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SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship

C O N T E N T S

Holocaust

*Remembrance
& Resistance*



*French
'Star of David'
badge Jews were
forced to wear
by the Nazis*

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From Where I Sit

Stefan Merken

Responses from Readers

The August issue of the *Shalom* newsletter was a big hit with our readers and friends. The issue dealt only with the work and struggles of Dorothy Day. Many of our readers responded. Below are a few of the responses we received.

“Thanks for the Dorothy Day newsletter. We need her right now.”
—Jim Wallis, *Sojourners Magazine*

“This is simply astonishing. So beautifully done--the photos! The great articles! The quotes! I wish it could be seen far and wide. Will send it to some friends, thanks for sharing it.”

—Fr. John Dear

“Thank you all so much for your great work.”

—Martha Hennessy,
Dorothy Day’s granddaughter
Plowshares 7

“Thanks for doing this special issue.”

—Rosalie G. Riegler

“Wow! Thank you.”

—Robert Ellsberg, Editor, Orbis Books



In this issue, we recall the horrors of the Holocaust and investigate ways of preventing genocide.

STEFAN MERKEN
is Chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

This current issue is concerned with anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. What is causing the growing anti-Semitism in America? Some alarming facts:

In a recent study, nearly two-thirds of young adults (18 and 19) were unaware that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

In another study, one quarter of those responding (23%) thought the Holocaust was a myth.

An FBI report noted a 37% increase in anti-Semitic hate crimes in 2017.

In my home state of Washington, hate crimes rose 78% between 2013-2017, and Seattle has shown an unbelievable increase in hate crimes of nearly 400% since 2012.

In these complicated and trying times, we continue to dedicate ourselves to peace work. In this issue, we recall the horrors of the Holocaust and the faith and courage of the victims. In addition, we investigate ways of preventing genocide and strategies for teaching the Holocaust when there are no longer any survivors. ✧

Book Reviews

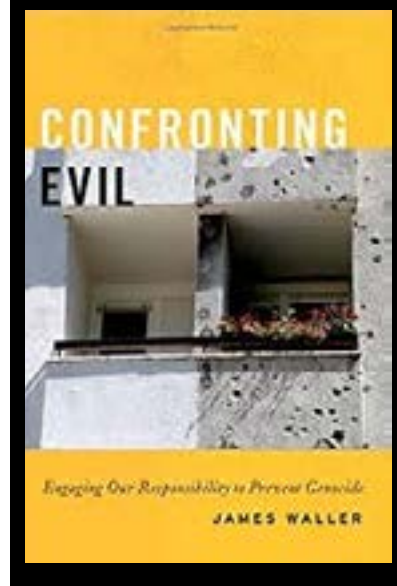
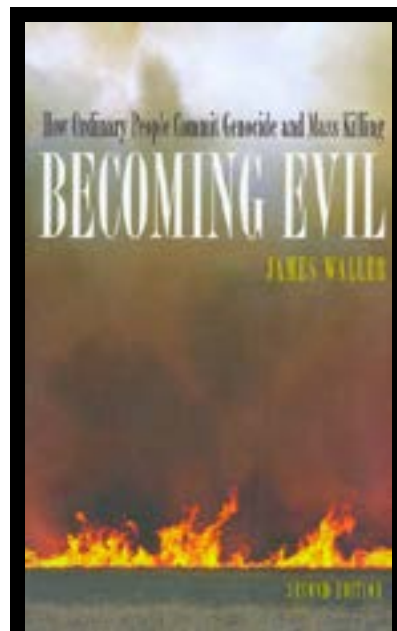
Connor Lemma

Becoming Evil and Preventing Genocide

In his two groundbreaking books, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (2002) and *Confronting Evil: Engaging Our Responsibility to Prevent Genocide* (2016), James Waller expounds a frightening outlook on the ordinary nature of genocidal perpetrators. He argues that we all need to realize that there is a potential for each person to commit such evil acts, as uncomfortable as that realization may be. In *Becoming Evil*, Waller offers a “psychological explanation of how ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing,” while in *Confronting Evil*, he presents “an analysis of genocide in the modern world that draws out the lessons to be learned in preventing genocide from ever taking place, preventing further atrocities once genocide has begun, and preventing future atrocities from ever taking place.” His analyses of past genocides and mass killings show that at each point, there could have been actions that would have saved lives.

In *Becoming Evil*, Waller explains the psychological tendencies and characteristics that genocidal perpetrators exhibit and how they are not significantly different than those of a cross section of a population. Waller also writes of specific psychological phenomena that various researchers have observed through social experiments that support the conclusion that any person carries the potential to become and abet genocidal perpetrators. Multiple psychological concepts and personality descriptions show that nearly every perpetrator is not psychologically different from a person that has, as Waller simply puts it, “done nothing more criminal in their lives than commit a parking meter violation.” It may seem easy or comforting to distance ourselves from genocidal perpetrators by assuming that there is something inherently evil about them. The reality, as Waller makes clear, is quite different.

