Bystanders to the Holocaust: Skepticism in the American Press, 1942-1945

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Bystanders to the Holocaust:
Skepticism in the American Press, 1942 - 1945

by

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ABSTRACT

Historical scholarship has certainly condemned the mainstream American press for their indifference towards the news of Jewish persecution under Adolph Hitler in Europe from 1933 to 1945. It has been documented that the major American presses perpetuated apathy among their readers from the outset of Nazi control in Germany. Building on previous scholarship, this thesis focuses on the coverage of the liberations of the concentration camps in the American press. It attempts to address why the American press, who practically ignored news of the Holocaust throughout the war, did not announce the liberations that were so thoroughly documented by American troops, politicians, and reporters.

The introduction focuses on establishing the historical precedent for studying this problem. It presents the historiography of the topic to this point and analyzes the shortcomings of prior works and sources. The first chapter examines the period from January 1942, when Hitler announced his plans for the “Final Solution,” to April 1945, when American troops liberated their first concentration camp at Ohrdruf. Chapter two analyzes the imperative months of April and May 1945. For Americans, this was the first evidence they physically encountered, even though confirmation of the Holocaust had been established many years prior. Even at this point, when Americans and more importantly American journalists had physical proof, the stories presented in the American press were lacking and buried in the back pages of major newspapers and magazines. The last chapter, the conclusion, analyzes this phenomenon and attempts to examine how American attitudes changed from May 1945 to October 1945, when the Nuremberg Trials were carried out to convict those who participated in the massacre. It was not merely anti-Semitism that caused the colossally important story of the Holocaust to be buried by the American press; rather, it was a multitude of motives including doubt, skepticism, selfish purposes, and a hesitancy to the report unverified accusations.
INTRODUCTION

Winston Churchill surmised, “The Holocaust was probably the greatest and most terrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world.”\(^1\) Few events before or since have been more confusing, more horrific, or more contemplated than the Holocaust of European Jewry under Nazi rule in World War II. Today, many historians, scholars, and students ask why nothing was done to stop the annihilation of the innocent. As you will read, there are many answers to this question. However, there is more to the story than simple indifference on the part of the Allied governments and their citizens. The mainstream Allied press, meaning popular newspapers, magazines and journals of the time, perpetuated apathy among their readers from the outset of Nazi control in Germany in 1933. Especially in America, news of the Holocaust was an aside to the military battles and political wars. It was not until American troops physically set foot in concentration camps themselves, followed closely by members of the American press, that any outcry was made against the Nazi treatment of concentration camp inmates who were, by and large, Jewish.

American military victory in World War II did not aim to liberate the Nazi concentration camps in April and May of 1945. There were no legendary battles that marked the emancipation of the victims; on the contrary, when liberation occurred, Allied victory was virtually certain. Despite this, history has granted the memory of the horrors encountered at the concentration camps a profound place in our consciousness. Holocaust literature and history is more thoroughly documented and holds public interest more completely than ever before.\(^2\) It is hopeful for today’s society to believe that the

\(^1\) Winston Churchill, as quoted in “America and the Holocaust,” *American Heritage*, (July/August 1999), 35.

\(^2\) For detailed information on the Holocaust, see Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, Comprehensive History of
liberation of these death camps marked a turning point in Western awareness of the cruelty humankind was capable of unleashing. No longer did Western culture believe it had evolved above the scope of such horrors; rather, these scenes served to painfully crush that notion. If these atrocities could take place in Germany, a civilized, industrialized, modernized nation, they could happen anywhere. Contrary to past belief, Nazi Germany was not necessarily hiding the evidence of their destruction of the European Jewry. If the information was indeed available, why was nothing done to stop Hitler’s genocide campaign?

Although they were minor, there were accounts in the popular American press about the existence and severity of Nazi concentration camps before the first liberations in 1944. However, as the historiography proves, these accounts were rife with skepticism and buried in the back pages of major American newspapers. Because the American media treated atrocity stories with such uncertainty, readers were free to interpret them or dismiss them as mere propaganda. Journalists who witnessed the initial atrocities in Germany after 1933, or at least hints of them, brought their experiences back to the States. Even this did not spring the press into action; it was the beginning of a long period of apathy on the part of the American media. For example, the lead of a September 5, 1939 article in the *New York Times* read, “First intimations that a ‘solution’ of the Jewish problem in Poland is on the German-Polish agenda are revealed in a ‘special report’ of the official German News Bureau that emanates from Polish territory now occupied by the German military…” and went on to say that “the implications of the ‘solution,’ were it carried out on the German model, are ominous.” In the spring of 1942, American journalists present in Germany when the United States entered the war were exchanged for Axis nationals marooned in America. These journalists came back with descriptions of the horrors Germany inflicted on Poland and the Soviet Union, and even

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gave clues to Hitler’s plan for the Jews. The information was not secret and it was not lacking. Joseph Grigg, a repatriated member of the United Press (UP), was appalled. In 1942, he clearly stated his position, claiming that “the slaughter in Poland was horrible, with 80,000 killed…a high percentage of [them were] Jews.”6 Shocking as these reports were, they did not evoke American sympathies on a large scale for two reasons: one, because the American free press did not give them the attention they warranted, and two, because America was still reeling from Pearl Harbor and mobilizing its own war effort.

Many factors contributed to the lack of attention the press gave the Holocaust from 1933 to the outbreak of war, including German influence on reporters and news correspondents. The American media had tremendous power in shaping public opinion and events, and their counterparts in Germany knew it. Consequently, the German government on occasion censored or expelled American correspondents in Berlin to avoid scrutiny by the American press.7 The threat of expulsion led many reporters to edit their accounts of happenings in Germany, even when they witnessed eerie and shocking events. American reporters observed anti-Semitic brutalities in Germany as early as the mid-1930s, such as the infamous Nuremberg Laws enacted September 15, 1935. Declared by Hitler, these laws deemed Jews ineligible for citizenship because they were not of “German blood.” They also banned Jews from such activities as marrying or having sexual relations with Germans or displaying the German flag. From this point, anti-Semitism in Germany only grew. On November 9, 1938, the violent pogroms of Kristallnacht, or “night of broken glass,” swept Germany. The assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by a seventeen-year-old Polish Jew sparked a spree of arson and looting by the Nazis in almost every town and city in Germany. Huge, silent crowds looked on as the situation for Jews grew increasingly more desperate. That night alone, one hundred ninety-five synagogues were burned, eight hundred shops destroyed and over seven thousand looted in one night.8 Most recent figures have stated that over 30,000 German Jews were arrested and the number actually killed was in excess of 100.9 President

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6 New York Herald Tribune, June 2, 1942, 2.
7 Lipstadt, Beyond Belief, 7.
9 Gellately, Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany, 128.
Roosevelt used the “strongest language a President has ever used to a friendly nation” and said that “I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization.”

Some reporters accompanied Jews expelled from Germany during these events, but only as far as the German border.

In 1941, American media correspondents watched as Jews were loaded onto trains for “resettlement” in the east. They even heard soldiers on leave from the eastern front describe the massacres there. Though American reporters in Germany had this knowledge, they did not always transmit what they saw and heard because they feared the personal impact of the information on themselves and their informants. Oftentimes information passed on to editors overseas was censored, removing information that was unreliable or, more importantly, unbelievable. Raul Hilberg, in his book *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*, makes an important point. He states that “they [Jewish organizations and Allied governments outside the area of destruction] had failed to focus their attention systematically on the dynamic of destruction [of the European Jewry], and they were equally unprepared for any revelation.” Any news that came from media correspondents, escapees, or intelligence networks was utterly unbelievable and, in most cases, had a motive other than presenting the facts in their truest form.

Unquestionably, there is historical importance, and relevance to this study, in determining when exactly America knew about the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question,” the Nazi name for the deliberate, carefully planned destruction, or genocide, of all European Jews that was officially implemented on December 12, 1941 by Hitler. To this day, debate exists among scholars over when American officials had knowledge of the atrocities occurring in German death camps and consequently what they should have done with that knowledge. This will be discussed in a later chapter. When most

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12. Ibid.
newspapers finally carried the news of the Holocaust, the liberations of the camps by American troops had already begun. The early liberations by Soviet troops, in 1944 and early 1945, was virtually ignored by the Allied press.

It is probable that many newspapers ultimately ran the atrocity stories because at the time of the liberations there was no denying the truth. There was no way for the information to be discredited; their reporters had images and personal testimonies and the American government pledged that action against the perpetrators would be taken. However, the manner in which the American press handled events prior to the liberations is equally significant because it is the major reason for the doubts that pervaded America about the reality of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, although they gave more coverage than to previous atrocity claims, the major daily newspapers in the United States gave news of the liberations brief exposure at best. Many reporters seemed to feel that while the fate of the Jews in Europe was indeed horrible, it was no more appalling than the horrors inflicted upon tens of millions of other war victims. Doubts concerning the accuracy of genocide claims pervaded American society even after liberation, when American soldiers, reporters, editors, publishers, and members of Congress had seen the camps.

It is hard to imagine why this occurred, though there are many reasons that can be accurately cited. At this time, the press was attempting to legitimize itself by distinguishing true journalism from propaganda. Prior to World War II, reporters had a rather dissatisfactory history regarding the accuracy of printed atrocity claims. At the outbreak of World War I, stories of German atrocities in Belgium filled American newspapers. Reporters chronicled tales of German soldiers spearing Belgian babies on their bayonets and gang-raping Belgian women. The British government asked one of England’s most renowned historians and journalists, Viscount James Bryce, to head a royal commission to investigate these claims. His report, released May 13, 1915 and dubbed the “Bryce Report,” verified these claims through unnamed witnesses. British


16 For the purpose of this analysis, the “American press” includes most major daily newspapers in the United States. Some smaller, more liberal papers have also been consulted. This is by no means an account of the articles that existed in the Yiddish or Jewish presses in America at the time, for they were most definitely decrying the horrors occurring in Europe.
propaganda headquarters made sure it was delivered to nearly every newspaper in America.\textsuperscript{17} After the war, when legitimate witnesses told different accounts, serious doubt was expressed concerning the truth of these claims. However, the damage was done. The press had released untrue, unconfirmed propaganda, and their image and integrity were tarnished. Consequently, the American press during World War II had a much higher responsibility, both to themselves and to the public, to verify their claims before printing them. When genuine atrocities occurred, such as Kristallnacht, the press was wary about publishing too many details for fear of being unreliable or deceitful.

