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Perceptions of the Holocaust in American Jewish Journalism, 1945 to 1951

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This thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

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## Digest

This study, which investigates early perceptions of the Holocaust as reflected in American Jewish periodicals from the period 1945 to 1951, is intended to test the validity of hypotheses offered today concerning the significance the Holocaust in the post-war period. The periodicals examined contain important material in three areas: issues arising directly and immediately from the Holocaust, the political and religious impact of the Holocaust, and the relationship between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Jewish writers of this period discussed three topics arising directly from the Holocaust: explanations for the German people's support of Nazi antisemitism, guilt for the deaths of the Jews of Europe, and the consequences of the destruction of European Jewry. Several journalists explained the German people's support for Nazi antisemitism by pointing to the economic difficulties which plagued Germany in the 1920's and the 1930's. Other writers saw the German people's support of Nazi antisemitism as the result of a long developing blend of German nationalism and antisemitism. Most of the writers ascribed the primary guilt for the annihilation of European Jewry to the German people collectively. A minority of journalists differentiated, in their ascription of guilt, between those Germans who participated in the murder of Jews, either directly or indirectly, and the remainder of the German people. The writers ascribed a secondary guilt for the deaths of the six million to a variety of groups. Several writers contended that the nations of the world, as a result of failing to aid the Jews of Europe during the war, bore a responsibility for the destruction of European Jewry. Some writers directed their accusations at the British who, they claimed,

contributed to the annihilation of the Jews of Europe by closing Palestine to Jewish immigration. In discussing Jewish guilt, the writers defended the victims of Nazism against charges of complicity in their own deaths. These writers were, however, willing to assign a portion of the guilt to American Jews. Several writers pointed out that, beside killing six million individual Jews, the Nazis destroyed the cultural and educational centers of European Jewry.

The impact of the Holocaust was felt strongly in the consideration of two major political questions facing American Jews in the years following World War Two: Zionism and relations with Germany. The influence of the Holocaust on religious questions and considerations was felt to a much lesser degree. The Holocaust affected the controversy over Zionism by providing the parties to the debate with additional evidence in support of their arguments and by persuading many people, who had been non-Zionists before the war, to become Zionists. With regard to Germany, the journalists advocated taking several specific steps which would serve to remind the German people, the peoples of the world, and American Jews of the crimes committed by the German State against the Jewish people. While American Jews of the immediate post-war period did not feel a challenge to their religious beliefs from the Holocaust, they did express a desire to memorialize the victims of Nazism and to avoid giving a posthumous victory to Hitler by forsaking their Judaism.

Many of those speaking and writing in support of the Zionist cause based their arguments for the necessity of a Jewish state on the events of the Second World War. They argued that a Jewish state was needed to prevent a repetition of the Holocaust, that the nations of the world, as a result of the guilt they bore for failing to aid the Jews of Europe

during the war, owed the Jewish people a state, and that statehood was the only solution to the problem of the Displaced Persons. Israel's becoming a reality necessitated a readjustment by American Jews of their understanding of the Holocaust. Some writers viewed the existence of Israel as a response to the Holocaust, others believed that the existence of Israel compensated for the destruction of European Jewry. But the periodicals generally devoted much less space to articles on the Holocaust after May of 1948, as the immediate problem, the new state, absorbed their intellectual energies.



## Introduction

A generation ago the Jewish people witnessed an awesome tragedy, the annihilation of six million Jews by the German State. In recent years the Holocaust has become a topic of much concern to the Jewish community. The publication of Lucy S. Dawidowicz's The War Against the Jews, a well written and carefully researched history of the Holocaust, was a major Jewish literary event generating an intense interest on the part of American Jews. Elie Wiesel rapidly became one of the leading Jewish personalities in this country because he spoke eloquently for the Holocaust and its survivors. In his books and lectures Wiesel described for a large audience his personal experiences during the Holocaust and his reactions to it.

For religious school classes the Holocaust is an intriguing and popular subject. Through the use of films, speakers and simulation games, teachers convey to their students an understanding and appreciation of the suffering Jews experienced during World War Two. Seminaries and universities, such as Hebrew Union College, Brandeis University, and Boston University, offer their students courses on this subject. Stern College for Women now has a chair in Holocaust studies.

The Holocaust also stands as a major issue for Jewish theologians. It has become the paradigmatic expression of the problem of evil. The most prominent example is Richard Rubenstein's After Auschwitz. Rubenstein writes that he is unable to believe in God in light of God's inaction to restrain or prevent the evil of the Holocaust. Emil Fackenheim, in contrast, sees in the Holocaust a new commandment: "Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories....A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction."<sup>1</sup> At Auschwitz Jews were commanded to live as Jews.

In the wake of the Holocaust the Jewish people experienced a second major event, the establishment of the State of Israel. The Holocaust and Israel are often linked together, in both popular and serious works. In Exodus, Leon Uris tells the story of Dov Landau, who, surviving death and humiliation in a concentration camp, comes to Palestine to fight and to rebuild his life. Elie Wiesel artfully blends together the Holocaust and Israel themes in his Beggar in Jerusalem. On the more intellectual side, Fackenheim describes the reaction of Jews to the weeks of tension in May of 1967, preceding the Six Day War: "For precisely and only because of their connection with Auschwitz was there a radical astonishment which gave military victory an inescapable religious dimension. And it is precisely because of this connection that a Jew must both tremble and rejoice."<sup>2</sup> Irving Greenberg has suggested in a lecture that the religious, cultural, and psychological devastation caused by the Holocaust was so powerful that had Israel not come into existence many Jews would have found it difficult or impossible to continue being Jewish.

As a result of this widespread interest and concern, the Holocaust and the State of Israel have undergone close scrutiny and study over the past several years. By examining the early reactions to the Holocaust in light of the establishment of the State of Israel I hope to provide a clearer understanding of the development of current attitudes toward the Holocaust. Also, in recent years individuals have presented hypotheses concerning the impact of the Holocaust in the post-war period; this study will provide evidence with which to judge the validity of these hypotheses. To accomplish these tasks I shall ask two basic questions: How did American Jews, from 1945 to 1951, perceive the Holocaust? How was their understanding of the Holocaust affected by the establishment of the State of Israel?

In order to develop a response to the first question several issues will be explored. The factors American Jewish writers identified as explanations for the German people's support of the Nazi party's antisemitic program will be explored. The extent to which American Jewish journalists saw this support as a result of the economic and political conditions that existed in Germany following World War One will be assessed, as will the belief that the Holocaust was an outgrowth of deep-seated German nationalism and antisemitism.

A second project will be to determine which individuals, groups, or nations American Jewish journalists held responsible for the Holocaust. The alternatives to be raised include: Hitler and his inner circle, the Nazis, the German people, the nations of the world, the British, the American Jews, and the victims themselves.

Perceptions of the consequences of the redistribution of world Jewish population as a result of the Holocaust will be another area of inquiry. To what extent did American Jews realize that, besides the deaths of six million individual Jews, the Holocaust brought about the destruction of the European Jewish community, its institutions, and its way of life?

The impact of the Holocaust on the political views and the religious beliefs of American Jews of the post-war period will be explored. On the political side, an attempt will be made to assess the affect of the Holocaust on the Zionist - anti-Zionist controversies and on American Jewish attitudes toward Germans and Germany following the war. In terms of impact on the religious life of American Jews I will determine if the event was seen as a challenge to previously held beliefs and if these Jews felt that the Holocaust demanded a religious response.



In considering the above issues, variations in response to these questions over the duration of the six-year time period covered by this study will be noted and analyzed. This study will include an evaluation of those alterations in perceptions which occurred as the temporal distance between the individual and the Holocaust increased.

The variation in response to these questions according to the group affiliation of the individual will be assessed. The groups to be included divide along religious lines: Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform; and along political lines: General Zionist, Labor Zionist, anti-Zionist and Communist. This is not a selective list, rather it includes all the meaningfully distinct positions advanced in the literature covered by this study. There are, of course, subtle differences within each of the religious and political points of view which will be taken into consideration.

To answer the second question I shall explain the ways in which American Jews linked the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. The extent to which the Holocaust was seen as a justification for the establishment of the State will be explored. Another task will be to determine the degree to which the impact of the Holocaust was affected by the establishment of the State.

To present the results of my research in an organized manner and to respond to the issues raised above, I have divided this study into four chapters. The first chapter will discuss American Jewish perceptions of the reasons for which the German people supported the Nazi's antisemitic program, ascriptions of guilt for the Holocaust and the consequences of the destruction. The political and religious impact of the Holocaust will



be the subject for the second chapter. The third chapter will explore the connections between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. Each of these chapters will take into consideration the variation in response due to the passage of time and group affiliation of the individual involved. The final chapter will consist of general considerations.

The period of time covered by this study begins on V.E. Day, May 7, 1945. While the actual systematic killing of Jews ended weeks earlier, this date is a clear demarcation point. Beyond May 7, 1945 the German State was no longer able to exterminate Jews. Also by this time the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis had become widely known in the United States. As the concentration camps were liberated American correspondents travelling with the Allied forces reported, in detail, the inhumanity of the Nazis. While there existed in the spring of 1945 some disagreement as to whether the number of Jews killed by the Nazis was five million or six million, all the sources covered in this study were aware of the approximate magnitude of the destruction by V.E. Day.

Three years elapsed between V.E. Day and the Declaration of Independence of Israel. To provide an opportunity to gauge the changes that took place as a result of the establishment of the State the three years following the coming into existence of Israel are included in this project. The close of the time period under consideration is, then, May 14, 1951.

To do a thorough study of world-wide opinion on this topic would be a project beyond the scope of a rabbinic thesis. Therefore it became necessary to impose a geographical limit on this work. I chose to restrict my study to American Jewish perceptions, for the views of this group are most significant as they represent the largest Diaspora community not

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directly affected by the Holocaust. Also, materials reflecting the perceptions of this group are more accessible to me than those of any other group due to language and physical availability of the sources.

Periodicals, because of their nature, will be the principal source for this study. The length of the articles and the frequency of publication of the journals make them the medium through which the most immediate response to the events under consideration may be ascertained. The articles on the Holocaust published by the American Jewish periodicals during the post-war era can be classified into three categories. First, survivors of Nazi terror wrote memoirs describing their experiences in Europe under Nazi rule. Second, scholars presented serious historical papers on various topics related to the Holocaust. Third, popular periodicals, aiming at a wide Jewish readership, published analyses of the event, discussions of its implications, and a variety of other reactions to the Holocaust. Since the articles in the first category, due to their non-analytical nature, do not contain significant information on the issues to be raised in this study, and since the numbers of articles falling into the second category is small, I will depend upon articles in the third category to provide the basis of this study.

My sources include the following periodicals: American Council for Judaism Information Bulletin, Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, Commentary, Congress Weekly, Conservative Judaism, Hadoar, Jewish Frontier, Jewish Life, Jewish Social Studies, Jewish Spectator, Liberal Judaism, Menorah Journal, New Palestine, Orthodox Jewish Life, Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, and Reconstructionist. This list includes all the major popular American Jewish periodicals published in English and Hebrew between 1945 and 1951. It reflects the

variety of opinions and positions held by American Jews during this period.

This introductory chapter is the foundation upon which this study will be built. The questions asked and the issues here defined provide the structure and direction of my study.

## Chapter One

### Explanations, Guilt, and Consequences

The inquiry into American Jewish journalists' perceptions of the Holocaust begins in this chapter with an investigation of their positions on those issues which grew out of the Holocaust itself. The Jewish periodical literature of the post-war years contained significant discussion on three topics directly related to the Holocaust. Each of the three sections into which I will divide this chapter will be devoted to one of these topics. The sections will be arranged in a chronological order, in keeping with the overall structure of this study. The first section will examine the American Jewish journalists' analyses of the forces operative in the pre-war period which contributed to the German people's acceptance of Hitler and his antisemitic policies. The second section will investigate the writers' ascription of guilt for the murder of the Jews of Europe to various groups as a result of these groups' actions during the war. The third section will consider the journalists' estimation of the consequences of the redistribution of world Jewry following the war. Each of these three topics adds an important dimension to our conception of the journalists' understanding of the Holocaust and provides the foundation upon which I will base my analysis of material to be presented in later chapters.