Waller shows that every human being can become a perpetrator of mass violence and genocide under certain circumstances. He concludes one section strikingly by noting: “While the evil of genocide and mass killing is not ordinary, the perpetrators most certainly are.” He does not mean that every human being who encounters these circumstances will become a perpetrator. Some people do not succumb to the hatred and the social structures that have turned ordinary people into doers of extraordinary evil. Waller explains further: “Regardless, what



“We now need to develop a set of interventions designed to prevent the development of a context of cruelty in military, paramilitary, security, and civilian organizations.”—
James Waller

Continued on next page

Book Reviews



Waller gives the analogy of a bridge over a river. If there is a structural deficiency in the bridge, we should try to fix it before anybody falls. That is upstream prevention.

perpetrators decide to do makes a significant difference in what they eventually do. In this way, the perpetrators willfully fail to exercise their moral judgment and retain full moral and legal accountability for their atrocities. No explanatory model, or ‘psychological insight,’ will ever take that away.” This concept is an essential part of Waller’s model of what causes people to become genocidal perpetrators. Perpetrators are not blame-free for their role in the oppressive system. Instead, their choices lead them to this place of evil.

Waller concludes *Becoming Evil* with a call to action in the form of deconstructing social structures that allow evil to happen at an institutionalized level. If systems produce conditions for ordinary people to participate in genocides and mass killings, the systems themselves should be reviewed and changed: “We now need to develop a set of interventions designed to prevent the development of a context of cruelty in military, paramilitary, security, and civilian organizations.” When these systems are allowed to function without review and critical questioning of their ultimate purpose, a hegemonic group of ordinary people can commit and coordinate genocide and mass killing. These social structures are perfect breeding grounds for genocidal perpetrators. Human nature’s very nature is the perfect starting point for becoming part of a group and losing personal identity.

Waller begins *Confronting Evil* with the history of the word “genocide.” In 1944, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer, coined the term to describe one of the worst actions of humanity. Lemkin’s original definition was ultimately changed, and the current United Nations’ definition has been tainted by bureaucratic processes and nations trying to absolve themselves of responsibility for their own genocides.

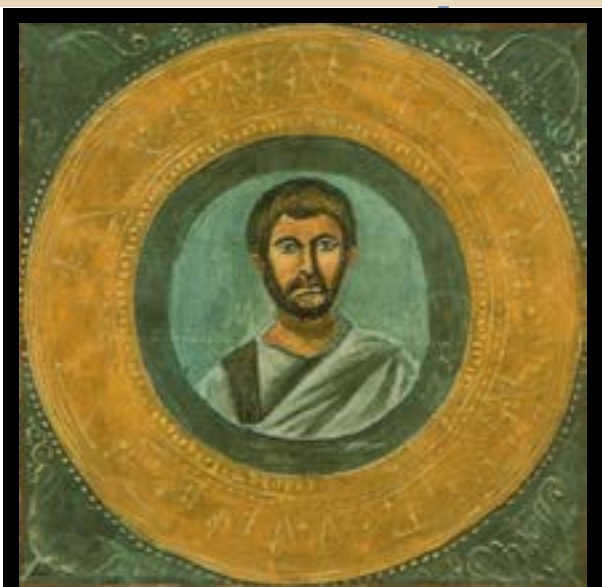
The creation of the legal definition of genocide advanced the study of how to prevent genocide and mass killing. Preventing genocide and mass killings is entirely possible, albeit challenging to accomplish. Waller divides prevention efforts into three stages: upstream prevention, midstream prevention, and downstream prevention. He gives the analogy of a bridge over a river. If there is a structural deficiency in the bridge, we should try to fix it before anybody falls. That is upstream prevention. If a person is to fall through, we should try to help them by any means possible, or midstream prevention. Finally, if intervention does not happen due to either choice or failure, it is time to determine how the person fell through the bridge and why nothing happened. This analogy also depicts the cyclical nature of genocide prevention; if the bridge isn’t fixed properly following the genocide, the cycle will just start over.

Upstream prevention is necessary before violence or killing begins. The purpose of upstream prevention strategies is to identify and act on risk factors such as governance style, conflict history, economic conditions, and social fragmentation, among others. Similarly to his approach in *Becoming Evil*, Waller focuses here on the structures and systems in power and the need to change them to become more empathetic and less devoid of individualism. Upstream prevention is necessary to address and respond to systematic oppression and bias. This is the first line of defense against genocide and mass killing.

Midstream prevention strategies include attempts to “slow, limit, or stop the continuation or escalation of genocidal violence.” Such strategies take the form of “political, economic, legal, and military” action that, when used in an

Preventing genocide and mass killings is entirely possible.

Continued on next page



The ancient Roman African playwright Terence (circa 195/185 to 159 B.C.E.) stated a principle now recognized as essential to genocide prevention: “Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto” (“I am human, I consider nothing human alien to me”).

Book Review

CONNOR LEMMA

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intersectional and diverse manner, can affect the path of genocidal violence. These strategies are effectual in responding and reacting to different triggers at the onset of violence or as it is in progress. One of Waller’s most important distinctions in this section is that militaristic intervention is not the only response that should happen. Other actions, such as economic sanctions or international pressure and legal pathways, may be enough to stop the violence in conjunction with other measures. Military intervention is by no means an end-all.

At the foundation of downstream prevention efforts are “Justice, truth, and memory.” Justice can bring closure for the survivors of the genocide, truth validates their experiences in the face of denial, and memory “is the active past that helps give shape and meaning to our social identities.” Memory shapes these social identities that become the change drivers in a post-genocidal period.

Waller’s books, at their ground level, give us two important takeaways. First, every human being is capable of committing genocide and mass killing, given the right environment and personal choices. Second, genocide can occur in any place, given the correct structural characteristics. While we and many “developed states think of genocide prevention as a foreign policy issue, it should also be recognized as a domestic concern as no state is immune to the risk of genocide.” As frightening as it may be to consider, it is entirely plausible for mass violence and genocide to happen in the future in the United States. Waller insists that an indicator of past violence is a strong predictor of violence to come. From the genocide of the indigenous people to the systematic targeting of Black citizens in the Jim Crow era and beyond, we can see that the United States has this predisposition for genocidal violence.

