BY ISAAC BENJAMIN

On November 15th, the American Society for Yad Vashem held its Annual Tribute Dinner celebrating 70 years since the liberation of the concentration camps and the end of World War II. Joined by American Society Chair Leonard Wilf, Director General of Yad Vashem Dorit Novak, and international dignitaries, three generations committed to Holocaust remembrance came together at the Pierre Hotel in New York to support the American Society for Yad Vashem. Representing different aspects of liberation, the program was filled with memories of survival and the emotional return to humanity after the Holocaust.

The dinner opened with the event master of ceremonies, actor Mike Burstyn, singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “Hatikvah”. As a friend of the organization, Burstyn has worked with the American Society in the past and ardently supports its work. Throughout the night, Burstyn guided the crowd through the meaningful program that was personally curated by 2015 Tribute Dinner Chair Mark Moskovitz.

Yad Vashem Benefactors Rose and Philip Friedman were honored for a lifetime devoted to supporting Jewish communities worldwide. As children of Holocaust survivors, the couple has made Holocaust remembrance and education a top priority. In 2014, the Friedman family dedicated the Jerusalem Garden at Yad Vashem in honor of their parents who survived the Holocaust, and to the memory of their many family members who perished. At the dedication ceremony in Jerusalem, Mr. Friedman spoke of his and his wife’s parents’ stories of survival in the face of Nazi persecution. On the dais in New York he referenced those remarks, explaining that “being involved with Yad Vashem is not just another charity; to me it is personal.” He concluded by acknowledging the dozens of young adults in attendance, many of whom were third-generation representatives. “Because of the young people” Friedman emotionally concluded, “I still have hope.”

A close friend of the Friedmans, famed “hip-hop violinist” Mira Ben-Ari, appeared on stage for a surprise tribute performance. The first time she met the Friedmans, the Grammy Award–winning artist told the crowd, “we shared our commitment to the mishvah of ‘never forget.’” The Israeli born Ben-Ari is the granddaughter of survivors and an activist for Holocaust remembrance. Ben-Ari has been recognized for both her talent and her social engagement by the White House and the president of Israel. In 2011, she received the American Society for Yad Vashem Young Leadership Award.

Dr. Lilian Steinberg described the relationship between her family, the foundation and Yad Vashem. Two families of survivors, Lillie and Milton Steinberg and Lola and Henry Tenerbaum, developed a close relationship with Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation trustee and talented artist Thomas Slaughter. Since the start of that friendship in 1993, the foundation has proudly donated over $1 million to Yad Vashem. Accepting the recognition on behalf of the late Tom Slaughter was his daughter, Hannah Jocelyn.

A featured speaker, celebrated CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer was introduced by American Society Chair Leonard Wilf. Blitzer and Wilf as kids first met in Augsburg, Germany and grew up together as friends both in Germany and later in America. Blitzer began by showing a video clip he made for CNN, tracing his family’s Holocaust experience through the Yad Vashem archives. “Yad Vashem played a significant role for me,” he said about his trip, “as it has for many children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors.” He stressed how the experience of growing up as the son of survivors shaped his conscious.

Offering a different narrative of that fateful time, Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter remembered his father, Rabbi Herschel Schacter, U.S. Army chaplain at the liberation of Buchenwald. The senior Rabbi Schacter was the first chaplain to reach Buchenwald, only an hour after General Patton. In those first few months, Schacter helped thousands of freshly liberated survivors both physically and spiritually. His son recalled hearing survivors express their gratitude to his father as “the most memorable experiences of my childhood.” Over the years, as Rabbi Jacob Schacter witnessed these many reunions, he further appreciated the belief that “we were not spared to forget.”

Throughout the evening, various speakers referenced General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s role in the liberation of Buchenwald and other concentration camps. As the final speaker, the president’s granddaughter Mary Jean Eisenhower brought those memories full circle with stories of how liberation had affected her grandmother. She read fragments from her correspondence, detailing the emotionally scarring “visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality.” She concluded her remarks saying, “I do not believe my grandfather was ever the same after witnessing what he did, and I know he was emphatic that the world understands what happened.”

When reflecting on the evening that covered the many perspectives of liberation, we left with an even greater commitment to Holocaust remembrance. The work of the American Society to support Yad Vashem’s mission in Jerusalem has evolved from the founding group of passionate survivors to a much larger, intergenerational group committed to their foundational cause. When introducing Mary Jean Eisenhower, American Society Treasurer David Halpern poignantly verbalized the message of the evening. “The cause of Holocaust remembrance is very daunting.” Halpern told the crowd, “But thinking you with us strengthens our resolve.”
AMERICA AND THE HOLOCAUST: THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

BY JEFF LIPKES, AMERICAN THINKER

There are two kinds of evildoers: those who kill, rape, beat and brutalize others, and those who let this happen.

The story of American and British indifference to the fate of Jews during the Second World War still makes for disturbing reading. It’s worth revisiting the subject for three reasons:

1) The abandonment of the Jews — the title of David Wyman’s comprehensive study — is the ultimate rationale for the creation of the state of Israel. There will be no second Hitler in Europe — though he has many apprentices in the Middle East. But when the West turned its back on Hitler’s victims (with exceptions discussed below), many Jews who were not committed Zionists were persuaded that the survival of their people depended on its having a state of its own, and an army to defend it. “There are two sorts of countries in the world,” Chaim Weizmann had concluded in the late ’30s, “those that want to expel the Jews and those that don’t want to admit them.”

2) America’s response to the Holocaust helps explain the seemingly perverse attachment of American Jews to a policy that permits an influx of immigrants who are considerably more anti-Semitic than European Americans, apart from other consequences that negatively impact all Americans. (Even second-generation Hispanics are twice as likely as whites to have strong Judeophobic beliefs.) It helps explain also the seemingly irrational attachment of Jews to a party with a significantly less favorable attitude toward them and which is far less supportive of Israel than its rival. Fully 83% of Republicans sympathize more with Israelis than with Palestinians; only 48% of Democrats do so.

3) The most important reason, though, has to do with the Iran nuclear agreement. A lot of things were taken off the table at Geneva: a renunciation of terrorism (responsible for 1,100 American combat deaths in Iraq), an effective means of verifying Iran’s renunciation of terrorism (responsible for the killing, raping, beating and murdering of nearly 100,000 American combat deaths in Iraq), an effective means of verifying Iran’s renunciation of terrorism (responsible for the deaths, beatings and murders of many apprentices in the Middle East). However, has to do with the Iran nuclear agreement.

Hiller didn’t waste any time per-secuting Jews and political opponents, within the months of coming to power in January 1933, the Nazis had fired nearly all Jewish government employees and judges, and disbarred many lawyers from practicing. Jewish doctors, dentists and professors would soon join the ranks of the unemployed. The purging of the judiciary was accompanied by random arrests, beatings and murders of Jews and political opponents. There were about 2,000 assassinations during the year. This practice didn’t begin with the notorious Night of the Long Knives in June 1934. Concentration camps at Dachau and Oranienburg were opened, and cities and towns vied with each other to pass laws restricting Jews. American consuls were appalled at the brutality, and sent back detailed reports.

The violence culminated in Kristallnacht on the night of November 9, 1938. Jews had already been stripped of citizenship by the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935. Now every synagogue in German, which included Austria, was vandalized, burned or destroyed. Ninety-one Jews were killed, 30,000 arrested and sent to concentration camps, and Jewish shops and homes were invaded and looted.

There was outrage in the West. The problem was headline news, and Roosevelt denounced it. This kind of medieval savagery was supposed to have ended centuries earlier in Europe, with the exception of hopelessly backward Czarist Russia.

It was one thing to condemn the vio- lence, but another one and the West do? The Eivan Conference, three months before Kristallnacht, did not augur well. There were expressions of sympathy for the now stateless German Jews, but little commitment to accept the refugees. (Britain admitted 10,000 children; Jews, and Jewish shops and homes were invaded and looted.