#### Explanations for the German People's Support of Nazi Antisemitism

Several reasons were presented in the Jewish periodicals of this period for the German people's acceptance of Nazism. First, several



writers pointed to the socio-economic conditions which existed in Germany following World War One as having set the stage for the rise of Hitler to power. Other writers saw the German people's support of Nazi antisemitism as the culmination of a long developing trend blending German nationalism and antisemitism. Besides these two explanations, which received the broadest acceptance in the literature, several divergent explanations also appeared. These minority opinions looked to the decline of Christianity or the collapse of morality to explain the support for Hitler within Germany.

Several writers explained the German people's support of Hitler and his antisemitic policies by arguing that, faced with the economic and political chaos of the inter-war period, many Germans believed that only the Nazis would be able to solve their nation's problems. The result of this line of reasoning, these writers argued, was that many Germans were willing to accept Nazism and its accompanying antisemitism as a means to the end of national revival.

Guenter Reiman, in refuting Henry Morgenthau's plan for dismantling Germany, argued that a program of this nature would recreate the situation out of which Hitler emerged. "From history we have also learned that poverty and frustration and denial of human dignity, not inborn evil, make up the soil that nurtures the hatred of man against man."<sup>1</sup> In an article entitled "Why Anti-semitism?" Alexander Levin presented a similar analysis. "The ascendancy of Nazi anti-semitism followed closely upon the staggering German difficulties after the First World War."<sup>2</sup> Samuel J. Hurwitz explained how the Nazis fed on the economic problems confronting Germany in the inter-war period. "Disheartened by the turn of events

and having no faith in Communism, the democratic working class had the alternative of acquiescence and apathy or National Socialism."<sup>3</sup> Cecil Roth, in rejecting this position, indicated that it was widely held. "To say that this [the Holocaust] was the result of inevitable social and economic forces, as is fashionable to say today, seems to me exaggerated. These factors might have normally led to the reaction, but not to the annihilation, which was the result of a mass-frenzy and the collapse of moral values."<sup>4</sup> The writers who advocated this economic explanation of the German people's support of Nazism felt compelled to explain how the German people's distress necessarily led them to accept Nazi antisemitism.

Other writers did not feel the need to find an excuse for the German people's support of the Nazi State's program of extermination of Jews, since these writers viewed Nazism as the product of deep-seated German nationalism and antisemitism. Those writers who presented this explanation concluded that the German people had understood and supported the anti-semitic aspect of Nazi ideology. In response to the suicide of Nazi labor leader Robert Ley, Liberal Judaism analyzed his final "testament": "It is clear from the very nature of Ley's testament that anti-Semitism was not merely a handy instrument to be picked up because it was useful and to be dropped perhaps when the Nazis no longer would need it after their victory. No, it is evidently something much deeper in Germany. It goes to the heart of German thought and feeling."<sup>5</sup> The Jewish Spectator elaborated on this theme by examining the German literary tradition. "Buchenwald's geographic proximity to Weimar is not as strange as some people judge it to be, for the 'superiority complex' and megalomania which led the Germans on the road to Buchenwald and even still more gruesome death camps can be traced in a direct line to the megalomaniacal

ideas of the German 'poets and thinkers' (the Dichter and Denker) of the classical period of German letters in the 18th and 19th centuries."<sup>6</sup>

Menahem Boraisha summarized this explanation of the German people's support of Nazi antisemitism when he wrote, "Hitlerism found a fertile field for the 'night of the long knife' in the centuries-old German anti-semitism."<sup>7</sup>

Divergent minority opinions on this issue were also presented. Emil Schorsch believed that the acceptance of the Nazi program by many Germans was "largely due to the decline of Christianity which preceded Nazism."<sup>8</sup> Cecil Roth, as quoted in a previous paragraph, pointed to "mass frenzy and moral collapse"<sup>9</sup> to explain the support for Hitler's policies. The literature being considered here does not contain a clearly stated Zionist position on this question. However, from opinions expressed by Zionist leaders on related issues we can gain an understanding of their position on the problem before us. From the Zionist point of view, Jewish residence in the Christian countries of Europe is an unnatural situation. The German people's willingness to support the Nazi program of extermination of Jews, then, can be understood as a necessary result of Jews living in this unnatural and provocative situation of Diaspora.

The first explanation for the German people's support of Hitler and his antisemitic policies, the economic one, seems to have been the most popular among the American Jews of this period, while the second opinion, namely the historical-cultural one, appears to have been supported by a smaller portion of the American Jewish community. This second explanation demanded a much more sophisticated analysis of the situation and a knowledge of German history and literature. The Zionist interpretation was advanced by those whose primary commitment was to the Zionist movement and its ideology.



This issue of the reasons for the German people's support of the Nazi policies toward the Jews did not attract extensive commentary or analysis in the Jewish periodicals of the post-war era. In light of the extensiveness and comprehensiveness of the discussion of other topics and aspects of the Holocaust one might have expected to find a more voluminous and wide-ranging debate on this topic. Two possible explanations may account for the lack of material on this subject. One could argue that little was written on this topic because most people subscribed to the economic explanation, as Cecil Roth suggested. On the other hand, one could argue that there was not more discussion of this issue because the American Jewish journalists of that period did not see it as a problem. From my research I cannot reach a conclusion on this question.

Having investigated the American Jewish journalists' analysis of what motivated the German people to support Nazi antisemitism, I will now turn to an examination of the extent to which these writers held the German people collectively responsible for the crimes the German State committed against the Jews during World War Two.

### Ascriptions of Guilt for the Holocaust

In order to fully examine the American Jewish journalists' ascriptions of guilt for the deaths of the six million this section will be divided into two sub-sections reflecting the writers' responses to two questions. First, should the German people collectively or should the Nazis alone be held responsible for the murder of the Jews of Europe? Second, what other non-German groups shared in the responsibility for the death and destruction of the Holocaust?



# I

The American Jewish writers of the post-war period utilized three arguments in assigning to the German people collective guilt for the deaths of the Jews of Europe. The first argument suggested that since a significant segment of the German people politically supported Hitler, they should be held responsible for his actions. Alfred Werner explained, "It is wrong to suggest that the poor German people were subjugated by a bunch of gangsters, that Nazism came to power 'by the disreputable backstairs method of the coup d'etat.' After all, on March 5, 1933 Hitler received 17.2 million votes, or 43.9 percent of all votes cast, in the Reichstag 288 out of 474 seats went to the Nazis, in the Prussian Diet 211 out of 474 seats"<sup>10</sup> Those who politically supported Hitler agreed with Nazi ideology according to Anatole Goldstein. "The German people were not passive. They clearly understood the program of the Nazis and they accepted it by accepting Hitler."<sup>11</sup>

The second argument contended that through their attitudes and actions most Germans participated in the crimes against the Jews. Either they aided in the actual process of killing Jews or they sympathized with the goals of the program. Anatole Goldstein described a process for determining the guilt of the German people. "If we can establish that all classes of the population, all the social strata of German society, or their overwhelming majority, were guilty of complicity in the growth of Nazi bestiality and of acceptance and adoption of Nazi ideology, then we must recognize the right of world public opinion to moral condemnation of the entire German people."<sup>12</sup> Albert Einstein reported, "The attitude of the overwhelming majority of the Germans toward our people was such that we cannot help considering them anything but a danger."<sup>13</sup>

The third argument ascribes guilt to the German people as a result of their silence. Leo Baeck spoke to this point, "I am grateful to some

Germans but as a whole that is another thing for myself and Jews. They are the people who burned the synagogues and inflicted every known torture on the Jews while most looked on silently. The biggest crime is to remain silent when the ethical command is to speak.<sup>14</sup> These writers who argued in support of an ascription of collective guilt to the German people realized that the Germans were not willing to accept the burden of guilt. Sgt. Harry Sions reported a conversation he had with Fritz Israel Strauss, a survivor of Nazi terror. Strauss said, "The non-party man blames the Party; the Nazis blame the SS; the SS blames the higher officers; and the higher officers blame Hitler, who is dead or escaped. But I tell you they are all guilty, all except the few decent ones who are left."<sup>15</sup>

While the writers who presented these three arguments ascribed collective guilt to the German people, other writers desired to distinguish those Germans who supported the Nazi program, either actively or passively, from the remainder of the German people. Alfred Werner limited the scope of guilt to include only the first group. "Just as I loathe people who have already forgotten Auschwitz and Maidanek and are ready to flirt with Germans again, I do not care for those fanatics, either, who declare that all Germans are murderers."<sup>16</sup> Hannah Arendt supported this view by arguing that most Germans were ignorant of the extent of their government's actions against the Jews. "In the early days of occupation, posters appeared everywhere showing the photographed horrors of Buchenwald with a finger pointing at the spectator, and the text: You are guilty. For a majority of the population these pictures were the first authentic knowledge of what had been done in thier name. How could they feel guilty if they had not even known?"<sup>17</sup>

Some writers pointed to the Nazi hierarchy as the group which should be held responsible. M. Shushani narrowed the scope of the blame to "Hitler-Himmler-Streicher."<sup>18</sup> In an article entitled "Is Every German Guilty?" Paul Massing contended that those individuals who made policy decisions in Nazi Germany should bear the guilt for the extermination of European Jewry.<sup>19</sup> Irving Kristol held one man responsible for the tragedy of the Holocaust. "Hitler was Nazism...The extermination of Jews was his project - as late as 1942 Goebbels was thinking of expelling them to Madagascar."<sup>20</sup> Still others saw Adolf Eichmann as "more directly involved in the extermination of European Jews than any other single man."<sup>21</sup> Liberal Judaism reported, "Adolf Eichmann, head of the Gestapo's Jewish Section, ...is perhaps more responsible than any one else for the mass slaughter and annihilation of European Jewry."<sup>22</sup>

Despite this variety of arguments and accusations, the dominant view expressed in the Jewish periodicals seems to have been to assign guilt to the German people as a group. A broad range of periodicals contained, on a regular basis, articles supporting this position of collective guilt. Even many of those writers who disagreed with this belief began their arguments with the assumption that their audience did indeed hold the German people collectively guilty for the crimes committed by the German State during World War Two. To explain the factors which motivated some to blame all Germans while others narrowed the focus of responsibility would be a difficult task. No pattern according to time or according to political or religious orientation emerges from an examination of the above material. However, those who held to the position of collective guilt did lay the foundation upon which justifications for solutions to two problems were built: In order to demand reparation payments from the



German government one had to demonstrate broad German responsibility for the crimes of World War Two; also those refusing to have any social, political or economic contact with Germans or Germany needed this assumption of group guilt as the basis for their position.

