims at Babi Yar were described by Russian officials as "Ukrainians, Russians and Jews who showed their loyalty to the Soviet Government."

# Urgent News, Buried News: An Interview With Deborah Lipstadt



Deborah Lipstadt: "How much did they need to know that there were incredible atrocities going on?"

**W**hat did the press know and when did it know it? And what did the public know and how did it know it?

These are the two main issues that historian Deborah Lipstadt wrestles with in *Beyond Belief*. Lipstadt's book, which will be released on Monday, charges that the American press did not treat the Holocaust as urgent news.

The more common questions about the Holocaust, as posed in such books as *While Six Million Died* and *The Abandonment of the Jews*, have inquired about the American government's knowledge about Hitler's death camps. Or why, since FDR's Administration knew more than it ever let on, it was so apathetic toward the atrocities in Europe.

But 11 years ago, a student in a class that Lipstadt was teaching in the history of the Holocaust asked what the public had read about the mass murders in magazines and newspapers during the war years.

"I was struck by that question," Lipstadt said in a telephone interview from her apartment in Los Angeles.

Lipstadt, assistant professor of Jewish history at UCLA, began to research what had appeared in American publications from 1933 through 1945. She found that most journalists — reporters, editors and publishers — put little credence in reports of the massacres in Nazi-occupied Europe. She discovered that few newspapers gave prominent space to dispatches about the Holocaust. An August 1942 front-page story in the *Chicago Tribune*, for example, reported that 258 Jews had been killed in a pogrom in Berlin. Two days later, the *Tribune* devoted nine lines on the lower half of page six to a report that 25,000 Latvian Jews had been slain during the German invasion the previous summer.

Lipstadt said she did not set out to write a "diatribe" against the press. And, in fact, she has not written one. "This is not a blanket condemnation of the press," she said. "People had no historical context in which to place the Holocaust. There was no precedent for it."

That is why Lipstadt chose the double-entendre *Beyond Belief* as her title. "The idea of a Holocaust was beyond the realm of human imagination," she said. But also, she added, those who had heard about the human slaughter from reliable sources — even reporters who visited the death camps near the end of the war — could not believe it.

To some extent, Lipstadt conceded, journalists' cynicism toward reports of the Nazis' extermination of Jews and other "non-Aryan" groups was justified — at first.

"Yes," she said, "there was room for doubt in the early period. Maybe journalists didn't believe that there were gas chambers. Maybe they didn't believe that there were ovens. But how much did they need to know that there were incredible atrocities going on?"

And why, she wondered, did some journalists and publishers believe these reports while others dismissed them?

Generally, said Lipstadt, the liberal press had the best record on reporting the Holocaust. In August, 1943, for example, *The New Republic* published a special 15-page section entitled, "The Jews of Europe: How To Save Them."

*The New Republic*, wrote Lipstadt, "argued that responsibility for the crimes against the Jews fell not only on the perpetrators, but 'on the whole of humanity... (including) the Allied States,' which had failed to take any 'concrete

action for the purpose of curtailing this crime."

One of the few exceptions to the conservative press' poor record on reporting the Holocaust, said Lipstadt, were the Hearst papers. About 1942, the Hearst chain began to editorialize for a rescue of European Jewry and the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Some observers of William Randolph Hearst attribute these stands to a desire to embarrass the British. As leading isolationist, wrote Lipstadt, Hearst "had loathed the British since the pre-war days" when he had believed that they were trying to involve America in the war.

Among other major American newspapers, said Lipstadt, neither the *Washington Post* nor the *New York Times* were very good at all. "The best that can be said about the *Times* was that it was fair in relation to other papers. Most of the press, unfortunately, takes its cues from the *Times*."

Lipstadt blamed a good share of these two papers' record on reporting the Holocaust to their publishers' "ambivalence" about being Jewish. And she blamed most of American journalism's avoidance of the Holocaust to the "symbiotic" relationship that flourished during the war between the press and the government.

"The press was part of the war effort," she said. "As long as the government did not push the issue of the Holocaust, the press did not pursue it. And as long as the press didn't push it, the government didn't pursue it."

A "tougher, more aggressive" breed of journalism has emerged since the war, she said. It is quicker to criticize the government and it is more independent of official sources. And after the carnage of the Holocaust, it is less skeptical about reports of mass brutalities.

But this new willingness of the press to report atrocities has also inured the public to them. "We hear that the Syrians have killed 20,000," said Lipstadt. "We hear that millions are killed in Cambodia. But the general public reaction is 'So what?' Atrocities have become old hat."

— A.J.M.

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## Claim Fascists Slew 25,000 Latvian Jews in 4 days

LONDON, June 15 (AP)—The Federation of Jewish Relief organizations said today that refugee reports showed 25,000 Latvian Jews were slain by local fascists in a four day interval between the evacuation of that Baltic country by the Russians and the occupation by the Germans last year.

in which Greek men, women, and children were being murdered by the enemy occupying authorities.

## Estimate 1,000,000 Jews Died Victims of Nazis

LONDON, June 29 (AP)—The British section of the World Jewish Congress estimated today that more than 1,000,000 Jews have been killed or have died as the result of ill treatment in countries dominated by Germany. Officials said that 700,000 Jews had lost their lives in Poland and 125,000 in Rumania, which had been re-occupied after the war.

Typical of the press' treatment of reports of Nazi atrocities is the sequence in 1942 from the *Chicago Tribune*. As the numbers grew larger of people killed by Germans, the *Tribune* kept burying the dispatches. On June 14, a front-page story reported that 258 people had been killed by "Hitler Guards" in a "new pogrom." Two days later, a nine-line item on page six stated that 25,000 Latvian Jews had been killed in four days. And 14 days later, an 11-line story, also on page six, said that one million Jews had been killed at the hands of the Nazis "by ill treatment."

The extent to which certain American officials were opposed to focusing on the murder of Jews was demonstrated in the fall of 1944 when John Pehle of the War Refugee Board received from American officials in Switzerland a full text of the eyewitness account of Auschwitz. The report contained precise details on the number and national origins of the

victims, the process of moving newly arrived victims from the freight trains to the gas chambers, the kinds of work done by the inmates, the physical plant of the camp, the physical dimensions of the barracks, gas chambers, and crematorium, and the way in which the "selections" for the gas chambers were conducted. Pehle urged John McCloy

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Assistant Secretary of War, "give serious consideration to the possibility of destroying the execution chambers and crematoria in Birkenau through direct bombing action." McCloy rejected Pehle's request with the incorrect but familiar explanation that it would pose too great a risk to American bombers and would divert critically needed air power. Pehle then decided to release the report to the press as a means of awakening public support for action.

Not since Kristallnacht had a story been so widely featured or prompted such extensive comment. Many papers carried it on the front page or in a prominent position elsewhere. The *New York Herald Tribune* described the report as the "most shocking document ever issued by a United States government agency." The *Louisville Courier Journal*, which devoted an entire page to excerpts from the report, observed in its article that "there is no longer any need to speculate on the mass murdering of millions of civilians." The amount of detailed information contained in the 59-page report made it difficult for anyone who read it, one paper acknowledged, to dismiss it as "propaganda." The release of this report and the response it engendered are a prime example of the symbiotic relationship between the government and the press. When an official government agency reacted forcefully, the press followed suit. Most of the time this symbiosis worked in the opposite direction and produced a dramatically different result: the news was ignored.

Government's release of this information should not be interpreted as a sign of a changing policy. Pehle was really acting on his own. Even after he sent the text of the full report on Auschwitz

to the general press for release on November 26, 1944, some Administration officials tried to stop its publication. Office of War Information Director Elmer Davis, pressured Pehle "to call back the press release" because, he claimed, Americans would think it was propaganda.

*The public would not believe that such things were happening and as a result would be inclined to question the government's credibility on other information released concerning the war effort.*

One of the most revealing aspects of the press reaction to the opening of the camps was the newspeople's almost uniform admission that only now were they convinced that the atrocity reports had not been exaggerated. Almost all reporters, publishers, and editors acknowledged that they had not believed the news that had been dispatched over the past years and had come to Europe "in a suspicious frame of mind."

**W**hy these doubts? Given the abundance of information that had passed through these individuals' hands — whether they chose to print it or not — and given the information that had appeared in their own papers, how can one explain such skepticism? Some of the reasons the press itself offered to justify its failure to believe were its experience with World War I atrocity stories, the American fear of falling prey to propaganda, an Allied policy which hid rather than publicized information regarding Jewish atrocities, the absence of eyewitnesses, and the distrust of information that came from the Russians.