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THE 43: THE STORY OF HOW UK JEWS FOUGHT A WAVE OF POSTWAR ANTI-SEMITISM

BY CAHAL MILMO, INDEPENDENT

W hen Morris Beckman returned to Hackney after the Second World War, he — like other British Jewish servicemen — must have hoped his work was done in snuffing out Fascism and the anti-Semitism that drove the Holocaust.

It did not take him long to realize that it was not. After arriving at his parents’ East London home after six years of service as a merchant seaman, during which he had been twice torpedoed, Mr. Beckman sensed an unease. His father told him: “The Blackshirts are back, the Fascists are back.”

Against a backdrop of smashed windows and anti-Jewish graffiti, Oswald Mosley and his supporters had re-emerged in groupings such as the “British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women.” By early 1946, they were once more holding outdoor meetings and seeking to regain the prewar momentum of Mosley’s British Union of Fascists.

Protests against the release from internment of Mosley in 1943.

While the language had changed — instead of railing against Jews, the Mosleyites used the euphemism “alibis” — it was clear that the intent to spread the poison of anti-Semitism by targeting London’s Jewish communities had not. The windows of the Jewish religious school in Dalston were smashed and Jewish shops were daubed with the letters “P/J” — “Perish Judah.” Jews were taunted in the streets — “Not enough Jews were gassed.”

He added: “We wanted revenge — the Holocaust was in our minds. We decided we had to out-Fascist the Fascists.”

What followed over the next four years was brutal, often vicious and now-long-forgotten confrontation which, its participants argue, stopped a nascent British Fascism dead in its tracks while others looked away by using the only method Mosley and his supporters understood — sustained, focused and overwhelming violence.

In February 1946, Mr. Beckman and three fellow Jewish ex-servicemen, including a decorated former paratrooper wounded at Arnhem, had disrupted a Fascist meeting in Hackney, holding the speakers’ words at gunpoint. The resulting conflict, fought out in pitch battles during Fascist gatherings where the 43 Group and their opponents gave no quarter, were wielded on both sides with dev- astating effect. One former veteran said he was told: “We’re here to kill. We’re here to maim.”

The result was a succession of pitched battles during Fascist gatherings where the 43 Group and their opponents gave no quarter. Knife-fights, knuckledusters, knives, steel-toed boots and sharpened belt buckles were wielded on both sides with devastating effect. One former veteran said he was told: “We’re here to kill. We’re here to maim.”

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As Sassoon later put it from his Hollywood mansion: “After Auschwitz, there were no laws.”

Where Mosleyites turned up to bait and persecute Jewish tailors in Hackney or Dalston, they found themselves confronted by former collaborators and Royal Marines well versed in mortal combat.

Julius Konopinsky, one of the 43 Group’s founding members, had more reason than many to see the virtues of such an approach. Having arrived in Hackney from Poland in 1939, he learned in 1945 that his nine maternal uncles and aunts had been murdered by the Nazis. A year later, another uncle, who had survived Auschwitz, came to live with him. Now 85, Mr. Konopinsky said: “Call them Fascists, call them Nazis, they only seemed to understand one thing — to hurt you or to be hurt. And we believed in hurting them first before they hurt us. I still believe that.”

The group did not gain universal approval among Britain’s Jews. The Board of Deputies feared the militants would be conflated with the activities of extreme Zionists such as Efrun, which was at the time conducting a bloody campaign against British control of their homeland.

Although some, including Sassoon, did subsequently join in the war to establish Israel, there were in reality no links between the 43 Group and such militant Zionists; nor indeed was it linked, as some suspected, to Communist agitators.

Instead, with British Fascism broken in the face of the ferocity of its onslaught, the group decided to disband in 1950. Mr. Beckman said: “In 1946, there were only two countries in Europe that allowed Fascist parties — us and Franco’s Spain. Why did the authorities allow Mosley to go unchecked? Somebody had to do it, so we did.”

Within the Jewish community, there is cautious approval that, while its tactics are no longer valid, the 43 Group’s memory is being resurrected.

A spokesman for the Community Security Trust, the volunteer body which helps safeguard Jewish communities, said: “It is a very interesting episode in the history of the Jewish community in this country. It brings more color and nuance to our understanding of Jewish history and how anti-Semitism was fought. It was a time when a lot of Jewish people really stood up and it worked.”

By 1947 it had 1,000 members across Britain, including a group of non-Jews who penetrated Fascist groups and exposed them to intelligence on where meetings and marches were taking place.

The group set up quick-reaction “commando” cells of ex-servicemen who were transported to Mosleyite gatherings by friendly London black taxi drivers. The men then used a twin-pronged attack to carve their way to the platform of a meeting and assault the speaker, forcing police to intervene.

Its actions included stakeouts of Jewish cemeteries to catch anti-Semites engaged in the desecration of graves, and raids on the homes of Fascists who were warned to cease their activities or face grim consequences.

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The resulting conflict, fought out in London’s Jewish suburbs and beyond by what became a force of more than 1,000 Jews and non-Jews, has large-
REVIEWS

GOVAND FAITH & IDENTITY FROM THE ASHES: REFLECTIONS OF CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS


Reviewed by Dr. Diane Cypkin

“I have learned...it is what we do with suffering that matters.”

Elie Wiesel, from the Prologue to God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes

With the passing of each day, each week, each month, each year—more and more Holocaust survivors are leaving us. That makes their children and grandchildren responsible for, as Menachem Z. Rosensaft, editor of God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections of Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors writes, “transmitting the survivors’ legacy of remembrance into the future.” How, as the progeny of individual survivors with collective and yet differing Holocaust histories, is this responsibility viewed by them? More specifically, how has the offering of help by the survivors affected the manner in which these children and grandchildren believe, how they see themselves, what they do and “are doing with their lives”? Eighty-eight contributors who live in sixteen countries on six continents, including “theologians, scholars, rabbis, and cantors to authors, artists, political and community leaders, physicians, psychologists, and media personalities”—all reflect in an interesting and thought-provoking manner on one or more of these issues in God, Faith & Identity, differing in ways and yet, in the end, not that very different.

For example, we read about how when it comes to faith in God, oddly enough, survivors who were believers before the Holocaust on the whole generally continued believing, and raised families who did too! How have some of these survivors, and their children and grandchildren, come to answer the question as to why God allowed the Holocaust to happen? God gave humans free will, and the Holocaust was “necessity” doing “others insinuating.” Others insist God was still there helping... others continue questioning... while determinedly continuing to believe. Meanwhile, there are those survivors who weren’t believers before the Holocaust, and would raise families who didn’t believe either! So, if not to God, where do these individuals and their children and grandchildren now turn for otherworldly help when it’s such help they need? A telling anecdote offered by an Israeli daughter of survivors: “Two elite paratroopers, one secular and one religious, are on the verge of collapse during a long, backbreaking exercise of running while carrying fellow soldiers on stretchers.”

“The secular soldier: ‘Tell me, where do you get the strength to keep running?”

“The religious soldier: ‘From God in heaven. How about you?”

“The secular soldier: ‘From Auschwitz.”

Which easily brings us to the essays in God, Faith & Identity offered in the section labeled “Identity,” and the progeny of a considerable number of Holocaust survivors who fervently proclaim that, just as many religiously oriented Jews believe all Jews should feel they were at Mount Sinai when God gave us the Torah, so now all Jews, unquestionably, should feel they were witness to the Shoah. Thus, not just the children and grandchildren of actual survivors, but all Jews are honorary-bound to remember the Holocaust and what was and what can be. In fact, for many in this cohort (descendants of survivors, like the Israeli daughter quoted above) it’s almost (if not surely) as if their Jewish identity springs from the Shoah more than from anything else! (Interestingly, such is frequently the case for Jews not children or grandchildren of survivors too.) Meanwhile, because of the Holocaust and the experiences of their parents and grandparents, many have become among Zionists. The question here is: who are those who want to let go of the Holocaust and what they see as its demands “without leaving”... Yes, indeed, there are most assuredly differences among us. (This reviewer is not only a child of survivors but a sister to one.) Yet there is one area where there is a great deal more agreement than not.