No place is immune to the evil that has plagued every corner of the earth. We can all apply this knowledge in our daily lives; we must live in a manner that actively counters the structures and systems that produce genocidal perpetrators and nations. This task, while daunting and overwhelming, is doable with collective action and change.

At the heart of the issue is the necessity to recognize everyone’s humanity; the construction of the “other” is the single greatest danger that faces us at this moment. We will all do well to remember and put into practice the Roman African playwright Terence’s principle: “Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto” (“I am human, I consider nothing human alien to me”). For his part, Waller claims that prevention measures exist, and the major obstacle facing us is lack of action. Lives of current and future generations are at stake; human lives are at risk of mass killings and genocide in every area of the world.

We must wage a good and moral fight to end mass killings and genocide. To heed Waller’s warnings and conclusions, everyone must recognize and avoid structures and systems that produce genocidal behavior, while realizing that our common humanity is more important than any differences that may exist between us. ☆

SHALOM

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Jews detained during the Vel D'Hiv roundup in Paris, 1942. Photo: Public domain.

Roundups, Regimes, and Rhinoceroses

Robert Ellsberg

*Under occupation,
a large part of the
French population
succumbed to
regarding their fellow
human beings as not
truly French, “not
like us.”*

Building Innocence on a Lie

How does a country cope with shame? In July 1942 French police in occupied Paris carried out “Operation Spring Breeze”—arresting 13,000 Jews, including 4,000 children, who were detained in the Vélodrome d’Hiver (a cycling stadium). The detainees were held for five days with little food or water, while awaiting transport by cattle cars to camps in the East. Of the 4,000 children rounded up in this raid, only six adolescents returned.

The Jews deported in Operation Spring Breeze represented only a fraction of the 76,000 Jews ultimately deported from France. However, the role of French police in conducting this raid remained a particular stain on the French conscience. After the war, many in France denied any culpability, claiming it was a Nazi operation. In 1994, President François Mitterrand declared, “I will not apologize in the name of France. The Republic had nothing to do with this. I do not believe France is responsible.”

But in 1995 President Jacques Chirac reversed this position, acknowledging the work of 450 French policemen, and issued a public apology: “These black hours will stain our history forever ... France, home of the Enlightenment and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, land of welcome and asylum, France committed that day the irreparable. Breaking its word, it delivered those it protected to their executioners.”

In 2017 President Emmanuel Macron renewed this apology: “It was indeed France that organized this roundup,” he said. “Not a single German took part. It is convenient to see the Vichy regime as born of nothingness, returned to nothingness. Yes, it’s convenient, but it is false. We cannot build pride upon a lie.”

There was surely a time when French citizens would have found

Continued on next page

Roundups, Regimes, and Rhinoceroses

it impossible to believe that their countrymen could be implicated in such a crime. But gradually, under occupation, a large part of the population, infected by the virus of racism and the cult of nationalism, succumbed to regarding their fellow human beings as the Other, not truly French, “not like us.”

In Eugène Ionesco’s 1959 play *Rhinoceros*, he describes a town in which the citizens are gradually turning into rhinoceroses—rampaging through the streets, destroying gardens and causing a ruckus. At first people are shocked and horrified—but they gradually yield to the “new normal,” accepting that there is nothing so wrong with being a rhinoceros; in fact, it is those who cling to their humanity who are the real outsiders and dangers to public safety!

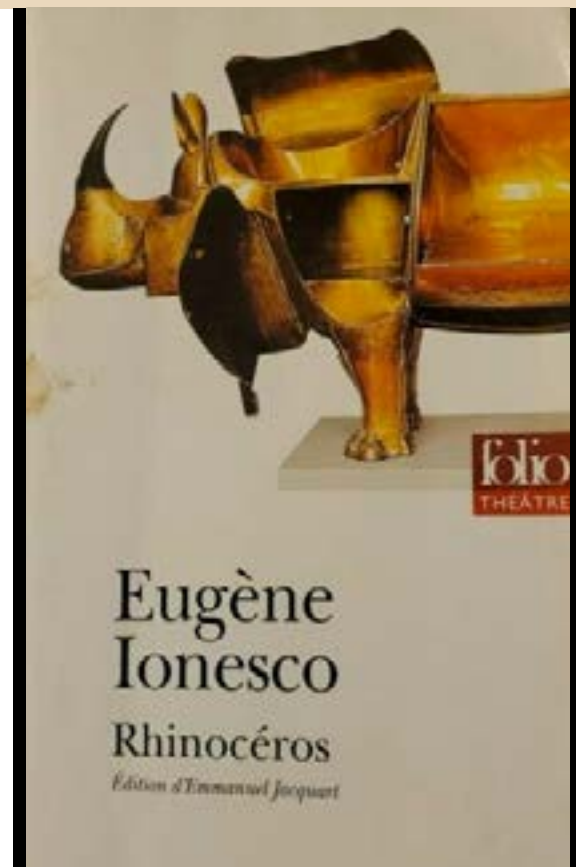
Only five years ago, in September 2015, Pope Francis spoke to a joint session of Congress, outlining a vision of the fundamental values—liberty, equality, compassion and solidarity—that make a country “great.” He did this with reference to four “great” Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton. Weaving a narrative intertwining religious truths with the highest civic ideals, he called for welcoming immigrants and refugees, caring for the earth, ending the death penalty, dedication to the poor and the common good and pursuing the goal of global solidarity.