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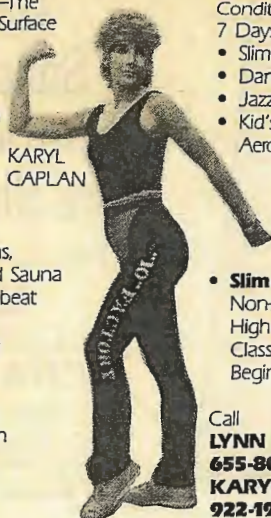
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**Some American officials were opposed to the press focusing on the murder of Jews. The head of the War Refugee Board, for instance, tried to stop the release of an eyewitness account of Auschwitz. The public's disbelief in the report, he feared, would undermine the government's credibility.**

editors and reporters of the nation's newspapers and magazines were many Americans who had studied in Germany, were of German ancestry, had toured Germany, or had been prisoners of the Germans during the previous war. To them these tales of horror seemed implausible.

Then also, America had been at war, and Americans, beset by many personal problems, worried about the fate of their friends and family in the armed forces. Convinced that war was the "ultimate atrocity," they were not disposed to focus on the travail of one specific group. This was particularly so when the group in question, Jews, seemed always to be lamenting its fate despite the fact that millions of others were suffering.

There was also something peculiarly American in this reaction. Americans prided themselves on their skepticism. The *Baltimore Sun* tried to explain how, despite so much evidence, Americans had been able to reject the reports as untrue. "Atrocities? Americans, a sophisticated people, smiled at this idea... When it came to atrocities, seeing, and seeing alone, would be believing, with most Americans."

But the press had been shown. It had been shown by reporters who had been stationed in Germany until 1942 and who had heard numerous reports including those of participants in the persecution of Jews. In 1942 UP's Glen Stadler, who had just returned from Germany, described what was being done to the Jews as an "open hunt." By 1944 captured soldiers were confessing to atrocities that Harold Denny, the *New York Times* reporter assigned to the American First Army, called "so wantonly cruel that, without such confirmation, they might have been discounted as propagandist inventions." Re-

porters had seen places such as Babi Yar and Maidanek. The American government had released a documented report on Auschwitz. Yet editors, publishers, and reporters claimed not to believe what they heard.

The truth is that much of the press had not rejected as propaganda all that it heard, but it had erected barriers which enabled it to dismiss parts of it. It accepted a portion, often quite grudgingly, and rejected the rest as exaggeration. It adhered to a pattern which I have chosen to call "Yes but." At first it argued, Yes, bad things may be happening but not as bad as reported. Subsequently it was willing to acknowledge that Yes, many Jews may be victims but not as many as claimed. Yes many may have died, but most probably died as a result of war-related privations and not as a result of having been murdered. Yes, many may have been killed but not in gas chambers. Yes, some Jews may have died in death camps, but so did many other people.

**R**arely was the press willing to accept the full magnitude of the atrocities. This was as characteristic of the press's behavior in 1945 as it was in 1933. In 1933 it could not believe that Jews were being indiscriminately beaten up in the streets, and in 1945 it could not believe that they had been singled out to be murdered. When it came to atrocity reports, particularly those concerning the annihilation of the Jewish people, skepticism always tempered belief. By responding in such a fashion, the press obscured the true picture for itself and its readers.

Each time a report confirming some aspect of the Final Solution was released, the

press treated it as if were a first official confirmation. Previous reports and new stories were ignored. In December 1944 *Newsweek* claimed that the War Refugee Board's description of Auschwitz constituted the "first time" an American governmental agency had "officially backed up" charges made by Europeans of mass murder. But the United States government had backed up the charges two years earlier, in December 1942.

*Newsweek*, *Life*, the *Chicago Herald American*, and a variety of other papers and magazines ignored the fact that over the past 12 years there had been a tremendous amount of "irrefutable evidence," evidence which they had dismissed as implausible and had placed in obscure corners of the paper or magazine so that reader either missed it or dismissed it. Almost without exception American journalists who visited the camps at the end of the war ignored that fact too.

Had the American press been willing to build on the information which had been steadily emerging over the past 12 years, there would have been little reason for "surprise." But the press was never able to see the full picture, even when it had many if not all, of the details in hand. It could not admit to itself or to its readers that these stories were the truth.

Now that there was no longer room for doubt, various papers sought to explain to themselves as well as to their readers why they had been so filled with doubts. One theme was repeated in editorial after editorial. I was the same answer Binga and his colleagues offered on another: this was a "maze of madness." The *New York Times* described the news of "the cold-blooded extermination of an unarmed people" a

acts that pass belief." Even before the camps were opened and the full horror known, the *Atlanta Constitution* argued that the "horror was too fantastic for belief." But there is a problem with explaining or excusing the press treatment of this news by relying on the fact that it was a story which was beyond belief. While the unprecedented nature of this news made it easier, particularly at the outset, to discount the news, by the time the Bermuda conference in 1943 and certainly by the time of the destruction of Hungarian Jewry in 1944, even the most dubious had good reason to know that terrible things were underway. Numerous eyewitness accounts which corroborated one another had been provided by independent sources. Towns, villages, and ghettos which had once housed millions now stood empty. The underground had transmitted documentation regarding the freight trains loaded with human cargo which rolled into the death camps on one day and rolled out shortly thereafter, only to be followed by other trains carrying a similar cargo. Where could these people be going? Where were the inhabitants of the towns and villages? Had they simply disappeared? There was only one possible answer to these questions. And most members of the press — when they stopped to consider the matter — knew it.

Given the amount of information which reached them, no responsible member of the press should have dismissed his news of the annihilation of a people as propaganda, and the fact is that few did. By the latter stages of the war virtually every major American daily had acknowledged that many people, Jews in particular, were being murdered. They lamented

what was happening, condemned the perpetrators, and then returned to their practice of burying the information.

There was, therefore, something disingenuous about the claims of reporters and editors at the end of the war not to have known until the camps were open. They may not have known just how bad things were, but they knew they were quite bad. It seems as if these publishers, editors, and reporters protested a bit too much. Why their claims to have doubted? Why their protestations of ignorance? They may have instinctively known that in a situation such as this, doubts are far more easily explained than apathy; disbelief is more readily understood than dispassion. They could rationalize and justify their doubts, but they could not justify the equanimity with which they responded to the news of the tragedy. The American press may not have believed everything that was reported, but it certainly believed a great deal. And therein lies the real question regarding the press reaction to the persecution of European Jewry. Why, given what it did believe, did most of the press react so dispassionately?

**T**his dispassion, if not disinterest, of most of the press becomes all the more noteworthy when it is compared to the behavior of publications such as the *New York Post*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Commonweal*, and *PM* and journalists such as Dorothy Thompson, William Shirer, Arthur Koestler, Sigrid Schultz, Freda Kirchwey, I.F. Stone, Alexander Uhl, Max Lerner, Henry Shapiro, W. Randolph Hearst, and a few others. They were able to surmount the ob-

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## Could the United States Have Rescued the European Jews From Hitler?

LUCY S. DAWIDOWICZ

THE murder of the six million European Jews during the Second World War by National Socialist Germany and its partners continues to preoccupy us, but as the years pass, public attention is diverted to ever more grotesque interpretations of those events and to ever more bizarre attributions of responsibility for that mass murder. In the Soviet Union and in its satellite countries, the official propaganda relentlessly slanders the Jews (code name: Zionists) as allies and accomplices of the Nazis, even in the murder of their own people. Meanwhile, the ragtag remnants of the fascist right in Europe, the neo-Nazis, and lunatic anti-Semites everywhere claim that the European Jews were never murdered at all, that the idea of the Final Solution was a hoax perpetrated by the Jews—to what purpose, they have never made clear.

In the United States, where the Puritan ethic has made moralism something of a national trait and moralizing a national posture, Americans have been more inclined to make universal moral judgments than to draw political conclusions from history. They've preferred to address themselves to the eternal verities, the large questions of good and evil, rather than to understanding how Nazi ideology and racist prejudice were embodied in the state's institutions and how the Nazi state enlisted those institutions in the murder of the Jews. During the Eichmann trial in the early 1960's, for instance, the American press, secular and religious, moralized a lot about man's capacity to sin and his propensity for evil, but didn't give much thought to Eichmann himself, the deeds he did, and the system that created him. Blaming themselves for harboring racist prejudices and for being sinful creatures, the editorialists intoned as one: "We are all guilty."

American Jews, too, have succumbed to self-castigation. Haunted by feelings of guilt for not having moved heaven and earth to have averted the murder of their fellow Jews, they blame themselves for their practical and political failures as well as their moral ones. They keep asking if they could not have done more. In the last two decades many books and articles have probed the historical

record to determine what American Jews did or failed to do and also what United States government agencies, pressed by American Jews, did or failed to do to help the European Jews. The story has by now been told many times.

Arthur Morse's best-selling *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* first appeared in 1967. Three years later came Henry Feingold's more scholarly account, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*. Last year Monty Noam Penkower's densely documented book *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* was published by the University of Illinois Press. The most notable of all has been Martin Gilbert's scrupulously researched *Auschwitz and the Allies* (1981).