Where? Overwhelmingly, many of us have dedicated ourselves not only to the betterment of life for our own people but also to the betterment of life for the world’s people. In fact, it’s common knowledge that many children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors have gone into the helping professions—as doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists and more—trying to mend the world, trying to bring peace to the world, trying to bring hope to the world. And it really is quite fascinating to ponder...for shouldn’t WE be the neediest of individuals? Shouldn’t WE be the ones needing a LOT of help ourselves? For that matter, shouldn’t we also ALL be the most selfish of individuals? Strange, that those whose families have suffered such inhumanity have turned around to eagerly give the world so very much. 

God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections of Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors is surely a unique addition to any Holocaust library and a must-read for any student of that period!

Dr. Diane Cypkin is a Professor of Media, Communication, and Visual Arts at Pace University. Her family survived the Kovno ghetto in Lithuania.

ANATOMY OF THE MURDERS

The Third Reich in History and Memory


Reviewed by Julia M. Klein

However deranged his deeds, Adolf Hitler was not certifiably mad. The German people did not voluntarily embrace the dictator, but acquiesced in his rule only after a campaign of terror that silenced or sidedividual resistance. The Third Reich, compared to other 20th-century genocides, was unique in its global scope and ambition. These are among the views that Richard J. Evans, the formidable Cambridge University historian, espouses in his lucid and informative essay collection, The Third Reich in History and Memory. Evans, best known for his three-volume study of the Nazi regime, originally wrote most of these pieces as book reviews; otherwise, they appear as journal articles. Apart from some repetition, the essays have aged well and provide a succinct overview of recent scholarly trends.

In his preface, Evans outlines these shifts in perspective: an attempt to situate Germany’s imperial aspirations and exclusionary ideology in a global context, a renewed emphasis on the extent of popular support for Hitler’s government, an examination of continuities between the Third Reich and Germany’s postwar democratic regime, and an interest in the relationship between history and memory.

The issue of domestic support for Nazism remains highly contested. It bears on both the thorny notion of collective guilt and on specific legal culpability for Germany’s crimes. And it helps explain the country’s generational anguish in confronting the Holocaust.

Following World War II, Germany and what it had done was次会议 in charge. Many Germans portrayed themselves as victims of the Nazis (not to mention Allied bombs and the brutal Soviet invasion). Later research complicated the picture. It uncovered the complexities of the Nazi bureaucracy, with its internecine rivalries, and suggested that there was space to resist the regime. Why then was resistance so minimal, at once so short-lived and so slow (as the war effort faltered) to rematerialize?

Some historians credit Hitler’s popularity. They believe, as Evans puts it, that the regime “rested not on police terror and coercion but on popular approval and consent.” The German historian Golo Aly, for example, has famously argued that social mobility and economic benefits derived from the plunder of Jewish property and conquered countries helped bolster Hitler’s support.

Evans is skeptical. “Nazi Germany actually was a dictatorship in which civil rights and freedoms were suppressed and opponents of the regime were not tolerated,” he writes. In “Berlin in the Twenties,” a dismissive review of Thomas Friedman’s book Hitler’s Berlin, Evans writes that “mass violence undermined the Nazi seizure of power at every level.”

In “Coercion and Consent,” he reminds us that the Nazis initially targeted not just Communists but also Social Democrats—the chief representatives of Germany’s working classes and, together, a powerful electoral force. “These people were hardly members of a despised minority of social outcasts,” he writes.

(Continued on page 13)
David Lenga was riding a streetcar in Lodz, Poland, on September 1, 1939, traveling across town on an errand for his mother, when the SS air-raid sirens began blasting. The streetcar halted abruptly, and within minutes the 11-year-old saw “German warplanes swooping down, machine-gunning civilians as they scattered in all directions. “Bodies went flying,” recalled David, who ran through an apartment courtyard and took alleyways back to his house. Inside, he found his father, mother, brother and grandmother huddled in the radio. His father somberly gathered everyone together. “This is the beginning of a horrible time,” David’s father told them.

David was born in Lodz on December 3, 1927, to Abraham and Sarah Lenga. His younger brother, Nathan, was born in 1931. Abraham was a chemical engineer who owned and operated a wholesale tannery factory in Strykow, 11 miles south of Lodz.

David enjoyed a very comfortable life with a loving family. He attended public school, which was predominately Jewish, as well as cheder, and played on his scholls’s soccer team. But anti-Semitism was always prevalent. “You could feel it in the air,” he said.

On September 8, 1939, David watched in distress as his non-Jewish neighbors and friends welcomed the German soldiers marching into Lodz, accompanied by tanks and high-speed flying swastika flags. In mid-September, the Gestapo, now occupying the city, confiscated the tannery factory, keeping Abraham in jail while moving the family to Strykow’s Jewish quarter.

In April or May of 1942, the Germans liquidated the Strykow ghetto, hording the town’s Jews into the cemetery, where they were held for two days and two nights with no food or toilets.

On the third day, Abraham, who was very ill, was sent to a labor camp. The family didn’t expect him to survive.

The other family members were transported to the Lodz ghetto, where David worked in a clothing factory managed by Yehuda T. Strykow, Chil, and became a full-fledged tailor.

In a large aktion the following September, Sarah was spared, but David, now 15, Nathan and their grandmother were selected for deportation and temporarily crammed into a warehouse just outside the ghetto, along with hundreds of other Jews.

While sitting in the warehouse, David heard someone calling his name. Bewildered, he approached the front door, which a guard opened a crack. “Run for your life,” the guard instructed. David asked for his brother’s first name. “He will come later,” the guard told him.

David raced back to the ghetto in search of his mother, but found only Aunt Bina, his mother’s older sister, and Bina’s son. She told him Sarah didn’t want to live without her children and had begged Chil to save them. But when David and Nathan didn’t appear, she went to the SS, desperately requesting to be deported with them. David later learned that his mother and brother were murdered in Chełmno.

After his mother and brother had been taken away, David became suicidal. He made his way to a third-story window in an abandoned building and prepared to jump. But Bina had followed him and grabbed him. “You have to have hope,” she told him.

Late one night, David was ravenous and sneaked out of the ghetto to a nearby vegetable field. He filled his burlap sack halfway with potatoes when a spotlight illuminated him, and an old German soldier pointed a rifle at his head. “What are you doing here, you goddammed Jew?” he barked.

“Please, sir, my family is starving,” David answered. “Maybe you have a wife and family, too.”

The soldier lowered his rifle. “Get the hell out of here, and take your goddamned sack with you,” the man ordered. David fled. The potatoes fed him, Bina and his cousin for weeks.

Sometime in 1943, as David passed through a newly arrived transport, he heard someone calling him. “I’m a very good friend of your father’s,” a man said. “Until last night, I was working with him in the Poznan labor camp. He’s doing well.” The news reinvigorated David.

In August 1944, as the Lodz ghetto was being liquidated, David refused to leave, believing the Russians would soon arrive. He continued living in his room but had also scouted out a hiding place in the attic of a nearby abandoned building. At one point, he lit a fire to cook a potato, but the smoke was visible and he soon heard Germans approaching with barking dogs. David escaped to his hiding place, terrifed as the German soldiers arrived. David raced back to the ghetto in September 1948.

The group was taken to one of the Kaufering concentration camps in Bavaria. There, David helped repair damaged railroad tracks, standing in wet cement in rubber boots while wielding a ladderjagger to keep the mixture soft.

Later, his block captain put him to work sewing socks, gloves and vests for the upcoming winter. For months he worked indoors, receiving extra rations. “That saved my life,” David said.

In late April 1945, as U.S. troops approached, the prisoners were evacuated, marched hours to the train station and then loaded into open cattle cars.

The train proceeded slowly, finally stopping in a thick pine forest, where a German military train pulled up alongside it. The same day, American planes strafed both trains, unaware that one held prisoners and killed many of them.

Some of the prisoners, including David and his friends Roman and Sobol, were able to jump out, escaping into the forest.

