Bringing the Holocaust to America

By Richard Libowitz

The United States maintained its neutrality through the first years of the great conflict which had been raging across Europe since 1914. Supporters of President Woodrow Wilson used the slogan, “He kept us out of war,” as a refrain in his successful campaign for re-election. The tune changed in 1917, however, as America entered the fray on the side of England and France. American doughboys joined the struggle with a now supportive American public singing that “the Yanks are comin’ over there,” renaming sauerkraut “Liberty Salad” and calling frankfurters hot dogs. Once the armistice stopped the fighting, the troops came home and the Treaty of Versailles ended the war, the country turned its back on Europe and the world in general. Despite Wilson’s most strenuous efforts, the United States rejected membership in the League of Nations, passed rigorous immigration restriction laws and generally maintained an isolationist policy for the next two decades that even so astute a politician as Franklin Roosevelt could not easily change.

A similar pattern seemed to develop at the end of World War II. With peace attained, many Americans preferred to put the war, its memories and lessons behind them. Elie Wiesel has often said the most important action to be taken about the Shoah is “to tell the story.” Stripped of mind-numbing statistics, multiple names on an overfull map and the names of politicians, generals, perpetrators, rescuers and bystanders, the Holocaust is a story of human tragedy and moral failure rarely approached in human history. When the war ended, it was a story few were willing to tell or even approach. The United
States had new goals, a new president and a new enemy—the Soviet Union. The beginning of the Cold War and subsequent anti-Communist inquisitions had major impact on domestic thinking as well as on American foreign policy. There seemed neither time nor place to reflect on an uncomfortably brutal past.

No matter how moved some Americans may have been by the visual and written testimonies beginning to emerge from the concentration camps, there seemed to be no great impetus to deviate from the policies that had limited immigration quotas from Eastern Europe since the early 1920s and had placed additional stumbling blocks in the path of would-be refugees in the 1930s. Post-war America, including the Jewish community, failed to welcome survivors of the Holocaust with open arms. Thousands of Jews lingered in Displaced Persons’ Camps, applying for visas and waiting for something to happen. Those who were permitted entry received assistance from various Jewish agencies concerning their physical needs, but their psychological concerns were ignored; no one wanted to hear the survivors’ stories, no one seemed willing to listen. Again and again, the survivors were told they were in America now, that they had to make a new life in the new world, and that the past should be forgotten. And, for the most part, the survivors took the hint; many would not discuss their experiences for decades.

Still, the past had not been completely forgotten nor had it been totally ignored. Photojournalists and reporters had been posting stories since the first concentration camps were liberated, most notably, Margaret Bourke-White’s photographs of Buchenwald survivors published in the May 7, 1945 issue of Life. Gruesome pictures were included in newsreels playing in movie theaters even before the war had ended. The International War Crimes Trials at Nuremberg were covered by a legion of reporters representing various wire services, newspapers, magazines and radio networks. Even the new medium, television, included aspects of the Holocaust in both its dramatic and public affairs broadcasts. However, the fact that some materials were available to the American public did not mean that the public took great note of them. Just as in the 1930s, while it was possible, if one looked hard enough, to read about the entire history of the Third Reich as it developed (Ross; Baron), the general public, nonetheless, was not inclined to include the Shoah among its major concerns. It would take more than two decades and the rise of a new generation to bring the Shoah to the prominence that we tend to take for granted today.
THE 1950s

By 1950 most people felt that the United States had left behind the struggles of 1930s Depression and 1940s world conflict. The GI Bill had provided the resources to quit the crowded streets of the northern cities for the new housing developments and open spaces of the suburbs. From one Levittown to another, America was engaged in a building explosion; new streets lined by tract housing, occupied by veterans whose growing families attended new schools and worshipped within the churches and synagogues that had followed their flocks to larger, airier quarters. Television had become a central facet of family life, with network programming filling the evenings and uniting diverse sections of the country to watch *I Love Lucy, The Ed Sullivan Show, Gunsmoke* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*.

Conventional wisdom, writes Jeffrey Shandler in his study of the presentation of the Holocaust on American television, is that the Shoah was a subject to be avoided by the networks for several decades after the war. Shandler counters that the Holocaust “as a concept . . . developed since the middle of the twentieth century in a dynamic and complex process, which has produced an extensive public debate over what may be considered a legitimate work of Holocaust memory culture, whether on television or in any other form” (xvii). The Holocaust was not an unknown topic for the new medium, but many of the discussions were reserved for Sunday morning religious programming, not likely to attract large or heterogeneous audiences.

A network of interstate highways was being built, to tie together north, south, east and west, supplying pathways for the automobiles being produced by Detroit in ever increasing numbers. The cars themselves reflected the growing optimism of the country—ever-lengthening, fins, bigger, more powerful engines that allowed drivers to take on ever greater distances. Airline travel was still a luxury for most people but newer planes, able to carry larger payloads of passengers farther in shorter time, were bringing down the costs, and Americans were on the move. Further atomic and hydrogen bomb tests proclaimed America’s dominant military power to the world. Still, tens of thousands of GIs were fighting in Korea and the Soviet Union also had atomic weapons. The infamous McCarthy investigations and House Un-American Activities Committee hearings generated a paranoia focused on Communist sympathizers and their plots, resulting in damaged reputations, ruined careers—all in the name of patriotism.