### Two Issues

From the welter of historical memory and record, two distinct issues have emerged, though they've seldom been considered apart. The first concerns America's immigration and refugee policy in the years before and during the war. The second concerns the possibility of rescuing sizable numbers of European Jews from the murderous grasp of the Nazis.

The dismal facts about America's immigration and refugee policy are familiar by now. During the Great Depression Americans, worried about their daily bread and what tomorrow would bring, afraid that foreigners would compete with them for jobs that weren't there, were unwilling to relax the country's restrictionist immigration laws in those years when exit from Europe was still possible. Americans may have been touched by the plight of persecuted people in Europe, but in those days they had more immediate cares.

It was a time also when pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic groups mushroomed in this country, reflecting the ascendancy of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. Precisely then, against logic and likelihood, American Jewish organizations persisted in trying to open the immigration gates. They enlisted liberal political groups and leading non-Jews in their efforts, but none of those strategies worked. Anti-Semites may believe that the Jews rule the world, but why should anyone else have expected that American Jews, three percent of the population, could have changed the immigration laws whose enactment the whole country had supported? Yet even today people continue to fault the Jews for not having turned this country's refugee policy around.

All through the 1930's and even into the war years, government officials in charge of refugee matters wholeheartedly endorsed the restrictionist policies they were empowered to carry out. Furthermore, they did so in a more mean-spirited manner than the law required. Breckinridge Long, Assistant Secretary of State in charge of refugee affairs, the chief architect of the government's obstructionist policy on refugees, especially Jewish ones, harbored pro-Fascist sympathies from the days when Mussolini first made the trains run on time. Long's sympathies eventually congealed into vicious anti-Semitism and his

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private prejudices, which he amply confided to his diary, shaped his policies as a public official.

The State Department's Visa Division and its consular service too were determined to exclude refugees, especially Jewish ones, from the United States. Consequently, they never even used up the small complement of available visas under the quota system. Had those regulations been more generously interpreted, it is now generally agreed, some additional tens of thousands of refugees could have been admitted to the United States even under the then existing laws. They would have been lives saved, lives subtracted from the awesome statistic of six million murdered Jews.

Besides obstructing the admission of refugees to the United States, the officials running the State Department's European Affairs and Refugee Affairs divisions, operating in large measure autonomously, sabotaged other undertakings designed to help European Jews. They blocked the channels of communication and suppressed information coming from European listening posts about the terrible fate of the Jews. They bottlenecked attempts to transmit financial aid when such aid was possible and desperately needed. They even caviled at language in an Allied declaration threatening the Germans with retribution for their crimes against the Jewish people in Europe.

Everyone who has written on this subject has criticized those government policies and actions. The historical record has amply documented the selfishness, narrow-mindedness, prejudice, and xenophobia which animated many members of Congress and many officials in government agencies, especially those in the State Department who oversaw matters of immigration and refugees. For the most part, historians have concluded that those politicians and officials allowed their personal prejudices to shape their public policies and their idea of what was in America's best interest.

Nor has Franklin Delano Roosevelt escaped the censure of the historians. He has been faulted for not standing up to Congress in the struggle to liberalize the immigration laws, for not pressing the State Department on matters affecting the admission of refugees or helping Jews, for not speaking out more often, more loudly, and more effectively to mold public opinion on behalf of the European Jews.

But no one, until now, ever charged the United States and its people with complicity in the murder of the European Jews. This is David S. Wyman's contribution in his book *The Abandonment of the Jews* (Pantheon, 1984). The grandson of two Protestant ministers, Wyman is a natural heir to the Christian moralist tradition and he presents a moralist interpretation about the responsibility for the murder of the Jews that is as eccentric as the interpretations by the extremists of the left and the right. He accuses the United States not only of "abandonment of the Jews," but of complicity in their murder: "The Nazis were the murderers, but we"—Wyman, in a broad sweep, includes the American government, its president and its people, Christians and Jews indiscriminately—

"were the all too passive accomplices." This book is but another variation on the theme that "we are all guilty."

Much of Wyman's book retreads familiar ground—the inhospitality to refugees and the obstructionist immigration policy, the inadequate coverage by the national media of news about the European Jews, and the widespread lack of interest in the fate of the Jews among Christians and their spiritual leaders. But in three areas Wyman gives us new readings of the past.

First, with true Christian forbearance, he absolves Breckinridge Long of anti-Semitism, though he never supplies any evidence to justify his indulgence. Second is his partisan treatment of the American Jewish organizations, Zionist and non-Zionist, and their activities on behalf of the European Jews. Wyman understates their efforts and belittles their accomplishments.

On the other hand, he puffs up the so-called Bergson group, a coterie of European and Palestinian Jews associated with the Irgun Zevi Leumi, a terrorist group in conflict with the Zionist movement and with the most of the organized Jewish community. Stranded in the United States during the war the Irgunists organized a series of front organizations, one of which was called, with appropriate modesty, the Emergency Committee to Rescue the Jewish People of Europe. They didn't succeed in rescuing the Jewish people of Europe, but they effectively dramatized their fate in the media. Since then, they have made exaggerated claims to a place in history that is not rightfully theirs.<sup>1</sup>

Here we are concerned with the third area in which Wyman gives us a new version of the past. Wyman believes that opportunities for rescuing European Jews existed, but that the United States made no effort to rescue them. According to him, Roosevelt and the War Department were unconcerned with the terrible fate of the Jews and unwilling to help them. Consequently, he concludes that the Americans were "the all too passive accomplices" of the Nazis.

This extraordinary insight has been embraced by book reviewers, even by some who profess to be historians, and by a large reading public, including many Jews. I have yet to learn of any challenge to Wyman's analysis or conclusion, yet to see if anyone has noticed what is surely a most remarkable historical anomaly. For if the Americans were "the all too passive accomplices" of the Nazis in the murder of the Jews, how did it happen that these very same Americans were at the same time fighting the Nazis? How can one reconcile Wyman's charge with the plain evidence—which, even in our unhistorical era, no one has yet had the temerity to deny—that the United States had mobilized all its industrial, military, and, yes, human resources to defeat and destroy National Socialist Germany?

<sup>1</sup> See my articles, "American Jews and the Holocaust," *New York Times Magazine*, April 18, 1982, and "Indicting American Jews," *Commentary*, June 1983.

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*Was Roosevelt Indifferent?*

Wyman accuses Roosevelt repeatedly of indifference to the murder of the European Jews, characterizing it "as the worst failure of his presidency." Yet he never once tells us that Roosevelt, surrounded as he was by Jewish friends and advisors with whom he talked about the terrible plight of the European Jews, believed the only way to rescue the European Jews was to win the war against Hitler as fast as possible.

Nowhere does Wyman adduce any specific evidence to support his charge of Roosevelt's hard-heartedness toward the Jews. Instead he resorts to circular logic: Roosevelt's alleged indifference is proven by Roosevelt's failure "to act." But other, more probable, explanations can be hypothesized for these alleged failures to act. Is it not likely that some proposals for rescue might have been rejected because they were considered unfeasible or because their costs in human life outweighed their possible benefits? Some proposals might have been rejected because they would have impeded or interfered with military operations and the speedy prosecution of the war.

But much of this is mere speculation about Roosevelt's views, for he left scarcely any record of his feelings and ideas. Even Wyman, notwithstanding his relentlessly repeated accusations of Roosevelt's indifference and lack of interest in the fate of the Jews, concedes at the end of his book that "Roosevelt's personal feelings about the Holocaust cannot be determined" and that Roosevelt "seldom committed his inner thoughts to paper."

Still, the lack of evidence has not inhibited Wyman from indulging his historical imagination. Having "established" Roosevelt's lack of interest in the fate of the European Jews by reference to his lack of action, Wyman then vouchsafes us a clairvoyant glimpse into Roosevelt's motives: "Roosevelt's overall response to the Holocaust was deeply affected by political expediency." Wyman surmises that Roosevelt, knowing he already had the Jewish vote in his pocket, felt he didn't have to respond to Jewish pressure, whereas the pursuit of "an active rescue policy" would lose him other less firmly committed votes. But this is merely a hypothesis for which no reliable documentary source exists.

By isolating Roosevelt's response to the murder of the European Jews from the ongoing history of the time and by considering his motives in this regard apart from his other responsibilities, notably the prosecution of the war, Wyman does a disservice to the historical Roosevelt and to the history of that period. To understand Roosevelt's behavior on any one question, one must understand his overall behavior. Even Roosevelt's admirers have faulted him for the way he ran his administration. His administrative operations have been described as "wasted effort, faulty coordination, disorder, delays, muddle." When he was dissatisfied with a particular agency, he created a new one by executive order, re-shuffling his staff, making them divide or share power that was circumscribed and at times uncertain. His associates grumbled that he always waited for a

crisis before acting, that he did things piecemeal, that he had no list of priorities, no timetables, no grand strategy.