The three eventually reached a farmhouse, where the farmer and his wife let them stay in their barn, providing cots, clothes and regular meals. “We were given the opportunity to be human beings,” David said.

On May 5, 1945, David heard the thunderous roar of tanks. “Come out,” his friends yelled. “We’re liberat ed.” It was May 5, 1945.

The freed prisoners sought in vain to communicate with the American soldiers. Finally, an officer approached. “You boys are Jews?” he asked in Yiddish. “We’re taking you with us.”

The officer transported them to a displaced persons camp in Landsberg, 40 miles west of Munich. Using the camp as a base, David traveled throughout Germany, des perate to find family. Unsuccessful, he went to Sweden, accompanied by Roman and Sobol.

The three were sent to a men’s camp in the hamlet of Furt. While checking out a nearby women’s camp, David met Charlotte Katz, a survivor from Czechoslovakia. The two soon moved to Helsingborg, where they married on July 18, 1945. Their daughter Helene was born in May 1946 and daughter Bert in September 1948.

While in Sweden, where David worked as a custom tailor, he learned his father was alive and back in Strykow. “I couldn’t speak. I was crying and my wife was holding me,” he said. He began corresponding with Abraham, but they weren’t able to see one another until 1953, when David, working three jobs, had saved enough money to buy his father a boat ticket from Israel, where he was then living. “Thank you,” David said. “I will not forget for my entire life.”

In 1954, the family moved to Philadelphia, where daughter Barbara was born in December 1955. David worked as the manager of a custom tailor shop and then, in the 1960s, opened Lenga’s Tailoring.


Charlotte died in 2000, when her car was hit by a man fleeing police in a high-speed chase. “We were totally devastated,” David said. Three years later, on May 4, 2003, he married Eva Mandel.

Now a grandfather of seven and great-grandfather of three, David began telling his story in 2013. At 87, he spoke regularly at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and participates in The Righteous Conversations Project.

David took many risks during the Holocaust, any one of which could have been his last. “Call it cunning, call it instinct, call it whatever you want,” he said. “The fact is, I dared it, and I’m proud of it.”
Nazis, went on to become an outspoken activist. "I’m still there — in my dreams," he said.

But he never really left the death camp behind. "I never escaped from Sobibor. I’m still there — in my dreams, in everything," Blatt said in 2010. "My point of reference is always Sobibor." Sobibor, where he was imprisoned for half a year before the mass escape, simultaneously haunted and motivated him. It’s the place where his parents and brother were killed, poisoned in gas chambers an hour after their arrival at the camp in Nazi-occupied eastern Poland. It’s the place where he was forced to work for months, shoving the heads of doomed women, sorting clothes stripped off of people about to enter the gas chamber, cleaning the blood off boots of S.S. officers who had just driven those people to their deaths.

But it’s also the place where Blatt saw Alexander Pechersky, one of the revolt’s ringleaders, jump onto a table in the moments before the breakout to speak to the people he hoped to help free.

"Those of you who may survive, bear witness," Pechersky said in Russian, according to Blatt’s book on the revolt. "Let the world know what has happened here.

The rebellion was born out of desperation, Blatt later said. Sobibor was not a work camp — its sole purpose was to kill prisoners. Most of the 250,000 or so Jews who were brought there were killed within hours of arrival. Just a few hundred prisoners were spared to help run the camp, and they knew that their time, too, was short — “work Jews” were routinely executed, Blatt told the Independent in 2011.

Led by Pechersky and by Polish-Jewish prisoner Leon Feldhendler, a small group of underground members worked to discreetly pick off the camp’s German guards on the afternoon of October 14. It was Blatt’s job to inform the officers that a new coat had been set aside for them, sending the men to the tailor’s shop where they would be quietly killed. The plan was for the rebels to then dress as officers and march the entire prisoner population out of the camp’s front gates.

But they were discovered too soon, and one of the rebels blew a whistle for roll call, so the prisoners would gather in one place. Blatt wrote on the Web site accompanying his book about the uprising. That’s when Pechersky gave his speech, and Jews began rushing to the exit, into a hail of gunfire from the remaining guards. Others clambered up the camp’s fence, dropping onto a field of land mines on the other side.

"Corpses were everywhere," Blatt wrote. "The noise of rifles, exploding mines, grenades and the chatter of machine guns assaulted the ears. The Nazis shot from a distance while in our hands were only primitive knives and hatchets."

It was the only mass escape from a World War II death camp, according to the Los Angeles Times, and the majority of participants did not survive it. Of the roughly 300 people who made it out of the camp, it’s thought that two-thirds were killed by land mines, by the guards’ gunfire or in the ensuing manhunt. Only about half of the escapees who survived their initial flight lived until the end of the war.

After the revolt, Sobibor was demolished, and every Jew who remained in the camp was executed. Blatt managed to evade the mines and made a mad dash toward the shelter of the forest ahead. "It was so close," he said. "I fell several times, each time thinking I was hit. And each time I got up and ran further … 100 yards … 50 yards … 20 more yards … and the forest at last. Behind us, blood and ashes."

Blatt and two fellow escapees bribed a Polish farmer to hide them in his barn, but after a few months the farmer — fearful of being caught — shot them and left them for dead. Blatt’s companions died, but he survived with just a wound to his jaw. He gathered his strength and moved on.

After the war, Blatt emigrated to Israel and then to the United States, where he established three electronics shops and a family of his own. He bought a house in an exclusive neighborhood of Santa Barbara. When he looked out the window, he saw boats bobbing in the crystalline Pacific — a stark contrast to the horrors he saw when he closed his eyes.

"From the pit of hell to paradise," he told the Los Angeles Times in 1988. "Sometimes I wonder if this is a dream and I’ll wake up and be back in Sobibor again."

The death camp was never far from his mind. His study overflowed with World War II literature and Holocaust narratives. Blatt himself wrote two books about the camp, and a manuscript for the 1987 TV movie Escape from Sobibor. In 1984, he traveled back to Europe to interview the commander of Sobibor’s imprisoned workers, Karl Frenzel, who had been sentenced to life in prison for war crimes but was released early for health reasons. He spearheaded the effort to preserve Sobibor as a memorial and often returned to the camp to check on its condition. Among the tall grasses and abandoned buildings, he still found burnt fragments of bone that he’d pray over, then bury.

Sometimes Blatt packed up and flew to Poland on a whim because "he had to be in Sobibor." The obsession took a toll on his life in the U.S. When his first wife left, he recalled, she told him "I don’t want to live in Sobibor any more. … I’ve lived there for 30 years."

Blatt also spoke at the trial of Ohio autoworker John Demjanjuk, a native Ukrainian who was charged with thousands of counts of being an accessory to murder at Sobibor. His testimony helped bolster the prosecution’s claim that if Demjanjuk was a guard at Sobibor, he would have taken part in the killing of Jews, according to the Associated Press.

Demjanjuk was convicted by a German court in 2011 and sentenced to five years in prison, but he remained free pending his appeal and died a year later.

But Demjanjuk’s imprisonment was less important to Blatt than the trial itself. "I don’t care if he goes to prison or not — the trial is what matters to me," he told the Independent in 2011. "The world should find out how it was at Sobibor."
New York–based Remember the Women Institute.

That few know Reick’s story speaks to a greater issue: the absence of women in history, Saidel said.

Women have been left out of history since the beginning of history. In general women’s experiences as women in the Holocaust and World War II have been overlooked in the historical narrative,” Saidel said. “As far as analytical books and films go, there just isn’t a lot of information.

The story of Haviva Reick really brings together those two strands of Holocaust history — Jewish resistance and gender dynamics — really well,” said Thomas Ort, assistant history professor at Queens College.

Saidel drew inspiration for Remember the Women from the lives of her grandmothers and great-grandmothers, and from a 1980 visit to Ravensbrück concentration camp.

“There was simply no indication that Jewish women were there,” Saidel said. She was working on her doctorate at SUNY at the time but started to investigate the issue as a side project. What she found was that not only were women missing from the story of Ravensbrück, but women also were missing from much of the history of the Holocaust.