The American Jewish community, as well, was undergoing a rapid metamorphosis in this decade. The postwar period was one in which American Jewry
achieved a greater blending into general American society, as Will Herberg affirmed in his groundbreaking study of religion in America, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. There was a new acceptance of Judaism as a legitimate American religious faith, so long as it was practiced unobtrusively, in a manner that did not challenge Protestant norms. Many young Jewish veterans used the GI Bill to attend college, married and joined the movement to the suburbs, leaving the urban Jewish neighborhoods of their youth. Native born and confident of their identity as Americans, this generation was leaving the blue-collar jobs of the sort that had employed many of their parents; they moved on to white-collar professions, ownership of independent businesses and entry into the upper echelons of the medical, legal and teaching professions. They joined Reform or Conservative synagogues with parking lots, playgrounds, gymnasium and swimming pools, became members of lodges, bowling leagues and the PTA. They tended to vote Democratic, the party of Roosevelt, and they also supported many social causes. Their children joined the Cub Scouts and Brownies, played Little League and complained about going to Hebrew School on weekday afternoons. Israel was largely viewed as a faraway land, populated by Jewish farmer-soldiers who danced the *hora* and sang “*Hava Nagila*”; while they bought Israel Bonds and proclaimed the wonders of a people who brought water to the desert, few actually made *aliyah* to the new state. The various American Jewish defense organizations were more concerned with domestic situations involving anti-Semitism than lobbying the federal government for support of Israel.

Research pertaining to the Shoah advanced throughout the decade. The number of scholarly monographs on the Third Reich and the Holocaust increased annually, some becoming early standards within the field (Baron 68–71), but few penetrated into the consciousness of the general public. The popular American literature of the 1950s included many books of special Jewish interest, several even making best seller lists (Asch; Baruch; Golden), but two books with Holocaust themes or sub-themes attracted particularly significant audiences, Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl* and Leon Uris’ novel, *Exodus*. While neither book can be said to have created a ground swell of interest in the Shoah among American readers, each would increase a general awareness of the event itself, particularly among younger, more impressionable readers.

Anne Frank’s diary attracted a large readership in the United States, as it would in many other translations around the world. The poignant words of the child in hiding, her saga of the relationships and clashes among the people who lived with her in the secret annex, her optimism about the eventual triumph of
good in the world and her tragic end all touched sensitive chords in the audience, as would the stage play and film that followed within a decade. Although a foreign story, Anne's hopes and dreams were typical of teenaged girls everywhere; and, while she may have been Jewish, that term seemed more adjective than noun. Hence she could be broadly accepted as a kind of Jewish persona of every young girl. The diary mentioned the Franks observing a holiday or two, but there was not a lot of concern with the details of Jewish life and theological distinctions between Christianity and Judaism were not a topic of her discourse. “Jew” was little more than a synonym for “victim.” Anne and her family were victims an audience could accept, pity and embrace—a fact not lost on those who later wrote the stage and cinematic adaptations of the story. The transmutation of Anne Frank from Jewish victim to universal symbol of tragically lost youth fostered the continuing acceptance of her story. Anne Frank became a universal martyr, but the reading and acceptance of her story by the public cannot be said to have advanced American knowledge of the Holocaust beyond the most subliminal level.

*Exodus* appeared on bookstore shelves in 1958, spent nineteen weeks atop the best-seller lists and was the best selling book in America for 1959. The topic of many a rabbi’s sermon and sisterhood luncheon, Uris’ novel contained all the ingredients a general readership might want; a strong and handsome hero, a beautiful heroine with a tragic past, ill-fated lovers, feuding brothers, evil villains, action scenes galore—all set against an exotic foreign backdrop. Although the central story was a fictionalized account of the postwar years leading up to the creation of the State of Israel, the opening subplot centered on *Aliyah Bet*, the illegal immigration efforts to resettle Holocaust survivors in Mandate Palestine in defiance of British immigration restrictions. Again, most of the characters were Jewish, but few were portrayed as religiously observant; the Jewish hero, Ari Ben-Canaan, was a determinedly secular Palestinian, while the heroine, Kitty Fremont, was a Christian from the American Midwest. A film version was released in the early 1960s; perhaps with an eye on the larger audience, several of the primary roles were portrayed by performers who did not appear stereotypically Jewish.