The complaints are justified, but in Roosevelt's defense one must adduce the burden of his responsibilities. He was faced with the economic collapse of the United States, the political collapse of Europe, the military collapse of China. No president before or after him ever had to confront responsibilities of such urgency and gravity, whose range and complexity, domestic and foreign, often put them beyond one man's capacity to resolve and, impinging as they did upon one another, beyond any man's capacity to reconcile.

In dealing with that tangled web of responsibilities, Roosevelt had to cope with entrenched bureaucracies which operated with a large measure of autonomy. For all his power, he could not impose his ideas or his policies upon the legislative or judicial branches of the government, and not even upon all of his subordinate executive agencies. He had constantly to weigh the cost and benefit of yielding on one issue in order to win on another as he tried to maneuver his policies through Congress. Roosevelt once told a young visitor: "If you ever sit here, you will learn that you cannot, just by shouting from the housetops, get what you want all the time." Another time, when the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board complained about the Treasury Department, Roosevelt replied: "The Treasury is not to be compared with the State Department. You should go through the experience of trying to get any changes in the thinking, policy and action of the career diplomats and then you'd know what a real problem was."

Nevertheless, in the face of all obstacles, Roosevelt succeeded in bringing the American people out of their moral despair and in rescuing the country from economic and social collapse. In foreign affairs, he was the architect of Allied victory. With Winston Churchill, he brought about the defeat of Hitler's military forces and the destruction of National Socialist Germany. To rally the American people behind him in his effort to bring America into the war, Roosevelt undid the public image that the isolationists had projected of themselves as peace-loving patriots. His persistent attacks on them turned the tide of public opinion and they came to be seen, according to Wayne S. Cole, the historian of isolationism, "as narrow, self-serving, partisan, conservative, antidemocratic, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi, fifth columnist, and even treasonous." No wonder the Jews loved Roosevelt.

American Jews were the most interventionist of all Americans and Roosevelt's most ardent supporters. They knew that he, more than any other American political leader, understood the threat that National Socialist Germany posed to Jews and to the civilized world. In November 1938, after the pogroms of *Kristallnacht* throughout Germany, Roosevelt ordered the American Ambassador in Berlin "to return at once for report and consultation." For the first time since the First World War an American president had summoned home an ambassador to a major power under such circumstances. At his press conference then, Roosevelt said: "I myself could scarcely believe that such things could

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occur in a twentieth-century civilization." Is it likely that, later, when even worse disasters befell the Jews, Roosevelt's heart would have hardened like Pharaoh's, that he would have turned indifferent to their murder, passive toward their murderers? Wyman's charges seem especially paradoxical, for in Roosevelt's lifetime American anti-Semites caricatured him as a Jew or a tool of the Jews and the war as the "Jew war," a view which was shared by Adolf Hitler and propagated by Josef Goebbels.

American Jews were not deluded in their fierce devotion to Roosevelt. Before the Nazi state began to carry out the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," most American Jews agreed with him that the surest way to help the European Jews was to defeat Hitler on the battlefield and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was Doctor-Win-the-War. He remained committed to the priority and primacy of the war against Germany, despite the urgings of some of his military advisors to redirect America's major military effort toward the war in the East against Japan.

### *Appeal to Hitler's Decency?*

Before September 1942, the agenda which American Jewish organizations pursued on behalf of their beleaguered fellow Jews under German occupation had consisted essentially in providing relief and assistance in immigration. But after receiving the famous cable from Gerhart Riegner of the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland, which informed them that Hitler planned to murder all the European Jews, the Jewish leaders revised their agenda and made the rescue of the European Jews their top priority. They tried to persuade the United States to undertake to rescue the European Jews.

Until then any suggestion of a mass evacuation of Jews from the European continent would have been regarded as fantastic. How could over three million Polish Jews or a community of some 650,000 Hungarian Jews be uprooted? Where would they go? How would they be transported? Who would pay the costs?

Whether or not rescue of massive numbers of Jews was at all possible or practicable, the American Jewish organizations, acting in concert, developed an ambitious and comprehensive program to do just that—to remove the European Jews from the grasp of their murderers. In March 1943, American Jewish leaders presented their program to top American and British officials. They proposed that the Allied powers approach the German government, its allies and satellites, through the Vatican or neutral governments, to secure the release of the Jews and to allow their emigration to havens of refuge. In effect, they proposed that the Allies beg Hitler to let the Jews go by appealing to his moral sense. They didn't have a single bargaining chip to put on the negotiating table. That proposal, conceived in hopelessness and helplessness, was as naive politically as it was unrealizable logistically.

By that time millions of Jews had already been murdered. Could the rest still be saved? The bitter truth was that it hinged on Hitler's wishes. So long as he commanded the European continent from the Atlantic Wall to the gates of Moscow and Leningrad, the fate of the Jews in his grip depended on his, Hitler's, will. The Allies had, after all, in a formal declaration issued in December 1942, threatened the Germans with retribution for the murder of the Jews, but that had not stayed Hitler from his course.

We now know that Hitler would never have let the Jews go, though no one knew it then. We now know that Hitler never abandoned his goal of destroying the European Jews, not even until his dying day, when six million Jews had already been murdered on his orders. But Wyman still doesn't know that. After reprimanding United States for its failure to save the Jews, he argues that one of the steps this country could have taken was precisely this. The American government, he says, "could have pressed Germany to release the Jews."

It was to be expected that the Allied leaders would declare the appeal to Hitler as "fantastically impossible." Still, however disheartened, the American Jewish organizations did not give up their efforts for government intervention on behalf of the European Jews. It took over a year for their efforts to produce any result. Finally, in January 1944, President Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board. Proposals for such an agency had been afloat in the Jewish community for about a year. This particular plan originated in the Treasury Department and the Treasury's Secretary, Henry Morgenthau Jr., was the one who brought it to Roosevelt for his approval.

Wyman thinks that the War Refugee Board could have been established earlier, if only Roosevelt would have cared to do so. But the creation of the War Refugee Board in 1944 was clearly facilitated by the then more hopeful military situation. A year before, the Germans were still at Stalingrad and the Allies did not yet have a toehold on the European mainland. By January 1944 the Russians had regained the military offensive in the East. The Anglo-American forces were fighting their way, bitterly to be sure, up the boot of Italy. Operation Overlord, the cross-channel invasion of Europe, was being prepared. Since the Allies expected that their forces would soon be advancing on the European plains, the humanitarian goal of helping refugees must have seemed less quixotic than it had appeared a year before.

Besides negotiating with Hitler for a mass evacuation of the Jews from Europe, what real possibilities for rescue existed which Wyman believes the United States neglected to pursue, shelved or sabotaged?

He mentions ransom, for instance. The particular case at issue involved an unconfirmed report—perhaps a trial balloon—that Rumania would release 70,000 Jews then languishing in Transnistria and allow them to emigrate to Palestine in exchange for transportation costs. But the Rumanians never put the offer on the table. It was said that the Arabs pressured the German Foreign Office and that Eichmann pressured the Rumanians to call it off. But Wyman is

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not to be diverted by mere facts. "The main issue," he says, "is not whether the plan might have worked" [*sic*], but that the British and Americans "*almost cursorily dismissed this first major potential rescue opportunity*" (my italics). In Yiddish we would say to this: "If grandma had wheels, she'd be a streetcar."

But suppose the Rumanians meant business. Could their offer have been accepted? At just that time, Rumanian troops were fighting alongside the Germans at Stalingrad. Would Stalin have permitted such a deal even if Roosevelt would have approved paying a huge ransom to an enemy country? The Americans were to confront a similar dilemma just before the war's end, when Eichmann, presumably acting for Himmler, proposed to exchange Hungarian Jews for trucks to be used by the Germans on the Eastern front. Could such a morally entangling bargain ever have been struck?

The absence of real opportunities to rescue the Jews from Hitler's murder machine has not deterred Wyman from denouncing the United States for failing to rescue the Jews. He often confuses the issue of rescue with that of refugees. Refugees were those unfortunates stranded on the outer perimeters of Hitler's Europe, beyond his grasp, but in desperate need of safe haven. Wyman accuses American military authorities of callousness because they did not, during the war, arrange transport to the United States for Jewish refugees then living in abysmal conditions in makeshift transit camps in Spain, Portugal, and North Africa. It could have been done, Wyman says, had the military wanted to do so. To make his case, he cites the instance of military assistance to Yugoslavs.

The American military helped, over a six-month period, to transfer some 35,000 wounded partisan fighters and refugees from Yugoslavia into southern Italy, then under Allied control. If they were willing to help the Yugoslavs, Wyman argues, why not the Jews? But Wyman doesn't tell his readers that transporting the Yugoslavs had nothing to do with preference or prejudice. It served a military objective. The Yugoslav partisans under Tito were military allies. At the Teheran Conference, November 1943, Churchill convinced Roosevelt and Stalin that they should give Tito's forces whatever support they could spare from land operations elsewhere, because the Yugoslav guerrillas were keeping twenty-one German and nine Bulgarian divisions pinned down on the Balkan peninsula. After Italy capitulated in September 1943, the partisans controlled the Dalmatian coast. They could then transfer their wounded by boat and air across the Adriatic.