## II

While all the writers in the periodicals examined for this study agreed that the Germans or the Nazis bore primary responsibility for the Holocaust, many assigned a secondary responsibility to other parties. The nations of the world, specifically the Allies, were accused of the crimes of inaction and silence. Abba Hillel Silver stated, "An enfeebled world, its conscience blunted by compromise, was seized with paralysis and permitted Hitler to destroy 6,000,000 Jews, one third of our people."<sup>23</sup> Menahem Boraisha, among others, shared Silver's analysis. "Men of conscience know very well that in the extermination of six million Jews the Allied governments shared responsibility. The Nazis planned and executed the butchery, but except for issuing a few warnings the Allies did nothing to stop it."<sup>24</sup>

The Jewish Spectator suggested adding a fifth question to the Passover observance to express "our amazement at the incredibility of the 'civilized world's' apathy in the face of what was done to the Jewish people during the Hitler period and after."<sup>25</sup> The Congress Weekly stressed the religion of the guilty nations. "Nor is Christianity to be absolved from the guilt for the murder of six million Jews, many of whom could have been saved by the timely and energetic intervention of Christian nations."<sup>26</sup> Specifically, the Allies were criticized for refusing to support rescue

efforts and for failing to aid the Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. Abba Hillel Silver described the ineffectiveness of the actions the American government did take:

The contribution of our own country in the face of this greatest single human holocaust<sup>27</sup> in modern history consisted of sending representatives to a do-nothing conference on refugees, in belatedly appointing a Committee for Refugees of its own whose accomplishments were insignificant, in sending away from its shores a shipload of helpless human beings to find their ultimate doom in the gas chambers of Oswiecim [Auschwitz] and in setting up on the eve of a national election an American concentration camp for a thousand refugees at Oswego.<sup>28</sup>

Irving Dwork focussed on refugee rescue efforts. "In order to understand the tragic lesson inherent in the loss of almost 6,000,000 European Jews, there is a need for an objective, well documented study of 'rescue' efforts during the war years, and how most of these were frustrated by the callousness, and sheer inhumanity of the leaders of the so-called civilized nations."<sup>29</sup> Menahem Boraisha reacted to the Nuremburg indictments by criticizing the accusers. "But upon the publication of the indictments we cannot help remembering that had the Allies placed more confidence in the early reports of the extermination of Jews and had they decided in time not to limit themselves to mere warnings of punishment after the war, hundreds of thousands, even millions of Jews, might have been saved."<sup>30</sup>

Jewish Life, a communist monthly, in assessing the precarious position of the Jewish people, pointed directly at the State Department as the source of American inaction. "The recent loss of six million of our brothers and sisters, the failure of western democracies to take serious steps to help save our people from Nazi slaughter houses, the efforts of some in seats of power - as in the American State Department - to sabotage what faltering steps were taken to rescue Jews - these

experiences have made us extremely sensitive to signs of political deterioration that would inevitably lead to the resumption of the extermination of our people.<sup>31</sup> The Congress Weekly broadened this criticism to include the "foreign offices of the great powers."<sup>32</sup>

All but one of the sources referred to in this discussion of Allied guilt can be classified as Zionist.<sup>33</sup> Also all but one of the statements advancing the concept of Allied guilt for deaths of the Jews of Europe to be found in the periodicals included in this study were published prior to May of 1948. This would lead one to conclude that those who stressed Allied guilt were most interested in pressuring the Allied Nations to atone for their sins by taking steps to aid in the establishment of a Jewish state. This phenomenon appears even more clearly when considering the arguments of those who blamed the British for the deaths of the Jews of Europe.

New Palestine, published by the Zionist Organization of America, editorialized: "In 1939, as Hitler began to murder Jews, Great Britain issued an infamous White Paper restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine to 75,000 in five years, with the Arabs deciding after that period whether they would be willing to permit further entry of Jews. It is now considered that this White Paper meant the death of perhaps millions of the 6,000,000 Jews who died in Europe during the war against Hitler."<sup>34</sup> Z.O.A. leader, Abba Hillel Silver echoed these sentiments, "...six million Jews perished because the doors of Palestine were closed to them in defiance of obligations voluntarily assumed by Great Britain when it requested and received the mandate over Palestine to facilitate Jewish immigration into that country and to assist in the establishment there of the Jewish National Home."<sup>35</sup> On this point the Zionists



clearly attempted to discredit their adversary, the British, by blaming them for previously committed crimes. By pointing out British responsibility for the tragedy of World War Two, they hoped to apply the pressure of public opinion to their struggle with the British over the future of Palestine.

Several writers carried this attempt to discredit the British through the use of the Holocaust beyond the ascription of responsibility for the deaths of the Jews of Europe. They accused the British of fostering Nazi attitudes toward Jews and of using Nazi tactics in Palestine. Menahem Boraisha in an address to the Rabbinical Assembly suggested a similarity between Hitler's and Bevin's view of Jews. "The Jews are a chosen people: in the acts of Hitler and Bevin there is revealed this choice."<sup>36</sup> New Palestine compared procedures instituted by the British in Palestine to those used by the Nazis. "In a new measure, similar to those used by the Nazi Gestapo, the Palestine police suspended all rights of legal appeal against sentences, orders, judgements or decisions of military courts and the general officer commanding Palestine forces."<sup>37</sup> An editorial in an earlier issue of this periodical on the same subject was headlined "British Gestapo in Palestine."<sup>38</sup> The merging of the Nazis and the British in Zionist thought was demonstrated by an incident which took place during a Zionist rally at Madison Square Garden. "Held high above the crowd by two American veterans was a huge British flag upon which had been superimposed a large Nazi swastika."<sup>39</sup> Besides looking to the British, and other nations, to bear the secondary guilt for the deaths of the six million Jews of Europe American Jewish journalists also considered the possibility of Jewish guilt.

American Jews of this period approached the question of Jewish guilt quite carefully. They seemed very concerned to avoid darkening

the memory of Hitler's victims by ascribing to them guilt in their own deaths. Western Jews were, however, prepared to assume a portion of the burden of the guilt themselves. The Jewish Spectator commented, "In assessing the guilt of the Nazis, let us not forget that all of us are to a certain extent accomplices to their crime. We Jews of the western democracies are guilty of not having been more vociferous and zealous in pleading the case of German and Austrian Jewry prior to 1939."<sup>40</sup> Z.O.A. president, Israel Goldstein, reported that while in Europe following its liberation he was challenged by a survivor: "Where were you American Jews when we were in the Nazi concentration camps?"<sup>41</sup> Stephen S. Wise attempted to defend the inaction of Western Jews by arguing: "The world could have intervened, as it should have intervened, to save six million Jews, who now lie slain by the Nazi government. We could not save ourselves because we lacked the status of statehood."<sup>42</sup>

Some Jewish writers of this period told of Jews who collaborated with the Nazis. Solomon F. Bloom described the rise of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski to his position as dictator of the Lodz ghetto.<sup>43</sup> Bloom explained the ways in which Rumkowski contributed to the Nazi effort, methods he used to persuade the Jews to cooperate with the Germans and steps he took to provide for the needs of the residents of the ghetto. The Jewish Spectator reported on the trial in Israel of seventy-five Jews accused of collaborating with the Nazis.<sup>44</sup> Leon Poliakov objected to a blanket condemnation of those Jews who dealt with the Nazis and offered this defense of their actions:

Today nearly everyone condemns the activity of these councils, who executed the orders of the Nazis, who, to save their own lives, ran the machinery that sent their fellow Jews to Belzec and Auschwitz, who lived in opulence while the Jewish masses were starving...However, the situation was not always so simple...It must be admitted that once the ghettos were set up, some



sort of relations had to be maintained with the holders of power. The councils were in accord with a venerable Jewish tradition of relations with state authority, a tradition in which a number of our sages distinguished themselves in days when genocide, the word and the fact, had not yet been invented...The initiators of the councils simply did not have sufficient imagination to foresee the consequences; but how many people in the whole world could have laid claim to such foresight?" <sup>45</sup>

Philip Friedman suggested that the situation varied from place to place:

Some of the Judenrats were composed of representatives of Jewish political parties. Others were dominated by cliques or by individual strong men. In some instances the Germans dissolved the Judenrats because they were too democratic and substituted commissars of their own choice. Some Judenrats were passive instruments in German hands; others maneuvered and tried to rescue as many as they could. There were even some Judenrats which cooperated with the resistance movement and the partisans. In any case, it is impossible to define the entire institution of Judenrats as black or white. <sup>46</sup>

The Communists enthusiastically pointed out that they led the resistance movements while their political opponents remained passive or even collaborated with the Nazis. Jewish Life explained, "Those who had grown up in a struggle were organizing for struggle. Those reared in mysticism called for the renunciation of struggle and for submission to the enemy." <sup>47</sup> And in another place: "Then there are those who made themselves a notorious record during the occupation (The famous poet-partisan Abraham Sutzkever, as well as others, told me that there were quite a few Revisionists amongst the Jewish police in the ghettos ...that is, the Jewish police who did Hitler's bidding.)." <sup>48</sup>

The sources covered by this study do not contain any statements accusing the victims of the Nazis of being responsible for their own deaths. However, they do contain responses to such charges. Philip Friedman reported, "The Poles often scornfully remarked that 'Jews go to their death like sheep'. But this was not so. As soon as the Jews

realized that there was no alternative to death, their determination became petrified into indifference to the murderousness of the enemy. But they went to their death convinced that the murderers would pay dearly. In their last hours they frequently expressed their scorn of the Germans."<sup>49</sup> Marie Syrkin's answer to this criticism indicates the concern American Jews felt about even discussing the possibility of the victims sharing the guilt for their own murder. She wrote, "Those who were never subjected to a similar test should be wary of passing moral judgements."<sup>50</sup>

American Jews appear to have been ambivalent concerning the issue of Jewish responsibility for the deaths of the six million. They acknowledged it as a problem and were generally prepared to see themselves as sharing the guilt. But, in speaking about the victims, American Jews desired to protect them from accusations of complicity either as collaborators with the Nazis or as passive accepters of their fate. This defense may be understood as the expression of a desire to honor the dead and as an attempt to quiet the guilt they may have felt for living while their European brethren had died. Milton Steinberg reflected on the Holocaust, "That is what haunts me: the thought that there, but for the grace of God and a capricious decision made by my father, but in any case through no virtue of mine, there go I, there my wife and there my children."<sup>51</sup> David Riesman expanded on this issue of guilt. "It is probably inevitable that those who have not suffered should feel a certain guilt about that very fact, especially, if one feels that not all was done that might have been done to rescue the doomed - and if one also has to combat one's own desire to forget and gloss over what happened."<sup>52</sup>

American Jewish journalists recognized, of course, the existence of levels of guilt. Reflecting the opinion of the mainstream of the

American Jewish community, Abraham Duker placed the relative guilt of the various groups, accused in the preceding discussion, into perspective:

But there are degrees of guilt. Of course the Nazis and their direct collaborationists are first on the list. Next are those who could have helped and did not. In this category the British occupy the first place. First it was they only who held the key to Palestine to which they admitted during the war, Greeks, Yugoslavs, and pogromist Poles - but not Jews. Second it was the British wartime government that stymied every effort at rescue.<sup>53</sup>

The range of discussion during this period on the question of guilt for the death and destruction of the Holocaust, as has been shown, was broad. The number of articles on this topic was quite large. A variety of ascriptions of guilt were presented in the periodicals. To an extent, positions taken on this issue reflect responses to practical political problems, such as, finding sanctuary for the refugees and establishing a Jewish state.

#### Consequences of the Holocaust

American Jews saw in the Holocaust, not only the death of six million of their brethren, but also the destruction of Europe as a cultural and educational center of world Judaism. Robert Gordis observed, "The tragedy that we dare not forget is the brutal extermination of the six million men, women and children of the Jewish people who represented a third of world Jewry in numbers, but, qualitatively viewed, constituted far more, the very heart and center of Jewish life these past centuries. The Second World War thus marks the end of the East and Central European Jewish Center, which was the historic successor of ancient Babylonia and medieval Spain."<sup>54</sup> Maurice Samuel described the destruction as the end of a civilization. "Something was taking place in the Warsaw ghetto,



in the Yiddish speaking Jewry of Europe generally, which was visible to certain Jews at the end...A civilization was being razed."<sup>55</sup>

The leadership situation of world Jewry which arose as a result of this destruction was interpreted in two ways. Some saw America replacing Europe as the center of Judaism. The president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Solomon B. Freehof, said in his 1945 convention message, "Jewish life in Europe is all but destroyed...The great Jewish Yishuv in Palestine is in a position of uncertainty and doubt in this post war period...All the Jewish world looks to America."<sup>56</sup> Mordecai Kaplan explained the process whereby America ascended to its position of leadership. "European Jewry was virtually written off as a determining influence on Judaism. Circumstances beyond anybody's wishing or planning have placed American Jewry in the same position as one in which a battalion finds itself, when all its higher officer are killed off and a sergeant has to take over."<sup>57</sup> Leo Trepp saw the change in the leadership of world Jewry symbolized by the m'zuzo from his parents' home in Europe. "European Jewry has disappeared, its homes have been leveled to the ground, but its spirit in the symbol of the m'zuzo survives. An American rabbi has dug it out and sent it to the New World. He has done so in a spirit of great love. Thus we have become heirs to the great spiritual heritage of European Jewry."<sup>58</sup> Robert S. Marcus defined the responsibilities of Jewry's new leadership. "European Jewry lies prostrate and helpless. If Israel is to live, if we are to carry forward our eternal aspirations, if Palestine is to be a Jewish homeland, if we are again to have dignity in the eyes of the world and equality before the law, American Jewry must carry the burden - united, zealous, sacrificing."<sup>59</sup>

Other American Jewish journalists saw Palestine emerging as the new center of world Jewry. The Rabbinical Assembly, at its 1947 convention,

adopted the following resolution: "We believe that the revival of Jewish life in Eretz Israel is an indisputable element in the revival and growth of Jewish life in the diaspora. The centers of learning in Europe have been destroyed, Eretz Israel is therefore vital to our spiritual development."<sup>60</sup>

It should be noted that all but one of the men speaking to this issue were rabbis and that their remarks are recorded mainly in periodicals published by the religious movements. The Zionist periodicals did not contain discussions of this problem. One could conclude that the religious spokesmen viewed this as a concern because they saw themselves replacing the murdered European religious leaders and their institutions replacing those destroyed by the Nazis. The Zionist already saw Palestine as the center of world Jewry and therefore did not perceive any change taking place in world Jewish leadership as a result of the Holocaust.