*Exodus*, though a story about Israel, included several characters who had experienced the Holocaust—in particular, Karen Clement, hidden and protected by a Danish Christian family, and Dov Landau, a young survivor of Auschwitz who sought revenge for his suffering and joined the terrorist Irgun as soon as he reached Palestine. Karen seeks to soften Dov’s hatred and mistrust of non-Jews by recalling the goodness of the Hansen family, while Dov
comforts Karen when her search for her scientist father concludes in a psychiatric hospital, German torture having left only a shell of the man she had long sought. *Exodus* was, most of all, an action story about tough Jews, playing against and cutting across stereotypical images of Jews as passive rather than active, cerebral rather than physical, victims rather than heroes. The American Jewish audience loved it and the general audience accepted it.\(^5\)

As the 1950s drew to a close, William L. Shirer published his massive *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, the first major history of Hitler’s Germany to be written for an English-speaking audience. The author had been a correspondent stationed in Germany, beginning in the 1930s; his book became a best seller, despite its 1,245 page length.\(^6\) It remained a standard source of information for decades and remains in print today.

A second book which appeared at the time was quite different in length, style, and tone from Uris’ novels or Shirer’s chronicle. *Night* was an English translation of the French version of a Yiddish book, *Un die Welt Hot Geshvign* (“And the World Was Silent”). Published in Argentina, the slender text was written by a young Hungarian-born Israeli newspaper correspondent named Elie Wiesel. Still selling after forty-five years (and recently on the best-seller’s list, thanks to an endorsement from Oprah Winfrey), there is nothing optimistic in *Night*, nothing positive, nothing hopeful. The fight for survival waged by Eliezer and his father through their months in Auschwitz and on the death march thereafter exhaust one, leaving the reader filled with sadness and despair. The book was not a best-seller; it did not inspire anyone, but it became a somber presence in Jewish literature, to be turned to when one was ready to go beyond the optimism of Anne Frank to the now familiar chilling words:

> Never shall I forget that night, that first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

> Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

> Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never (44).
But if Wiesel was unable to forget, the American public was not yet prepared to remember with this level of intensity.

THE 1960s
In the early 1960s, America’s attention was focuses upon the space race and the Communist threat. The inauguration of John F. Kennedy marked a transition—the accession to power of a new generation, born in the twentieth century, tested by Depression and tempered in world war. The optimism of what would come to be called “Camelot” would soon be offset, however, by the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the building of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. On the domestic front, civil rights demonstrations—begun in the 1950s—filled southern streets, sidewalks, and jails as well as northern newspapers. Many rabbis spoke from their pulpits in sympathy with the cause of civil rights, and young Jews joined in, as marchers, Freedom Bus riders, voter registration activists and—as in the case of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner—the victims of racist backlash.

The activism of the Kennedy administration and the moral passion of Martin Luther King, Jr. further stimulated these young, largely second-generation native-born American Jews to participate in causes that Jewish tradition or teachings might have endorsed. The image of Abraham Joshua Heschel standing next to Martin Luther King, Jr., during the march in Selma, Alabama, a rabbi and a Baptist minister together as Americans, underscored the findings of Will Herberg from 1955 and 1960, that a non-specific empathy with Judaism was being accepted by American culture as a legitimate—if not quite equal—American identity (231–53). This involvement of the first members of the Baby Boom Generation—with their elder brothers and sisters—was only a foretaste of the turbulence that would envelope the country by decade’s end. Before the morass that was the Vietnam War, three events occurred that helped to invigorate Jewish identity, raise public concern for the well-being of the State of Israel and arouse unprecedented American interest and investigation about the Holocaust.

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, on the evening of May 11, 1960, agents of the Mossad, Israel’s secret service, kidnapped a middle-aged man shortly after he alit from a bus on his way home from work. Initially insisting his name was Ricardo Klement, the man soon admitted he was SS officer Adolf Eichmann, former head of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Berlin and the Reich Central Security Office (dealing with Jewish affairs and evacuation) and
among the most wanted of Nazi leaders. Secreted out of Argentina, Eichmann was brought to Israel where, despite protests from the Argentine government, he was held for many months leading up to a public trial that presented the facts of the Holocaust before a world that had either never been very familiar with them or had long before put them out of mind.

In Israel, interest in the trial was so great that the Israel Broadcasting Authority used the event to establish the country’s first television station, and television receivers were placed in storefronts so that the citizenry—most of whom did not own a TV—could view the continuing broadcast of the trial.

In the United States, the ABC television network regularly devoted several minutes of its late-night news broadcast to the day’s events at the trial and made available to the public a copy of the charges levied against Eichmann. For a younger generation, too young to remember or born after World War II and the horrors of the Shoah, the trial served as an introduction to an event largely unmentioned at home or in their school history books (see Epstein). It may have been difficult for many to believe that the ordinary-looking man with the dark-rimmed eyeglasses who sat, day after day, in a bullet-proof glass cubicle in the court room, had worn the Death’s Head insignia and bore responsibility for millions of deaths in the camps. For survivors and some other members of the generation who had lived through that period, the trial reawakened memories and raised consideration of the events for the first time in years, if ever.