Five years ago, that message seems like a time capsule from a different era. Did

he already hear what most of us could not?—somewhere on the horizon, the distant hoof beats of the rhinoceros? He could not literally have known that the next year a presidential candidate would campaign under the slogan of “Making America Great Again,” and that, with strong Catholic support, he would go on to pursue an agenda aimed at countering all the policies and “fundamental values” outlined in his speech to Congress.

Yet five years later, I listened to the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast where Attorney General William Barr, fresh from making good on his promise to execute federal prisoners, was awarded the Christifideles Laici award for his “selfless and steadfast service in the Lord’s vineyard.” He was followed by President Trump, who was lauded for his unparalleled commitment to the “culture of life.” And in between, there was a keynote by a respected Catholic bishop who lauded the Christian inspiration behind the Declaration of Independence and the importance of religion in the public square. There were pictures displayed of St. John Paul II in Poland, and even of the President honoring the Shrine of

Someday, many may look back on our time and pretend that it was not we who put children in cages, fiddled while 200,000 died, and applauded those who marched under banners of hate.



In Eugène Ionesco’s 1959 play Rhinoceros, people are first shocked by rhinoceroses rampaging through the streets. They quickly adapt to this “new normal.” The play shows that people will quickly adjust to accepting violence, rejecting humanity, and upending their own values.

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*Roundups,
Regimes, and
Rhinoceroses*

*Pope Francis
spoke to a
joint session
of Congress,
outlining a
vision of the
fundamental
values.*

ROBERT ELLSBERG is the publisher of Orbis Books and the author of many books, most recently, *A Living Gospel: Reading God's Story in Holy Lives* (2019).



JPII, fresh from having bravely, with the help of his attorney general, dispersed demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets to pose with a Bible in the public square.

Someday, many may look back on our time and pretend that it was not we who put children in cages, dismantled environmental regulations, fiddled while 200,000 died, applauded those who marched under banners of hate—or imagine that it was all the work of a regime that was born of nothingness and returned to nothingness.

But we cannot build innocence upon a lie. ✧

This article was previously published on September 24, 2020 online at https://sacredheartuniversity.typepad.com/go_rebuild_my_house/2020/09/building-innocence-on-a-lie It is reprinted here with the publisher's permission.



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Below, please clearly print the names and addresses, including e-mail, of friends you think might be interested in supporting the aims of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

Light in the Darkness

Judy Tydor
Baumel-Schwartz

Chanukah in Buchenwald 1939

In the autumn of 1939 my father, Chaskel Tydor, was incarcerated as a Jewish prisoner in Buchenwald, after having been arrested by the Gestapo at the war's outbreak. He was 36 years old at the time, a businessman who had been born in Poland, raised in Germany, married, and father of two small children who had been sent out of Germany that spring on a *Kindertransport* of Jewish children to Belgium, seeking refuge from Nazi persecution. Arrested as an enemy citizen at the war's outbreak, he was taken from his home in Frankfurt where he and his wife awaited the arrival of immigration visas from England. From that moment on, his fate had been like those Jews in Germany who had been born in Poland and either not deported in October 1938, or, like my father, had been deported but then permitted back into Germany some time in 1939 to wait for immigration visas that would allow them to leave the country and never return. For those whose visas arrived, they left and never looked back. For those like my father whose visas did not arrive before the war's outbreak, their fate was sealed.

Buchenwald was actually their third stop. Originally such Jews arrested at the war's outbreak had usually been taken to prisons near their homes where they were held for several weeks. Later they were transferred to a larger facility, in Chaskel's case, a prison

in Kassel, and from there eventually transported to the concentration camp located in Weimar, that had been established two years earlier in July 1937 as a Nazi detention center and later concentration camp. Taking its name from the nearby beech forest, its famous landmark was the "Goethe oak tree" which stood inside the camp's perimeter. Over 250,000 prisoners passed through the camp during its almost eight-year existence; these included Jews, Poles, political prisoners, Gypsies, criminals, and Prisoners of War. Until 1942, most of the political prisoners in Buchenwald were communists and they were instrumental in the camp's internal administration.

When Chaskel's transport entered Buchenwald, he and the other prisoners were given the usual reception for new inmates. "The Nazi guards stationed at the railway roughly pulled us off the train and we were forced to run through the gate while they rained truncheon blows down on our heads and backs." Those who could not keep up the pace were kicked and pummeled until they lay in the dirt. Chaskel had no time to look at his surroundings as he ran into the camp, he and the other new prisoners were herded into a large hall where they were received by a high-ranking Nazi SS officer. The room was packed with the newcomers who

Arriving at Buchenwald, my father and other prisoners were greeted with this welcome from an SS officer: "The best that you can do is to hang yourself."

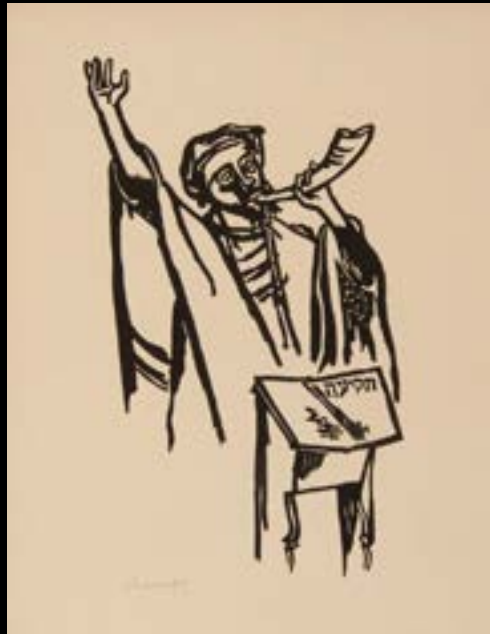


Buchenwald was one of the largest concentration camps established within German borders.