Having examined the responses of American Jewish journalists to the basic questions concerning the Holocaust, we can now proceed with an investigation of the impact the Holocaust had on their political positions and religious beliefs.

## Chapter Two

### The Impact of the Holocaust

American Jewish periodicals of the post-war era reflected how deeply the Holocaust affected the American Jews of that period. The impact of the Holocaust was felt strongly in the consideration of two major political questions facing American Jews in the years following World War Two, Zionism and relations with Germany. The influence of the Holocaust on religious questions and considerations was felt by American Jews to a much lesser degree.

This chapter will be divided into three sections, each dealing with the impact of the Holocaust on a different area of thought. The first section will discuss how the Holocaust affected the controversy over Zionism in the American Jewish community. The second section will examine the attitudes towards Germans and Germany expressed in the American Jewish periodicals of the post-war period. The third section will explore the impact of the Holocaust on the religious beliefs and commitments of American Jews following the war.

#### The Controversy over Zionism

The Holocaust played a part in the controversy over Zionism in the post-war period in three ways. First, both the Zionists and the anti-Zionists argued that the Holocaust proved the truth of their basic positions. Second, Zionists contended that the Holocaust proved that the emancipation of Jews in non-Jewish countries could not be successful, while non-Zionists and anti-Zionists argued that the Holocaust should

not be used to evaluate the future possibilities of emancipation. Third, a number of individuals who had been non-Zionists before the war reported that in light of the Holocaust they saw no alternative to the establishment of a Jewish state.

Several Zionists of the post-war period argued that the Holocaust had convinced many American Jews of the truth of the Zionist program. The periodical literature contained many testimonials written by individuals who state that they became Zionists as a result of the war. Reactions of American servicemen, particularly chaplains, to their experiences in Europe often appeared in the Zionist press. Chaplain Ely Pilchik reported, "I have become a Zionist and will work for the cause of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine with all the earnestness and zeal and strength that God will give me...You recall previous to my entry into service I was in doubt...The aftermath of the European war leaves no doubt about the absolute indispensibility of Palestine for Jewish survival."<sup>1</sup> Chaplain Ernst Lorge explained:

No matter what one's former allegiances in Jewish life, nobody faced by the reality of personified Jewish suffering in the camps of Central Europe can be so blind to facts as to escape the conclusion that the Zionist analysis has been proven correct in a way unwished by any Zionist the world over...I simply want to tell how an ever deepening conviction of the essential truth of Zionism filled me while engaged in the practical task of salvaging as much of the Jewish human wreckage as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Jeanette Rachmuth described the political conversion of David "Mickey" Marcus. "This [his military service] brought him to Dachau prison camp, where face to face with Jewish tragedy, the necessity for a Jewish state became a driving force within him."<sup>3</sup> This series of remarks from Zionist periodicals demonstrates the Zionists' willingness to use the Holocaust



as a tool to promote their position. By pointing out that many chaplains, and other military personnel, had become supporters of Zionism as a result of their experiences in Europe, Zionists hoped to persuade larger groups of American Jews that an appropriate reaction to the Holocaust lay in supporting the Zionist cause.

The American Council for Judaism, however, used the Holocaust to argue against Zionism. Julius Franklyn contended that Zionism was a Jewish form of Nazism. "So far is our community astray from the path of our destiny, that many of us are supporting Hitler's racial theory with which he scourged us, and are repeating his blood-and-soil slogan in the mistaken idea that we are asserting our identity."<sup>4</sup> Ernst Munz suggested that Jews should be opposed to nationalism. "Since nationalism has identified itself with antisemitism to such an appalling extent, surely they have a special interest in the issue."<sup>5</sup> The Council News claimed that the program which the Zionists were advocating would provide Hitler with a posthumous victory. "What is required is open and vigorous repudiation [of Zionism] or the Jewish nationalist effort to foist a segregating 'Jewish state' relationship upon every member of 'the Jewish people', will stand as an accomplished fact before the world. Hitler will have triumphed at the hands of some and passivity of too many Jews."<sup>6</sup> The anti-Zionists appear to have been as willing as the Zionist to use the Holocaust as a propaganda tool.

The Holocaust also became an issue in the debate over the future of emancipation for Jews in Western countries. Zionists like Shlomo Katz contended, "The era of political democracy thus failed to devise a permanent solution to the Jewish problem by guaranteeing every citizen



equal rights. Those who argue that only in a renewed, invigorated democratic order lies the future of the Jews in Diaspora counsel a repetition of the experiment of the past century without offering any evidence that the next crisis will not again avenge itself on the Jews."<sup>7</sup> Samuel M. Blumenfield provided a historical perspective to this issue. "Following the Damascus Affair, the Dreyfus case, the pogroms of the eighties, the massacres of World War One and the annihilations of the Nazi era, there is little likelihood that Jews will again stand in awe and submission before the glories of Western enlightenment."<sup>8</sup>

Other writers agreed with Maurice N. Eisendrath who emphatically opposed those who contended that the Holocaust "has proved beyond any possible dispute the complete failure of emancipation."<sup>9</sup> Those who supported the belief in the viability of Jewish life in the Diaspora offered several arguments for their position. The Information Bulletin of the American Council for Judaism argued that the Holocaust should not be used to judge emancipation because Germany itself was never adequately a liberal democracy. "German society never rejected the idea of castes, and romantic radicalism. As a result, what happened in Germany was not so much integration and emancipation as complete assimilation among some Jews and an intensification of Jewish nationalism among others."<sup>10</sup> The Council made further use of the Holocaust in its struggle with the Zionists by accusing their opponents of using Nazi tactics. The Information Bulletin reported an incident which disrupted a debate between the Council's Dr. Berger and Zionist representatives. "If you were not there you missed one of the worst graphic illustrations of psychological Nazism which permeates a section of Jewry in the United States now...It was terrible, particularly coming as it did from rabbis! Good God, how near we are in

spirit to Nazism. Dr. Berger was the only dignified, civilized person on the platform."<sup>11</sup>

Jacob Agus also believed in the future of emancipation. He explained that the spirit of emancipation is central to Judaism:

If, however, the horrors of Buchenwald and Oswiecim have deadened our faith in human nature and reason, then we must give up in despair the struggle for human rights and concur with our worst enemies in admitting the complete failure of emancipation. In that case, the whole drive of our individual and collective energies should be concentrated upon the sole task of preparation for the ultimate flight from the lands of Diaspora... Happily, the sober sense of the average American Jew is likely to immunize him against the paranoic counsels of despair and hysteria. The glory of Judaism lies precisely in its emphasis on the essential goodness and nobility of men.<sup>12</sup>

Zachariah Shuster argued that while emancipation is impossible in a totalitarian country, as Germany had become, in a genuine democracy it would be possible for Jews to be free and equal citizens. "Wherever democracy rose and grew, Jewish emancipation rose and grew as an integral part of it. And conversely, the decline of democracy in any country was either preceded or accompanied by an attack on the position of the Jews."<sup>13</sup> The individuals who spoke in support of the viability of emancipation do not seem to have been affected by the events of World War Two. Rather, they defended their previously held positions in light of the Holocaust, and in many cases they made use of the Holocaust as evidence to support their position.

Until now I have presented statements from Zionists, non-Zionists and anti-Zionists reaffirming their pre-war positions on the question of the need for and the desirability of a Jewish state in light of the Holocaust. Evidence of a genuine change in attitude among some American Jews can be seen through an examination of the records of the conventions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a group whose record on Zionism prior to the war would be considered mixed. In his Presidential

message to the 1945 convention, Solomon B. Freehof, previously a non-Zionist, called upon his colleagues to unite in support of the Yishuv in Palestine. "At the time when all of world Jewry turns to us, just at the time when the immense building task needs coordinated effort on our part, we have fallen into bitter disputes and shocking contentiousness."<sup>14</sup> A year later Morton Berman, a Zionist member of the Conference, urged the Reform Rabbis to "speak now - in 1946 in Chicago - with equal clarity and firmness for the establishment of the Jewish National Homeland on the basis of the right which has been legally and morally recognized by the nations of the world - though they may be cruelly slow in implementing it."<sup>15</sup> The following year Liberal Judaism reported, "American Rabbi, Dr. Julian Morgenstern declared that recent world conditions 'have made us all Zionists to a degree...political Zionism is a reaction of the soul of the Jewish people...nationhood of some type is absolutely essential in Palestine."<sup>16</sup> This statement from an individual associated with the non-Zionist faction of American Jews reflects the dramatic impact the Holocaust had, in terms of attitude towards the establishment of a Jewish state. To explain the reasons for this swing to Zionism within the American Jewish community we turn to Menahem Boraisha. "Zionism has made substantial gains, which is natural. Since most Americans regard Zionism chiefly as a solution of the problem of European Jews and not as a Jewish concept that places certain obligations upon their own personal life and behavior, the growing sentiment for the Jewish National Home is understandable."<sup>17</sup>

The material presented in this section on the impact of the Holocaust on the controversy over Zionism suggests that as a result of the Holocaust many American Jews became more favorably disposed towards Zionism. However,



the hard-core members of both sides to the controversy over Zionism attempted to use the Holocaust to bolster their arguments. The willingness to make use of the tragedy of World War Two in this manner reflects an overall attitude toward the Holocaust which is different from that held by most American Jews today.