Part of the reason for the historical gap is that many of these topics were, and remain, highly controversial, Ort said. Pregnancy in the camps, prostitution in the camps, abortions and sexual abuse are uncomfortable subjects around an already painful topic.

One recent Remember the Women project dealt with the identification of Holocaust survivors and witnesses of sexual violence. Together with Sonja Hedgepeth, Saidel edited Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust.

“It was pioneer research. The topic has been a taboo for many years and it was very controversial,” Nava Semel, an award-winning Israeli author and playwright, said in a phone call from Jerusalem. “The survivors did not dare to speak about it, they felt shame and wanted to protect their families from the past. Only in old age could they come forward.”

In 1985 Semel published the novel A Hat of Glass, based on the testimony of her mother, Margalit Artzli, a concentration camp survivor. The novel is about a lesbian kapo who, because she had been a fronttire, a prostitute for Nazi troops at the front, was able to secure medicine and other life-saving measures for the prisoners.

Semel’s novel And the Rat Laughed delves into the topic of how Holocaust survivors hidden as children were sexually abused.

“We’ve come a long way in understanding men and women had different roles and survived in different ways,” said Dr. Eva Fogelman, an author familiar with Reick’s story.

It’s time for these stories, whether they are acts of resistance and defiance or overt as Reick’s or less known, like the kapo in Semel’s novel, to be more widely known, Fogelman said.

Because the numbers of survivors are rapidly declining, the opportunities to give and share firsthand testimony are dwindling too. This gives a sense of urgency to the work of Remember the Women, Semel said.

“Special attention must be paid to what I call the shadowy corners of the Holocaust, it must be part of the discourse now,” Semel said. “The institute is fighting to give voice to those who are mute or were silent. The institute gives them a feeling before they leave this world that they are not alone in the world, that someone is out there for them.”
PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANNUAL TRIBUTE DINNER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

Leonard A. Wilf, chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem, present the Yad Vashem Remembrance Award to Rose and Philip Friedman.

Wolf Blitzer, featured dinner speaker.

Mary Jean Eisenhower, dinner speaker.

Ron B. Meier, executive director of ASYV; Dr. Joyce Raynor and Dr. Miriam and Sheldon Adelson.

Miri Ben-Ari delivered a surprise performance in honor of Rose and Philip Friedman.

Hannah Jocelyn (2nd from left) representing the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, along with Lu Steinberg (4th from left), and Milton Steinberg (seated).
Daniella Pomeranc, Young Leadership Associates, introduced dinner speaker, Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter.

Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, dinner speaker.

Rose and Philip Friedman and family.

Harry Karten, Barry and Marilyn Rubenstein, and David Halpern.

Mark Moskowitz, dinner chair (back row, r.), with Rose Moskowitz and members of his family.

Gladys Halpern is joined by two generations of her family as she recites the Motzi.

Photos by Bernard DeLierre.
Seventy years ago, as the Holocaust survivors began the slow and painful process of returning to life in the wake of the Shoah, many of them found themselves in, or were directed toward, displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, Austria and Italy. Lasting from the end of World War II until the early 1950s, the period of the DP camps was short-lived, but is exemplified by the vibrant Jewish life created therein.

The living conditions of the thousands of Holocaust survivors who gathered in the various DP camps were characterized, primarily at first, by hardship and scarcity. The shock of liberation, the realization that many of them were alone in the world, and the physical and emotional scars and deprivations burdened many survivors who, even under American and British supervision, suffered anti-Semitic violence from time to time. A trend found a parallel expression in the physical and emotional scars and deprivations burdened many survivors who, even under American and British supervision, suffered anti-Semitic violence from time to time. A significant change in the attitude toward the Jewish survivors and their living conditions in the DP camps took effect in the wake of the Harrison Report in the summer of 1945. Earl G. Harrison, envoy of US President Harry Truman, visited the DP camps in Germany to examine the military authorities' treatment of the Jewish survivors. Harrison's unequivocal report was not late in coming: "We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them, except that we do not exterminate them," he declared in no uncertain terms. Harrison called for an immediate increase in food rations and clothing for the Jewish survivors, improved housing conditions, and the creation of separate DP camps for Jews. Truman adopted the Harrison Report, instructed the US Army to improve its treatment and attitude toward the Jews in Germany at once, and even ordered that a special advisor for Jewish affairs be appointed. However, even before any major improvement in their living conditions, the members of She'erit Hapleita (the Surviving Remnant) began to express in the first few weeks after liberation, and increasingly during the development of the DP camps, a vitality and wish to rebuild their lives. Many survivors married, had children and began to collect the fragments of their lives. This trend found a parallel expression in the public arena, too: local leadership from within the DP's sprouted quickly in the various camps, an education system and relief departments were established and, with time, youth movements and sports organizations began to operate.

A nether example of this desire to rebuild was the attempt to reestablish religious life, which was expressed in the many holiday assemblies, the founding of yeshivot in a number of the camps, and efforts to regulate kosher slaughter and other needs. Also noteworthy was the energetic cultural activity that developed among the members of She'erit Hapleita. This activity, most of which was conducted in Yiddish, included the publication of more than a hundred different newspapers, some of which became regular and wide-ranging publications. Yiddish theater blossomed in the camps, with numerous bands of amateurs and serious professionals taking part and performing for the benefit of the DPs. Another important venture that the survivors founded was the establishment of historical commissions in numerous camps and the beginning of gathering wartime testimony.

It should be noted that the public mood in the DP camps had a striking Zionist character, and the members of She'erit Hapleita waged an insistent campaign in favor of immigration to Eretz Israel. This last aspect was just another example of how the DPs themselves hungered for the return to life after the long years of war, and fulfilled a prominent role in rehabiliting the fragments of the Jewish world after the Holocaust.

By Dr. Ella Florshaim

REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

LIFE AFTER LIBERATION

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By Dr. Ella Florshaim
Jacob Bresler was only member of his family to survive the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, and at the end of the war he was one of thousands of lost children who had nowhere to go.

So in August 1946 the BBC broadcast on the old Home Service a series of appeals to find any relatives in Britain. In clipped 1940s tones, one said: “Jacob Bresler, a 16-year-old Polish boy, has survived five concentration camps, but has lost his entire family.”

No one knew what happened next until nearly 70 years later, when the BBC found a recording of the 12 appeals and decided to find out what became of the children. Of the 11 who were traced, five were still alive and four well enough to tell their stories, including Jacob, now 86, based in Los Angeles and known as Jack.

He says: “I came from a large family — four sisters, one brother and 65 first cousins. I am the only one who is alive. “In 1939 when the war broke out, my father was taken away right away and I became the sole supporter of my family. They kept him in jail and I was separated from my mother and the rest of the family in 1942. “My mother and two sisters were taken to an extermination camp. They were the first ones to be gassed in the Chelmo concentration camp. My father died behind bars in the Lodz ghetto. And he lost his big brother Josef when they were both sent to Dachau.

Jacob Bresler is now in touch with another survivor from the BBC appeals. German Jew Gunter Wolff is now known as Gary and lives in Arizona. His father died in Auschwitz, while he slept beside him.

He recalls: “He just couldn’t wake up one morning. I was next to him and that was it. To be honest, I was relieved. I had to take care of him. “He was not quick enough, he was not agile enough, I realized it was a matter of life or death. He was like the anchor if I had to survive. I felt guilty about feeling that way, but what are you going to do?”

Unlike Jacob, Gunter did find a new home as a direct consequence of the BBC appeals. Taken by the United Nations to London, he met a cousin of his father’s at Waterloo Station.

Gunter says: “He looked more English than the English, with a bowler hat and umbrella. I said ‘Uncle Theo!’ in German and he said, ‘We don’t speak German here, we only speak English!’ “I learned very early the only reliable person is you, yourself. I still have that today.”