The care of the wounded had become a major factor in Tito's guerrilla operations. Small hospitals had been set up wherever regional guerrilla units existed. When the guerrillas had to move, the hospitals moved with them. F.W.D. Deakin, Churchill's emissary to Tito, wrote that at times "the shape of the battle ahead would now be conditioned, and at moments dictated, by the protection of long columns of the hospitals." The evacuation of the wounded Yugoslav guerrillas was intended to restore greater mobility to the partisan fighters and to free them from the responsibility of caring for their wounded and helpless.

### *Bomb Auschwitz?*

In 1944 a new proposal emerged which, it was hoped, might save Jews from the gas chambers. At first the proposal entailed bombing the railway lines leading to Auschwitz. Later it was extended to include bombing also the gas chambers and the crematoria. The idea had originated with Slovakian Jews late in May 1944. Just weeks before, two Slovakian Jews who had escaped from Auschwitz arrived at Bratislava, where they told their story to Jewish underground leaders. Their written report, with a chronology and statistics of mass murder and diagrams of Auschwitz's layout and installations, reached the West in mid-June.

Meanwhile, that May, Eichmann had begun to organize the deportation of the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The Slovakian Jewish underground, knowing what would be the fate of the Hungarian Jews, sent urgent letters to Jewish leaders in the West, demanding the destruction of the rail lines to Auschwitz.

Those requests were transmitted to British and American military authorities, but they were turned down. The official U.S. reply read:

The War Department is of the opinion that the suggested air operation is impracticable for the reason that it could be executed only by diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations.

The War Department fully appreciates the humanitarian importance of the suggested operation. However, after due consideration of the problem, it is considered that the most effective relief to victims of enemy persecution is the early defeat of the Axis, an undertaking to which we must devote every resource at our disposal.

The War Department's rejection of this proposal on the ground that it would divert air support from the war effort was, according to Wyman, merely an excuse. "The real reason," he confides to us, again without proof for this insight into the collective mentality of the whole War Department—was that "to the American military, Europe's Jews represented an extraneous problem and an unwanted burden." A more objective historian might have concluded that the War Department and its air staff regarded such operations as costly and hopeless, a view readily documented, since the War Department turned down a number of similar proposals in which Jews were not at all involved.

A more responsible historian would surely have looked into the War Department's reason for turning down the Jewish proposal, but Wyman never even explains what were the "decisive operations" to which the War Department referred and from which it refused to divert its air resources. Did he think that such an explanation would have undercut his denunciation of the military? Those "decisive operations" were nothing less than the Allied landings on Normandy and the Allied invasion of Europe. Wyman never mentions these military engagements at all. Indeed, his only reference in this chapter to D-Day lies buried in a footnote at the back of the book.

Those "decisive operations," it may be argued, were at least as urgent as the

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proposed mission to bomb Auschwitz and its railway lines. Those "decisive operations" involved the lives of millions of people, Jews and non-Jews, Americans and Europeans. Alas, that Hitler's wars against the Allies and against the Jews posed such irreconcilable alternatives and demanded such desperate choices.

Wyman believes that had Auschwitz been bombed and the railway tracks to it, many Jewish lives would have been saved. Yet by now everyone knows that bombing railway tracks was of little avail in impeding the Germans in their conduct of war. According to Craven and Cate's standard history, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, the Germans repaired their tracks "with admirable efficiency" and were "fairly successful" in redistributing their traffic flow. In some cases, they reestablished through traffic within a few hours after the bombing.

Would the destruction of Auschwitz's gas chambers have impeded the German's mass-murder operations? No one can know for sure. One obstacle which even advocates of bombing Auschwitz had to reckon with was the fact that the masses of Jews, herded together by the S.S., waiting their turn at the gas chambers, would become victims of the Allied bombing. Wyman dismisses that argument: those Jews were doomed to die anyway, whereas the bombing might save those not yet rounded up.

In defense of precision bombing, he cites the rescue mission at Amiens. There the Germans held 258 French resisters imprisoned. It was said they'd soon be executed. Since those resistance fighters were militarily helpful to the Allies and because the Free French had pressured them, the R.A.F. undertook the rescue at Amiens. The bombers flew so low and dropped their bombs with such precision that they blew up the walls of the prison and the prisoners ran out.

Would a similar bombing operation have succeeded at Auschwitz? There's further instruction in the Amiens experience. Despite the precision of the bombing, about one hundred prisoners were killed in the raid. The installations at Auschwitz were spread over a considerably larger area than the Amiens prison and would therefore require heavier bombing. As the pleas for bombing Auschwitz continued in the ensuing months, the dilemma of killing the assembled prisoners in order to save others troubled Jewish leaders. Some opposed the bombing; others held that the risk should be taken to gain the possible benefit. The War Department thought otherwise. It often had to make hard choices in such matters of life and death, as for instance during the preparations for D-Day.

Since March 1944, the Allied air forces had been carpet-bombing the railroad marshalling yards in France and Belgium in preparation for the landings in Normandy. That kind of wide-area bombing entailed killing thousands, even tens of thousands, of innocent and friendly civilians in France and Belgium. It became a matter of profound concern to Churchill, who discussed it in his Cabinet and wrote about it to General Eisenhower and President Roosevelt. He finally set a limit of 10,000 French civilian casualties for that operation.

In balancing the costs in civilian deaths against the military costs and gains, the purely humanitarian consideration—that is, concern for the lives of innocent civilians—did not always prevail. Nevertheless, that consideration often determined military decisions. Walt W. Rostow told me that when he had been a member of the Enemy Objectives Unit (E.O.U.) of the Economic Warfare Division of the U.S. Embassy in London, the staff considered bombing factories at Dachau and Nordhausen which were employing slave laborers to produce armaments. From information supplied by escaped prisoners, the E.O.U. knew the exact layout of the factory at Dachau. After serious study, they turned the plan down, concluding that there was no way to destroy the armaments factory without killing the slave laborers.

The decision not to bomb Nordhausen was reached under more dramatic circumstances. The Allies knew that the Germans operated an underground aircraft factory at St. Astier, near Bordeaux, whose structure was similar to that at Nordhausen. Rostow went with a colleague to Bordeaux, as the Germans were withdrawing in October 1944, in order to examine that site and to evaluate the possibility for bombing Nordhausen and other underground installations in Germany. But the idea of a Nordhausen mission was also dropped because the costs in human life were judged to outweigh the benefits.

Advocates of bombing Auschwitz believed that such bombing would have created the chance for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of the inmates to escape from Auschwitz during the ensuing chaos. Once again Amiens is instructive. There most of the Free French prisoners who escaped were speedily recaptured by the Germans. In the inhospitable environs of Auschwitz, from which few prisoners had ever managed successful escapes, it was hardly likely that large numbers of Jews in flight could have found hiding places in the countryside or shelter in an "Aryan" household willing to take that risk.

Still, it is argued, the damage done to Auschwitz by bombing might have slowed down or halted the murder of the Jews. Possibly, though not probably. The bombing might not have damaged the installations beyond repair. We know, for instance, that Allied saturation bombing of the German ball-bearing industry did not appreciably retard German ball-bearing production.

But even if Auschwitz had been bombed beyond repair, would the Jews have been saved? The answer is provided by the grim facts of history. In November 1944 the Germans themselves began to dismantle Auschwitz, lest the advancing Allied armies find evidence of the murder operations. On Himmler's orders the gassings ceased on November 2 and the gas-chambers and crematoria began to be destroyed on November 26. Nevertheless, Jews kept arriving at Auschwitz until January 1945. The S.S. was not deterred and sent them into Germany and Austria, first in open freight cars, later on foot, on the so-called Death Marches. Jews who survived became slave-laborers, but not many survived.

Albert Speer, in an interview in July 1972, is reported to have said that Allied bombing of German cities in retaliation for the murder of the Jews and Allied

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bombing of Auschwitz would have prompted Hitler to divert more of his manpower and materiel resources to speed up the murder of the Jews. Three hundred "little Auschwitzes," he said, would have been established or the S.S. would have reverted to the system of shooting-commandos which the *Einsatzgruppen* (special-duty S.S./S.D. troops) had used in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Abandonment of History*

The very title of Wyman's book premises an obligation on the part of the United States toward the European Jews. "Abandonment" means desertion of an allegiance, duty, or responsibility. The implication, then, is that the United States had a commitment to the European Jews which it failed to live up to. A parallel comes to mind, though Wyman never mentions it—the American relationship to Great Britain.

Early in 1941, nearly a year before the United States became a belligerent in the war, American military authorities, with the approval of the President and the State Department, conferred for two months in secret with British military officials. Those talks were held because the highest authorities in the United States believed that the future of the West depended on the early defeat of Germany and that they had an obligation to Britain, then standing alone against the Nazis.