### Attitudes toward Germany

The large majority of individuals who wrote on the topic of Jewish attitudes toward Germany in the post-war period expressed no sympathy for the German nation or people. The Jewish Spectator observed, "Pitying the 'poor Germans' and helping them to get back on their feet means to sign the death sentence of millions of men, women and children who will be the victims of the resurrected German fury and bestiality tomorrow. It is not only of the past and of our six million martyrs that we and others concerned about the peace are thinking of in demanding that Germany be kept impotent to wage aggressive war."<sup>18</sup> The Congress Weekly stated that, "It will take generations until the word 'German' will cease to be synonymous to us with the words: bestiality, sadism, cannibalism."<sup>19</sup>

Suggestions of pity for the Germans were greeted with severe criticism. Responding to a request from Pope Pius to be "big-hearted enough to forget the past" Robert S. Marcus wrote, "And I take an oath: No, never, never will I forget these things for they seared my soul. No one has the right to be 'big-hearted enough to forget.'"<sup>20</sup> Allen Field was outraged by an interview in the Staatszeitung, a German-American newspaper, in which Louis Finkelstein said, "We are duty bound to love the Germans." Field responded, "Our Jewish tradition most certainly



does not command us to love the Germans, where the Germans are concerned our text is Deuteronomy 25:17ff, 'Remember what Amalek did unto you by the way as ye came out of Egypt'...Verily, we shall remember what the Germans did to us...Never, never will Jews who are worthy of the tradition and the name of their people forget what Germany has done to us."21

In 1946 the Jewish Spectator demanded that an authentic change take place in Germany. "Unless the democracies and, first of all, our own country will sweep Germany clean with an iron broom of determined strength, the terrible blood letting of the Second World War will have served no other purpose but the preparation for another Armageddon."22 Five years later Orthodox Jewish Life noted the lack of change in Germany. "Thanks to the pressure of Hitler's Soviet heirs, the aura of culpability which Nazi Germany drew upon itself in being dissipated...The retribution that the world requires of Germany is not the execution of vengeance on its sixty-five million inhabitants but rather the eradication of that in German life which Adolf Hitler personified. The past six years have shown that this has scarcely begun."23

American Jews of the post-war period suggested six specific courses of action based on these attitudes towards the Germans. First, the Congress Weekly recommended that the Allied Nations should continue to administer the areas of Germany occupied by Western forces. "Until there has been sufficient evidence of a change in the German mentality, occupation of the territory of Germany as well as close control of all phases of German public life should be continued."24 Second, several sources argued strongly against clemency for Nazi war criminals. An example of this position can be seen in Harry Sperber's reaction to the release of Franz von Papen. "How can we educate a new generation while permitting the guiltiest of the old guard to go free?"25

Third, the Reconstructionist attempted to persuade American Jews to avoid visiting Germany. "The release by the American Jewish Congress calls attention to the efforts being made to entice American tourists to visit Germany. No self-respecting Jew, no self-respecting American will accept the invitation of a Germany that is still hostile to democracy, still impentitent for having been principally responsible for two world wars and for the extermination of whole populations, including 6,000,000 Jews."<sup>26</sup> Fourth, any economic interaction with Germany was also strongly discouraged. The Congress Weekly entitled an editorial urging its readers to protest a German trade show in New York City: "Nazism Invades the United States."<sup>27</sup>

Fifth, when as a result of cold war pressures, the American government began to rearm West Germany, the Jewish community responded with strong renazification of Germany. "In the present instance, the precipitate haste to build up West Germany as a bulwark against Communism has involved a premature grant of power to the Germans. This has necessitated the employment in government service of a large part of the old governing class, of those who held positions under the Hitler regime."<sup>28</sup> The Jewish Spectator feared that an economically and militarily revived Germany would be uncontrollable. "Indeed we are opposed to Communism - and we have Jewish reasons in addition to American reasons justifying our fear and opposition. Yet we do not believe that the revival of Nazism will be the solution. Those who believe that they can raise an automaton in Germany are bound for a rude awakening. They will discover that the Golem, come into its own, will not hesitate to turn against its maker."<sup>29</sup> Acknowledging this issue to be of specific Jewish concern Jewish Frontier editorialized, "... for every opponent of Nazism in

Germany there were fifteen to twenty loyal Nazis. The plan for rearmament of Germany evokes among Jews a reaction of nightmarish intensity not always adequately understood by non-Jews." <sup>30</sup> Mary Brown, writing in Jewish Life, took a communist approach to this topic by suggesting that the United States should be supporting the East Germans. "As in China, the Truman administration is backing the wrong horse." <sup>31</sup> In this discussion of the rearming of Germany, we see more than a desire to punish the Germans or to avoid contact with them. Rather, those responding to this issue, with exception of Brown, appear to have been afraid of a militarily independent Germany. They were concerned that a rebuilt Germany would become a renazified Germany. Rearmament, then, was not understood as a moral or ethical choice but rather as a practical political question.

Sixth, at the end of the period covered by this study the Israeli government requested reparation payments from Germany for the destruction caused by the German state during the war. <sup>32</sup> The Congress Weekly supported this Israeli initiative. "While the dead cannot be resurrected and the crime cannot be undone, it would be sheer folly to permit the Germans with impunity to have in the Biblical phrase - 'killed and also taken possession.' They must be required to restore the stolen property and to pay for the rehabilitation of those who survived." <sup>33</sup> A year earlier Jewish Frontier published a debate on this issue. H. Leivick objected to taking money from the Germans. "May my foot wither if I ever again tread the earth of Germany for personal pleasure or for personal gain. May my hands be paralyzed if they ever stretch out to take from the Germans reparations of money, even if it be millions, in exchange for the lives and the pitiful possessions of my sister, two brothers and most of their children whom the Germans slaughtered." <sup>34</sup> Leivick's



arguments represented a minority position. Most of his contemporaries seemed prepared to accept these payments from the German government.

One voice did speak out on the side of forgiveness. The C.C.A.R. convention in June of 1945 passed a resolution, proposed by its Committee on Justice and Peace, which said in part, "Though we recognize the German people's guilt, we as religious teachers reaffirm our conviction that the German people can be regenerated and urge the application to them of the Yom Kippur formula, 'Repentance, prayer and good deeds avert the evil decree.'" <sup>35</sup> This last statement, together with the sentiments attributed to Louis Finkelstein, represents a religious attitude toward the German people in opposition to the political attitude expressed in the other sources referred to in this section.

There is a basic assumption underlying all of the statements included in this section. It is that the German people as a group are responsible for the crimes of World War Two. In the first chapter we found that there were American Jews who differentiated between those who participated in the crimes against the Jews of Europe, either actively or passively, and those who were genuinely innocent of committing any crime. Alfred Werner applied this differentiation to the issue of post-war relations with Germans and Germany. "If the Jew of 1948 glibly forgets what happened between 1933 and 1948 and carelessly tries to fraternize with Germans without first making sure that their fingers were never dipped into human blood, he not only desecrates the memory of our six million dead (and of additional millions of German, Czech, Russian and other victims of Nazism), but he also aids those elements in Germany who deplore, not Hitlerism, but the fact that Hitler lost the war. But if, on the other hand, he makes the mistake of calling all Germans murderers, or of showing no interest in what is going on beyond



the Rhine he does a lot of harm to the 'Other Germany', that, weak and irresolute though it is, is trying to take root in the devastated soil of the German mind."<sup>36</sup>

### Religious Issues

While the impact of the Holocaust on the controversy over Zionism and on relations between the United States and Germany attracted much comment and analysis from American Jewish journalists, the impact of the Holocaust on religious issues elicited a far smaller volume of responses from the writers. This third section will examine three ways in which the Holocaust did affect the religious life of American Jews: First, the extent to which the Holocaust was seen as raising the problem of theodicy; second, the proposals for religious and secular observances to memorialize the victims of Nazism; and third, the acknowledgement of what Emil Fackenheim would later refer to as "The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz" demanding that Jews avoid giving Hitler a posthumous victory by refusing to forsake their Judaism.

Today the Holocaust is seen as the paradigmatic expression of the problem of evil. During the six-year period immediately following the conclusion of the Second World War the vast majority of serious Jewish thinkers remained silent concerning the theological implications of the Holocaust. In Commentary Eugene Borowitz reported on a 1950 theological conference at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati on the topic of "Reform Judaism's Fresh Awareness of Religious Problems."<sup>37</sup> Borowitz's report of the discussion contained no mention of difficulties in terms of faith in God in light of the events of the war. At the 1949

convention of the Rabbinical Assembly Milton Steinberg chaired a panel discussion on "The Theological Issues of the Hour."<sup>38</sup> The seventy-three page record of the discussion between Steinberg, Will Herberg, Eugene Kohn and other members of the R.A. does not contain a single reference to the Holocaust. Writing in Orthodox Jewish Life, Israel Gerstein presented "A Post-Hitler Appraisal of Judaism."<sup>39</sup> Again there is no mention of the problem of faith in God in light of the evil of Auschwitz. Emil Fackenheim, today considered a leading writer on the theological issues engendered by the Holocaust, wrote an essay in 1948 entitled "Can We Believe in Judaism Religiously?"<sup>40</sup> In the essay Fackenheim examined the human paradox and religious faith without once mentioning the Holocaust.

While the serious religious thinkers tended to ignore the Holocaust, a few popular writers did approach it from a religious point of view. However, rather than seeing it as a challenge to their religious beliefs they attempted to fit it into their theological systems. Orthodox Jewish Life argued that the existence of survivors demonstrates God's involvement in the war. "A million and a half European Jews had survived the murderous brutality of the Hitler fiends. In keeping with the Divine promise, a remnant of hope had been granted us; there were men, women and children of the she'erit hapléitah."<sup>41</sup> Also speaking to those who held to a traditional religious system, Menahem Boraisha pointed out that five German-Jewish refugees and an American Jew, Robert Oppenheimer, were largely responsible for developing the atomic bomb.

Religious Jews who for a period of twelve years witnessed the extermination of their kin by the Kingdom of Evil cannot help seeing the Hand of the Almighty in the circumstance that through this ruthless hatred of the Jew the mightiest weapon was removed from the hands of the hater and given to their adversaries... Providence does not halt evil but places within it the kernal of the final destruction of the evil doer.<sup>42</sup>

The Reconstructionist attempted to draw a religious lesson from the outcome of the war.

We seek an interpretation of the significance of our struggles, sufferings and triumphs. We hope thereby to salvage from the swirling flood of events something of abiding value. In that quest, we are guided and inspired by the great prophets of Israel. It is they who taught mankind to perceive the 'finger of God' in history. From catastrophic wars of their day, they derived a deep faith in the reality of God's law of justice. Inscrutable though God's dispensations are, inexplicable as is the uneven distribution of joy and suffering among men, two truths stood out clearly to their vision: that human sin inevitably leads to calamity and that the forces of evil eventually bring about their own destruction.<sup>43</sup>

While the large majority of writers remained silent or fit the Holocaust into their previously held religious beliefs without facing the problems it raised, a few individuals did raise the question: Why did God allow such an evil event to occur? Nathan Barack, in reviewing John Hersey's The Wall, commented, "It is odd that aside from Hersey's careful selection of beautiful prayers, there is no discussion on theology, and specifically on why God permitted such evil."<sup>44</sup> Ziviah Lubetkin writing about the Warsaw ghetto recalled, "Our future was veiled in darkness and we who had been rescued felt superfluous and alone, abandoned by God and Man... The heart wondered and asked, wondered and asked - but there was no answer."<sup>45</sup>

In all the Jewish periodicals of this period, published in the United States, between 1945 and 1951, I did not find even one article which attempted to answer the question of how to reconcile a belief in God with the horrors of the Holocaust. In my research I came upon only one individual, during this period, who accepted the theological challenge of the Holocaust. This man was not an American but rather a European speaking in this country. In a lecture given in New York City in 1951, Martin Buber said:



In this our own time, one asks again and again: how is a Jewish life still possible after Auschwitz? I would like to frame this question more correctly: how is life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Auschwitz? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness too deep. One can still 'believe' in the God who allowed those things to happen, but can one still speak to him? Can one still hear his word? Can one still, as an individual and as a people, enter at all into a dialogic relationship with Him? Dare we recommend to the survivors of Auschwitz, the Job of the gas chambers: 'Give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever'?

But how about Job himself? He not only laments, but he charges that the 'cruel' God (30:21) has 'removed his right' from him (27:2) and thus that the judge of all the earth acts against justice. And he receives an answer from God. But what God says to him does not answer the charge; it does not even touch upon it. The true answer Job receives is God's appearance only, only this that the distance turns into nearness, that 'his eye sees Him' (42:5), that he knows Him again. Nothing is explained, nothing is adjusted; wrong has not become right, nor cruelty kindness. Nothing has happened but that man again hears God's address.

The mystery has remained unsolved, but it has become man's.

And we?

We - by that is meant all those who have not got over what happened and will not get over it. How is it with us? Do we stand overcome before the hidden face of God like the tragic hero of the Greeks before faceless fate? No. Rather even now we contend, we too with God, even with Him, the Lord of Being, whom we once, we here, chose for our Lord. We do not put up with earthly being; we struggle for its redemption, and struggling we appeal to the help of our Lord, who is again and still a hiding one. In such a state we await his voice, whether it comes out of the storm or out of a still ness that follows it. Though His coming appearance resemble no earlier one, we shall recognize again our cruel and merciful Lord.<sup>46</sup>

Buber's writing stands apart from that of his contemporaries as an indication of what was to come in later years in terms of reaction to the religious implications of the Holocaust.