Eventually relatives in New York helped him to get papers to emigrate to the US, where Gunter ran a successful real estate business until he retired.
repeatedly barred the path was the stipulation that the émigré not become a "public charge." This was intended to be unsympathetic. In one of many similar cases, the application of a young physician and his wife, both with $1,600 in cash (the average annual salary in the U.S. was $1,370), and affidavits of support from relatives with good jobs and valuable property, was summarily rejected.

The restrictive policies were partly a response to the Depression, naturally. But in July 1941, when unemployment had fallen from a high of nearly 25% to 9.6%, the State Department further tightened requirements. The Visa Division introduced the "relatives rule," stipulating that any applicant with a child, parent or spouse in German, Italian or Russian territory would be subject to "strict scrutiny involving representa- tives of five government agencies. After World War II, refugees from Axis-controlled Europe were labeled "enemy aliens," increasing the difficulty of obtaining a visa. Still another paper wall was erected in the fall of 1943: refugees "not in acute danger" were denied entry. This barred individuals who had managed to escape to neutral countries.

In an extraordinary memo in June 1940, Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long, in charge of immigration, explained his strategy to his subordinates: "We can delay and effectively stop for a temporary period of individuals and the number of immigrants...by simply advising our consuls to postpone and postpone and postpone the granting of visas."

The number of visas issued that year, the number of visas issued had been cut in half.

Then, as a result of the various obstacles erected by the State Department, between December 1941 and April 1945, only 21,000 refugees were admitted from the Axis-controlled territory, a little over 10% of the quota, and not all of them Jewish.

There were legitimate security considerations, of course, but all historians who’ve combed the State Department archives have concluded that these were largely pretexts. They have also discredited the other frequently mentioned excuse for the wholesale rejection of applications: that refugees were "not in acute danger" and that tens of thousands of Arab refugees were repeatedly rejected by the British. They were denied entry because the British were worried. News of the extermination of Jews never made the front pages. The official confirmation of the killing centers in November 1942 (four months after Riegner had informed the State Department) was delegated to page 10 of the N.Y. Times and page 9 of the Washington Post.

No wonder Eisenhower was shocked when he saw the camps in Germany: "It was almost unbelievable," he said.

John Kerry has called Israel’s reaction to the Iran deal "way over the top." But it was not the first time an American Congress will make the Jewish state "more isolated and more blamed" by the international community. Obama has repeatedly attacked Netanyahu for criticizing the deal.

More déjà vu. The correspondence of both British and American officials in the '40s is filled with references to the Jewish penchant for exaggerating their problems and to Jews’ excessive self-pity. “A disproportionate amount of the time of the Office is wasted on these wailing Jews,” a Foreign Office official concluded.

American Anti-Semitism has morphed once again. Having shifted from religious to racial grounds, it is now incited by a political crisis — public exposure of the new anti-Semitism is that it per- ceives is eerily familiar. “The Jews always sit at the back of the bus,” DuBois wrote a searing 12-page memo, “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of Jews.”

Morgenthau was reluctant to con- front his friend FDR, but not so after changing the memo’s title, cut- ting the indictment and bowdlerizing its language. Congress had mean- while begun its own investigation. In testimony before a House committee, Breckenridge Long lied about the number of German immigrants allowed into the U.S. Faced with a political crisis — public exposure of the State Department’s machinations and lies — FDR took preemptive action. He authorized the creation of a War Refugee Board, to be headed by John Pehele and to be funded almost entirely by Jewish agencies.

The Board worked hard and had some significant successes. It subsi- dized the rescue of 120,000 Budapest Jews by Raoul Wallenberg and his staff. But it was repeatedly thwarted by the President and by government departments.

Pehele hoped to set up refugee camps in the U.S. He was permitted just one, in Oswego, New York, for fewer than 1,000 Jews. These refugees were to be repatriated, like the 425,000 German PWs who were housed in 700 camps — for whom shipping had been found. Pehele’s proposals to ship Hungarian refugees from Hungary were repeatedly rejected by the War Department. He was told that shipping costs and the number of camps that distance from Britain. In fact, bombers from Foggia, Italy, twice struck the synthetic oil and rubber plants at Monowitz (Auschwitz III), just five miles from the gas chambers.

As for censoring Riegner’s reports, the State Department need not have worried. News of the extermination of Jews never made the front pages. The official confirmation of the killing centers in November 1942 (four months after Riegner had informed the State Department) was delegated to page 10 of the N.Y. Times and page 9 of the Washington Post.

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SEVEN DECADES ON, ISRAEL STILL SEeks RESOLUTIONS FOR “HOLOCAUST ART”

BY DANIEL ESTRIN

Before and during World War II, the Nazis seized up to 600,000 works of art from all across Europe. This has created a long-running drama that is still playing out from movie studios in Hollywood to museums in Israel.

If you saw last year’s movie The Monuments Men, starring George Clooney, then you know the story line. Toward the end of the war, American and Allied forces sent teams on a treasure hunt through Europe. Their mission was to find those stolen art works the Nazis had stashed away, and return them to their original owners. But many of those owners had been killed in the Holocaust, and a lot of art was just never claimed.

Ultimately, a couple of thousand art works were distributed to Jewish institutions around the world, with many going to Israel, including the country’s leading museums.

Now, advocates for Holocaust victims say it’s now time to get the art back to the families that once owned it.

At the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, director James Snyder shows me a 1915 oil painting — a sort of mosaic of rooftops — by Austrian artist Egon Schiele. It’s a well-known work by a famous artist, one of about a thousand pieces of Holocaust-era art the museum received.

“The fact that no one has ever surfaced with record of its prior ownership suggests that no one from the family that may have owned it before the war survived the war,” Snyder says.

Today, many museums around the world are going over their collections to see if they have art that was confiscated by the Nazis. Snyder says the Israel Museum has returned about 40 works to heirs.

But art experts say it’s likely that museums in Israel have many looted paintings on their walls and they don’t even know it. These are likely works that museums bought in good faith, or received as gifts, and they simply aren’t aware of the history, or have no way of tracing it or haven’t done enough research to find out.

R AENEWED SEARCH

S art Eizenstat, special adviser to Secretary of State John Kerry on Holocaust issues, addressed a conference on art restitution in Israel this past summer. He said Israel hasn’t done enough.

“It’s ironic because Israel is the state of the Jewish people. It’s ironic because Israel has the greatest number of Holocaust survivors in the world. It’s ironic because should a leader as a Jewish state on Holocaust-related issues,” said Eizenstat.

The Israeli organization Hashava was formed by the government to locate Holocaust victims’ assets in Israel, though it only started looking into art in 2013.

“I believe Israel always had the sense that being the state of the Jewish people, things should belong here if they are heirs,” says Elinor Kroitoru of Hashava.

Her organization has caused a bit of a stink on this issue, publicly accusing Israeli museums of not doing enough detective work to weed out suspect art.

Kroitoru has singled out one major museum, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

Says she has a big collection of impressionist and post-impressionist art — the kind European Jewish collectors owned before the war. She thinks that statistically, it’s likely the museum has looted art on its walls without even realizing it.

“The Tel Aviv museum claims they have done research internally but nothing has been published yet,” she says. “We are waiting for the museum to come forward and show us and the public what they have done. They are a responsible museum. I know they are a serious museum, and I hope they will publish and work transparently.”

Ruth Feldman, who recently retired as a curator at the museum, says the museum takes the matter seriously.

“We did a lot of work in that field. There is not always the time to do it … But things are done at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art,” Feldman said.

MUSEUMS ATTAINED BY NAZIS

The Hashava organization is working to get money to fund provenance research at the Tel Aviv Museum. And this past summer, Israeli curators attended the first workshop of its kind in Israel, on how to do that research.

Even if a museum can find an heir and return a piece of art, that’s not always the end of the story. In some cases, Kroitoru says, the heirs turn around and sell the piece to private collectors.

“They were in a very unusual situation, where art that was looted from a Jew in Europe before the war, ends up in the beautiful palace of a very rich person in Dubai. And one of the questions is, is that what we want to happen to looted art?” she asks.

In other cases, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem has returned art to heirs and they have allowed the art to stay where it is, on loan, or sold it back to the museum.