The United States was not yet in the war, but it had already—by way of Lend-Lease and other forms of aid—made its firm commitment to Britain. Could the United States have made such a commitment to the European Jews? One calls to mind the Anglo-French guarantee to Poland in the event of aggression. To put that question is to demonstrate its implausibility. The European Jews had no corporate identity, no government to represent them, no agency to negotiate on their behalf. The European Jews were individuals, citizens or residents of different countries. How could the United States extend its legal protection to ~~Jews, who were being persecuted by the government within whose borders they~~ lived and which in fact was obliged to protect them?

Even today, despite the high rhetoric of the United Nations, no country permits another to intervene in its internal affairs, especially not in matters of human rights. One need only point to the impotence of international public protest, even when exercised on the highest diplomatic levels, as in the case of Andrei Sakharov.

One might argue that the United States had a military obligation towards the Jews, who were after all not mere bystanders to the war, but the primary, indeed the primal, foe of the Nazis. In *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*, I

<sup>2</sup> Shlomo Aronson, "Die Dreifache Falle: Hitler, Judenpolitik, die Alliierten und die Juden," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, January 1984, p. 60. Dr. Aronson interviewed Speer in July 1972; the filmed interview is in his possession.

concluded that the Nazis launched two wars at the same time: a conventional war for empire and political supremacy which they conducted against the Allied nations and an ideological war which they fought against the Jews. But in 1942, when news of the mass murder of the Jews first reached the West, no one entertained such an outlandish concept. The war was viewed in familiar military and political terms as a war of aggression by Germany against the sovereign nations of Poland, Britain, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Denmark, Greece, and later the Soviet Union.

Jews fought in the armed forces of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the Free French, or in the resistance movements in occupied Europe as nationals of their countries. Except for a few ghettos, foremost among them the Warsaw Ghetto, the Jews had no military apparatus of their own, no supplies of weapons. Locked as they were in ghettos and slave-labor camps, without freedom of movement, they had no military or strategic value to the Allies.

What, then, of America's moral obligation towards the Jews who were being murdered? The formal declarations which the United States issued threatening the Germans with retribution for their crimes against the Jewish people and President Roosevelt's warnings to the Hungarians in 1944 were surely an acknowledgment of moral obligation. Yet these acts proved to be futile. Would retaliatory bombing of German cities for crimes against the Jews have stopped the Germans from murdering the Jews? Besides Speer's testimony, we have also the testimony of history. The bombing of German cities by the British in retaliation for the German bombing of English cities did not halt the Germans from launching over one thousand V2 rockets against London in 1944.

How, practically speaking, could the United States have fulfilled its moral obligation beyond its commitment to destroy National Socialist Germany and to await Germany's unconditional surrender? An implicit answer can be found in the case of the Soviet prisoners of war, to whom the U.S.S.R. had legal, military, and moral obligations. Yet the Soviet Union was unable to rescue some 3.5 million of its Red Army soldiers and officers whom the Germans murdered, most of them the same way they murdered the Jews.

Yes, the European Jews were abandoned—by the governments that were obliged to protect them. Some, to be sure—the Czech Protectorate, Poland, and that part of the Soviet Union which the Germans occupied—could no longer protect the Jews, even if they would have wanted to. Occupied by the Germans and ruled from Berlin, deprived of their sovereignty, they could no longer shelter their Jewish subjects from the murderous reach of the S.S.

As for the German satellites (Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria) or German-occupied countries which retained some degree of self-government (Denmark, Belgium, Vichy France), the fate of the Jews depended on whether those governments were willing to resist German demands to deport the Jews. Whether Jews lived or died depended also on whether the people of those countries were prepared to risk their own security, even their lives, to save the

Jews. In Denmark, the Germans protected all Jews.

Bulgaria rescued Jews living in the Balkans, Yugoslavia, and Greece, but not "foreigners." Throughout Italy, the Germans tried to conceal and protect those who gave

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Jews. In Denmark, both the government and the people did just that. They protected all Jews, citizens and refugees alike.

Bulgaria resisted German demands to deport its Jews, but agreed to deport Jews living in territories which it had newly annexed from Rumania, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Vichy France protected only those Jews who were French nationals, but not "foreign" Jews, though many of them had lived in France for decades. Throughout Italy after 1943, when the Germans occupied the northern half of the country, many Italians conspired against both the German and Italian police to conceal and protect Jews. In contrast, the Slovaks and the Croats were among those who gave their Jews no protection.

### *What the Past Teaches*

Preaching history turns the record of the past from the reality of what it was into a record of what it should have been. Historians do, to be sure, make moral judgments, but they do so on the basis of the historical evidence, on the *is* of history, not its *ought*. No doubt that a more humane refugee policy on this country's part would have saved tens of thousands of lives. But even a liberal U.S. immigration policy would not have diverted Hitler and National Socialist Germany from their will to annihilate the Jews of Europe.

We study the history of the murder of the European Jews not just to mourn and commemorate them, but to try to understand the past and, if possible, to learn from it. But history can instruct only if we know what to ask of it. If we are to learn any lessons from this terrible past, the question "Could the U.S. have rescued the European Jews" will lead us astray. Instead, the question to ask is: How could one country—National Socialist Germany—have gained dominion so rapidly over Europe and enlisted so many different peoples into the commission of mass murder? The answers to that question suggest the lessons to be learned.

The first is about anti-Semitism. National Socialist Germany demonstrated anti-Semitism's terrifying power when harnessed to the apparatus of the state. In converting racist ideology into practical politics, the Nazis made the passage of anti-Semitism from prejudice to mass murder appear not only easy, but irresistible, as the behavior of many European nations attested. Here is a lesson to be learned about the dynamics of anti-Semitism and racist thinking.

The second is about military power. That was the only way the United States could have saved the European Jews, not by negotiating with Hitler or by bribing his satellites. Had the United States maintained a strong defense capacity, Hitler might not have succeeded in dominating the European continent as swiftly and easily as he did. Had the Western powers been better prepared for war, they might have defeated Hitler's armies on the battlefield sooner than they did. Had the German military machine been stopped in 1941, not only would there have been fewer Jewish dead, but today there would be a vibrant Jewish presence in Europe, with Jewish communities flourishing across the continent.

The third lesson, and one which every Jewish child now knows, is about political power. Without political power Jews had no chance for survival. Had a Jewish state existed in 1939, even one as small as Israel today, but as militarily competent, the terrible story of six million dead might have had another outcome. As a member of the Allied nations, contributing its manpower and military resources to the conduct of the war, a Jewish state could have exercised some leverage with the great powers in the alliance. Even though it would not have diverted Hitler from his determination to murder the Jews, a Jewish state might have been able to wield sufficient military and political clout to have inhibited Slovakia, Rumania, and Croatia from collaborating with the Germans in that murder. A Jewish state could have persuaded neutral countries to give Jewish refugees safe passage. A Jewish state would have ensured a safe haven. A Jewish state would have made a difference.

In war and politics, it's only power that counts. Power counts when it is exercised by governments of moral responsibility. Power counts even more—in diplomacy and in war—in confrontation with governments that operate without morality and without acknowledgment of their moral obligations.

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## Books in Review

### Abandoned

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE JEWS: AMERICA AND THE HOLOCAUST 1941-1945. By DAVID S. WYMAN. *Pantheon*. 444 pp. \$19.95.

THE JEWS WERE EXPENDABLE: FREE WORLD DIPLOMACY AND THE HOLOCAUST. By MONTY NOAM PENKOWER. *University of Illinois Press*. 429 pp. \$21.95.

A REFUGE FROM DARKNESS: WILFRID ISRAEL AND THE RESCUE OF THE JEWS. By NAOMI SHEPHERD. *Pantheon*. 291 pp. \$18.95.

Reviewed by RICHARD S. LEVY

THE first shots fired by the British after the outbreak of World War II killed two Jewish refugees attempting to gain entry into Palestine. In 1944, while various Allied government agencies were invoking the lack of available shipping as a reason why Jews could not be taken to safety, Liberty ships were returning empty from Europe, their captains complaining about the difficulty of finding proper ballast. Chaim Weizmann aptly summarized the plight of European Jewry in those days: "The world is divided into countries in which Jews cannot live and countries which they must not enter."

The three excellent books under review here provide answers to the question: why were not more Jews saved from the Holocaust? None suggests that Hitler's extermination policy, once under way, could have been undone, or that more than a small portion of his intended victims could have been saved. All three, however, show in concrete detail that much, much more could have been done to rescue Jews.

From slight written sources and the oral testimony of acquaintances, Naomi Shepherd pieces together the story of an obscure hero. Wilfrid Israel, son of a totally assimilated, wealthy German

Jewish business family, led a privileged aesthete's existence. In mild rebellion against his father, he formed a sympathetic attachment to East European Jewish refugees during World War I and a commitment to Zionist socialism; he became a friend of Weizmann, Einstein, and Buber. Repelled by the business world, Israel nevertheless dutifully entered the family concern. In 1921, he involved himself in famine relief for Russia and witnessed for the first time human indifference to the deaths of millions.