To explain the lack of recognition of the Holocaust as a source of theological difficulties I turn to Gershom Scholem's analysis of the reaction to the expulsion from Spain. Scholem wrote: "The contemporaries



of the expulsion were chiefly aware of the concrete problems it had created, but not of its deep lying implications for religious thought and its theological expression.<sup>47</sup> My research leads me to conclude that in the years immediately following World War Two, American Jews were concerned with the practical and political problems growing out of the Holocaust. The murder of six million Jews by the German state was seen as an event with political, rather than religious, implications, which created concrete problems in need of practical solutions. What will happen to the survivors? Will this crime goad the nations of the world into aiding in the establishment of a Jewish state? How should the Germans be punished? The vastness of the literature on these issues published during the post-war period leads me to reject the theory that Jews of this period suppressed the Holocaust. On the contrary, Jews of that period were so involved in the political realities created by the Holocaust that they lacked the perspective to appreciate its theological implications.

While American Jews of the post-war period did not feel a challenge to their religious beliefs from the Holocaust they did express a desire to memorialize the victims through religious and secular observances. New Palestine reported plans to plant a forest of six million trees outside Jerusalem. "The Forest of the Six Million will be an eternal reminder to the world to beware totalitarianism and the bestiality it breeds."<sup>48</sup> N.D. Gross suggested adding a line to the Passover Haggadah. "The shank bone of the Paschal lamb serves to remind us of our remnant that was spared from the holocaust."<sup>49</sup> The Jewish Spectator proposed a fifth question to be asked at the seder which would "express...our amazement at the incredibility of the 'civilized world's' apathy in the

face of what was done to the Jewish people during the Hitler period and after.<sup>50</sup> The Reconstructionist also recommended a religious observance to honor the victims of Nazism.

The inclusion in the Kaddish of some additional phrase making specific reference to the victims of Nazi brutality, the setting of a day in the calendar when all worshipers in all congregations might join in saying the Kaddish in their memory, - these are all possible liturgical forms in which we might record our mourning. But there should be some way of registering our loyalty to the memory of our dead in practical terms. Some act of self-denial on our part which would at the same time contribute to the rehabilitation of Jewry and redeem the death of the six million of our people from futility.<sup>51</sup>

Jerome Lipnick, in a letter to the editor, objected to the Reconstructionist's proposal. He contended that the time for political action was at hand and that religious observances should wait. "Your suggestion is a bit immature [sic]. Perhaps fifty or a hundred years from now the Reconstructionist can recommend that we ponder the question. Did the Jewish people establish Tisha B'av while Jerusalem was yet smoldering?...The American Jewish community should be so busy trying to save those in Europe who still live, that it could not afford the time to memorialize the dead."<sup>52</sup>

In a letter to the Jewish Spectator, Mrs. S. Baum contended that American Jews could act to compensate for the losses in Europe. "I am gradually getting tired of your and other Jewish magazines harping on the theme of 'the six million Jews who died in Europe.' If every young Jewish couple in this country would plan for an extra child we could more than make up for the losses."<sup>53</sup> The following issue of the Jewish Spectator contained a letter supporting this position from Dr. Margret Jacobson. "It might be possible, even, that special awards to mothers of three children and more will result in an increase of the Jewish birth rate."<sup>54</sup>

This discussion of memorializing the victims in this early period already contained all the basic ideas to be suggested in later years. It

seems to me that Lipnick's statement most clearly reflected the tenor of the time. Far more interest was shown in taking political action on behalf of the survivors, in support of the Zionist cause and against Germany than in developing religious memorials for the victims of the Nazis.

In God's Presence in History, written in 1968, and thus beyond the time period covered by this inquiry, Emil Fackenheim spoke of "The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz" which demands that Jews avoid giving Hitler a posthumous victory. They must, according to Fackenheim, honor the memory of the victims of Nazism by not cooperating in the destruction of Judaism. This sentiment was also expressed, not so eloquently, in the period immediately following the war. The Jewish Spectator editorialized, "The most fitting memorial for our heroes and martyrs will be our Jewish loyalty. By taking up the sacred task of creative Jewish living, they were deprived of, we can insure the eternity of the ideal for which they fought and died. Contributing our share to entrenching the Jewish future and securing Jewish survival is the Yizkor incumbent upon us."<sup>55</sup>

The Reconstructionist applied this principle to political action.

If in spite of Hitler and the forces of evil he unleashed, the Jewish people revives and lives as a creative force in human history, then the millions of those whose tragic deaths moved us to action will live through us. But if in our selfishness we fail to insure a better future for our people everywhere, then American Jewry will have demonstrated that it too is dead. Let us over subscribe the \$100,000,000 pledge and thus proclaim that we together with the millions of our slaughtered brothers and sisters 'shall not die but live and declare the work of God.'" <sup>56</sup>

Judge Simon Rifkind reported that the survivors were responding to this voice. "It was not true that Hitler had won the war against the Jews. True he multiplied their casualties, decimated their ranks, demolished

their institutions, exterminated their leaders, but this war he did not win. He did not win it because in Germany there are 100,000 Jews who have the courage to endure, who are determined to live as Jews, who are prepared to pioneer again and create a Jewish civilization."<sup>57</sup> The concept that Fackenheim expressed in 1968 was already understood in 1947.

American Jews of the post-war period felt a need to respond to the Holocaust. The belief that the Jews of this time ignored or suppressed the Holocaust is a misconception. Only in the area of theological impact is the response sparse. As I have explained, this is because the Holocaust was understood as a political, practical event which produced concrete problems that demanded solutions. In all areas, except the theological impact, the response to the Holocaust in this early period reflects, to a large degree, those ideas commonly expressed today.



### Chapter Three

## The Holocaust and the State of Israel

A complete explication of the impact of the Holocaust on the American Jewish journalists of the period 1945 to 1951 requires not only an examination of the ways in which the Holocaust was used to demonstrate the need for a Jewish state but also an investigation into the effect the establishment of the State of Israel had on the writers' understanding of the Holocaust. During the years preceding May of 1948, a large segment of American Jewry devoted its attention and energies to working for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Many of those speaking and writing in support of the Zionist cause in the post-war period based their arguments for the necessity of a Jewish state on the recent events of the Second World War. But Israel's becoming a reality necessitated a readjustment by American Jews, especially the fervent Zionists, of their thinking on many subjects. This major change in the configuration of the Jewish world certainly affected the American Jewish journalists' understanding of the Holocaust. In order to clearly elucidate the interaction of these two events this chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section will examine the American Jewish journalists' use of the Holocaust as proof of the need for a Jewish state. In the second section I shall examine the ways in which the establishment of the State of Israel altered the writers' perceptions of the Holocaust,

### The Impact of the Holocaust on Perceptions of the Need for a Jewish State

American Jewish journalists presented three major arguments to justify the need for a Jewish state based on the experience of the Holocaust.

First, we shall see that there were several writers who suggested that if a Jewish state had already existed in the 1930's then the number of Jews killed by the Nazis would have been greatly reduced. A second group of writers argued that the guilt which the nations of the world incurred as a result of failing to aid Hitler's Jewish victims could only be assuaged by these nations providing the Jewish people with an independent Jewish state. Those journalists who advanced the third argument stressed the necessity of a Jewish state to provide a home for the surviving victims of Nazism, the Displaced Persons (D.P.s).

In commenting on the destruction of European Jewry, some Jewish writers concluded that if only a Jewish state had existed previous to the war, the annihilation of the Jews of Europe could have been prevented through the channels of international diplomacy open to a sovereign nation, or at least the number of Jews killed could have been greatly reduced as a sanctuary would have been available to them. New Palestine lamented the destruction which occurred as a result of the absence of a Jewish commonwealth and urged its readers, therefore, to rededicate themselves to the Zionist cause:

The tragic past, not without guilt on our side, must guide us.  
Had we but taken possession of the land between 1917 and 1939!  
Had we but distrusted the glitter of a decaying Galut and gone home. The hour is late and the horizon dark. But millions of stout hearts may yet remedy error and wring redemption from a confused and stubborn world.<sup>1</sup>

Those who argued the Zionist position from this point of view based their contentions on the belief that "what happened to our people in Europe did not and could not happen to any people in the world which has a country and a state of its own."<sup>2</sup>

If those presenting this argument only asserted that had a state

existed before World War Two the Holocaust would not have occurred, then this observation could be simply understood as a Zionist interpretation of history. However, the second step of the argument added that the conditions which allowed the Holocaust to take place still existed in the post-war period. The Jews remained "a people without a land." Alexander Levin wrote:

So long as the Jews will live as a minority among the nations, they are bound to suffer in the role of eternal scapegoat... the solution and cure of antisemitism is Zionism.<sup>3</sup>

This played a central role in the Zionist analysis of the condition of the Jewish people. Its importance and wide acceptance can be seen in its inclusion in Israel's Declaration of Independence as one of the justifications for the establishment of a Jewish state.

The Nazi holocaust which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe proved anew the urgency of the reestablishment of a Jewish State which would solve the problem of Jewish homelessness by opening the gates to all Jews and lifting the Jewish people to equality in the family of nations.<sup>4</sup>

This entire line of reasoning rests on the belief that if the condition which allowed the Holocaust to occur - the statelessness of the Jewish people - was not corrected, then another holocaust might take place. In the month immediately following the conclusion of the war in Europe, the Jewish Agency presented this argument.

The time has come to draw a lesson from the fearful cataclysm. It is because of their unique position as a homeless and stateless people that the Jews could be marked out for wholesale destruction. Nothing but the removal of that historic disability can prevent a recurrence of similar disasters. The Jews must be given a home in a land of their own enjoying the same safeguards as are insuring the security of all nations.<sup>5</sup>

Two years later Samuel Gringauz explained that the fear of another attempt to destroy the Jewish people had converted the survivors of the Holocaust into dedicated Zionists. "It is, moreover, a Zionism of warning, because the She'erit Hapleita feels that the continuation of a Jewish national abnormality means the danger of a repetition of the catastrophe."<sup>6</sup>



From our perspective this argument for a Jewish state out of the fear of an imminent repetition of the Holocaust may appear to have been simply emotionally charged rhetoric rather than a reflection of a genuine fear. In the post-war period, however, there existed proper cause for a "reasonable man" to conclude that a danger still existed for the Jews of Europe. In Poland pogroms occurred and the leftist government appeared unable to control rightwing antisemitism. The attitude toward Jews demonstrated by officers of the occupying forces, such as General Frederick E. Morgan, at times seemed threatening. Having just lived through an event which until that time most people would have considered an impossibility, and facing life in unstable post-war Europe, the Jews of this period were justified in their fears.

The attempt to present the need for a Jewish state by means of an argument based on the antisemitism of the peoples of Europe did not originate after World War Two. It dates back to the beginnings of Zionism. The founders of the Zionist movement in Russia acted in response to pogroms. Theodor Herzl's final awakening followed his covering the Dreyfus trial and the election of the antisemite, Karl Lueger. While this first argument for a Jewish state based on the danger of a recurrence of persecution originated long before World War Two, a new line of reasoning in support of the movement toward Jewish statehood did emerge from the Second World War. The first argument was directed at American Jews in order to broaden support for the Zionist cause within the American Jewish community. Those advocating this second argument directed their statements toward the community of nations, specifically the United States and Great Britain, for these countries possessed the power to take concrete steps in the direction of establishing a Jewish state.