America’s dismissal of atrocity claims was matched by their strong desire to remain neutral. The American public, staunchly isolationist prior to World War II, was skeptical of atrocity allegations coming from anywhere in Europe, including from the British press. Believing that Britain was slowly pulling the United States into the war, Americans were distrustful of both sides. On top of these sentiments, Americans were familiar with the terror in Stalinist Russia. When the Soviet Union first released claims of Nazi atrocities on their soil in 1941, Americans greeted these stories with utter contempt. To many Americans, Germans and Russians accusing each other of mass murder was a case of “the pot and the kettle.”\textsuperscript{18} Just a year before, the Soviet Union had been allied with Nazi Germany. Americans found this difficult to forgive. At this time, Communism was considered much more dangerous to American democracy than Nazism. Therefore, any news coming from Moscow prior to America’s entry into the war was considered tainted. Many Americans believed that the Soviets were just as guilty as the Nazis. Even when the Soviets sided with the Allies, Americans were still unconvinced of both their loyalty to the Allied cause and the truth in their reports.

Other factors contributed to America’s indifference. Stories of Nazi atrocities occurred so frequently in the press that Americans became somewhat desensitized to their true meaning. Reports of Nazi terror on civilian populations, in Germany but especially in conquered territories, repeatedly made the news. It was no secret, especially in the American press, that the Nazis aimed to control occupied areas using violent force. For this reason, stories about mass murder of Jews were often buried within larger stories


\textsuperscript{18} Lipstadt, \textit{Beyond Belief}, 138, and the Dayton News (OH), July 21, 1941, 1.
concerning other equally brutal Nazi acts. Thus, as will be discussed later, the identity of the Jewish victims was lost within the national identity of other victims. The constant barrage of stories describing terror and coercion within the Nazi regime numbed the American public to the underlying significance of such depictions. Also, Nazi Germany was very focused on presenting a good image to the American public. They closely monitored what the popular American newspapers were saying, and they treated most American correspondents with great care. Those who did not follow Nazi Germany’s rule for positive perception in the press were, as stated, expelled from the nation.

Obviously, the press bears a large responsibility for fostering such American skepticism. For years preceding the liberations, only perfunctory mentions of Nazi mass murder of the Jews and of concentration camp inmates received attention in print. When tales of massacres in Europe reached American presses, the American public cynically questioned their accuracy and purpose. Many felt the reports existed simply to give Americans a sense of legitimacy about the war. Veteran newsman Harrison Salisbury once described the press as “holding up a looking glass to history.” The press does not simply hold up that looking glass; rather, it arranges the glass and points it in certain directions. Thus, the way it does so shapes perception of events themselves. Although newspaper articles may not change individual beliefs, they do have an impact on what is generally accepted as fact. Thus, the media is not a passive bystander. It decides, either consciously or not, what to print and, consequently, what information garners the most attention. With a few notable exceptions, and the press regarded the liberations of the concentration camps and the horrors that American liberators encountered as inferior news.

This raises an important point: the American press had access to a critically important and unprecedented story, yet it reacted with impassivity. Even as irrefutable evidence was gathered, both by the U.S. government and American journalists, the press as a whole virtually ignored this tragic issue. It is hard to believe that the American people comprehended information regarding the Holocaust and then blatantly disregarded

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19 This has been deduced through both the use of Gallup poll results (see Deborah Lipstadt’s Beyond Belief for accurate numbers) and editorial sections of newspapers of the time.
it. Rather, they never received the information in a proper form that allowed them to understand it at all. If the stories of Nazi violence towards the Jews and other minorities in Europe had been properly published, dissected, and explained, I believe that at least a faction of the American public would have called for some action of rescue or relief by their government. The American government ignored reports of the fate of concentration camp inmates, the persecution of the Jews, and the Final Solution, and in turn the American press also overlooked those events when they decided what to print, at least on their front pages. It is a heartbreaking chain of events, and one which most definitely could have been avoided.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historians have thoroughly addressed the issue of American apathy during the Holocaust, especially addressing American wartime complicity in the Holocaust. However, many shy away from focusing on either the responsibility of the press or on the liberations themselves and quickly condemn the American government. Over the last two decades, scholars have proven not only that credible reports reached the hands of Allied governments throughout the war concerning the extermination of the Jews, but also that much of the same information appeared in the Jewish press, the Protestant press, popular magazines, and on radio. The Allied governments most definitely deserve some blame, but it most certainly does not explain why atrocity reports were initially ignored. The secondary works consulted include volumes on the liberations themselves, and a few on the American press and the Holocaust. They are each analyzed below.

The first comprehensive work on the liberations was Robert Abzug’s 1985 publication Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberations of Nazi Concentration Camps, a comprehensive record of the American liberations of Natzwiller,

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Ohrdruf and Nordhausen, Buchenwald, Woebbling, Dachau, and Mauthausen, as well as many of their important sub-camps. Abzug, a noted Holocaust historian, not only acquired many images of the liberations, but interviewed both survivors and liberators. Their accounts, and the pictures accompanying them, leap from the pages of his book. It is an early and surprisingly complete analysis of the experiences of American GI’s, officers, journalists, congressional representatives and other eyewitnesses who observed some of the most frightening scenes in history. Abzug, while accurately documenting the American liberations, addresses many issues that are still relevant to Holocaust studies. For example, he describes the feelings of guilt that afflicted American soldiers and led to allowable killings of German guards by the inmates. He also documents many of the horrors through powerful photographs. However, Abzug leaves his readers with the facts alone and little concise analysis of the events. His opinions are not synthesized except to say that the liberations changed the lives of many American liberators. However, his research is extensive and valuable, and proves a fine introduction to the study of American liberations of German concentration camps.

Closely following Abzug’s book was Deborah Lipstadt’s invaluable 1986 book, Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945. It is one of the few comprehensive works on the responsibility of the American press. Lipstadt’s focus lies in determining why American correspondents virtually ignored atrocity claims prior to and in the early stages of the war. She notes that although the major American newspapers ran stories of the violence against civilians in Europe, they failed to connect to them the ideologies of anti-Semitism and Nazism. She also systematically documents the confusion surrounding the truth, both in America and in Europe.

Lipstadt at least attempts to answer the question of why America did nothing to stop the Holocaust. She asks, “During the 1930s and 1940s America could have saved thousands and maybe even hundreds of thousands of Jews but did not do so…If more could have been done, why was it not done?” She is quick and severe in her condemnations of the American press, claiming they failed both their morals and their

duties. However, Lipstadt steadfastly claims that the American press was as confused by the events of 1933-1944 as anyone else. She also suggests that the press cannot be held completely culpable because there was no way to make sense of such irrational events. Conflicting reports grew from the same areas, often from both members of the press and from German propaganda mills. She documents, mostly through the use of Gallup Polls, America’s skepticism about the truth of atrocity claims. For most of her sources, she cites President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Division of Press Intelligence, which contained clippings from over 500 of America’s largest and most influential newspapers. To draw many of her conclusions, she leans more on the text in print than on memoirs from journalists or minutes from staff meetings. That important archival work appears later in Laurel Leff’s 2005 book Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper.

In 1987, following Lipstadt’s groundbreaking work, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum published the edited transcripts of the International Liberator’s Conference, held in Washington, D.C. in October of 1981. Edited by Brewster Chamberlain and Marcia Feldmen, The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps 1945: Eyewitness Accounts of the Liberators is a compilation of valuable primary accounts of both liberators and liberatees. It consists of eyewitness accounts and testimonies regarding the liberation and conditions of the Nazi concentration camps, including reports from soldiers, reporters, medical personnel and clergy. This work presents Holocaust memory, through the eyes of survivors and liberators, as an important key to the past.

This thesis utilizes not only the edited published transcripts of this conference, but also the raw transcripts from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Institutional Archives, which are greater in length and quality of discussion than the published material. The benefit of using these transcripts is that they depict nuances within the dialogue, including emotions, tears, anger, and utter sadness. Much of this is edited out of the printed copy. The downside to utilizing such material is that it is in fact memories of events that occurred almost forty years before. As historians frequently note, memory is often skewed. Timelines are hard to pin down, and accuracy is often skewed.

Ibid., 35.
compromised. However, the emotions expressed cannot be ignored. As with many oral sources, its positive aspects outweigh its negative ones.

There is no firm focus within the text; it is simply highlights of a weekend of conversation among participants in the liberations. However, many essential conclusions are drawn from the discussions. For instance, Dr. Fred Crawford explains that the Holocaust is still present, even today. It is present by omission – the millions that went missing and perished under Hitler’s regime. Thousands of children perished – children who one day would grow up to be industrious members of the European community and the world. A whole generation went missing, and for those who survived, and the children and grandchildren of those who survived, that legacy lives on. Dr. Crawford goes on to explain that the Holocaust is also still present because of its commissions – of the guilt and retribution manifest by German citizens even today. It is present in the lives of the survivors, who constantly peruse memories of the horrible events of World War II. The Holocaust is interdisciplinary – its study involves not only historians but also psychologists, sociologists, scientists, economists, and political scientists. Dr. Crawford is just one example, but many of his fellow attendees eloquently remind listeners and readers that the Holocaust indeed lives on, and that remembrance and respect was the sole reason for the existence of the 1981 International Liberators Conference.

These transcripts are also valuable for their inclusion of several very important member of the United Press International (UPI) who were present at the liberations. They explain what information they transmitted to their editors overseas and why. It is almost impossible to find, without reading memoirs or minutes from daily meetings in newspaper offices, to determine why certain stories made it to the front pages and others did not. The testimony of the UPI members at the 1981 Conference shed some light on this puzzle.