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Light in the Darkness

My father explained that Chanukah was a holiday celebrating when Jews fought back against their oppressors, and actually won!



From a series of 14 wartime prints by a Hungarian Jewish artist honoring the Jewish holidays.

were suddenly ordered to stand at attention. Facing the rows of prisoners, the officer began his “welcoming speech” with the pronouncement: “You should know that this is your last station. From here no one will come out alive. The best that you can do is to hang yourself.”

“That was our entrance into the hell of Buchenwald, our new world,” my father said. “A world turned upside down. This was not just a prison, it was a dreaded Nazi camp.

Most of us had heard about these camps before the war. But who would believe that we would end up in one of them, torn from our parents, our wives, our children?! We moved like robots from one station to another, following commands being barked at us and trying not to feel anything, not to think.” Chaskel’s head was shaved and he was handed a striped shirt and trousers, the usual concentration camp uniform.

Life in Buchenwald followed a set routine. Prisoners were awakened at five-thirty, allowed a short time for washing, dressing and putting the block in order, and then marched to work. Woe to him whose bunk was not arranged in a precise manner or to those responsible for cleaning the barracks table who had left a spot of dirt on the wood. All this had to be carried out in a few minutes every morning and like the other inmates, Chaskel soon learned to do everything with speed if he wished to survive.

My father was not a natural leader, usually preferring to remain in the background, nor was he a particularly vocal person. However, it seems that during his years in the Nazi camps and for a short period afterwards, he went through a metamorphosis. Soon after arriving in Buchenwald he became one of the unofficial leaders of a group of Jewish teenagers incarcerated in the camp. In addition, having rabbinical ordination, although he never functioned as a practicing Rabbi, there were Jews who began turning to him for guidance about religious matters.

From their early days in the camp, religious prisoners kept a *luach*, a Jewish calendar to know when their holidays would occur. The first festival which Chaskel celebrated in Buchenwald less than two months after his arrival was Chanukah. As the first night of Chanukah approached, a number of Jewish prisoners in Buchenwald spoke to him about the upcoming festival. “They came to me and said how wonderful it would be if a few of us could get together and light candles to celebrate the event, hoping that I might be able to figure out how to arrange a clandestine candle lighting ceremony.”

Knowing that such an act, if discovered, might be punishable by flogging, solitary confinement, or even death, he knew that he could not attempt to carry it out on his own. Consequently, my father turned to the *blockeltester* (block elder), a communist-Jewish prisoner named Erich Eisler, for assistance. Eisler initially looked at Chaskel in dismay. Did he really think that it would be possible to put together a Chanukah celebration in Buchenwald in December 1939, almost four months after the war had begun? It was too dangerous, who needed to light candles anyhow, and why was my father bothering him with

matters of religion, etc. But my father appealed to his communist spirit, stating that by not helping them in this matter, he was actually collaborating with the Nazis. Chanukah, he explained to Eisler, was not only a religious holiday but one of Jewish heroism, where Jews fought back against their oppressors, and actually won! After long discussions, the *blockeltester* eventually understood that celebrating Chanukah would awaken the fighting conscience of the Jews in Buchenwald and act as a morally uplifting event. As a result, he gave his tacit approval to the candle lighting event under several conditions.

Continued on next page

Light in the Darkness

Celebrating Chanukah in Buchenwald created “hope in the darkness, giving us courage and strength to survive this gezeirah (evil decree).”



From a series of 14 wartime prints by a Hungarian Jewish artist honoring the Jewish holidays.

PROF. JUDY TYDOR BAUMEL-SCHWARTZ is Director of the Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research, Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

“First,” Eisler said, “you are responsible that the event will not be discovered by the guards. Second, none of the block functionaries will be involved in anything having to do with its organization. Third, the event has to be totally on your own initiative.” If it works, Chaskel should let him know how it went. In any case, Eisler would make sure that he would not be in the block at that time.

Chaskel and his friends went into action. Mobilizing the Jewish prisoners, my father ensured that they would open supply lines to the camp workshops. Prisoners in the carpentry commando constructed a wooden menorah; those from the cleaning department “organized” a tablecloth and paper towels. The shoemakers and tailors obtained candles and wax while those in the kitchen hid food that would round off the celebration: apples, cookies, and even a bit of chocolate. On the afternoon before Chanukah the prisoners began preparing a wing of Block 29 for the event and word went out that after nightfall all Jewish inmates of Buchenwald who wanted to celebrate Chanukah should gather discreetly in the block. Finally, the prisoners also set up a warning system if S.S. men should enter the area. One of the prisoners would stand guard at the window and if they would see any of the Nazi staff members coming towards the block, the entire enterprise would be shut down within seconds.

My father described the event in glowing terms. “The hall was filled to the top and people were still climbing on each other and through the window to get in.” Before the candle lighting ceremony he spoke to them about Chanukah’s history and significance. Just as the Jews who were slaves in Egypt felt hopeless and only a minority held out, thus the Jews in camp should consider themselves such a minority and know that they will hold out in the exile of Buchenwald. “This is the purpose of Chanukah and these lights,” Chaskel concluded. “A hope in the darkness, giving us courage and strength to survive this *gezeirah* (evil decree).”