After studying the events which took place during World War Two, many writers concluded that the Jewish people deserved an independent state as a reparation for crimes committed against Jews during the war. Abba Hillel Silver, in an address to the World Zionist Congress, said, "The establishment of a Jewish state in our time is the only conceivable recompense...for the slaughter of 6,000,000 Jews."<sup>7</sup> American Jewish journalists supported the trials of Nazi war criminals as a reaction to the crimes committed during the war. But many of these writers suggested that punishing the criminals did not suffice as the only reaction to the nefarious deeds of the Nazis, rather they felt it necessary that the survivors receive collective political compensation for the damages caused them. The Jewish Spectator editorialized:<sup>8</sup>

There is only one act of justice that could prove that the nations who tried and convicted the Nazi criminals are in earnest about removing the great evil: Giving the million Jews who miraculously survived the gas chambers, charnel houses and crematoria a new lease on life in a land of their longing and hope - in Eretz Israel.<sup>9</sup>

The principle underlying this method of advocating the Zionist cause rests upon the belief that the nations of the world shared in the guilt for the deaths of the six million, since before and during the war these countries failed to act to save the Jews of Europe. These nations did not open their doors to escapees from Nazi dominated sections of Europe, they did not respond to the urgings of Jewish leaders to destroy Germany's ability to murder Jews, and they failed to issue sufficiently harsh warnings of punishment for those involved in the killing of Jews. Therefore, these nations, in the eyes of many American Jews owed the Jewish people a great debt. This debt could only be repaid by allowing the Jewish people to establish an independent Jewish state. In addressing the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Stephen S. Wise explained:

Mr. Chairman, may I be forgiven if I say to you that the Christian world...suffered six million of the people of Jesus of Nazareth to die, die in the most awful way - the only Jews of Eastern Europe who survived, literally, were those who fled to Russia and those who lived in Palestine. You will forgive me if I say that the Christian world owes the Jews some reparation, I think a great measure of reparation...The Christian world...cannot do less than say to the Jewish people, "You have labored, you have grieved, you suffered, you have long been injured. Palestine shall be yours." 10

A cartoon in New Palestine also expressed the argument for Jewish statehood as a repayment for crimes committed against Jews during World War Two. The drawing showed the United Nations fact finding committee in a car riding between two rows of clothed skeletons labeled "six million Jewish dead." The caption under the cartoon read "The Guard of Honor." 11

The arguments advanced in this sub-section for a Jewish state as a reparation for crimes committed against Jews during World War Two, were directed primarily at the nations of the world. The arguments presented in the first sub-section, based on the claim that had a Jewish state existed before the war the Holocaust might have been avoided, was directed primarily at American Jews in an attempt to increase support for Zionism in that community. In the third sub-section I will present arguments, based on the Jewish D.P.s' problems in post-war Europe, aimed at both American Jews and the community of nations.

In presenting the case of the immediate need for a Jewish state before the nations of the world, some Zionists posed as spokesmen for the survivors of Nazi terror. These leaders hoped to convince these nations of the need for a Jewish state to solve the problem of Jewish D.P.s in Europe. The argument was presented as a moral issue in the "Appeal of a Thousand Rabbis to the Conscience of America."

At this decisive moment in history, we direct this urgent plea to the conscience of America as well as to the world statesmen gathered at San Francisco - a plea on behalf of the Jewish survivors of Nazi bestiality...that the conditions be created which will insure realization of a Jewish aspiration...that Palestine shall be a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth.<sup>12</sup>

The editors of New Palestine broadened the plea: "Even on humanitarian grounds it is a crime for the United Nations to prolong the agony and suffering of the survivors of Nazi atrocities." <sup>13</sup>

By presenting these arguments in the public forum Zionist leaders hoped to generate widespread sympathy for the D.P.s among the general American population. The resultant public opinion would then encourage the American government to take steps to aid the Zionist cause. The Truman administration was already feeling the pressure of the D.P. problem in a more direct manner. During the period following the conclusion of the war Jewish refugees streamed into the American Zone of Germany, severely straining the United States Army's capacity to provide them with food, shelter and medical care.

The Zionist press spoke with one voice in explaining that the only solution to the D.P.s' difficulties lay in immigration to Palestine/Israel. Also the D.P.s themselves desired to go only there. Robert S. Marcus reported, "They [the D.P.s] spoke of their hopes for the future. There was only one, just one salvation for them, Palestine."<sup>14</sup> Their experiences during the war proved to the D.P.s that only in immigration to Palestine/Israel could they find a solution to the problems which they faced. Sholome Michael Gelber described a concrete example of the Holocaust's influence on the survivors' attitude toward aliyah.

Near them [the D.P.s] a single rusted crematorium still stands as a memorial of the nightmare. It is as though these unhappy souvenirs goad the people on, stimulate them, excite them, warn them. It is as if the very word "Belsen" is continually jostling them to be mindful of their faith that Palestine, if not the best answer is the only answer.<sup>15</sup>



According to those who supported this line of reasoning, only in Palestine/Israel could the problems of the D.P.s be appreciated and solved. Emanuel Gross described his reaction to visiting the D.P. camp in Rentzschmühle. "Palestine is their only solution; only there can they be absorbed by a community which understands their problems and will rehabilitate them. Elsewhere they will become a public liability. Palestine, and Palestine alone can absorb them."<sup>16</sup>

Zionist leaders also utilized the D.P. issue to present the need for a Jewish state to the American Jewish community as being no longer a question of Zionism but rather a humanitarian concern. Solomon Itzhaki wrote:

It is an indisputable fact that Palestine can now - today - absorb all the Jews who survived in the liberated countries. Why should these unfortunate people have to wander about and live in fear and be far from kinfolk in the Jewish homeland. This is not a question of Zionism. It is a question of simple humanity and simple reality.<sup>17</sup>

Abba Hillel Silver strongly objected to this line of reasoning. He feared that arguing the case for a Jewish state on the basis of the D.P. problem diverted attention from the deeper, and in the long run, more significant, meaning of Zionism. Silver understood the quest for Jewish statehood in the classical Zionist sense of political redemption for the Jewish people. New Palestine reported one of Silver's many expressions of this point of view.

At a political meeting amid discussion back and forth, Dr. Silver suddenly and quietly broke in. "I am tired of hearing about refuge and shelter. This is not Zionism. I want to hear about redemption, the redemption of a people from homelessness and artificial pain and grief. Refuge for the exiled and shelter for the oppressed - all of that is included in the goal which is infinitely greater and more resplendent."<sup>18</sup>

Throughout this study I have spoken of the American Jewish journalists' concern for the concrete problems which developed as a result of the Holocaust.



The plight of the Jewish D.P.s certainly falls into this category. The journalists connected this plight with the need for a Jewish state in two ways. Some writers, deeply affected by the situation of the D.P.s, saw immigration to Palestine/Israel as the only solution to their problem. Other writers, primarily interested in promoting the Zionist cause, seized upon the plight of the refugees as an opportunity to gain sympathy for their position. This strategy greatly upset Dr. Silver, for he believed that the Zionist movement possessed the higher goal of revitalizing the Jewish people. Approaching the need for a Jewish state from the refugee problem may have caused the Zionist movement to gain speed, but the accompanying loss in altitude disturbed the Cleveland rabbi.

Having examined the use of the Holocaust by American Jewish journalists of the post-war period as a basis for arguing the need for a Jewish state, we can now turn to the post-May 14, 1948 period. The establishment of the State of Israel was a major turning point for Jewish history in general, and for this study in particular. The goal for which a significant segment of Jewry had been toiling had been reached. The D.P.s of Europe now had a sanctuary in which they could settle. And the new state became the focus of Jewish attention, moving the Holocaust off of center stage.

#### The Impact of the Establishment of the State of Israel on Perceptions of the Holocaust

Three separate and distinct changes took place in the way in which the American Jewish press dealt with the Holocaust as a result of the establishment of the State of Israel. First, the periodicals devoted much

less space to articles on the Holocaust after May of 1948. Second, several writers viewed the existence of Israel as a response to the Holocaust. Third, there seems to have been a movement among some American Jews in the post-1948 period to a position which held that the existence of Israel compensated for the Holocaust.

Between the spring of 1945 and the fall of 1947 American Jewish periodicals contained many articles relating to the Holocaust. Following the establishment of the State of Israel the frequency with which these periodicals published articles on the Holocaust decreased greatly. To be sure, previous to May 14, 1948, New Palestine, the official publication of the Zionist Organization of America, dealt almost exclusively with the need for a Jewish state and steps being taken to reach that goal; other subjects, such as the Holocaust, were discussed only as they related to the Zionist cause. But before May of 1948 nearly every issue of New Palestine contained such references to the Holocaust or its implications. From May 14, 1948 until the end of the period covered by this study, May 14, 1951, New Palestine found reason to mention the Holocaust only four times.

Other Zionist periodicals, such as Congress Weekly and Jewish Spectator, contained a broader selection of articles before May of 1948, including many on the Holocaust independent of its significance for the Zionist movement. Since the content of these magazines was not as uni-directional before May 14, 1948 as that of New Palestine, Israel's coming into existence did not affect these periodicals radically. Although after the establishment of the State articles on problems facing Israel replaced those on the need for a Jewish state, remaining articles continued to deal with a wide variety of subjects, including, to some extent, the Holocaust.

In these periodicals the number of articles on the Holocaust dropped off gradually, beginning in the fall of 1945, as the temporal distance from the actual events increased, accelerating somewhat after the establishment of the State. This trend differed from that of New Palestine where the frequency of articles on the Holocaust remained at a constant level from the summer of 1945 to May of 1948 and then dropped off suddenly and dramatically. The pattern of Jewish Spectator and Congress Weekly was reflected in non-Zionist publications such as Commentary.

I see five reasons for this change in the amount of attention paid the Holocaust in American Jewish periodicals after the establishment of the State of Israel. The first and second reasons apply exclusively to the Zionist periodicals, while the other three apply to all the periodicals of this period. First, the Zionists had worked long and hard for a Jewish state. For many of them the Holocaust's main significance lay in its use as evidence of the need for a Jewish state. When their goal was reached, these Zionists no longer needed the Holocaust to justify the necessity of a Jewish state. Therefore, these Zionists ceased to pay attention to the Holocaust. Second, while the new state fulfilled the dreams of the Zionists, it created new problems for them. For years these people worked for a state; now that their goal had been reached it became necessary for them to redirect their energies toward dealing with the concrete problems a modern state faces. Following the establishment of the State, Zionism, as a movement, lost its immediacy and glamour. As a result, Zionist organizations lost support, numerically and financially. The leadership of the American Zionist movement, in addition, had to redefine its role in light of the new government of Israel. Preoccupied with these new challenges, the writers in the Zionist journals devoted less space to the Holocaust.



Third, Zionists and others primarily concerned themselves with the concrete problems which the Holocaust had created, the refugees and the continuing unnatural state of homelessness in which the Jewish people existed. The establishment of the State of Israel provided a sanctuary for the refugees and, by its existence, Israel "solved" the "Jewish problem". Since the State's existence provided solutions for the problems which the Holocaust created, journalists no longer had reason to dwell on it. Fourth, by 1948 the Holocaust was no longer news. The journalists had already written about the Holocaust from a wide variety of angles. American Jews had become familiar with the details of what had occurred and with the issues the Holocaust raised in their lives. The State of Israel, however, was new and raised many new topics of interest that drew the attention of a broad range of American Jewish journalists. When discussing any event interest is highest immediately following it and then drops off until something happens to revive interest in the event.<sup>19</sup> A fifth possibility would be to suggest that American Jewish writers preferred not to deal with the Holocaust because they saw it as an unpleasant and distasteful subject. Israel, a far more attractive and positive topic, provided these writers with an excuse to ignore the Holocaust.

All five of these reasons, to a varying degree, apply to changes in the contents of each of the periodicals of this period. In general it would be difficult to determine what motivated a specific periodical to curtail its discussion of the Holocaust. New Palestine, however, because of the radical nature of the change that took place, presents a simpler problem than do the other periodicals. In that particular case, the unidirectional nature of the periodical's content provides a relatively clear picture of the magazine's editorial attitude toward the Holocaust before May of 1948. New Palestine referred to the Holocaust almost exclusively



within the context of an argument for the indispensability of a Jewish state. The Holocaust, from the point of view of New Palestine's writers, served as the newest and most powerful evidence for the truth of their cause. After the establishment of the State, judging from the contents of New Palestine, there no longer existed a need to justify the necessity of a state, and as a result New Palestine ceased to mention the Holocaust. The second reason also applies to this periodical. In an effort to establish a post-independence identity and sense of purpose, New Palestine devoted much space to the problems of the new State and the problems American Zionists experienced relating to it.