For ten years following the publication of the transcripts from the Conference, little was published by historians to further develop or even challenge Lipstadt’s conclusions and the panel’s observations. Recently, however, there has been an explosion of information both condemning and acquitting the American press and the American government during the Holocaust. Barbie Zelizer’s 1998 work, entitled Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye, asserts over and over that “much
of our ability to remember depends on images.”

Covering the atrocities in newspapers thousands of miles from the front proved difficult, and often involved “extensive repair work…correcting, altering, and redoing reports that had already been filed.”

The liberations by the Russians of camps on the eastern front proved to be dress rehearsals for the American liberations the next year. As early as July of 1944 the Soviets liberated Majdanek and occupied the evacuated camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. In January of 1945 they liberated Auschwitz in German-occupied Poland. This gave the Russian press its first real glimpse at the horrors occurring inside German concentration camps. However, Soviet journalists were oddly inconsistent in their reports. They presented no press releases at all regarding Belzec, Sobibor, or Treblinka. They quite successfully hid the horrors of Auschwitz from international eyes until the western liberations by the Americans and the British. Reports from Majdanek failed to grip the attention of the American press, and small, inconsequential stories were sporadically printed. Many accounts were unable to be confirmed and were attributed to mere Russian propaganda. This is significant; how much culpability are the Allied and American presses liable for if the Soviets, the first liberators, hid the evidence that they found?

Zelizer describes a very important and telling event. As will later be explained, in August and September of 1944 thirty foreign correspondents were allowed into Majdanek through the sponsorship of the Soviet-supported Polish Committee of National Liberation. These reporters were so shocked at what they saw that it took them days to decide how to disperse this information. Of the stories that were published, which were not numerous, almost all had a “Lublin” dateline. This, at least to those reading the articles on the Allied home fronts, represented the substantial town in Poland two miles away rather than the camp itself. This happened for months and served to diminish the significance of both this camp and many others. Zelizer is confident that these tours of the Russian-liberated camp served as the keystone for how the press handled the news and images of the American-liberated camps. Only with the liberation by American

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26 Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, 49.
27 Ibid., 50.
28 Ibid., 51.
29 Ibid.
troops did camps bear their true names in print, but the general attitude of ambivalence towards printing the horrific stories remained the same.

Another 1998 work was a primary account of the U.S. Army’s 42nd “Rainbow” Division’s liberation of Dachau, the first concentration camp put into practice by the Germans and one of the last to be liberated by the Americans. *Dachau: 29 April 1945*, edited by Sam Dann, not only recounts the experiences of the soldiers, but also the war correspondents and members of the International Prisoners Committee traveling with the 42nd Division into Dachau. It is a rough account, often choppy in its descriptions, but it is nonetheless a valuable firsthand work. It has many accounts from Sidney Olson, the *Time-Life* correspondent following the Rainbow Division through Europe. An entire chapter, titled “The Rainbow Division’s Official Correspondents,” describes Dachau’s intense magnetism throughout the media. “Word that the capture of Dachau was imminent spread through the journalistic fraternity—and sorority; many of them arrived there practically on our heels.”30 By the time Dachau was liberated, many journalists recognized that there was truth in the atrocity claims. Also, many officials in Great Britain and the United States were on the verge of forming a war crimes tribunal to punish the perpetrators. Dachau indeed made front page headlines, specifically in the *New York Times*, but its coverage was concise and never took precedent over military news.

In 1999, historian Peter Novick published *The Holocaust in American Life*. He explores the question of American interest and sympathy with the Holocaust in the 1990’s, fifty years and thousands of miles from the liberations. Novick attempts to explain the phenomenon of “Americanization” of the Holocaust and the intense interest it holds among American historians. He ponders the differences between American understanding in 1945 versus American understanding now. During the war years, the Holocaust in Europe was marginal news. Atrocity stories appeared in the back pages of major newspapers, often overlooked or outright ignored by both reporters and American citizens. Novick attempts to reconcile past American ignorance with current American attention and sympathies. To do this, he cites many instances of false or ambiguous

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reporting during the war. For example, he notes how the word “Jew” was left out of many accounts of the liberations, leading Americans to believe that the Holocaust was not focused on eliminating them completely.³¹ Novick’s account of the war years is short and rough, often jumping from one date and place to another at lightening speed. However, he places the liberations in the confused and war-weary minds of Americans during the early 1940’s and establishes a context for their apathetic and even incredulous thoughts. He then compares these sentiments to the current fascination with the Holocaust in American life. Although Novick’s work might at first glance seem particularly relevant to this discussion, his work ventures far outside the scope of its title. He often writes as a psychologist rather than a historian, leaning on American perception of the Holocaust today rather than its reaction to it sixty years ago.

In 2003, a series of papers was published from a 1995 international conference sponsored by the Eli and Diana Zborowski Professional Chair in Interdisciplinary Holocaust Studies at Yeshiva University. Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust, edited by Robert M. Shapiro, contains various papers addressing the issue of the Holocaust in both the American and international presses. Mr. Shapiro admits in his introduction that “Deborah E. Lipstadt’s study of the American press was an important pathfinder in examining journalism during the Nazi era.”³² Opinions vary among scholars, but many fall back on Lipstadt’s initial arguments from 1986. The American press, for reasons that will later be addressed, fell short of their duties to both report and condemn the actions against the Jews by the Nazi party. However, the reasons they failed are explainable and therefore somewhat understandable.

Two chapters of Why Didn’t the Press Shout? deal specifically with the liberations. One, by Jeffery Schandler of Rutgers University, is entitled “The Testimony of Images: The Allied Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps in American Newsreels.” He documents the phenomena of the American newsreel aired prior to movies in cinemas across the country. As early as the spring of 1945, videos footage of emaciated victims and pyres of dead bodies was being showing throughout the country. This is a different

type of media from the conventional, more trusted American newspaper. Before 1945 these newsreels often shied away from showing controversial topics. But they did affect American consciousness, as Shandler points out.

The other article, “The Public Response of American Jews to the Liberation of European Jewry, January – May 1945,” was written by Haskel Lookstein. For the most part, Haskel gives a history of the American Jewry and their experience during the Holocaust. As early as 1942, many Jewish newspapers cried out against the horrors in Europe. They claimed that “two million Jews had already been murdered in Poland and four or five million more were in danger of annihilation.”33 But many things kept the American Jews from crying out for help. For one, they were fully assimilated into American society, unlike Jews in many European nations. Secondly, they were extremely worried about their 550,000 relatives fighting in America’s armed forces overseas.34 For this reason, many American Jews viewed the reports with a sympathetic but unresponsive eye.

Early in 2005, Laurel Leff published a comprehensive work on the New York Times’ coverage of the Holocaust. Named Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper, it chronicles the decisions made up and down the chain of command at the Times regarding the publications of Nazi genocide. Leff condemns the Times’ lax attitude towards the Holocaust from its onset for many reasons. She believes that personal relationships within the newspaper’s staff, the assimilation of its Jewish owner, and the attitudes of its American readers all significantly impacted how the Times reported the news. Although her argument that the assimilation of the Jewish owner of the Times had any impact on its coverage is rather convenient, her other arguments do hold firm. It is interesting to note that in 1986, Deborah Lipstadt argued that the New York Times “provided more coverage than most papers [in the United States].”35 Leff addresses this issue by stating that although more stories regarding the Holocaust may have appeared in the New York Times, the seriousness and depth of these articles was often lacking. She states that “from September 1939 to May 1945, the Times

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34 Ibid.
35 Lipstadt, Beyond Belief, 219.
published 1,186 stories about the fate of the Jews in Europe, or an average of 17 stories per month. But…the story of the Holocaust – meaning articles that focused on the discrimination, deportation, and destruction of the Jews – made the Times front page just 26 times, and in only six of those stories were Jews identified as the primary victims.”

Leff’s work is wrought with facts and figures, often confusing the reader as to her point. But all these pieces of information prove effective in the end, because there is never any doubt as to her intentions or meanings.

Leff’s focus on one newspaper is significant. The New York Times was at the time viewed as society’s most important, and therefore most trustworthy, newspaper. Leff makes a valid point when she states that, “The Times was unique…in the comprehensiveness of its coverage and the extent of its influence among American opinion makers. Because of its longtime commitment to international affairs, its willingness to sacrifice advertising rather than articles in the face of a newsprint crunch, and its substantial Jewish readership, the Times was able to obtain and publish more news about what was happening to the Jews than other mainstream newspapers.”

This sounds incredibly biased but incidentally, it is the truth. Leff’s book is a very well-documented historical work that can only serve to expand our knowledge of the Holocaust in the American press. However, it is the most recent work on the subject and even it leaves much room for expansion and discussion.

Like many other fields, there is much research to be done on the American press and the Holocaust. The potential for quality historical investigation of this subject is tremendous. However, in researching this paper, I have found that this topic does not exist neatly alone. Many other factors, decisions, and events have crowded my research. It is true, and has been well-documented, that the American press responded poorly, if at all, to the Holocaust occurring in Europe during the Second World War. However, the reasons for their doubt, ignorance, and apathy are varied and puzzling. It is my goal to establish not only what has already been asserted by previous authors but also to answer the elusive why: why did the American press disbelieve, disregard, and oftentimes abandon news of the massacre of Jews in Europe until American troops came upon

37 Leff, Buried by the Times, 5.
indisputable evidence in the camps? The following chapters will outline the attitudes of the media towards initial news of the Holocaust, the first liberations, and finally the liberations by American and British troops. In the final chapter, I will focus on the press itself and attempt to answer some of the questions posed throughout.
CHAPTER ONE
JANUARY 1942 – MARCH 1945

The Nazis chose rural Poland as the setting for some of their worst death camps, presumably to attempt to keep horrific details from reaching the rest of the world. Soviet soldiers were the first to liberate concentration camp prisoners on their push to Berlin. On July 23, 1944, they entered Majdanek concentration camp in Poland. As the Soviet Red Army pushed German troops westward late in 1943, the Nazis evacuated many camps and destroyed what evidence they could. Chelmno, Sobibor, Belzec, and Treblinka were virtually destroyed. However, all the evidence could not be erased. As the Red Army marched forth into Poland, they encountered sinister remnants of mass murder. At Majdanek, a death camp outside of Lublin, they found abandoned crematoria and mass graves.