As the inmates in the packed block stared at the flickering lights in the makeshift menorah, some with tears in their eyes, Eisler’s face appeared at the doorway. The *blockeltester* looked around the room, taking in the prisoners’ faces, the food, the menorah, and then he disappeared once again. For a moment, everyone in the room dreamed that they were free. What did my father think of as he looked around at the group gathering in block 29? Could he even imagine that five years later he would still be a prisoner in a Nazi camp, secretly lighting Chanukah candles in a camp in Poland that did not yet even exist—Auschwitz-Buna.

The Jews in Block 29 continued eating the tiny slices of apple each had gotten, encouraged for a few moments to believe that one day they would again be free. It was a most memorable Chanukah, one they would recall years later, both during and after

the war. Even Eisler remarked to Chaskel that he had been brought up in an assimilated home and until then he knew of Chanukah only by the name as a “festival of lights” which he imagined was like Christmas. But what he saw in the block in Buchenwald made a deep impression on him and his communist friends as it reminded them of their communist solidarity. It was a memorable Chanukah that they would recall for the rest of their lives and strengthen them in moments of despair.

“And so you see,” my father said to me, “how a simple candle and apple can make the difference between life and death, physical or spiritual. It kept us going, it reminded us that we are human beings and Jews. It was a light in the darkness of Buchenwald.” ✧

Some Unsung Heroes

Steven Bowman

Jewish Resistance in a Death Camp

All heroes are dead heroes” is an old Greek tradition that commemorates those individuals either iconically or aniconically, the former in marble, granite, or picture, the latter as saints or martyrs. Today they are memorialized in war cemeteries and legends reflecting the victims of the bloodiest century in world history. Christian tradition reflects the Hebrew midrash of martyrs derived from the Books of the Maccabees, witnesses to their god for whose Name they were tortured and killed as korban, a gift to their respective god. Modern secular Hebrew uses korban for victim, a semantic opposition to the religious tradition of witness. Relatively few of these heroes survived in their time of travail.

The various memorials in museums and calendars to the killing fields of the twentieth century do not include a memorial to a unique moment in the Shoah, an alternative term for the Holocaust, the latter a religious/secular term for the extermination of European Jewry during WWII by bullets and gas. That moment occurred in the Birkenau subcamp of the Auschwitz concentration complex during the afternoon of October 7, 1944, a Saturday that the Nazis celebrated with ritual murder of their Jewish prisoners (compare Abraham and Nimrod as well as the better known three men in a Babylonian oven). The Sonderkommando—the special unit drafted for the disposal of the victim’s ashes—was a modern incarnation of the medieval tradition in Byzantium and Venice of using Jews as executioners and of the French tradition of using Jews as gravediggers, whence the word ‘macabre’ from *mekaver*, an antisemitic tradition reflecting the animosity of Christianity’s millennial anti-Judaism.

The young, strong men in their teens and twenties were drafted from the cattle trains that regularly brought men, women, and children as sheep to slaughter in the gas chambers of Auschwitz II, known as Birkenau. Eleven such kommandos were drafted seriatim to burn the corpses of their families and also included young women (known as the Kanadakommando) to sort and pack their belongings for dispersal among the poor of Germany’s bombed cities. The wealth and jewelry of the victims was distributed among Nazi leaders, the gold of their baggage and even teeth added to the treasury of the Third Reich. The men of the Sonderkommando were themselves gassed and burned after a three-month slave labor tour in the crematoria.

Finally, after the slaughter of over 400,000 Hungarian Jews in the summer of 1944, the last major Jewish community in Europe, the fate of the XIth Sonderkommando neared its end following the decision to reduce its complement. Already in July and August, plans were developed for a camp-wide revolt for August 15, a major Catholic holiday for Mary, the mother of Jesus, derived from the Temple tradition of ancient Jerusalem, when the camp guards

Young Jewish male prisoners called Sonderkommando, forced to work in the gas chambers and then themselves doomed for gassing, planned a revolt.



This is one of four photographs which were smuggled out of the camp in a toothpaste tube and delivered to Polish Resistance fighters. They are the only photos in existence that document what happened near the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

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David Dario Gabbai (1922–2020) was a Greek Sephardic Jewish member of the Sonderkommando who launched an armed rebellion at Birkenau on October 7, 1944. Photo from USC Shoah Foundation.



Isosif Barouch, a Greek army officer from Ioannina, is said to have led the Greek Jews during the revolt

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would be inevitably drunk. Among the planners in the Sonderkommando were captured army officers (Polish, Russian, Greek) and veterans including Greek Jews who were line officers during the war against Italy and Germany and veterans who fought with the resistance in the Greek mountains. On that October 7th, Saturday, the Sonderkommando was prepared for the revolt using the same plan as that for August 15th which had been postponed by the major camp resistance group (composed of Polish Communists who feared a general massacre).

During the roll call on that fateful day, the numbers of the Greek Jews consisting of some 300 Sephardim and Romaniotes were called out announcing their death sentence. The complexity of their plan was sabotaged by the timing of the Nazi actions which upset their planned schedule for the revolt. Nonetheless, the Greeks charged their captors. Armed military reinforcements quickly arrived and after a brief conflict, the survivors were shot. The Greek prisoners in one crematorium, poorly armed with few weapons and grenades, powder for which was supplied by the female slaves in the arms factory in the main camp, held out until the end and—in true Greek fashion—blew up the crematorium. They died with their Greek and Hebrew national anthems on their lips. One small group that had succeeded in escaping the camp was tracked down and immolated in the barn where they were resting. Bottom line: Half of the Sonderkommando contingent numbering 660 males was killed, their bodies burned by their coreligionists.