While the story of Eichmann’s capture, his trial and subsequent execution began to stir memories, a later series of events in Israel created the impetus that led to an upsurge in Jewish identity and inquiry in America of the Shoah, including a much more systematic investigation of the darkest times in modern Jewish history. The growing tensions and fears of May, 1967, followed by the seemingly miraculous events of the Six-Day War awakened among young American Jews. Largely third-generation Americans—the baby boomers—were not yet old enough to have experienced the remaining social and professional prejudices with which their parents were so well acquainted. Many had grown up in the new neighborhoods, sharing with their Gentile friends Cub Scouts and Brownies, Davy Crockett hats and hula hoops before the folk music revival and then "Beatlemania" put guitars in their hands and love beads around their necks. Now, they had begun attending college, in numbers incomparable to those of previous generations. For them, the Six-Day War fostered an upsurge in Jewish identity and a personal identification with the State of Israel—even among otherwise secular young Jews—that had not manifested itself before, nor had it been apparent in many of their elders. Oddly enough, a
remark by Martin Luther King, Jr., uttered just prior and in a context unrelated to Israel or the Six-Day War, played a contributory role in this new Jewish positivism. Following the lead of previous speakers, King had used the phrase “Black is beautiful” in a speech, meaning that a Negro seeking equal rights and opportunities in America need not abandon his or her distinctive African traditions and cultural identity. King’s apparent approval of African cultural particularism—an apparent rebuff of the melting pot theory that had excluded Blacks anyway—gave an imprimatur to distinctiveness that many minority groups—and donors to liberal causes—quickly embraced. By midsummer of 1967, a number of groups were asserting their cultures with buttons—bearing declarations of “Black Power,” “Irish Power,” “Italian Power,” “Indian Power,” “Polish Power,” and “Jewish Power”—which began to be worn on the shirts and jackets of largely youthful advocates of each cause. Over the next few years, growing numbers of young American Jews traveled to Israel, as tourists and volunteers to work on the kibbutzim, or as students in the suddenly burgeoning semester and one-year programs sponsored by American and Israeli universities as well as by the Israel government and the Jewish Agency.\(^\text{11}\)

We have already noted how the box office success of the 1960 motion picture *Exodus* spread a positive and sympathetic portrait of Jews and Israel to a large viewing audience. A second film released during this period created a different mood. An adaptation of a telecast from *Playhouse 90* in 1959, *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) was unlike the many World War II battle films that continued to be produced during the 1960s; attention focused upon a segment of the Third Reich’s leadership and, therefore, upon Holocaust perpetrators. An international cast brought star power to this fictionalized version of the War Crimes Trials held in the immediate post-war years. Spencer Tracy starred as Dan Haywood, an American jurist presiding as Chief Justice during the trials of former judges in the Third Reich.\(^\text{12}\) The audience was presented with a variety of defendants, from the staunch Nazi Emil Hahn (Werner Klemperer) to the noble Ernst Janning (Burt Lancaster), who had known his actions were contradictory to the legal system to which he had devoted his life but who continued to act in accordance with Party policies and now was prepared to confess his acts and accept his punishment. Director Stanley Kramer included actual film footage of the concentration camps, which was utilized as evidence during the trial. For many in the audience, too young to have seen the newsreels fifteen years earlier, this was the first time these now-familiar images were giving broad public viewing. In the film’s final scenes, after the Nazis have been found guilty and sentence has been pronounced upon them, Haywood
is depicted visiting Janning. The convicted Nazi-judge thanks the American for the manner in which the trial had been conducted and gives him a stack of papers, files on as many of the Nazi-era cases as he can recall. Haywood accepts the papers but again rebukes the German for having acted as he had.\textsuperscript{13}

The film was well received by audiences and critics alike, garnering many awards around the world.\textsuperscript{14} Its acceptance by the American public may have been as much a response to the A-list cast as to the story itself, but the fact remains that a producer (Stanley Kramer) felt he could include actual scenes out of the Holocaust in a major commercial film.

Two highly controversial dramas reached Broadway during the 1960s. While Richard Burton was starring in \textit{Hamlet} and Carol Channing dominated the stage in \textit{Hello Dolly}, \textit{Der Stellvertreter}, a lengthy work by West German playwright Rolf Hochhuth, debuted in Berlin, and had its initial English-language performances as \textit{The Representative} in London. In a shorter version, it opened on Broadway February 26, 1964 as \textit{The Deputy}, where it ran for 316 performances. Incurring audience catcalls, demonstrations and picketing in Europe, the play is the story of Father Riccardo Fontana, S. J., a naïve young priest whose father, Count Fontana, is counsel to the pope. Father Fontana has been sent to Berlin, where he meets Gerstein, a Christian SS officer with a conscience. Gerstein informs Fontana of the massacres of Jews and asks for papal intervention. Having been confronted, the pope agrees to make a general statement of concern for the oppressed, but refuses to make any direct reference to death camps. Disheartened by the refusal to help, Father Fontana eventually sacrifices his own life, substituting himself for a Jewish prisoner selected for the gas chamber. The young priest’s passionate anguish stands in sharp distinction to the pope, making the play a clear condemnation of Pope Pius XII and his public silence throughout the Holocaust. Conservative Catholics were quick to condemn the play and rushed to the defense of the late pontiff.\textsuperscript{15} Coming so soon after the invitations to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue of Vatican II, \textit{The Deputy}, written by a Lutheran, was seen by some as a step backwards. Other critics were more positive in tone. James H. Nichols, a Protestant who served as an observer at Vatican II, was critical of the theatrical merits of the play, calling the portrayal of the Pope “dramatically unconvincing,” but he added, “The function of such a play as this is precisely to make men acknowledge and test their deepest religious differences in a dialogue, not to deny they have any” (112).