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In other cases, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem has returned art to heirs and they have allowed the art to stay where it is, on loan, or sold it back to the museum.

That way, the heirs don’t need to fuss with security cameras and climate-controlled rooms for their precious paintings — and the public in Israel gets to appreciate a great work of art and a piece of Holocaust history.

(Continued from page 4)

He notes, too, that the Gestapo and the concentration camps were only part of the apparatus of repression. The regular courts and state prisons played a role, along with job loss, eviction and harassment, as well as widespread indoctrination, effective particularly with younger Germans.

Though Evans makes a credible case, he doesn’t entirely demolish his opponents’ arguments. While the results of plebiscites were clearly unreliable, it was incontestable that many Germans, by the mid-1930s, supported Hitler and his belligerent expansionism and (at the least) tolerated his violent persecution of the Jews and other groups. Even Evans admits that “the number of people who were willing to some degree or other by a role in the coercive apparatus of the regime must have run into several millions.”

On the perhas equally vexed question of Hitler’s personality, sanity and overall health, Evans coolly parses the evidence. In Was Hitler Mad?, a review of a 2013 book by Hans-Joachim Neumann and Henrik Eberle, he seconds the authors’ conclusion “that… he was no more ill than most other people are at some time or other during their lifetime.” He agrees, too, that Hitler “certainly was not mentally ill, not at least in any sense known to medicine or psychiatry.”

He fails to tackle the question of whether Hitler was a sociopath or suffered from other severe personality disorder, emphasizing instead that “he was sane according to any reasonable definition of the term, and fully responsible for his actions.”

In the same vein, his essay on Heike Görtemaker’s 2011 biography Eva Braun: Life with Hitler argued, in concert with the author, that the relationship between Eva Braun and Hitler was “a normal expression of heterosexuality on both sides.” It took two suicide attempts for Braun to consolidate her hold on her man — tactical successes, Evans says. (Evidence of emotional instability, one might argue instead.)

Over time, Evans writes, Braun became increasingly assertive in the relationship, subverting the Nazi ideal of passive womanhood. Görtemaker’s biography’s depiction of the romance is “deeply troubling,” he suggests, because of its very normalcy. “For if a man like Hitler was capable of ordinary human love for another person,” he asks rhetorically, “then what power does love possess?”

On the (even more) emotional subject of genocide, Evans asserts the historians’ right to introduce analytic distinctions. He reviews the murder-invasions of Poland by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the anti-Semitic actions of Croatia and Romania, the Nazi killing of Gypsies and the handicapped and mentally ill, the early 20th-century extermination by Germans of the Herero tribe in southwest Africa, the 1930s Ukrainian famine, and the Armenian and Rwandan genocides — a depressing catalogue of human iniquity. But he finds that an “ob sessiveness” and “desire to be comprehensive and make no exceptions, anywhere, is a major factor distinguishing the Nazis’ racial war from all other racial wars in history.” He adds: “Unlike all the other others it was bounded neither by space nor by time.”

It is possible to argue with Evans’s conclusions. But as he threads his way through historiographical battles, among the mists of various schools of thought, Evans emerges as a fair-minded and precise interpreter — a useful guide if not necessarily a final arbiter.
POLISH AUTHOR REOPENS MINEFIELD OF WHO KILLED JEDWABNE’S JEWS

In an English translation of her book The Crime and the Silence, journalist Anna Bikont sheds more light on the WW2 massacre of hundreds of Jews in occupied Poland.

BY JP O’ MALLEY, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL.

In 2001, American historian Jan T. Gross set off a maelstrom of passionate historical debate upon the publication of his book about the massacre of hundreds of Jews during World War II, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland. There were already numerous history books about World War II’s brutal atrocities, but what set Gross’s book apart was its revelation that these murders were not committed by the Nazis, but by the Poles themselves.

While this came as a shock to the world at large, years prior to Neighbors’ publication, Polish-Jewish journalist Anna Bikont had been eager to report on the crimes of Jedwabne. But her editor,.Adam Michnik — one of Poland’s most prominent Jewish writers and public intellectuals — didn’t want her to write the story.

“At the time he was afraid because Poland was coming into the European Union and NATO,” says Bikont, “so it was extremely difficult for Poles to admit what happened. So it’s very difficult to think about the Jews who had a normal, happy life in east Poland in places like Jedwabne,” she says.

In the 1930s, with anti-Semitism raging across Europe, Bikont claims Polish Catholics organized their entire social fabric around a deep mistrust and hatred for the Jews.

“Even children at the time would play anti-Semitic games such as ‘the Jew is the thief,’” she explains. “So the Church taught Poles to have hostility and contempt for Jews from early childhood.”

SOVIET OCCUPATION OF POLAND’S MIXED “BLESSING”

Bikont documents in her book how the Soviet occupation of wartime Poland also played an important role in stirring up a strong anti-Semitic feeling, especially in Jedwabne.

In 1939, both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia invaded Poland, carving up the country between them. The two occupying armies coordinated their efforts against Poland until 1941’s Operation Barbarossa in which Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, causing a complete shift in their relationships.

Called “the reign of terror,” the Soviet occupation destroyed the entire fabric of social life built up by the Jewish community for centuries — the Jewish municipal government was liquidated, Hebrew schools were closed, Yiddish became a normal work day, political parties were dissolved and Zionist activists were put on deportation lists.

But the occupation was beneficial for Jews too, says Bikont. Many began to experience equal rights for the first time in their lives and were given the right to attend public school, to study, or to pursue professional careers in medicine or education.

“Many young Jews were particularly happy about the Soviets coming into Poland,” says Bikont. “But when the Poles saw these Jews who had a normal, normal life, that was not full of humiliation, they really resented that. So hatred for Jews from the Poles became far greater in the Soviet times.”

During this time, many Poles were involved in the Soviet underground, where Poles often betrayed other Poles. But, Bikont says, it was easier for many to say that it was the Jews that denounced the Poles, so it didn’t look as if Poles were betraying each other.

“Jews were given the blame for a lot of things in these affluent and suspicious times,” she says.

This helps to explain why the Jews, who were systematically rounded up to be torched alive in the barn on July 10, 1941, were paraded around the marketplace in Jedwabne before-hand. Crucially, though, they were made to carry a statue of Bolshevik Revolution leader Vladimir Lenin, just before they perished. This was seen both as a sign of humiliation, and to indicate Jewish-Soviet collaboration.

The Soviet iconography was extremely significant in representing feelings of far-right Polish nationalism at the time, says Bikont.

“All of the propaganda was anti-Bolshevik propaganda. So the Polish nationalists wanted to associate Jews with this statue of Lenin and to make these links between Jews and Communists,” she says.

In all of the accounts that Bikont heard — both directly from her own research and from secondary sources about the Jedwabne massacre — the names of Zygmunt Lauðanski and Jerzy Lauðanski were always mentioned as the most active participants in the crime.

Both brothers were sentenced to prison for the massacre. Zygmunt was sentenced to 12 years, but served just six, while Jerzy served just eight years of a 15-year sentence.

As part of her research Bikont interviewed both brothers. “It was the most horrible thing I have ever had to do in my career,” she says, looking extremely distressed as she thinks back to the interviews.

MEET THE MURDERERS

“Both brothers seemed very content in what they saw as achievements in their lives,” Bikont tells The Times of Israel. “I saw that they were happy remembering how they raped and killed Jewish women. They showed no remorse in these interviews and they were completely cynical.”

Even though both brothers served time in a Communist prison, Bikont says after their release they were greeted as heroes in their local community.

“The Lauðanski brothers were liberated because most people who were in the prison were involved in anti-

Bikont believes it’s likely to be impossible to give an exact figure,” she says.

In Jan Gross’s book, Neighbors, the historian writes that the murderers of the Jedwabne massacre were ordinary people. But Bikont believes that such a description has led to many academics and journalists claiming, falsely, that it was the Polish working class who predominantly carried out the murders.

In her book Bikont quotes a prominent Polish sociologist, Antoni Seleń, who wrote on this period of history that “the most active participants in theatrocity were from the lower rungs of the social hierarchy, unsettled, unfettered by bonds of family.”