The legacy of this revolt was a stimulus for hope and even for survival among the prisoners and more so in later camps to which the Auschwitz prisoners were dispersed in the wake of the camp's closure. These men had died as free men responsible for their own fate rather than as sheep to slaughter as were the vast majority of the victims of Birkenau and the Auschwitz complex with its 39 sub-camps. That heroic tradition has been obscured by the feelings of shame of the few Sonderkommando survivors on the one hand and the emphasis of historians of the role of Ashkenazim in the planning and recording of the revolt events.

Only the Greeks remembered their role and participation, their voices muted by the inability to communicate in Yiddish with the Ashkenazim who spoke mainly Central and Eastern European languages. Even so, some of the Greeks did speak German, French, Italian, and Hebrew but linguistic tribes were mostly separated in the camp, especially since the mass arrival of the Hungarians whom no one could understand unless they had other language skills.

Still, a few Greeks survived, and their stories have been recorded to assist historians to reconstruct this unique event only matched by the lengthier rebellion of the Warsaw Ghetto during Passover 1943. That earlier revolt is famously recorded in radio, memoirs, Nazi reports, and histories galore; the latter is incompletely remembered as well as the centrality of its Greek Jews, many veterans of the war with Italy and Germany and the Greek resistance mostly ignored. Slowly this silence is being rectified in recovered memoirs in print and video (although several recent films on the revolt totally ignore the Greek role!), scholarly investigation, and publications.¹ And now a documentary is planned and in its initial phase hopefully to be completed later this year. ☆

The legacy of this revolt was a stimulus for hope and survival.

1. See *Testimonies of Resistance. Representations of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Sonderkommando*, edited by Nicholas Chare & Dominic Williams (2018). Especially pertinent is the essay, "Greeks in the Birkenau Sonderkommando" (pp. 265-84) written by the author of this article.

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Richard
Middleton-Kaplan

Keeping Memory Alive

Why and How Holograms Should Be Central to Holocaust Teaching in the Age of No Survivors

The world has long known that a night would come when only one living witness to the Holocaust still breathes—and that then, after that last survivor's passing, no one would remain who could testify first-hand to Nazi horrors. Seventy-five years after the end of World War II and the liberation of the camps, the prospect looms with increasing urgency. Many experts predict that time will arrive in five years to ten years. A January 2020 mortality projection estimates that the number of survivors will dwindle to zero by 2035—and that projection was made before COVID-19 began ravaging high-risk senior populations, accelerating the rate at which survivors pass away. This year's Obituary sections teem with names of people who survived the Shoah but not COVID-19.

Soon no one will remain to refute Holocaust deniers by showing a tattooed number or by saying "I was there." We will lose the authenticity and authority that survivors carry.

What are the implications of this loss for educators? How will it alter classroom practice and the ability to guide students toward a meaningful connection with, and deepened understanding of, the Holocaust?

Consider that a person who was 20 years old at liberation would be 95 now. As these survivors age, their ability to speak in person diminishes, because common aging conditions limit their ability to travel and to withstand the demands of speaking at length about traumatic experience. Younger survivors would have been children during the Holocaust—toddler-survivors are already in their late 70s—and their memories are subject to the fallibility or irretrievability of childhood memories...yet they will likely be our last living witnesses.

One and a half million Jewish children were murdered in the Holocaust. Today's living witnesses were their classmates, playmates, brothers, and sisters. Survivors, especially child survivors, reach the child inside

"I wonder: If I indeed turn out to be the Last Witness, will my death mark the beginning of the Great Forgetting?"

—Joseph Polak,

"The Last Witness" (2012).

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Hologram technology converts videotaped survivor testimony into a 3D holographic speaking image.



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each listener through a connection with the child inside the now aged survivor.

In a future world with no survivors, teachers should discuss with students the following questions: What was the value of having survivors speak in person? What difference would that opportunity have made to you? What would you have asked? What is lost by not having access to a living survivor? What ways are available to surmount the distance between we the living and the dead? What do you think might enable you to humanize the “It” in images of emaciated victims staring out vacantly from behind concentration camp barbed wire into a “Thou”?

EDUCATIONAL RISKS AND REWARDS OF HOLOGRAM TECHNOLOGY

Holocaust museums and educators have been preparing for more than a decade for the inevitable day when there will be no living survivors. “The world’s Holocaust memorials are scrambling to react,” Naftali Bendavid wrote in 2013 (from “A Race to Preserve the Voices of Holocaust’s Last Survivors,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 Dec. 2013).

The Illinois Holocaust and Museum Center (ILHMEC) had begun working with

technology that converts videotaped survivor testimony into a 3D holographic speaking image and furthermore creates an answer bank from the testimony that enables interactive Q&A exchanges with audiences. Created in association with the USC Shoah Foundation, with technology developed by the USC Institute for Creative Technologies from a concept by Heather Maio of Conscience Display, “Dimensions in Testimony” appeared in pilot form at ILHMEC in 2014, became part of ILHMEC’s permanent exhibition in 2015, and is now viewable at Holocaust museums in Dallas, Houston, Terre Haute, and Stockholm. The interactive technology will soon come to the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood, Ohio. A feature by Lesley Stahl about hologram testimony on the April 5, 2020 airing of *60 Minutes* illustrates the public’s fascination with the technology.