Soviet troops encountered many communities in occupied lands that desperately greeted their arrival. They were joyously greeted in Bucharest, Romania in August of 1944. However, they often found grisly scenes left behind by the Germans. At the concentration camp of Klooga, Estonia, the Nazis hurriedly murdered 2,500 of its inmates before fleeing the approaching Soviet liberators. When the Red Army arrived on September 28, 1944, only 85 inmates were found alive. In January and February, the Soviets liberated Budapest, Hungary. There they found thousands of Jews who had been murdered and left in the streets by the fleeing Nazis. The Hungarian Fascist government, the Arrow Cross, was not innocent in these murders; they unleashed horrible violence on

39 Ibid., 5.
their country’s Jews as well.\textsuperscript{41} Generally, Protestants and Catholics in Hungary supported anti-Jewish legislation and deportations.

Yet the liberations by the Soviet troops were by no means the first hints to the truth of the Nazi death camps in Poland and elsewhere. In 1942, the Slovakian puppet government deported a native young Jew named Walter Rosenberg to a camp in the Polish countryside. Two years later, in April of 1944, he escaped the death camp. To avoid Nazi suspicion he changed his name to Rudolph Vrba. On April 24, 1944, he arrived to Zsolna, Slovakia, and immediately informed the local Judenrat, or leaders of the local Jewish Council, of the mass murder happening in the camp. Vrba dictated his story to the Judenrat and together they calculated that about 1,750,000 Jews perished while Vrba was imprisoned. This number now is inaccurate but the sheer volume of mass murder was still evident. The news of this camp and its horrors traveled through the Jewish underground network in Europe as Vrba was the first eyewitness to escape the Nazi camp system and speak out against its practices. His 30-page story, which soon reached the United States, became known as the Vrba Report. The camp he had experienced was one of the worst: Auschwitz-Birkenau. By June 1944, the Swiss, British, and American governments owned reports of the function, position, and internal layout of Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{42}

Liberated in January 1945 by the Soviet Red Army, Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, outside the provincial Polish town of Oshwiecim in Selesia, would later be recognized as the site of the worst mass extermination in history. It was erected in 1940 as a camp for Polish prisoners, but converted in 1942 into a modern facility for the mass extermination of over four million people, at least a million of which were Jews.\textsuperscript{43} Poles, Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a myriad of other people met their death here. Auschwitz was not just one camp but a huge network of interrelated sites, each used for its own purpose. Buna and Monowitz provided slave labor, while Birkenau was strictly for extermination.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 587.
\textsuperscript{42} Reading No. 95 in Levin, The Holocaust Years, 120-121 and 329-330.
\textsuperscript{43} The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps 1945, (Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Council, 1987), 205.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 4.
Mass murder on this scale was part of a Nazi master plan: three years earlier, on January 20, 1942, the “Final Solution” was announced. This is not to say that the intentional mass murder of the European Jewry was not happening before this date; indeed, it was. However, the policy was developed and administered in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee, where Reinhard Heydrich laid out the fate of Europe’s 11 million Jews. The initial step was to deport them to the east, first to ghettos and then to camps such as Auschwitz for slave labor or extermination. In the middle of a total war, even as the tides were turning against the Axis powers, the Nazis devoted essential manpower, fuel, and transportation to the evacuation and execution of the Jews. Heydrich did not approach this task lightly: he successfully destroyed almost every Jewish community on the continent. Their success in this realm spurred the Nazis to take more drastic measures against the Gypsies, who were also condemned to death as a race. Many of them were murdered by special action units, specifically the Einsatzgruppen in the east, or deported to slave labor and death camps. In all, over 600,000 of the two million Gypsies in Nazi-occupied Europe perished under their regime.45

In April 1943, the German government issued reports claiming that they had discovered the bodies of 10,000 Polish officers who were Soviet prisoners of war massacred by the Russians in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk in 1940. The Polish government in exile in London stated that “the Red Star, the official organ of the Red Army, reported on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Poland that 10,000 officers had been taken…among the 18,000 prisoners…Polish circles here [London] insist that in order to counteract German propaganda aimed at sowing distrust, the Allies and Russia allow an impartial mission to fully investigate the disquieting affair.”46 A rift between the Polish government in exile in London and the Soviet Union ensued because the Poles wanted the Red Cross to investigate the claims and identify the bodies. On April 23, the International Committee of Red Cross in Geneva accepted the task of identifying the victims in the Katyn graves as long as all parties concerned, including the Red Army, requested the investigation. This event caused an intense rift between the Soviet government and the Polish government in exile in London, and as an April 29,

45 Ibid.
1943, page 6 article in the New York Times states, “…there was not the slightest indication from Russian sources here that the Soviets were in any sense appeased, and the tone of the Russian press in Moscow today made in clear that any speculation regarding whether relations [between the Soviets and the exiled Polish government] had been suspended or broken was purely academic. So far as the Russians are concerned, the relations are broken.”

The Soviet government denied all involvement and claimed that the Polish prisoners of war had been engaged in construction work near Smolensk when they were captured and slaughtered by invading German troops.

The controversy surrounding the Katyn Massacre was beneficial to Nazi Germany, which used it to discredit the Soviet Union. German propaganda mastermind Dr. Josef Goebbels wrote in his diary on April 14, 1943:

We are now using the discovery of 12,000 Polish officers, murdered by the GPU [part of the NKVD, or People’s Commisariat for Internal Affairs in the Soviet Union], for anti-Bolshevik propaganda on a grand style. We sent neutral journalists and Polish intellectuals to the spot where they were found. Their reports now reaching us from ahead are gruesome. The Führer has also given permission for us to hand out a drastic news item to the German press. I gave instructions to make the widest possible use of the propaganda material. We shall be able to live on it for a couple weeks.

Not only did the reports encourage the anti-Communist sentiments of the Americans and the British, but they also threatened the alliance between the three powerful nations. It also caused a division within the American government itself, because many American leaders were unwilling to admit that the Soviets had indeed been responsible for the mass execution.

American views were divided; editorials in mainstream newspapers expressed both views of Soviet guilt and innocence. Arthur Pope, organizer and director for the Committee for National Morale, wrote, “despite the needs and hopes of the world, despite the good offices of both the American and the British governments, despite the efforts of

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Sikorski, Mikolajczyk, and the Russians themselves to find a permanent solution to centuries of discord, and despite recent hopes of favorable settlement, the Polish-Russian problem in once more assuming an ugly character...Poland has kept her neighbors constantly agitated, frantic imperialistic ambitions have been bruited about for an empire extending from the Baltic to the Aegean.”49 Others outright blamed the Germans, claiming that “A German SS leader...declares that the corpses in the grim Dnieper forest came from German concentration camps...it fits the Nazi character. This is the type of ‘propaganda stunt’ that would have seemed a bright idea to Goebbels and Ribbentrop.”50 It seems that even the American press was divided on the issue; nevertheless, they hid the majority of the Katyn controversy in the inner pages of their newspapers. Credibility issues must have been a source of this hesitancy. The Red Cross, the Red Army, the Nazi government, and the Polish government in exile could not agree on who exactly committed this terrible crime, so the United States press obviously had no better information. Like many issues to come, this one was buried because it simply could not be corroborated.

In the midst of the ongoing Katyn controversy, Soviet troops pushed deeper into German territory. On January 18, 1945, days before the Soviet liberators arrived, the Germans liquidated Auschwitz. Many of the prisoners who were able to walk were forced on a brutal winter death march through Germany. Thousands of evacuees died on the journey, and the ones that survived were dumped at camps like Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and Dachau, deep in German territory. Diseases spread rapidly, and sanitation and order virtually disappeared. Mordecai Lichtenstein, a Polish Jew interned in Auschwitz, wrote a report following his escape from the death march into Germany. Delivered to the Jewish Central Information Office in London in May of 1945, his account confirmed,

Many of the party were too weak to stand the strain of this march all through the night and the following day...anyone who broke down on the road was shot on the spot. We passed hundreds of bodies lying on the roadside. Some of the fellows were only wounded and implored

us to take them with us. But we could not do that. I dragged my 
brother Jakob, who had come to Oświęcim (Auschwitz) in September 
1943, on my arm. Although I have seen death a thousand times and 
have become somewhat callous, I must say that the sight of the poor 
fellows lying in the bloodstained snow, desperately begging for pity 
and help, is the most horrible impression which haunts my mind.  

As American and British forces pressed from the west, many of these prisoners were 
again forced on long marches. Countless numbers perished in these horrible death 
parades from sheer exhaustion, dehydration, or murder by German guards. Ironically, the 
evacuations of prisoners, which was undertaken in part to remove evidence of the death 
camp system, essentially helped to produce the scenes of liberation in the camps in 
Germany by Allied troops that convinced the world of Nazi genocide.

In an interview done in a displaced persons camp outside Paris immediately 
following the war, one woman described her march from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück 
concentration camp and her subsequent liberation. The interviewer asked, “Tell me about 
the last few days. Did you notice you were going to be liberated?” Hadassah M., as she 
was anonymously named, replied,

Rumors reached us. But we were already so resigned about everything; 
we didn’t imagine that someday the happy moment would come. Every 
one of us remained entirely alone. But the moment of liberation did 
come. A few minutes before the Americans arrived, all the SS men 
disappeared and we were left alone. They didn’t tell us 
anything…People were sitting and eating grass from hunger. We didn’t 
even have the strength to get up…First the Americans drove through in 
trucks and calmed us. Later on the Russians arrived, and the Russians 
stayed.