“This is simply not true,” says Bikont. “There is a mythology out there that the people who committed these crimes in Jedwabne were the poor and the marginalized. Sure, there were also some people who were criminals, alcoholic, on the pogroms. But it was not organized by them. It was organized by the local nationalistic Polish elites.”

Author Anna Bikont.
THE ROYAL FAMILY, THE HITLER SALUTE
AND BRITISH POLICY DURING THE WAR

BY DANIEL WAGNER, THE JERUSALEM POST

The recently released video footage of the Queen of England and her parents happily displaying the Hitler salute for the camera in 1933, now the subject of much media sensation, might be dismissed as an innocent action at the time. Some might even write it off as little more than practicing the “German” salute, perhaps not knowing then what evil Hitler was already in the process of unleashing on the Jews and other minorities in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

Yet in 1933, a network of detention camps had already been established in Germany where political prisoners were being held, and Hitler was already in the process of using the salute to galvanize support for his political movement.

The reluctance of the royal family to release information from the archives that may be incriminating — evidence of either direct or indirect support for Hitler and the extermination of the Jews — is understandable. But if such support did exist it would not be surprising, because the fact is that the British government actively worked against Hitler and the extermination of Jews by migrating to Palestine by severely restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine starting in 1939 (when Hitler’s evil was understood), and kept the restrictions in place until it was forced to rescind them in 1948, under protest. It seems the media are focused on the wrong issue.

While the Nazis prepared to annihilate the Jews, in Europe, the British government approved the White Paper of 1939, which severely restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine under the British Mandate.

The BBC, in line with the Foreign Office, maintained a very British silence about the Holocaust. Britain’s policy of denying a place of refuge to Jews facing extermination would have been very difficult to maintain had the public known what the government knew. Britain was determined to postpone active preparations for the Normandy landing until its colonial empire was endangered, which meant waging war for North Africa and Burma, while simultaneously pleading that it wasn’t ready to begin preparations for the war in Europe.

By 1943, with its victory in the war for the colonies, the British government had postponed the first of its two strategic war aims. The other war aim was to prevent revolution in Europe. World War I had produced a wave of intense class struggle in many parts of the British Empire.

Signs were multiplying that World War II would repeat the experience of World War I, as the resistance movements in France, Yugoslavia and Greece were becoming an anti-imperialist struggle. In order to secure the empire and prevent revolution, the British government was endeavoring to sacrifice the Jews of Europe.

At the end of World War II, the British Labor Party conference voted to rescind the White Paper and establish a Jewish state in Palestine; however, Labor foreign minister Ernest Bevin persisted with anti-Jewish policy, which remained in effect until the British departed Palestine in May 1948.

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POPE FRANCIS WANTS TO OPEN HOLOCAUST-ERA VATICAN ARCHIVES

Pope Francis has reiterated his position to open the secret Vatican archives covering the period of World War II to allow researchers to assess the role played by Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust.

In an extensive interview with the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronot, Francis said there was “an agreement between the Vatican and Italy from 1929 that prevents us from opening the archives to researchers at this point in time. But because of the time that has passed since World War II, I see no problem with opening the archives the moment we sort out the legal and bureaucratic matters.”

The pope expressed worries that releasing the archives could result in the “legal and bureaucratic matters.”

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After the war, the determination of Holocaust survivors to reach Palestine led to large-scale illegal Jewish migration. British efforts to block the migration led to violent resistance by the Zionist underground.

Illegal immigrants, who had no citizen- ship and could not be returned to any country, were detained by the British government in internment camps on Cyprus.

From October 1946, the British gov- ernment, under the “severest pres- sure” from the U.S., relented and allowed 1,500 Jewish migrants per month into Palestine. Half of those admitted came from those prison camps in Cyprus, owing to fears that a growing Jewish presence in Cyprus would lead to an uprising there. The Provisional Council of Israel’s first contribution was a proclamation that all legislation resulting from the British government’s White Paper of 1939 would become null and void.

The British government turned its back on the Jews of Europe and failed to aid Jewish resistance groups in Europe as a result of both political and economic expediency. It was more concerned with access to oil from the Middle East and maintaining its empire than the plight of the victims of Hitler’s atrocities. Only in 2013 did Prime Minister David Cameron become the first British leader to establish a Commission on the Holocaust, and it was only in 2015 that the commission recommended that Britain create a national memorial to the Holocaust — 70 years after the end of the war. Just as the French and the Germans have done, the British failed to take a hard look at their government’s policy and actions during the war.

Did Pius XII remain silent in the face of the extermination of the Jews? Did he say all he should have said? We will have to open the archives to know exactly what happened. But to judge the actions, we will also need to understand the circumstances under which he was acting: Perhaps it was better for him to remain silent because had he spoken, more Jews would have been killed. Or maybe the other way around? I don’t want to sound petty, but it really gets my goat when I see that everyone is against the Church, against Pius XII — all those detractors.

And what about the Allies during the war? After all, they were well aware of what was going on in the death camps and they were very familiar with the rail- road tracks that led Jews to Auschwitz. They knew exactly what was going on. And they didn’t bomb those tracks. I’ll leave that question hanging in the air, and say only that one needs to be very fair in these things.
THE CONCENTRATION CAMP CURRENCY YOU’VE NEVER HEARD OF

BY PENNY SCHWARTZ, JTA

In the 70 years since the fall of the Third Reich, the trappings of Nazi power have become infamous icons of evil — think of the swastika flag, the yellow badge or the striped concentration camp uniform.

But have you ever heard of “Holocaust money,” the currencies that the Nazis forced on Jews and others in concentration camps and ghettos?

If not, you’re not alone. Even scholars have largely neglected the subject.

“It’s a mystery to me,” said Deborah Dwork, a professor of Holocaust history at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, regarding why there isn’t more contemporary research on the currencies.

Dwork hopes to change the situation. The university’s Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, which she directs, is making a newly acquired collection of the notes and coins available for study this fall.

Amateur numismatist Robert Messing, a founding member of the association.

“Clearly this is an under-researched area,” Dwork said. “It is a salutary reminder that we think we know so very little.”

Robert Messing, an amateur numismatist, or currency expert, who graduated from Clark in 1959, donated the collection last spring. The university’s Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, which she directs, is making a newly acquired collection of the notes and coins available for study this fall.

In concentration camps, Nazi officials and some factory owners paid Jewish slave laborers “bonuses” in the currencies to make them work harder. Thousands of Jews were worked to death during the Holocaust.

In ghettos, currencies served to compensate Jews when Nazi officials confiscated their valuables and cash. While ghetto residents relied on food rations, there was never enough to eat, and cash could be the difference between life and death. Coins in the Lodz ghetto were made of a flammable alloy and sometimes used as fuel.

The ghetto currencies also served to mark the Jews who carried them, putting them at risk if they left the ghettos, where they were legally required to stay.

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Banknotes from the Theresienstadt concentration camp are included in the Strassler Center’s collection. Both the blue 50-kronre notes and the pink 100-kronre notes feature an image of Moses, bearded and holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments, and a stylized Star of David.

The notes were designed by a Theresienstadt inmate named Peter Kien, Natale explained. Nazis officials forced Kien to alter his original design to make Moses look more stereotypically Jewish and, ironically, to make reality of the genocide home for her. She predicts the Holocaust money will resonate with other students as well.

“We all use money. People held it in their hands as part of their everyday lives. It connects people through time,” she said.

Much of Natale’s knowledge of Holocaust money comes from reading copies of Shekel, a magazine published by the American Israel Numismatic Association. Issues of the magazine and other documents were donated along with the currency collection by Messing, a founding member of the association.

First drawn to the subject because he lost family members in the Nazi genocide, Messing has now spent nearly 50 years researching, collecting and writing about Holocaust money.

He donated his collection in hopes that it will become another symbol of the Nazis’ crimes — and one that people can hold in their hands.

“It’s a real artifact that said these horrible things did happen,” he said.