With the rise of the Nazis in the early 1930's, Israel quickly recognized the impending disaster for German Jews. Since he himself held a British passport, it would have been easy for him to get out of Germany in 1933. But he remained until just before the war, out of a sense of obligation to the weaker victims of Nazism. Using his connections, bribery, and great ingenuity, and relying on a wholly improbable stamina, he arranged the escape of many children to Britain and Palestine and managed to free numerous individuals from concentration camps. In England from late 1939, he functioned as a German expert for various groups, preparing position papers for postwar relief and resettlement and trying to convince the British of the deadly peril facing European Jews. Returning from a mission to Jewish refugee camps in Spain and Portugal in 1943, Israel died when the plane he, the actor Leslie Howard, and eleven other passengers were traveling in was shot down by the Germans.

It is well that Israel's story has been preserved in this compassionate and restrained biography, which presents a view of rescue work as seen from the grassroots level. For this is an aspect of the story that neither David Wyman nor Monty Penkower deals with. Although both try to inject the personal element into their studies, their source material keeps them in the realms of high policy-making, where they concentrate on the role of the Allies

in actually preventing large-scale rescue attempts of Jews.

Of the two books, Wyman's is the more important. Impressively researched, balanced in its judgments, devastating in its discussion of untaken opportunities, and informed by an essentially moral purpose, *The Abandonment of the Jews* makes a clear, largely persuasive argument. Penkower's *The Jews Were Expendable* is no less diligently researched, and in its own way represents exceptionally valuable scholarship. It takes the form of nine discrete articles, all related to the diplomacy of the Holocaust, four of them published previously. But the absence of an integrating interpretation or connecting narrative, and the frequent overlaps and repetitions, make it a difficult book to use. On all the central issues Penkower and Wyman are in basic agreement. In what follows I shall refer to both books, but the focus of my remarks will be on Wyman's.

DRAWING on his earlier *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis-1938-1941* (1968), Wyman outlines the historical basis for America's poor record in accepting refugees during the 1930's and 1940's. Fear of unemployment, deep-seated xenophobia, and widespread anti-Semitism among the American public supported a restrictive immigration quota system, in place since the 1920's and strongly defended by Congress. Neither the laws nor the reasons behind them had lost their force by the time the U.S. entered the war.

Wyman's narrative properly begins in the summer of 1942. In June and August of that year, information filtering out from Jewish and German sources revealed that the Nazis had begun the systematic murder of Jews and that an all-embracing program of annihilation had been decided upon in Berlin. (Penkower devotes an entire study to the tortuous process by which this news gained acceptance in the Western democracies.) By August 1942, 1.5 million Jews

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had already been murdered by the *Einsatzgruppen* and in the six death camps of Poland. But not until November 24, 1942 did the U.S. State Department admit the reliability of the evidence, by which time another million Jews had perished. Then, in Wyman's terms, "fourteen lost months" passed before President Roosevelt gave the go-ahead to set up a special agency—the War Refugee Board—for the rescue of those facing death at the hands of Hitler.

What took so long? Who or what was responsible for the dreadful delays, the heartbreaking missed chances so thoroughly documented by Penkower and Wyman?

Some time was needed to overcome the sheer unbelievability of the news about the Final Solution. A death sentence on an entire people was unique in history. Wyman cites opinion polls showing that, for a significant part of the American public, the Holocaust remained unbelievable right up to the liberation of the camps at the end of the war. Jews themselves, even the Jews of Palestine and the leaders of the Zionist movement, were slow to accept the truth or grasp the scope of the disaster. Those less personally touched reacted more cautiously and callously: documents from the British Foreign Office and the State Department speak of "typical Jewish hysteria" and exaggeration, well after the accumulated evidence pointed to an unprecedented human catastrophe.

Wyman searches for the reasons behind the lack of credence given the Holocaust, and ascribes responsibility to two sources. The mass media, despite abundant material from the wire services and the Jewish press, devoted little coverage to reports of the massacres or of independent rescue efforts. What stories did appear were often buried deep in the paper. In the ten newspapers from across the nation which Wyman has studied, the Holocaust was very rarely front-page news. The same can be said of the mass-circulation magazines. The record of the *Nation* and *New Republic* was better but, with their small circulation, hardly an adequate remedy for the silence of *Time*, *Life*, and *Newsweek*.

Wyman candidly admits to being at something of a loss to explain such negligence. Perhaps it was the baleful legacy of the atrocity stories knowingly spread by the Allies in World War I that made newspapers so cautious. Perhaps the news media were merely reflecting the indifference of the American public toward Jewish suffering. Whatever the reasons, the lack of interest is indisputable.

The other major bearers of responsibility for the remoteness of the Holocaust from the consciousness of Americans were the churches. The near-silence of the Protestant and Catholic churches—a matter of personal anguish to Wyman, the grandson of two Protestant ministers—is thoroughly documented in his book. With few exceptions, churchmen did little or nothing to change the attitudes of

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Christians regarding immigrants, anti-Semitism, or the persecution of the innocent. Christian America (again with notable exceptions) simply did not care enough.

NEITHER Penkower nor Wyman, however, will accept the lack of awareness as a sufficient reason for the apathy of government or the diffidence of Jewish leaders. For whatever was the case in the mass media or among the public at large, responsible leaders in the Jewish community and in the organs of British and American government did have plenty of authenticated evidence. Why did *they* not do more?

Wyman rests part of his argument here on a muted but nonetheless clear criticism of the American Jewish leadership. Penkower is equally critical. But readers of these two books will find in them no evidence of inertia or passivity on the part of Jews. Public demonstrations, private contact with government leaders, fund-raising, courageous intervention in the danger zones, and personal sacrifice all form part of the historical record.

Wyman does not question the level of this activity but its quality. Its "... effectiveness was importantly diminished by [the] inability to mount a sustained or unified drive for government action, by diversion of energies into fighting among the several organizations, and by failure to assign top priority to the rescue issue." There is some truth in all these points. The established Jewish leaders in America, especially Stephen S. Wise, failing in health and hectically active, remained too uncritical of Roosevelt's patently clear indifference to Jewish survival. Many of FDR's Jewish advisers were reluctant to embarrass him with what might look to the world like special pleading for Jews. The rivalries among Jewish organizations—Wyman seems unaware of how constant a feature this is of Jewish life—led to some unedifying open conflicts.

But they never led to paralysis. Both Penkower (to the point of passion) and Wyman emphasize the effectiveness of one group, the

so-called Bergsonites, in building public pressure that eventually helped lead to the creation of the War Refugee Board. This small group of Irgunists, who arrived in America to lobby for a separate Jewish armed force but soon turned their attention to rescue operations, were militants, unrestrained by any of the more staid conventions of American Jewish or mainstream Zionist political activity. Full-page newspaper advertisements, the recruitment of Hollywood personalities, the staging of elaborate pageants, an occasionally questionable use of funds—these were the weapons employed in their often sensational enterprises. They provoked opposition from the established organizations but also goaded them into a short-lived show of unity.

The object of this unity was not, however, rescue. The American Zionist Emergency Council, lobbying nationwide and in Washington, won three-fourths of the U.S. Congress to the idea of a Jewish commonwealth after the war. Wyman regrets this campaign as premature and deflecting, but argues that as an example of relatively unified Jewish activism it proves that the government could have been moved to genuine deeds of rescue earlier than it was. Had such unity been in place from the beginning, he implies, the fourteen months need not have been lost.

Yet the brunt of responsibility for the failure to rescue Jews falls not on American public opinion, or on Jewish disunity, but on the governmental agencies of the Allies, particularly the British Foreign Office and our State Department. The evidence both in Wyman and in Penkower is overwhelming. Every concrete proposal of rescue or relief, whether developed by Jews or non-Jews, whether by groups or individuals, met with resistance, obstruction, or outright sabotage.

The idea that Jews deserved special consideration because they were singled out by Hitler for total destruction was branded unpatriotic. The formula was voiced early and endlessly that the only hope for Jews was swift Allied victory,

and that nothing should impede this effort, even though many of the rescue plans would not have required a significant diversion of war resources. (Wyman's chapter demonstrating the feasibility of bombing Auschwitz to destroy or at least slow down the machinery of death leaves contrary arguments in a shambles.\*) Simply and directly, Wyman shows that the Foreign Office and State Department pursued policies "aimed at obstructing rescue possibilities and dampening public pressure for government action."

PENKOWER aims his palpable anger at the British, who, by sealing off Palestine and adhering heartlessly to the 1939 White Paper restrictions on Jewish immigration, caused the loss of thousands of lives. Other countries, like neutral Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey, lacking assurance that Jews would move on elsewhere, slowed the inflow of refugees to a trickle. British documents abound in references to these "useless people," and voice the fear that Hitler might "dump unwanted Jews" simply to embarrass His Majesty's Government.