Jewish reactions to the play have varied. In 1999, in an essay devoted to the Vatican statement, “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,” David Novak wrote:
Rolf Hochhuth’s 1963 play *The Deputy* . . . [which] builds on the plausible assumption that the Pope did know about the mass extermination of the Jews from 1942 on, raised the question of why the Pope didn’t publicly condemn what the Nazis were doing to the Jews. On that question, the jury is still out. If we assume that the Pope knew what was happening, then the question is whether his public silence was an act of moral cowardice or an act of moral prudence.

Those who make the case for moral cowardice argue that the Pope feared to upset the Nazis under whose control he was living during the German occupation of Italy. Furthermore, he had always seemed more concerned with the danger of communism, with its explicit anti-Christian and anti-Catholic bias, than he had been concerned with Nazism. . . . Those who make the case for moral prudence note that the Pope reasonably feared that many other Catholics, especially the clergy (who would be taken as his agents), would be killed if he spoke out. There is also, of course, the question of whether public criticism by the Pope of Nazi policies would have had any positive effect. It might well even have been counterproductive.

Because moral judgment in this case requires much more historical inquiry, one can hardly be conclusive about either judgment. The case is further complicated by the fact that we are dealing with a moral judgment that if unfavorable would be for a sin of omission rather than a sin of commission. No one could say that the Pope actually spoke or acted positively on behalf of the Nazi regime (as did some bishops), and certainly not on behalf of the crimes of the Nazis.

The second play to induce consternation among some viewers, *The Man in the Glass Booth*, opened on Broadway September 26, 1968, and enjoyed a run of 269 performances, closing May 17, 1969.16 British actor Donald Pleasance starred as Arthur Goldman, a Jewish businessman with a proclivity for making anti-Semitic remarks. Convinced he is actually SS Colonel Adolf Dorff, Israeli agents capture Goldman and, when he does not refute the charge, bring him to Israel for trial. Goldman/Dorff seems to revert to his Nazi past; he wears an SS uniform as he sits in his bulletproof box during the trial, boasting about Hitler and atrocities, until a spectator announces that the defendant really is a Jew. Goldman, it seems, wishes to be a martyr, to provide some sort of atonement and retribution for the crimes done to his people.
The play, so clearly based upon events of the Eichmann capture and trial, was not well received by the critics. Donald Pleasance received rave reviews for his performance (and won a Tony as Best Actor), but the reviewer for *Time* wrote that the play “recapitulates the past without transforming it. It raises the stale questions of German guilt, Jewish passivity and the paranoiac personality of the archkiller, along with a recital of atrocities. But it offers no fresh illumination.”

Television presentations concerning the Holocaust were not numerous in the early portion of the decade; although former Nazis and concentration camp survivors would appear as characters in various episodic television series, usually detective mysteries or court dramas, and references to the camps became more common, as some terminology became familiar to American audiences. One different and notable exception to this norm was an episode of the series *The Twilight Zone*. Airing on CBS on November 10, 1961, “Death’s Head Revisited” told the story of the unrepentant SS Captain Lutze, who makes a nostalgic visit to Dachau many years after the war. Intending to reminisce, he is instead confronted by the ghosts of the men he tortured and killed. Tried and convicted by the shades of his victims, he is sentenced to feel the pain they had known, a punishment which costs him his sanity.

A far different view of the Third Reich debuted on the ABC network on September 17, 1965. *Hogan’s Heroes* was a situation comedy about a group of Allied prisoners of war who were, in fact, the masters of Stalag 13 (their POW camp), from which, its bumbling Commandant, Colonel Wilhelm Klink, boasted, no one had ever escaped and within which the overweight and unaware Sergeant Schultz saw and heard “nothing.” Led by the dashing Colonel Hogan (Bob Crane), the prisoners eat gourmet meals, maintain radio contact with London and constantly slip out of camp to romance local *fräuleins*, perform acts of sabotage, and rescue Allied fliers and spies, despite the efforts of evil Nazi generals and diabolical Gestapo agents. A farcical production with little connection to history, the series generated some early complaints for making light of such dark times but enjoyed good ratings and a long television life (168 episodes) before beginning syndicated reruns.