Hadassah M. was a Polish Jew who was discovered hiding in Warsaw and sent 
to Majdanek, where she was forced to build the crematoria. Later she was

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Oświęcim Extermination Camp,” by Mordecai Lichtenstein. From the American Jewish Archives, 
52 Donald L. Niewyk, ed. Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival. (Chapel Hill: 
moved to Auschwitz, from where she began the gruesome death march to Ravensbrück. She raises the important question: why did no one come to our aid?

There is debate even today regarding whether the Allies could or should have bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau and its surrounding rail lines in 1944. Central to this dispute are the following questions: (1) what exactly did the Western Allies know and (2) what was the capability of their air forces? These questions are inextricably linked; in 1979, Dino Brugioni and Robert Poirier discovered aerial reconnaissance photos taken in 1944 of the Auschwitz complex. Since this discovery, many historians have weighed in on the topic. Gerhard Weinberg is skeptical about the likelihood of an air raid successfully stopping the killing. Richard Breitman believes that although there is evidence the Allies knew about Auschwitz as early as 1943, there was little reliable intelligence to state the importance of destroying such a camp. David Wyman is very outspoken on the topic, stating that the Allies not only knew about the camp and unequivocally had the power to bomb it, but they also had the moral responsibility to do so. United States Central Intelligence Agency photograph interpreter Dino Brugioni, who uncovered the 1944 reconnaissance photographs, states that photograph interpreters in 1944 were preoccupied with critical military missions and therefore missed the significance of the photos they viewed. He also explains that their capability to enlarge photographs was significantly less than it is today, and therefore it was easy to overlook the photographs taken by accident on runs over the I.G. Farben-Monowitz plant.

Following the 1944 release of the afore-mentioned Vrba Report, requests to bomb Auschwitz were received by the Operations Division of the War Department in the

United States. Americans rejected the appeals, as did the British. It is controversial whether their reconnaissance was indeed accurate and whether innocent civilian inmates would be killed in the bombing attacks. Also, at this time mainstream Jewish opinion, at least in the United States, seemed against the whole idea of bombing Auschwitz. The very thought of the Allied forces deliberately killing Jews was objectionable. And, if Auschwitz was effectively bombed, where could the survivors go? The Germans controlled all of the surrounding territory for miles through mid-1944. Although only President Roosevelt or General Eisenhower could have ordered the American bombing of Auschwitz, there is no record that indicates that either one was asked to deliver such an order even though Jewish leaders had close access to both of them. Rescue, apparently, was either not an option or not a priority for either government. From August 20 to September 13, 1944, the United States Air Force indeed shelled the Auschwitz-Monowitz industrial complex, less than five miles from the deadly gas chambers in Birkenau. However, the United States government preserved its policy of non-involvement, especially in regards to rescue, and bombed neither the gas chambers nor the railway lines used to transport inmates.

In Holocaust studies, especially regarding America and the Holocaust, Roosevelt is consistently cited for being apathetic towards bombing Auschwitz. However, little emphasis is put on the Soviet Union and its proximity and abilities to bomb the camp. It is often assumed, at least in English-language secondary sources, that they Americans failed miserably when it came to protecting the Jewish victims in Auschwitz or even stopping more victims from being delivered to the camp. However, rarely is it mentioned that the Soviet Union had better access and was much more within striking range than either the Brits or the Americans. This is by no means a condemnation of the Soviet Union’s lack of action; the other Allied nations did no better. However, it speaks towards the double-standard that is present in today’s literature. Although it is expected that the Americans and British should have performed some rescue effort, the same denunciation for inaction is not placed on Stalin and his army. Obviously, there were many factors that contributed to this, including the Soviet Union’s march towards Berlin and the opposition they were facing militarily on the front lines. The same goes for the United States and
Great Britain. However, all of the Allies should be criticized equally for inaction. That they were not is important in how Holocaust history is viewed even today.

Whether or not Auschwitz should have been bombed seems irrelevant at this point; it was not, and there is no reversing that fact. However, it speaks volumes about the treatment of Nazi death camps by the Allied powers. In what would become a hallmark of the American press, treatment of the Nazi mass murders in Poland received little space and was relegated to the inner pages of the major papers. The *Los Angeles Times* printed a concise count of the victims from Auschwitz, listing the Polish count at 900,000, on page 5. It made no mention of gas chambers.\(^{58}\) When President Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board in January of 1944, it dictated to that the Allies help with rescue efforts as much as possible for Jewish victims under the Nazi regime. When news of Auschwitz reached the ears of American leaders, why was there no public and thunderous outcry against the Nazis? The Germans publicly denounced the alleged Russian massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest; why did the Americans not follow suit when it came to the Nazis massacre of the Jews in Auschwitz?

Almost every media outlet in the world had ulterior motives when they decided what stories to print regarding news of Auschwitz and subsequent liberations. The Soviet Press, whose troops were liberating the camp, was no different. Not a free press, it was used as a tool by the government to control civilian reactions. Consequently, it was censored throughout the war. Initially, members of the United Press could only receive their information regarding Auschwitz and other death camps in the east from reports coming out of the Soviet Union. Everything written, and not written, served propaganda goals both in the Soviet Union and in their Allied nations. As Yitshak Arad of Yad Vashem points out, “the information reported in the Soviet newspapers about German atrocities against the Jews must be viewed in the context of what was written about the situation of the general population in the occupied territories and how they related to the unique fate of the Jewish population there.”\(^{59}\)

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\(^{58}\) *The Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1944, 5.

From Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 until German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, very little was reported in the Soviet press regarding Nazi atrocities against the Jews. There were, however, printed stories regarding protest gatherings in Moscow against German anti-Semitic policy. There were also numerous articles condemning the horrors of *Kristallnacht*. Moscow, or at least the Soviet leaders there, saw this as an opportunity to get in line with the West’s criticism of the terror happening in Germany. With such strong evidence of anti-German sentiment among both the Soviet population and the Soviet government, it is easy to believe why the 1939 Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact was so shocking to the West. Following this stunning agreement, reports in the Soviet press about the persecution of the Jews in Germany, in occupied Poland, and in other occupied areas ended completely. The tide turned in the Soviet press, and Poland, Great Britain, and France became the aggressors.

Obviously, the attitude of the Soviet press changed following Nazi Germany’s 1941 surprise attack on the Soviet Union. Germany once again became the enemy. However, atrocity stories still lacked coverage. Very few mentioned Jews at all, and often the identity of the Jewish victims was hidden from all but the very astute reader. The first real mention of any wholesale massacre of the Jews was in an article concerning a meeting of the Representatives of the Jewish People in Moscow on August 24, 1941. Later, in November, Stalin mentioned the fate of the Jews in his speech marking the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution. He said,

> The Hitlerite rabble is killing and raping the peace-loving inhabitants of our country…They are carrying out pogroms in the style of the Middle Ages against the Jews…Hitler says…that to establish the great German Empire it is first necessary to displace and destroy the Slavic people – the Russians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Ukranians, Belorussians…

As is evident in this speech, the Soviets often highlighted Hitler’s desire to wipe out his Slavic neighbors rather than solely his Jewish ones. This is not to say that

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60 Ibid., 199-200.
61 Ibid., 200.
62 A transcript of this speech was printed in many Russian newspapers, including Pravda and Izvestia, on November 7, 1941. Translation taken from Ibid., 201.
their plight was any less harsh than that of the Jews; on the contrary, they suffered horribly at the hands of the invading Germans. However, it is an example of the Soviet press’ initial attitudes towards the Jews. This same ambivalence later shows up in the Allied press as well.

This is important. The Soviet Press refused to acknowledge that many victims of the Nazis were killed simply because they were Jewish. When the discovery of the massacre at Babi Yar, outside Kiev, was exposed, the Soviets purposefully omitted the Jewish identity of the victims. The Extraordinary Committee to Investigate the German-Fascist Crimes in Temporarily Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union stated that “during the German occupation of Kiev…over 195,000 citizens, whose only guilt was being Soviet people, were killed…at Babi Yar they threw new-born children in the ravine and buried them alive, together with their killed and wounded parents…” Not a word mentioned that all of these people were Jews. On May 7, 1944, the same Committee made an announcement. 28,000-29,000 Jews were murdered in 1941-1942 in Rovno; their remarks about the events were that “the Hitlerites annihilated Soviet citizens – Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, Jews.” That small quote was the only mention of Jews on almost a full newspaper page. Often, descriptions of Nazi atrocities mentioned them against civilian populations rather than admitting that they targeted a specific group.

However, even if the Soviet press had divulged the mass slaughter of specifically Jews, would the West have followed suit? It is hard to say. Western newspapers, as will later be addressed, also had stipulations and ulterior motives on the stories that ultimately made their front pages. Atrocity claims detailed in Soviet newspapers were often seen by other Allied presses as communist propaganda. Consequently, it would have been difficult for American and British presses to adopt Soviet stories as though they believed them, because the fear of communism among civilians in both nations was still very real. On the same side, the Soviets may have played down the evidence they encountered because they did not want to risk being accused of lying in order to strengthen their cause against the Germans.

Although they tried very hard to avoid being seen as either the liars or the helpless victims, the Soviet regime and the Soviet press could not keep silent forever. By 1942,

63 All quotes as translated in Ibid., 210.
the United States had proof of the Nazi aims against the Jews, and the United Nations forced the Soviet hand on the matter. On December 19, 1942, the Soviet press was required to print the Joint Declaration of the Allied Countries, which was issued concurrently in London, Washington, and Moscow the previous day. The front-page *New York Times* article read,

A joint declaration by members of the United Nations was issued today condemning Germany’s “bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination” of Jews and declaring that “such events can only strengthen the resolve of all freedom-loving peoples to overthrow the barbarous Hitlerite tyranny.” The nations reaffirmed “their solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end.”

In all, eleven nations issued this declaration in their home presses (if possible) on December 18. They included Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Yugoslavia.