Such inhumanity is indefensible. But Penkower goes too far when he implies that the Nazis turned to mass murder only after it became clear to them that the Jews could not be forcibly expelled to Palestine or elsewhere. There is no evidence for such a contention. He also gives too little credence to the reasons for British implacability. There were solid grounds for believing that a dramatic increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine might result in serious Arab unrest. British concessions to the needs of Jewish refugees might have provided an extra incentive to several Arab leaders, already openly flirting with the Nazis, to enter more fully into the enemy camp. The consequent need to divert British troops to maintain order in the Middle East had to be another concern of the Foreign Office. Yet Penkower is surely right to point out that the British did

\* This chapter originally appeared as an article in COMMENTARY, "Why Auschwitz Was Never Bombed," May 1978.

less to save Jews than their diplomatic or military position would have warranted. They had no legitimate grounds for opposing the establishment of havens for Jews *outside* Palestine; nevertheless, they did so oppose it.

With less passion but no less forcefulness, Wyman indicts the State Department. In my opinion, this is a more proper emphasis. The United States possessed greater resources for launching a meaningful rescue program and would have had to face fewer serious political-diplomatic consequences. Yet thanks to the administrative policies of the State Department only 21,000 refugees were allowed to enter the United States during the war, a mere 10 percent of what was admissible under the stringent quota system.

The lax leadership of Secretary of State Cordell Hull allowed middle- and low-level officials, primarily in the Visa and European Affairs

divisions, to set policy and to perform classic acts of bureaucratic obstructionism. Foot-dragging, the withholding of information, the impulse to protect departmental turf and to block "outside" initiatives, the reflex of referring urgent plans to moribund committees—these techniques were in constant use during the fourteen lost months. Thus, what in peacetime would have been no more than an annoyance became, during the war, a death sentence for thousands who might have otherwise been saved.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt wrote about a new kind of crime that became visible for the first time during the Holocaust: bureaucratic murder. Remote though he was from the actual killing, Eichmann was nonetheless more responsible for the deaths of innocent Jews than the actual wielders of the fatal weapons. On the evidence provided by these three books, readers may be

tempted to consider another new category of crime: bureaucratic complicity in murder.

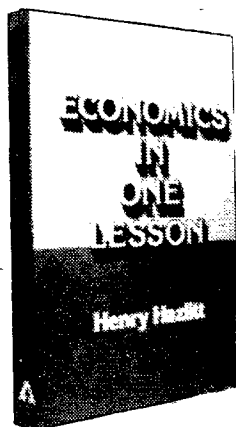
Wyman resists this temptation. He, Penkower, and Shepherd are concerned to show that there were decent, compassionate men working in official capacities for the Allies; there were just not enough of them. Moreover, even when examining the motives of the State Department obstructionists, Wyman sticks carefully to the demonstrable facts. Some actually believed that the Jews could not be helped, or that dealing for Jews with Hitler's shaky allies was still dealing with the enemy. Others worried that Roosevelt's reelection chances might be jeopardized among the electorate at large if significant numbers of Jews were allowed into the country; FDR had always been subject to charges of catering to Jews.

Wyman is chary of accusing the culprits of personal anti-Semitism. On this count, he states, his scru-

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tiny of the evidence is inconclusive. That may be owing to his notion of anti-Semitism, which is rather narrowly limited to the coarser varieties of the phenomenon, the sort that produces hate-mail and doggerel, and that shows up in the expressed opinions of those too unsophisticated to hide their beliefs. To me, at least, the evidence Wyman does present concerning the attitudes of State Department personnel strongly suggests the existence of anti-Semitism of the elitist variety. In any case, anti-Semitic attitudes do not always leave their imprint on the written record. Deeds are a better indication than diaries and memoranda. And in this regard, one thing is certain: these men treated Jews differently from the way they treated other Europeans fleeing Hitler. Wyman and Penkower cite numerous instances of much greater flexibility when it came to saving Yugoslavs and Frenchmen, or when it came to bringing relief to starving Greeks. In these cases, the usual excuses about inadequate shipping and fears of aiding the enemy by feeding his victims were swept away.

MOTIVES aside, Wyman builds his case against the State Department so strongly that he somewhat weakens the other strand of his argument, raising doubts that even a totally unified, sustained public campaign waged by American Jews could, of itself, have led to an earlier creation of the War Refugee Board (WRB). What finally prompted FDR to abolish the State Department monopoly on refugee questions was not only the effective propaganda of the Bergsonites—a resolution in favor of a WRB-like body was threatening in Congress—but the approaching elections and a brewing political scandal.

The State Department had quashed a plan to ransom 70,000 Rumanian Jews who had been driven into the squalid camps of Transnistria. This aroused the suspicions of four (non-Jewish) lawyers in the Treasury Department, who thereupon undertook to investigate the full record of State Department obstructionism. On the basis of the detailed report they submitted, Secretary of the Treasury

Henry Morgenthau was prodded into intervening personally with FDR.

Both Penkower and Wyman properly give much weight to Treasury's action, which was independent of the campaign of the Bergson group. (One of the four lawyers, outraged at the State Department's delaying tactics, described them as a case of *para delicto*—equal guilt; presumably, he meant guilt equal to that of the Nazis.) Without Morgenthau's initiative and the threat of exposure, even a far more unified Jewish public-relations campaign might have failed in its objectives. It is doubtful, therefore, that Wyman's "fourteen lost months" between acknowledgment of the Holocaust in November 1942 and creation of the WRB could have been drastically foreshortened by more determined Jewish efforts.

In the sad history of attempts to save Jews from the Holocaust, even the creation of the WRB comes as an anticlimax. It really looks good only in relation to what went before. Bureaucratic delay still impeded its work. Two weeks passed before an executive director could be named. FDR lost interest immediately. The Board received almost no appropriations, and had to rely on Jewish organizations for 90 percent of its limited funds. And it still had to deal with rear-guard actions from the State Department and the British Foreign Office.

Nevertheless, a few dedicated, energetic, and imaginative people, working closely with Jewish and non-Jewish agencies of relief and rescue, were able to save approximately 200,000 Jews and 20,000 non-Jews before the end of the war. Wyman is quite correct: the WRB was what had been needed from the beginning.

THE lessons of these three books are dispiriting. They have to do with power and powerlessness. It was tragic for the Jews that only their enemies perceived them as enormously powerful. Hitler, even from his bunker, never ceased regarding them as the omnipotent fomenters of war. Himmler thought that offering to save a few Jewish lives would be sufficient leverage to win

a separate peace for Germany with the West. Antonescu of Rumania and Horthy of Hungary operated under similar fantasies.

But the "friends" of the Jews, the Western democracies, knew exactly how negligible a factor they were. Britain could be sure that the Jews had no option but to work for Allied victory. FDR similarly recognized how powerless American Jews were politically. His indifference to the fate of European Jewry was made easier by the knowledge that American Jews could not bring themselves to vote for anyone else.

Ultimately, it was not the lack of will but the lack of military, governmental, or even financial resources—the lack of power—that kept American Jews from doing more, that thwarted their efforts to persuade those who did have power to use it in time to save more Jews. In this sense, above all, the Jews were expendable and abandoned.

### Graves of Academe

POISONED IVY. By BENJAMIN HART.  
Foreword by WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR. *Stein & Day*. 254 pp.  
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Reviewed by PETER SHAW

THE rightward shift of the American political Center that can now be seen to have begun with the first election of Richard Nixon in 1968 was accompanied by a leftward shift among American university faculties and administrations. Although college students themselves eventually moved away from the Left, in the 1970's the minority of them who continued to favor radical causes enjoyed the greatest campus visibility and official approval. Only in 1980 did a group of conservative students at Dartmouth found a newspaper and begin to challenge what had become a distinctly liberal university establishment. By 1982 there were some eighty similar publications in operation.

PETER SHAW is currently Visiting Professor of English at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

The *Dartmouth Review*, of which Benjamin Hart, class of 1981, was the student publisher, set out to lampoon, ridicule, vilify, and denounce the reigning orthodoxies of the college administration, faculty, and activist student organizations. The issues raised by the *Dartmouth Review* ranged from the college's permissive system of electives that, according to Hart, made it possible to graduate from Dartmouth "without ever

having read a word of Shakespeare, Dante, or Homer," to "the obviously political academic departments—Black Studies, Urban Studies, Native American Studies, Women's Studies." A favorite target of attack was the college-funded Tucker Foundation, which sponsored

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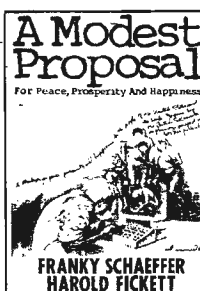
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