With 3D interactive hologram technology there comes ethical responsibility to use the testimonies with sensitivity toward survivors, their family members, space for silence, and the historical record. What other risks come with hologram testimonies? To name a few:

- ▶ If the hologram answered questions with inappropriate responses, the illusion of having an actual interactive conversation with a survivor could be shattered.
- ▶ The hologram must not seem like a parlor trick or kitschy, creepy, or ghostly.
- ▶ The holograms could make the speakers seem less real rather than more real.
- ▶ There is a risk that the technology plays into the hands of Holocaust deniers, who could argue that all this Holocaust business is a bunch of phantoms and that “testimonies” are constructed out of words patched together. The technology must be absolutely transparent to all audiences and must be safeguarded against tampering. We need not overstate this concern, though; deniers already discount the testimony and tattoos of living survivors, so hologram testimony will be no different.
- ▶ Over-reliance on holograms as an educational tool could result in educators not seeking other innovative ways of conveying the enormity of Shoah loss. Perhaps the loss of any living survivors will be far more moving than any attempt to preserve them.

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The producer of Schindler’s List, Branko Lustig (1932–2019), said: “I know when I go I will be one of the last survivors who is working in the film industry...and when I go there will be nobody anymore who can build a set and if somebody makes a mistake or something, to tell him how exactly it was looking, how exactly it was looking when somebody was hanged, and how exactly it was looking when somebody was beaten, or how exactly the roll call was. I remember when the people were dying and they was telling us, ‘Abi gezunt and tell to the world how we died and this should never happen again.’”

—Branko Lustig in the documentary film Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust (directed by Daniel Anker, 2004)

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► If we see these holograms, what in turn do we lose sight of?

Teachers can invite students to contemplate those risks against these appeals and benefits:

- Hologram testimonies deny Hitler any posthumous victories. Survivors' voices are not silenced ever, not even in death.
- We can continue to hear and witness survivor testimony long after survivors are gone.
- As Stephen Smith, Executive Director of the USC Shoah Foundation, says, "We understand very well the power of conversation between Holocaust survivors and the younger generation. ... Conversation allows you to learn in a way that most suits your interests, and that's where the deepest learning takes place. ... we're going to enable them to be able to learn through their own curiosity."
- Holographic survivor testimony offers a direct, emotionally visceral way of breaking through young people's ignorance about the Holocaust and helping them connect not to a vague concept or distant historical event but to a human image that commands their attention and empathy.
- Holograms offer the next-best experience of survivor's moral credibility. Holograms keep the human dimension of the Holocaust present for our students in a way that statistics, documents, and photographs often do not.

Hologram testimonies deny Hitler any posthumous victories. Survivors' voices are not silenced ever, not even in death.

As with the risks described above, these benefits might be discussed with students, encouraging them to think critically about ways of remembering, about how history comes to us not as raw fact but always mediated, always requiring context and critical inquiry while demanding respect for the integrity and humanity of those testifying witnesses.

PHANTOM ENCOUNTERS AND AUTHENTIC ETHICS

Concerned with how the last survivor's death will alter Holocaust education, we can draw from Primo Levi's wisdom regarding what survives after the survivors. Speaking of Mala Zimetbaum's escape from Auschwitz-Birkenau's women's camp, Levi writes, "In fact, I would like the memory of it to survive" ("Stereotypes").

Holographic testimonies offer a potently vivid way of keeping memory alive with a simulacrum, and they add components of interactive Q&A not available through text, film, or simple text and video recordings.

One challenge for Holocaust educators is how to make the lives of Holocaust survivors matter to students, how to take students behind and inside the statistics, the pervasive black-and-white iconography of skeletal hollow-eyed creatures, so distant from our students in time, place, and circumstance. A living survivor can help students cross the chasm that separates them, and particularly a survivor who endured the Shoah at an age close to the students' own. Once those survivors have passed, perhaps we need not despair of putting our students in dialogue with those who seem so different—and in dialogue with history as living history even after those who lived it are no more. At the same time, we must



Speaking of hologram testimony, Stephen Smith, Executive Director of the USC Shoah Foundation, says, "That moment of dialogue where I ask my question and I get it answered, it's magic in the room when that happens, and we wanted to try and find a way to preserve that as best possible." Photo credit: USC Shoah Foundation.

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RICHARD MIDDLETON-KAPLAN'S most recent publication is "Refractions of Holocaust Memory in Stanisław Lem's Science Fiction," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture*, edited by Victoria Aarons and Phyllis Lassner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

prepare students for the dialogic hologram encounter so that we do not merely replace skeletons with equally unreal phantoms that have no more humanity than a laser light show or a magician's stage illusion.

The component of dialogue is crucial, especially for students at a formative age who are constructing their identities, their ways of being and interacting in the world, and their relationships to others. Recognizing the humanity of the distant Other constitutes a necessary step in learning to treat others not as instruments to be used for one's own gratification but as having individuality and humanity. If we bring students into dialogue with survivor holograms, then those holograms must not be deployed in an instrumental fashion; rather, the inherent dignity of the speakers must never be forgotten.

In many ways, our lives as Holocaust educators will become narrower and poorer, bereft of the presence of survivors as they dwindle and then disappear. Yet the holograms hold out hope that we can find, for ourselves and for students, a different kind of fullness. In what ways can we help our students engage dialogically with survivors, with or without holograms, that will aid students in developing selves informed by both historical understanding and empathy?

May our search for those ways not prove to be the futile chasing of a phantom but rather a rescue of the real from the great forgetting of oblivion. ☆

A version of this article will appear in the journal *Prism: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators*, Volume 13, forthcoming in 2021.

Survivor holograms could help students who are at a crucial stage of identity formation to develop empathy for others.