THE 1970s
Stirred by the Six-Day War and emboldened by the wave of activism sweeping college campuses throughout the late 1960s and early 70s, Jewish students joined in the call for curricular reforms, breaking away from the “canon” of
traditional liberal arts subjects. Departments of history, philosophy, sociology, English, religion, and political science were requested, implored, and, in some cases, commanded to add course offerings recognizing the existence and significance of heretofore generally ignored groups. The three fields which most benefited from this expansion of the curriculum and about which, in some cases, student interest fostered a rapid growth from an additional course or two to programs, majors and departments were Women's Studies, Black Studies, and Jewish Studies. The 1970s witnessed a rapid increase in courses and even programs in Jewish Studies at colleges and universities throughout the United States. Many of these new courses began as expansions of units previously included within earlier offerings in history and religion departments. They tended to be broad rather than deep, usually involving surveys of a period or religious tradition. The historical surveys, if inclusive of the twentieth century, engaged in discussion of the Holocaust, on some campuses, for the first time. Department chairs and college registrars, pleased by the full enrollments the new courses were achieving and in a period when many departments were expanding their total course rosters, were inclined to accept proposals for further additions, more specialized in nature. In 1959, independent of one another, Franklin H. Littell and Yaffa Eliach had offered the first courses on the Holocaust at any American college or university.\(^{21}\) In the ensuing decade, few followed their lead, but, as the 1960s yielded to the 70s and, especially, the 80s, Holocaust courses, the publication of books, and preparation of films became a growth industry, supported by endowed chairs in Jewish Studies, which also enjoyed a sharp increase in number.\(^{22}\)

By the mid-1970s, courses and units devoted to Holocaust study were spreading across the country; Night was becoming standard reading in many of those courses, and Elie Wiesel was being seen more and more frequently on American television, serving, for all intents and purposes, as the voice of the survivors. The 1973 Yom Kippur War had put an end to much of the optimism that had been the prevailing Jewish attitude about the Middle East since 1967. The intervening years had also witnessed other events which darkened the mood of the country. Years of increasingly strident protest against the Vietnam War had divided the country and brought down the Johnson Administration. Many liberal Jews found themselves advocating for changes in federal policy in two different directions: urging Washington's support for Israel while demonstrating against American military actions in Viet Nam. The bipolar nature of these positions was not lost on some, as when Vice President Spiro Agnew publicly accused Jewish American student war protesters of dual loyalties and
questioned their patriotism. This was a charge the students’ immigrant grandparents might have feared above all others—America was for them the refuge, after all—but it was one quickly dismissed by the protesters.23

American television had tended to give minimal attention to the Holocaust during the opening years of the 70s although, by decade’s end, the mini-series *Holocaust* (discussed below) would burst across the small screen. *QB VII*, a six-hour drama based on the Leon Uris novel, aired in two parts, April 29–30, 1974, on the ABC network. Ben Gazzara starred as Abe Cady, a journalist sued for libel by Adam Kelno (Anthony Hopkins), a physician whom Cady accused of committing medical atrocities in a concentration camp during the war. The program featured a well-known international cast, including Jack Hawkins, John Gielgud, Edith Evans and Anthony Quayle. Re-broadcast on several occasions, *QB VII* received thirteen Emmy nominations, winning five.24

The 1976 rescue by Israeli forces of Jewish passengers from a plane hijacked to Uganda was the subject of competing programs, each with internationally known lead performers, rushed through production for American television. *Victory at Entebbe* premiered on ABC, December 13, 1976, with a cast of extremely familiar faces, including Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Elizabeth Taylor, Helen Hayes, Helmut Berger and Richard Dreyfuss.25 Less than one month later (January 9, 1977) *Raid on Entebbe* was broadcast by NBC. This version, the stars of which included Charles Bronson, Peter Finch, Yaphet Kotto and Sylvia Sidney, was better received by critics, garnering eight Emmy nominations.26 Although not the primary subject, each film made references to the Shoah and made repeated mention that Holocaust survivors were among the passengers.27

American network television achieved its broadcasting high-water mark on April 16, 1978, with the premier airing of *Holocaust*. The eight hour miniseries traced the lives (and deaths) of two German families—one Jewish, the other Gentile—against the backdrop of the Holocaust in all its horrors. Following the now familiar pattern, fictitious characters were at the center of the story, surrounded by actual events and true historic figures. Once again, an international cast was assembled for the drama,28 including a cohort of relatively unknown players who became extremely well known in subsequent years.29 The characters represented a variety of types; the thoroughly assimilated Weiss family included a doctor and his wife, their artistic son (Karl) and his Christian wife (Inga), his sister (Anna) and athletic younger brother (Rudi). The primary German character, Erich Dorf, begins as a mild-mannered German Christian and ends as the cold organizer of mass murder.
The series was announced by NBC with great fanfare and publicized heavily in the weeks prior to its airing. The script, written by Gerald Green, was published as a novel and appeared in bookstores a fortnight before the initial episode; the music, composed by Morton Gould, was recorded and available for purchase. NBC also prepared a viewer’s guide for educators, encouraging discussion following each episode. The broadcast itself began during the week before Passover and was scheduled to conclude on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Jeffrey Shandler has noted, quite correctly, “Few critics championed *Holocaust* for making a significant artistic or intellectual statement about its subject—for some its greatest virtue was that it was produced at all” (159). As for the story itself, when all is said and done, it was a soap opera—lavishly produced on location, well acted, but a soap opera nonetheless. Every character meets a different fate; the Weiss parents witness *Kristallnacht* in Berlin, are deported to the Warsaw Ghetto, and die in Auschwitz. Daughter Anna is raped by German soldiers, loses her sanity and is sent to Hadamar, the “house of shudders,” where patients are routinely killed. Karl, the artist son, survives Auschwitz and the death march to Buchenwald, reaching Theresienstadt, only to die at the moment of liberation, while younger brother Rudi leaves Germany and joins a partisan band, where he meets and marries Helena Slomova, a Zionist from Czechoslovakia, only to lose her in an attack. Captured and sent to the Sobibor concentration camp, Rudi is part of the uprising there and escapes. The sole surviving member of his family, Rudi is preparing to voyage to Palestine when he spies children playing soccer, his former sport. The series’ final shot is a close-up of the handsome and healthy Rudi, smiling broadly.