In October 1943, Allied reporters finally gleaned a little of what was happening in occupied Eastern territories. A group of Soviet officials brought foreign reporters to Babi Yar where they described to them the massacre in September 1941. At this point there was little reason to deny that systematic executions were taking place in German-occupied territory. However, some reporters believed that this was untrue. Bill Lawrence of the *New York Times* was one such reporter, stating that in October of 1943 he did not doubt that Hitler “treated Jews badly, forcing many of them to flee to the sanctuaries of the West,” but concluded that there was no way the Nazis had killed “millions of Jews, Slavs, gypsies…and those who might be mentally retarded.”

This skepticism, which he later admitted in his published memoirs, seeped into his article about his visit to Babi Yar in 1943. He recognized that there were no more Jews left in Kiev, but that their current location was simply a “mystery.” He went on to say that:

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64 *New York Times*, December 18, 1942, 1.
On the basis of what we saw, it is impossible for this correspondent to judge the truth or falsity of the story told to us. It is the contention of the authorities in Kiev that the Germans, with characteristic thoroughness, not only burned the bodies and clothing but also crumbled the bones, and shot and burned the bodies of all prisoners of war participating in the burning, except for a handful that escaped.66

Not only is his use of the word “contention” important, but he also notes that those murdered were “prisoners of war” instead of revealing their true identity as innocent bystanders to the fight. Lawrence’s denial may explain why the New York Times ran the story on page 3 while other newspapers, such as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Los Angeles Times, and the New York Journal American ran the story on page 1, with the latter proclaiming, “100,000 Kiev Civilians Killed By Nazis: Wholesale Massacre Revealed.”67 Lawrence was not willing to acknowledge the validity of the arguments against the Germans until he visited Maidanek, one of the first death camps discovered by the Red Army. There his skepticism abated. After that visit, his attitude regarding the truth of the claims changed. He remarked,

Never have I been confronted with such complete evidence clearly establishing every allegation made by those investigating German crimes. After inspection of Maidanek, I am now prepared to believe any story of German atrocities, no matter how savage, cruel and depraved.68

Even more amazing than Lawrence’s about-face was the New York Times’ reaction to his declaration. They stated, on the same page, that Lawrence was “employed by this newspaper because he is known to be a thorough and accurate correspondent.”69 Other newspapers did not react the same way, namely the Christian Century who claimed that the “parallel between this story

67 New York Journal American, November 29, 1943, p.1
68 New York Times, August 30, 1944, 1, August 31, 1944, 16.
69 Ibid.
and the ‘corpse factory’ atrocity tale [of World War I] was too striking to be overlooked.”^70 The basis of these doubts was the sole fact that the information came from the Russians, who the newspaper outright did not trust. The Christian Century argued that the atrocity claims between the two nations were nothing more than a ruse to divide the Allies. They went on to assert that Russian claims of mass murder were announced simply to divert attention from the fact that the Russian government refused to come to the aid of Polish Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in August 1944. According to Christian Century, the war was obviously drawing to a close and the Russians were anxious to secure communism a spot in postwar Poland, therefore delaying aid until many of those participating in the revolt had been killed. The Russians, according to the Christian Century, believed that they were sympathetic to the London-based Polish government in exile and would not want a communist-led regime instated following the war. Given the human remains found and Maidanek, and the trustworthiness of the reporters who legitimized Russian claims, Christian Century should never have condemned the story. However, a pattern of devaluing the truth of the liberations emerged in the mainstream press as well.

The Soviet Union, through its government and its presses, set somewhat of a precedent regarding the validity and reporting of atrocity accusations against Nazi Germany. However, they did so for very different reasons than the American presses that followed suit.

^70 Christian Century, September 13, 1944, 1045.
CHAPTER TWO
APRIL – MAY 1945

American and British troops did not get the same firsthand look at the concentration camps until April and May of 1945, almost a year after the Soviets had encountered the first ones in the east. From the beginning, the Allied troops in Germany encountered sick horrors. Liberators on both fronts were forced to burn camp buildings and bodies because the threat of disease was so great. The smell and sights caused many troops and officials to vomit.

As American and British troops pushed into Germany, they encountered strange things that bore hints of the Nazi Final Solution. They met refugees and small work Kommandos on the road who were nothing but skeletons with sunken eyes. They found abandoned gas chambers and mass graves. However, the true horror did not set in until April 4, 1945, when units of the Fourth Armored Division of the Third Army of the United States moved on Gotha and Ohrdruf in Western Germany. They were in search of secret Nazi communications along the Autobahn, but what they discovered instead soon became known as one of the most infamous and horrendous sites in history. After the Americans took control of the town where part of the secret communications center was located, gathering troops found the main gate to Ohrdruf concentration camp just over the crest of a small hill. Corpses in striped uniforms were found just inside the gate. Frank Hamburger, one of the first men on the scene, said “…the most vivid recollection of the whole camp is the pyre that was located on the edge of the camp. It was a big pit where they had stacked bodies and burned them.”

Ohrdruf was in fact a minor sub-camp of

Buchenwald, near Weimar, Germany; however, its significance lay in the fact that it was the first camp discovered by either the American or the British armies that contained both live prisoners and corpses. Eight days later, on April 12, Generals George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower, and Omar Bradley toured the camp, shocked and distraught at the loss of civilian life. As the story goes, Patton walked away from the group behind a barracks and became physically sick.\textsuperscript{72} Ironically, this was the day that President Roosevelt passed away.

General Eisenhower ordered every nearby unit to view Ohrdruf to remind them of the evil they were fighting. From the Third Army headquarters he wrote to London and Washington, “We are constantly finding German camps in which they have placed political prisoners where unspeakable conditions exist. From my own personal observation, I can state unequivocally that all written statements up to now do not paint the full horrors.”\textsuperscript{73} Eisenhower was obviously shaken by what he witnessed, but it was just the beginning.

From Ohrdruf, the Third Army progressed deeper into Germany. Even as the horrors of Ohrdruf were sinking in, United States Army units due north were uncovering additional and more awful conditions. At Nordhausen, American troops found three thousand corpses and less than seven hundred critically ill inmates. Nordhausen also contained the first crematorium uncovered by American troops. From there, soldiers “discovered” camps such as Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen (near Linz, Austria), and Ebensee at a sickening pace.

Aaron Cohn, then an enlisted man but now a Georgia Juvenile Court Judge, described the liberation of Ebensee,

April 1945…When we entered the courtyard, we found 100 or more survivors, skeletons – gaunt, starved faces waiting for someone or something to happen… “Dass is a shutztafermier [SS Major]!” someone said, mistaking my gun and uniform for that of the SS. The crowd surged back in fear. “Nein,” I replied. “Ich been an American

\textsuperscript{72} General Omar N. Bradley, \textit{A Soldier’s Story}, (New York: Rand McNally Company, 1951), 539.
\textsuperscript{73} Dwight D. Eisenhower. Cable reprinted in \textit{Atrocities and Other Conditions in Concentration Camps in Germany}, 79\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, Senate Document No. 47 (Washington, 1945, reprinted as Witness to the Holocaust Publication Series #3, 1983), 1.
Major,” and I repeated it again and again. They started surging a little closer. I then told them I was an American Jew and, when the understood, they crowded around kissing and hugging me. Do you know my Uncle Louie in St. Louis? My Aunt Sadie in Brooklyn? They all wanted to know. In the United States everybody is supposed to know everybody else…Thirty-five years and the memory is still vivid…without being overly dramatic, you just never forget.74

Survivor Elie Wiesel stated, “I shall always remember the day I was liberated: April 11, 1945. Buchenwald. The terrifying silence terminated by abrupt yelling. The first American soldiers, their faces ashen. Their eyes – I shall never forget…it was as though [they] sought to alter reality with their eyes. Rarely have I seen such anger, such rage.”75 The horrors they encountered shocked the soldiers. John Glustrom, of the 333rd Engineers of the United States Army that liberated Buchenwald, said,

My first impression was the odor. The stench of it was all over the place and there were a bunch of very bewildered, lost individuals who came to me pathetically at the door in their unkempt uniforms…they were staying at the camp even though their guards and staff had fled because they didn’t know where to go or what to do…my feeling was that this was the most shattering experience of my life.76

Many soldiers, like Glustrom, describe the liberations as a shocking and life-altering experience. What they encountered could not be avoided or denied, and many did their best to get word home. Oftentimes, however, their words fell on deaf ears.

Others composed personal records of their experiences during the liberations. Sergeant Hurtis L. Enlow, a young American soldier involved in the liberation of

74 Judge Aaron Cohn as quoted in “Witness to the Holocaust” by Don Fischer, Atlanta Magazine, 1980, 161.
76 From the remarks of John Glustrom, 333rd Engineers, U.S. Army, as quoted in Abzug, Inside the Vicious Heart, 53.
Buchenwald, kept a diary of his advance into Germany and his time at the concentration camp. On April 17, 1945, in a shaky, unsteady hand, he wrote, “I am in Weimar, Germany. Lots of P.W.’s – a prison here. Starved Russians and Yanks to death. I saw the dead ones stacked on trucks like wood. They starved about 30,000 to death here.” On April 22, after discovering the true intent of the camp, he could only bring himself to write, “This prison camp is really something to see. Unbelievable.” Liquid splatters mark the pages of his diary. On April 26, his horror is still apparent: “Five days before we captured this prison they killed 10,000 inmates. Went through 2 or 3 buildings near Gas Chambers. These buildings had thousands of women’s dresses. They stripped the women of their clothes and marched them to the Gas Chambers, killing thousands of them. These fellows that are yet alive are just skin & bones.” April 27: “Still at Camp Buchenwald. In rock quarry back of this building US Government dug into the SS troops loot – two caves full of money, watches, rings, silverwear. [sic] Just like a story book.” April 28: “Still taking out loot.” April 29: “Still taking out loot.” On May 1, his tone changes and his anger becomes apparent.

Would like to know the value of the loot that came out of the SS troop’s cave. Millions. Can’t believe it. They were just like pirates only worse. If one of these Germans even make one crooked move I will beat his brains out with my bare hands. I wouldn’t waste a good bullet on him. I have a good German pistol I carry. I’d use their own gun on ‘em. Ammo is hard to get for it, but I’d just have eight rounds for eight Germans. I sure wish the German-loveing [sic] people back at home could see the big furnace where they burnt our fellows – see the dead ones just skin and bones stacked in front of the big furnace door like wood ready to burn. Sure makes my blood boil – damn those SS troops!??