The shift exhibited in New Palestine was not universal, Israel Knox, writing in Commentary, acknowledged the importance of Israel but criticized the trend he saw to allow the joy of its establishment to obscure the Holocaust. He was disturbed that American Jews seemed to be disregarding the significance of the Holocaust on account of Israel.

What has happened in Europe should have shaken us to the roots of our being, and it is no disparagement of Israel and no blindness to the historical importance of the establishment of a Jewish state to say that it is a joy incommensurate with the infinite tragedy that has befallen us. And so there are celebrations - as perhaps there should be - of the anniversary of the establishment of Israel, but there is no day of mourning, no yortseit, for the six million who perished.<sup>20</sup>

Among those journalists who continued to write about the Holocaust after Israel's independence, several expressed an understanding of the connection existing between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. They saw Israel as a response to the Holocaust. Sol Bernstein, writing in Orthodox Jewish Life, understood this response in a religious light.

The decision by the United Nations to permit the establishment of a Jewish state in partitioned Palestine is, in its essence, one of those acts of Divine Providence which seem to transcend the ordinary course of natural law...Each of us, sensing in the rebirth of the Jewish Commonwealth a cosmic event, feels impelled to define his own relationship towards it. The murk of contemporary life is pierced by a grand vision, a vista of scores of generations of dauntless spirits, swept by storm and driven by current after current and now, bloodied but unbroken, guided by an Almighty Will onto the shores of the Homeland. Surely, even the most machine-blunted mind must perceive here a purpose beyond any human ego, a purpose to which he himself belongs.<sup>21</sup>

While there is no explicit mention of the Holocaust in this paragraph the expression "now bloodied" is a clear reference to the Holocaust. This is the only analysis, in the periodical literature of the post-war era, which from a religious point of view links these two events. This is due to the fact that the large majority of the American Jewish journalists of this period saw the Holocaust as a political event. Even those writers who saw the establishment of the new State in a religious light, with the exception of Bernstein, failed to link the State to the Holocaust.

While Sol Bernstein saw the establishment of the State as a result of Divine redemption, others saw an opportunity, in the new State, for personal redemption. Leon S. Lang described a woman he met in Europe in 1949.<sup>22</sup> This survivor, who recently had given birth to triplets, awaited her husband's message informing his family that he had completed making preparations for them to join him in Israel. Lang understood the actions of this family to be an expression of renewed faith in the possibility of a fruitful and positive Jewish life brought about by the establishment of the State of Israel.

Some journalists saw another connection between these two events. Their contributions to these periodicals depicted the guardians of Israel as concentration camp survivors supported by the six million. On the cover of its 1948 Rosh Hashanah issue, New Palestine printed a photograph of a

soldier with his head bandaged, a rifle hanging over his shoulder, holding an Israeli flag and turning his arm in such a manner so that his tattooed concentration camp number faced the reader.<sup>23</sup> Along similar lines, Jewish Frontier published a poem by Marie Syrkin entitled "The Victory". It read in part:

Six million guard Manara's height  
And watch the peaks of Galilee.  
The soldier with the numbered arm  
Summons his silent infantry.<sup>24</sup>

These statements stressed that despite the Holocaust the Jewish people survived. Those Jews, who survived Hitler found a new life, a new dignity in Israel on behalf of themselves and the six million.

There seem to have been individuals who pressed this argument further and viewed the Holocaust as the "necessary evil" which made the establishment of the State of Israel possible. The journals which I consulted did not promote this argument, but rather criticized it. Referring to "future historians", Louis Finkelstein offered a harsh criticism of those who held to this point of view.

So the future historian of civilization will think of Nazism primarily as the evil which made the third Jewish Commonwealth indispensable and inevitable...It is small comfort to six million martyrs, their bereaved and the many million more who suffered frightful torture, to state that it was the price history exacted for the emergence of an effective Jewish community in the Holyland.<sup>25</sup>

One can easily understand the temptation to consider the Holocaust a necessary evil. This approach to the tragedy of World War Two allowed the individual to avoid confronting the questions and challenges which the Holocaust raised. It allowed the individual to avoid being shaken to the roots of his being.

Each of these two awesome events, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, provoked change in the manner in which American Jewish journalists perceived the other. The Holocaust provided new evidence of the need for a Jewish state. And once Israel became a reality, it threw the writers' understanding of the Holocaust into a new light.

...first to be found in the fact that the study reveals that the Holocaust is a key to understanding the Jewish people and the Jewish people are a key to understanding the Holocaust. In a time when people are asking "What does it mean to be Jewish?" and "What is the Holocaust?" the study provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The study also provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The study also provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The study also provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people.

In today's world, the relationship between current perceptions of the Holocaust and the Jewish people is more complex than it was in the past. It is necessary to understand the Holocaust in the context of the Jewish people and the Jewish people in the context of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is a key to understanding the Jewish people and the Jewish people are a key to understanding the Holocaust. In a time when people are asking "What does it mean to be Jewish?" and "What is the Holocaust?" the study provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The study also provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The study also provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people. The study also provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and the Jewish people.



## Chapter Four

### General Considerations

While many specific aspects of the American Jewish journalists' perceptions of the Holocaust have already been explored, four general issues, first mentioned in the introduction to this study, remain to be discussed. First, how is current thinking on the Holocaust related to the early reactions to the event? Second, is it true, as some people believe today, that not much was written about the Holocaust in the post-war period? Third, how significant were the group affiliations of the individual writers? Fourth, is Irving Greenberg's assessment of the relationship between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel accurate?

To fully explain the relationship between current perceptions of the Holocaust and those of the post-war period it would be necessary to undertake a study similar to this one focussing on recent years. Here, however, I shall merely touch on the major issues raised in this study and comment on their status today. Explaining why the German people supported the Nazis and their antisemitic program continues to be a topic of interest, and those explanations offered in the periodicals of the post-war era, the socio-economic one and the historical-cultural one, remain popular. The ascription of guilt for the Holocaust has changed over the years since the end of the war. While we continue to ascribe collective guilt to the German people for the deaths of the Jews of Europe, today the discussion is historical, centered on the Germany of thirty years ago, while in the post-war period accusations of collective

German guilt were of a current nature and carried with them concrete implications. The question of Allied guilt was revived in the current period by Arthur Morse in his book While Six Million Died. Since specifically blaming the British for the deaths of the six million grew out of the conflict over the future of Palestine, British guilt is no longer an issue. On the other hand, the discussion of Jewish guilt, especially that of the victims themselves, has widened in recent years.

As a result of the current broad support for Israel within the American Jewish community, the question of the Holocaust's impact on the controversy over Zionism is no longer a topic of contemporary discussion. While the attitudes toward Germans and Germany expressed in the post-war Jewish periodical literature are still advanced today, the passage of time, the existence of a new generation of Germans, the reparation payments, and Israel's diplomatic ties to Germany have lessened support for the earlier views. The impact of the Holocaust on the religious life of American Jews has increased greatly since the post-war period. As I pointed out in the introduction to this study, the Holocaust has become the paradigmatic expression of the theological problem of evil. Also the observance of Yom Hashoah, the memorial day for the Jewish victims of Nazism, has become quite widespread within the Jewish community today.

Concerning the relationship of the Holocaust to the establishment of the State of Israel, Louis Finkelstein's 1950 prediction that future historians will see the Holocaust as the event which made the establishment of the State possible has, to an extent, come true. Many Americans today seem to link the two events in the way described by Finkelstein. The justifications of the need for a Jewish state based on the experience

of the Holocaust which were discussed in this study are no longer issues of contention today.

The number of articles published in the American Jewish periodicals of the post-war era on various aspects of the Holocaust was large. In the body of this study I have referred to one hundred and forty and I have not included all the articles on the Holocaust in the literature under study. I selected only those articles containing significant material on the topics of investigation. In addition to the journalism on the subject, an extensive memoir literature was produced in the years immediately following the war. In 1950 Philip Friedman described the total Jewish literary reaction to the Holocaust:

This cataclysm has evoked a greater outpouring of literature than any other in our past history. In the course of a few brief years there have appeared hundreds of books and thousands of magazine articles written not only by professional writers. Many persons who never dreamed of being authors began to write on this theme. The urge to write on this subject has become a true popular movement.<sup>1</sup>

Those who say that the Holocaust did not attract discussion and comment during the years immediately following the war are mistaken.

In order to evaluate the significance of group affiliation it is necessary to examine both political and religious divisions. Within the Zionist camp there do not appear to have been major differences between how the General Zionists and the Labor Zionists approached the Holocaust. The establishment of the State of Israel, however, seemed to create more problems for the General Zionists than it did for the Labor Zionists. The Labor Zionists, after May of 1948, remained oriented to aliyah and kibbutz as they had been before 1948. The General Zionists had been primarily concerned with the establishment of a Jewish state prior to May

of 1948 and thus seemed to lose direction after Israel's independence was declared. Also the Labor Zionists felt an ideological bond with the ruling party of the new state, while the General Zionists, even though they were the dominant group within the United States, felt a little out of touch with the Israeli government. The anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism held to a strict "party line" when it came to the Holocaust; this event demonstrated the end product of nationalism. If Jews desired to avoid becoming Nazis they should reject Zionism. The Jewish Communists' concerns during the post-war period were different from those of the rest of the Jewish community. As a result of Cold-War tensions the Jewish Communists became worried about political oppression in the United States. In terms of the Holocaust, they desired to portray themselves as the political successors to the Warsaw ghetto freedom fighters.

Within the religious community no clear distinction emerges from an examination of the statements of Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative leaders with regard to the Holocaust. Representatives of these three movements offered opinions on the political as well as the religious issues growing out of the Holocaust. Orthodox representatives, however, addressed themselves primarily to the religious issues.

As for Irving Greenberg's assertion that the religious, cultural, and psychological devastation caused by the Holocaust was so powerful that had Israel not come into existence many Jews would have found it difficult or impossible to continue being Jewish, my research into the early reactions to the Holocaust would lead me to agree partially with Greenberg. While clearly I cannot report on what would have happened if there would not have been a Jewish State, it is possible to evaluate the extent of the effect of the Holocaust on American Jews in the post-war period.



Following the war American Jewish religious life continued in a business-as-usual fashion. I did not find any evidence suggesting that a change had taken place in the level of participation of American Jews in religious observances after the war. Also these Jews did not see the Holocaust as a challenge to previously held religious beliefs. Psychologically speaking the Holocaust did create within many American Jews intense feelings of guilt, anger and despair. In many cases these intense feelings were transferred to the drive for the establishment of a Jewish state. Participating in the struggle for statehood soothed these Jews' feelings of guilt and anger. Hope for a speedy remedy to statelessness of the Jewish people sustained them in their hour of despair.

During the years covered by this study interest in the Holocaust decreased as time passed. In the twenty-six years since 1951, concern with the Holocaust has risen and fallen in response to world and Jewish events. Today interest in the Holocaust is, perhaps, as high as it has been at any time since the spring of 1945. The questions being asked, to a large extent, are still the same ones which were first raised nearly a generation ago, except that the specifically religious issues seem to loom ever larger.

## Notes

### Introduction

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2. Idem., Quest for Past and Future, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 26.

### Chapter One

#### Explanations, Guilt, and Consequences

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9. Cecil Roth, "Thoughts on Jewish History," p. 14.
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25. "A Fifth Question," Jewish Spectator, Vol. 12 No. 7 (May 1947), p. 6.
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30. Menahem Boraisha, "The Incredible Facts," Congress Weekly, Vol. 12 No. 30 (October 26, 1945), p. 4.
31. "Wallace for President," Jewish Life, Vol. 2 No. 4 (February 1948), p. 3.
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## Chapter Four

### Conclusions

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