*Holocaust* was accompanied by many controversies. Critics complained about the predictable (soap opera) format of the plot, while others decried the unrealistic appearance of the concentration camp inmates (the sole exception being the character of Karl, played by the gaunt James Woods). The fact that the series was filmed in color was objected to by some, who felt that black and white cinematography would have better projected the mood. Others worried that *Holocaust* would be the only major program on the Shoah many in the audience would ever see, leaving them believing the fictional presentation to be an accurate rendition of history. Elie Wiesel, perhaps the harshest critic, entitled his evaluation of the series “Trivializing the Holocaust.”

On a more positive note, discussions of the series and the event it portrayed took place in many venues, before a wide variety of audiences. *Holocaust* was the subject of articles in many Jewish and Christian journals, as well as in history,
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international affairs, and other publications, both scholarly and popular. Within a year, the program had been broadcast in Israel, South Africa, and a number of European countries, including West Germany, where it reached another large audience which had never discussed the Holocaust in so public a fashion.\textsuperscript{31}

Perhaps the definitive affirmation of the Holocaust’s entry into the American psyche also came in 1978, just several weeks after the airing of \textit{Holocaust}, with the formation of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust. Created by President Jimmy Carter and chaired by Elie Wiesel, the interfaith group was charged with making recommendations for an appropriate memorial to the Holocaust’s victims. The commission met for the first time on February 15, 1979; on September 27 of that year it issued a Report to the President containing four recommendations; the creation of a “living memorial” with spiritual and educational components, national recognition of Days of Remembrance honoring victims of the Shoah, Senate Ratification of the Genocide Treaty, and American pressure on foreign countries to prosecute Nazi war criminals and care for Jewish cemeteries.\textsuperscript{32}

On October 7, 1980, Carter signed Public Law 96-388, which established the President’s Council on the Holocaust, the successor to the commission. The recommendation for a combined museum, memorial, and learning center having been approved, a site was chosen, the process of fundraising begun, and, on April 30, 1984, a symbolic groundbreaking was held, in which ashes from two concentration camps were mixed into the earth. Construction of the building was slow; the actual groundbreaking did not occur until October 16, 1986, while the cornerstone of the new edifice was laid October 5, 1988. Finally, on April 26, 1993, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was opened to the public, soon becoming second only to the Smithsonian Institution as a tourist attraction in Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{33}

The creation of a national museum, the opening of similar institutions in Los Angeles and New York as well as many smaller museums and Holocaust memorials throughout the country, the observance of national Days of Remembrance by the Congress and military, and the many \textit{Yom HaShoah} commemorations by Jewish and interfaith groups testify to the acceptance of the Holocaust not only as an unprecedented human tragedy, but one about which Americans should be concerned and remember. With a second and third generation taking courses, reading books, attending symposia, watching films and television programs, the victims’ stories were finally heard and accepted. The Holocaust had become part of the American memory and was “silent no more.”
Notes


2. The shared name of several large suburban developments across the northeastern United States created by developer William Levitt.

3. Its sales continued when a paperback version was published; by 1965 over five million copies had been purchased.

4. The cast included Paul Newman (Ari Ben-Canaan) and Eva Marie Saint (Kitty Fremont) with Sal Mineo, Valerie-Jill Haworth, David Opatoshu and Lee J. Cobb in the primary “Jewish” roles. Mike Cummings, in the “All Movie Guide,” praises Sal Mineo for his portrayal of Auschwitz survivor Dov Landau but is more critical of Paul Newman, noting that he “performs well enough as Jewish leader Ari Ben-Canaan [but] his physical attributes—notably the blue eyes and light hair—rob him of a small measure of credibility.”

5. In 1961 Uris published a more straightforward Holocaust novel, *Mila 18*. Set in the Warsaw Ghetto—the title was the address of the bunker in which resistance leader Mordechai Anielewicz and one hundred Jews were killed, May 8, 1943—the novel applied the same formula, blending fictional characters with historical events. Sales were good, although the commercial success of *Exodus* could not be duplicated.

6. The book was ranked seventh in sales in 1960 and second in 1961, its sales assisted, perhaps, by an increase in public interest due to the capture and trial of Adolph Eichmann.

7. Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner were civil rights activists who, along with James Chaney, an African-American civil rights activist, were murdered by Ku Klux Klan members in 1964. Their story was the subject of the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*.