Enlow’s diary ends there, but inevitably his anger and sorrow live on. Like many soldiers involved in the liberations, it was a life-altering experience, not one to be denied nor relived in the following years.

?? Diary excerpts all courtesy of Sergeant Hurtis Lowell Enlow, April 22-May 1, 1945, Collection # 98.0552, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.
Diaries like Enlow’s and letters like Glustrom’s remind their readers of an important phenomenon. When describing the war using the word “liberation,” many images come to mind: champagne being uncorked, flags waving, men kissing their women – much like the scenes that would later occur in Paris, New York, and Rome. But the liberations of the camps saw no such events. Grim-faced Allied soldiers stood next to piles of corpses, walking skeletons, and starving men and women. Naked or barely clothed, packed into barracks with the dead, too weak to move, the inmates greeted their liberators with at best wide-eyed astonishment and at worst with no movement at all. There was no outward joy to be seen, no parades or celebrations. For many inmates, sheer survival was the only goal.

Elie Wiesel, one of the most famous and outspoken Holocaust survivors, remembers his own “pathetic” attempt to thank his liberators. “What did we feel? Only sadness, and also gratitude…you wept, and we could not. We had no more tears left; we had nothing left. In a way we were dead and we knew it. What did we feel? Only sadness.” Edward Murrow, a prominent American journalist whose radio broadcasts during World War II were followed attentively, visited Buchenwald a few days after liberation. It caused a great deal of controversy, but was extremely important in legitimizing atrocity claims because he refused to apologize for his severe descriptions. One of his most famous quotes stated,

We proceeded to the small courtyard [at Buchenwald]…It was floored with concrete. There were two rows of bodies stacked up like cordwood. They were thin and very white. Some of the bodies were terribly bruised, though there seemed to be little flesh to bruise. Some had been shot through the head but they bled little. All except two were naked. I tried to count them as best I

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could…more than 500 men and boys lay there in two neat piles.\textsuperscript{80}

Although the beginning of his broadcast was heartbreaking, it was the end that truly got the world’s attention. He ended by stating,

If I’ve offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I am not in the least bit sorry. I was there on Thursday. And many men and many tongues blessed the name of Roosevelt. For long years his name had meant the full measure of their hopes. These men who had kept close company with death for many years did not know that Mr. Roosevelt would within hours join their comrades who had laid their lives on the scales of freedom.

His broadcast was followed by a poignant silence. It not only opened America’s eyes, but it also placed Murrow in company with some of the greatest reporters of all time, noted for his honesty and integrity. Later, he would be one of the most influential figures in modern American history. For then, he was simply a witness. His testimony on air was more than words on a newspaper page could ever convey.

At Buchenwald, United States Army Officials rounded up German citizens from the nearby towns to tour the carnage in the camp. Footage of these tours is startling: well-dressed, well-fed Germans walked hand-in-hand, aghast at the evidence they were forced to view. In interviews done many years after liberation, many Germans stated that although they knew the concentration camps existed, they had no idea what was occurring inside their walls. Erwin Hammel, a Catholic member of the Hitler Youth living in Cologne, Germany throughout the war stated, “You knew there were concentration camps. What they looked like from the inside, you didn’t know…of course, malnutrition and disease were all over the place.”\textsuperscript{81} Some downright denied any knowledge. Werner Hassel, from Leobschütz in Upper Silesia, said, “The [German] soldiers out there on the front knew effectively knew nothing about the concentration camps and the mass murder of the Jews…No, there weren’t any rumors either. I would

\textsuperscript{80} Edward R. Murrow, radio address of April 15, 1945, transcript printed in The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps, 1945, 1987.

have heard them.”82 Other Germans were more outspoken: Ekkehard Falter, born and raised in Dresden, was asked when he first heard of the concentration camps and the goals to exterminate the Jews. He replied, “We’ve come back to this question. I’ve wondered often about it myself... only in 1943 did it become clear to me that Jews were being incarcerated in large numbers. They disappeared without any ado, picked up one by one.”83 As many Germans came to realize, there is a big difference between incarceration and extermination, and many are hesitant to discuss their knowledge of the camps during the war.

As the British and American troops pushed further into Germany, they discovered more and more gruesome sights. On April 29, 1945, several hundred men of the U.S. Army’s 42nd “Rainbow” Division came upon Dachau, near Munich. The history of Dachau is important because, according to writer Sam Dann, it was the “first concentration camp in Nazi Germany, opening in March 1933 and becoming the model for the entire concentration camp system.”84 In June 1933, Theodor Eicke was named Commander of the Dachau concentration camp. He was notorious for setting up a detailed system of structure for the camp and its inmates. In 1934, Eicke was named Inspector General for all concentration camps under the Nazi regime. The model he began at Dachau spread to all the camps throughout the empire. He developed an institution which was meant to scare the masses and spread fear through its very existence. Dachau, the original concentration camp, became a training ground of sorts for the SS. They learned to view other races and cultures as Untermenchen, or sub-human.85

At first, the concentration camps were intended for political enemies of the Nazi party. Dachau, the first, housed mostly Social Democrats, Communists, and Monarchists. Later in 1933, Jehovah’s Witnesses were incarcerated. However, gradually the list grew. By 1939, the inmates included all political opponents of the Nazis, specifically Jews, gypsies, clergymen, homosexuals, and blacks. After Kristallnacht over 10,000 Jews from all over Bavaria were delivered into Dachau, many of whom never survived the war. At Dachau, as well as other concentration camps, Jewish inmates received harsher treatment

82 Ibid., 182.
83 Ibid., 198-199.
85 Barbara Distel, Dachau Concentration Camp, (Brussels: Comité International de Dachau, 1972), 1-3.
than other prisoners. As Nazi territories, and consequently the concentration camp system grew, inmates from many other countries were integrated into the camps. When Dachau was liberated, the inmates represented over 30 nations, and only a very small faction were German citizens.\(^{86}\)

Dachau was one of the last camps discovered by the Allies, and was also the site of one of the first memorials in Western Germany following the war. This is in part because by late April, many journalists realized the importance of documenting the evidence in concentration camps immediately upon liberation. Dann, in analyzing the liberation, claims that “Dachau was a magnet for the media…Word that the capture of Dachau was imminent spread throughout the journalistic fraternity- and sorority; many of the arrived there practically on [the] heels [of the Rainbow Division].”\(^{87}\) The journalists present at Dachau were fully aware of its importance. Time-Life correspondent Sidney Olson wrote, “what they found bears out every atrocity told about the first great concentration camp in the twelve years of its existence.”\(^{88}\) Boyd Lewis, European News Manager for the United Press, describes fellow reporters after witnessing the camps: “They landed in Paris, a rather cocky lot. They were some of the best men in the communications industry. They headed for those camps, which had been fairly well cleaned up by the time they got there…When they came back at the end of that week, [they were] men who had gazed into the jaws of Hell. And they believed! Believe you me, they believed.”\(^{89}\) It seems that, craving these images as absolute proof, the press systematically documented the liberation. The newspaper of the United States Armed Forces, the Stars and Stripes of May 1, 1945, ran the headline “Catching Up With the SS – Yanks Free 32,000 at Dachau Death Camp,” and includes a list of famous inmates who perished there.\(^{90}\) However, little of what journalists recorded actually ended up in mainstream American newspapers.

Similar to their counterparts at other camps, some soldiers liberating Dachau sent pictures or letters home to their relatives, explaining in harsh terms that this is not

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86 Ibid.
87 Dann, Dachau, 41.
88 Remarks of Sidney Olson, as printed in Ibid., 42.
90 Stars and Stripes, Germany edition, May 1, 1945, 1.
propaganda and these atrocities did occur. One soldier who was at Dachau wrote to his parents about what he saw, and said, “they didn’t know what the hell I was talkin’ about.”91 For the soldiers entering the camps, from Ohrdruf to Dachau, it was a tremendous experience. Sadly, for Americans at home, it was a sidebar. The main focus of the press and propaganda in April of 1945, at least for the United States, was the push into Germany and “VE Day,” or victory in Europe.

Most accounts by American troops state that they had no idea what they were about to encounter as they pushed into Germany. As I have stated, those on the home front had little knowledge of the camps the Russians had already encountered; news like that reached the troops on the front even slower. Stars and Stripes, the newspaper of the United States Armed Forces overseas, released many editions but had to be careful what they printed for fear of giving away locations or secrets. Since the publication “offices” of the Stars and Stripes were located so close to the front lines, stories reporting the fighting (and the liberations) had to be censored to avoid giving away troop positions or movement.92 For that reason, troops in the Pacific Theatre often had more knowledge of the discovery of concentration camps than did those in European Theatre. Dr. Leon Bass, then an 18-year-old enlisted man, recalls, “no one had told me about the death camps. I went through many orientations, but no one shared with my what had been going on in Europe for so many years. On this day in April 1945, with some of my comrades, I walked through the gates of a place called Buchenwald. I was totally unprepared for what I saw.”93

Comments such as Dr. Bass’ are found frequently in the testimony of liberators. However, if American and British soldiers had been aware of the situation, would they have reacted differently? Would the scenes they encountered have struck them any less horrifying than they did? Probably not, for once contact was made the images will never be erased. But this points to the central theme of this paper: coverage was lacking, even

91 From interview of Jack Hallett, Witness to the Holocaust Project, Emory University, as quoted in Azbug, Inside the Vicious Heart, 138.
to our troops overseas, and the truth had been hidden for some time. The American press was as much at fault for American ignorance, indifference or, at worst, disregard for the truth. The reasons for this disappointing trend in the Allied press will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE
REACTIONS AND REASONS

Before an understanding can be established of why the liberations were the first real evidence to show up on the front pages of the mainstream American press, first it must be determined how confirmation of the Final Solution, and consequently the Holocaust, was handled in the years preceding 1945. Certainly Nazi ideology and presence were no secret; intense anti-Semitism was clear almost from the beginning of Hitler’s command. In order to determine why the Allied press was for the most part so staunchly against giving atrocity claims front-page coverage, the timeline must go even further back than the outbreak of war in 1939. As stated at the beginning of this paper, journalists were present in Germany before the war. They saw deportations occurring, they had knowledge of pogroms such as Kristallnacht, and they knew of Hitler’s eugenics plans. Yet the Final Solution, Hitler’s order to physically exterminate the Jews, came as a shock. It took almost a full calendar year for the Allied governments themselves, and consequently their presses, to confirm even the existence of such a program. During this year, death camps had the capacity to kill anywhere from 15,000-30,000 people a day in gas chambers. Over five million were gassed between 1942-1944 alone.94

Before the implementation of the Final Solution, many small steps were taken against European Jews that resonated throughout Germany. Although formal concentration camps existed from the very beginning of Hitler’s regime in 1933, no one believed that they would become an enduring legacy of Hitler’s rule. During Hitler’s first year in office, ten concentration camps were constructed in Germany, the functions of which were carefully concealed from the world. This is not to say that news of them did

94 Levin, Holocaust Years, 57-59.
not get out; on the contrary, there was substantial evidence of both their existence and their horrifying conditions virtually from the start. However, stories from within their walls diminished as the war went on.