8. For the story of Eichmann’s capture and transport to Israel, see Harel.

9. See Hausner. Hausner, as Israel’s Attorney General, was the lead prosecutor in the case.

10. Cf. Arendt 252 and her description of the “banality of evil.”

11. The author speaks here from personal experience, having attended programs sponsored by Hebrew University and the Jewish Agency in the early 1970s.

12. In addition to Spencer Tracy, the cast included Burt Lancaster, Richard Widmark, Maximilian Schell, Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Montgomery Clift, Werner Klemperer, and even the future “Captain Kirk,” a young William Shatner.

13. Janning says, “Judge Haywood . . . the reason I asked you to come: Those people, those millions of people . . . I never knew it would come to that. You must believe it. You must believe it.” Haywood replies, “Herr Janning it came to that the first
time you sentenced a man to death you knew to be innocent.” See IMDB.com/title/tt0055031/quotes.

14. The film was nominated for the Best Picture Academy Award. Tracy, Schell, Clift, and Garland received nominations for acting. The film received a total of eleven nominations, and two Oscars. It also received awards in Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain.

15. More than forty years after the play’s debut, a casual search of the Internet will uncover dozens of sites devoted to impassioned paean to Pius and vituperations of Hochhuth’s work as anti-Catholic, for example, “The Deputy was more than merely a play. It was a sustained exercise in character assassination that was resoundingly echoed in the popular press. The production of that play coincided closely with the publication of Anne Frank’s Diary and the trial and execution of Adolf Eichmann. The world needed to give vent to its horror, and with no more real Nazis left to punish, the image of a pusillanimous pope offered just the right scapegoat” (Graham).

16. The play was written by British actor and author Robert Shaw and directed by Harold Pinter. A film version starring Maximillian Schell was released in 1975.

17. *Time* 4 Oct. 1968. Reviewing the play for the *New York Times*, Clive Barnes wrote: “Engrossing the play certainly is. But it has nothing to say about any of the subjects it hints it is going to illuminate. For its pretensions are based on totally false premises . . . We are in a lurid world of melodrama.”

18. The set—which had been built as a frontier fort for an earlier production—did not look anything like Dachau, an inaccuracy unnoticed by the general audience which was satisfied by its decrepit appearance. *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling would include the character of Hitler in other episodes of the series, in stories that warned the audience of the dangers of hate.

19. Col. Klink was played by the same Werner Klemperer who had appeared in *Judgment at Nuremberg*. A German Jew and the son of conductor Otto Klemperer, the actor had come to America as a refugee in the 1930s and served in the American military. Robert Clary, who played the French POW, Cpl. Louis LeBeau, had an even stronger connection to the Holocaust. A child performer in his native France, Clary was captured in the second roundup of Jewish children in Paris and sent to Auschwitz, a fact he kept from public knowledge until the 1980s.

20. For some viewers, the program generated greater significance because of the character of Sgt. Kinchlow. Played by Ivan Dixon, “Kinch” was the first Negro character treated as an equal among an otherwise white ensemble cast. If *Hogan’s Heroes* reduced Nazis to buffoons, Mel Brooks would transmute the horrors of the Third Reich to farce in his 1968 film *The Producers*.

21. Littell offered his course at Emory University; Eliach at Brooklyn College. Forty-five years later, each scholar was still offering courses on the topic.

22. In previous writings, I have discussed these survey-type courses as “phase one” Holocaust studies, the more specialized courses as “phase two,” and, inevita-
bly, courses that use the Holocaust primarily as a hook for more general topics, as “phase three.” By the 1990s, the total of phase one and two courses offered on American (and Canadian) campuses numbered in the many hundreds. See my article, “Teaching the Holocaust: End of the Beginning.”

23. The author recalls spirited arguments with Israeli friends in this period about Richard Nixon: while I was excoriating the president for his Vietnam policies, my Israeli friends praised him for his support of their country.

24. John Gielgud and Juliet Mills won the awards for Best Actor and Actress; the program also received awards for music, graphic design and editing.

25. Outside the United States, it was exhibited as a feature film.

26. *Victory at Entebbe* received four nominations, for writing and technical achievements. See Marill 1: 176, 178, 235.

27. Even before either version of the Entebbe rescue story was broadcast, *21 Hours at Munich*, a dramatization of the murders of Israeli Olympic team members and coaches was aired on ABC (November 7, 1976). The film featured several well-known stars, including William Holden, Shirley Knight, Richard Basehart and Anthony Quayle, and received the Emmy for “Outstanding Special—Drama or Comedy.” References were made to the earlier plight of Jews in Germany and the specter of the Holocaust was raised before an audience from whom sympathy for the victims could be expected.

28. Fritz Weaver, Rosemary Harris, Ian Holm and Nigel Hawthorne were among the better known cast members.

29. Performers within this category include Meryl Streep, James Woods, Tovah Felshuh, Michael Moriarty and Joseph Bottoms.

30. Shandler 155–78. Other objections extended to the sponsors; some felt commercials for a popular dog food were inappropriate.

31. The series had one NBC network rebroadcast before reaching cable, where it is shown on an annual basis.


33. See www.USHMM.org.
Works Cited


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