In the beginning, the concentration camps were not built as killing centers; many were simply used as an excuse to incarcerate and torture enemies of the state.\textsuperscript{95} They were also used as a training ground for Hitler’s \textit{Gestapo}, or Secret State Police because they left no room for human emotions or sympathies to get in the way. Later, the camps served as medical experimentation labs, complete with expendable human guinea pigs. However, these camps were not the only tool for anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and they were not the only clues as to what Hitler had planned.

In America, a small few noticed the trend of intense anti-Semitism happening in Nazi Germany. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, head of the international World Jewish Congress, began his fight against anti-Semitism in Europe during this time. A close friend and confidant of President Roosevelt, Wise organized a rally in New York City in 1933 to protest the Nazi treatment of Jews. This was incredibly early in the Nazi regime and an exceedingly astute and bold move by the United States Jewish leader. Following the rally, he received a message from German rabbis urging him to stop announcing such nonsense as truth. They implied that American Jews were doing this for their own benefit and in the process were defaming the Germany that German Jews loved.\textsuperscript{96} In 1933, thirty-six thousand Jews fled Germany, but in the relative calm of 1934, over half of them returned. At this time, no one fathomed that Nazi anti-Semitism could culminate in the Holocaust.

United States immigration laws had been set in 1921 under President Harding and in 1924 under President Coolidge. A complicated formula used the number of people of a specific origin living in America in 1890 as the basis for comparison. Not only were these numbers outdated at this time, but the political tides had turned since the early 1920’s. The harshest regulations were aimed at Eastern Europeaners, specifically Russia and Poland. Immigration of Italians and Asians were equally regulated. The total number of immigrants permitted annually was set at 153,774; the two countries of origin given the

\textsuperscript{96} “America and The Holocaust,” \textit{American Heritage}. (July/August 1999), 36.
highest allocations were Great Britain (65,721) and Germany (25,957.) Because of the
Great Depression, these numbers remained stagnant for many years.97 It was a sad chapter of American history; those who needed to escape the worst carnage, specifically in Eastern Europe, Spain, and China, were virtually excluded from entering the borders of a country founded on equal opportunity and with a policy of open arms.

In 1933 Eleanor Roosevelt founded the International Rescue Committee which brought intellectual, political, and labor leaders to America. Her husband issued more than the allotted number of visas for these people to enter the U.S. However, both the United States and Great Britain were reserved in exactly how many refuges they could accept from Nazi-occupied Europe. Both nations were facing large unemployment numbers, and both nations had recently climbed out of the dark hole of the Great Depression.98 In March 1938, when the Anschluss of Austria occurred, Roosevelt called an international conference of twenty-nine nations at Evian, France to arrange for the rescue and immigration of Germany and Austria’s 475,000 remaining Jews. The conference had clear and lofty goals, but there was significant unease regarding its outcome. In a New York Times interview, Rabbi Wise stated, “One thing I know: the Evian Conference ought not and, in my judgment, will not sanction governments other than the Nazi Reich establishing new centers for the manufacture of refugee populations. The governments of Eastern and Central Europe must not imagine that it is for our government…to deal with the problem of their own so-called superfluous populations.”99 However, Rabbi Wise was correct in his predictions and that is indeed what happened. The Polish and Romanian governments requested the same rights of refuge for their Jews – or for the same rights as Germany to expel their Jewish populations. Because this included an additional 3.5 million people, the results of the conference were poor.100 The only thing the Evian Conference accomplished was the establishment of the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) whose goal was to force the Germans to let Jewish refugees leave with enough to secure their lives elsewhere.

97 Ibid.
98 Hilberg, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders, 252-253.
100 Levin, Holocaust Years, 28.
When war was declared in 1939, press reports reaching the United States began to indicate an increase in Hitler’s desire to drive out all the Jews in Germany to ghettos in its outlying territories. With the invasion of Poland, there were reports of a “purge” on the Jews of Poland and deportations extending throughout the German protectorate.\textsuperscript{101} Some newspapers ran stories on the exile the Jews, including the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} who announced that “Thousands of Jews” were “in a New Exodus from Vienna to Poland.”\textsuperscript{102} It went on to say that they could take nothing with them, and if they could not find work, they were “expected to starve.” Reports of the conditions in these ghettos also appeared in the press. Mention was even made of concentration camps. However, as Allied troops would later discover, there was a vast difference between concentration camps and death camps. Those, and Hitler’s implementation of the Final Solution, would come later.

Throughout this period, Hitler was systematically conquering more territory throughout Europe. In 1939, thousands of German Jews managed to escape into Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland. By when France fell in 1940, Europe became a prison for all Jews. The International Rescue Committee could only do so much. The invasion of Russia in June 1941 tightened the noose – and special mobile killing units, called \textit{Einsatzgruppen}, slaughtered over 1.5 million Jews behind German lines in Russia. Zionism, or the Jewish quest for a homeland in the Land of Israel, was not a major movement in the Eastern European Jewish communities. Jews of Europe, unlike in many other places, were extremely patriotic. And Hitler was one of the most outspoken and determined ideologues of racial superiority who ever ran a nation.

Although it was not necessarily perceived in print, many had knowledge of the occurrences in Europe, including journalists, German soldiers, Vatican intelligence, the Polish underground, and neutral foreign ministry and consular officials, among others. In early August 1942, Gerhardt Riegner, the representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, sent a telegram through the American and British embassies in Switzerland to the WJC in London and New York. Riegner’s source was a German industrialist, Edward Schulte, who told Swiss businessmen of Hitler’s plan to annihilate nearly 4 million Jews

\textsuperscript{101} Lipstadt, \textit{Beyond Belief}, 142.  
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, November 1, 1938, 5.
using prussic acid the following fall. It was the first report from a reliable source that shed light on Hitler’s true intent: the total annihilation of an entire people. The cable was initially dismissed by the United States State Department as being inaccurate. Further verification was requested by Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. Thus sparked a debate within the WJC as to how to handle publication of such a report. Riegner himself wanted more publicity “in the British and American press and over the radio, but so far very little has been done in this respect.” An earlier telegram, in May 1942, depicted the same atrocity stories but this one was also disregarded by the State Department. The problem remains as to what exactly was done with these reports, and why they were not used to rouse public opinion or action on the matter. The Foreign Office in London claimed that any official British response “might annoy the Germans.” One of the only newspapers that published some of the news concerning the initial May report was the ultra-conservative British Daily Telegraph. It detailed the report, including its conclusion that the Nazis intended to exterminate all of the Polish Jewry and eventually, all Jewry in Europe.

Reactions to the second, more well-known Riegner report were different. Jewish leaders were hesitant to push for coverage of “Jewish propaganda” for fear of retribution and argued that as much detailed information must be provided as possible. Some, including Max Beer, a well-known socialist, argued that Jewish suffering should only be mentioned in the context of violence against other people. Nazi propaganda already claimed that this was a “Jewish war,” and Beer had no desire to play that card in the Allied press. Many Jewish Officials in America grew antsy – prolonged silence risks becoming complicity. In October 1942, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency published the whole Riegner cable without revealing its source. Finally, on November 16, 1942, Undersecretary Welles contacted Rabbi Wise, who was exiled in New York City. Welles gave Wise the green light to keep all sources a secret but to alert the press that atrocity claims had been verified and that the report was accurate in most every disheartening detail. Wise and his son James called a press conference in Washington, DC, attended by

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103 Gerhardt Reigner, as quoted in Laurel Leff, Buried By the Times, 151.
105 Daily Telegraph (Great Britian), June 25, 1942, 5. This was the only newspaper encountered by the author that mentioned the May telegram, although there may very well be others.
about a half dozen reporters. When news that the State Department had confirmed a German plan to annihilate all the Jews in Europe finally appeared on the wires, hardly any newspapers picked it up. The New York Times ran it on the bottom of two related stories on November 25. The evidence cited in the Times story quoted Polish officials who stated that “only 40,000 October ration cards had been printed for the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, where the population last March was 433,000.”

Below this was a short statement from Rabbi Wise declaring that he had been awaiting confirmation since September. Other papers ran the story, but most attributed the information from the press conference to Rabbi Wise rather than to the State Department. The New York Times reported that Rabbi Wise “learned through sources confirmed by the State Department that about half the estimated 4,000,000 Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had been slain in an ‘extermination’ campaign.” Other newspapers, such as the New York Herald Tribune, ran the story in similar style and on similar page numbers. Jewish organizations throughout the world called for a day of mourning on December 2, 1942, in response to the claims of the Riegner report.

United States and British officials denounced the tragedy and warned the Nazis that they would be held individually responsible for the massacre of the Jews. On December 17, 1942, English Parliament stood in silence for the first time in its history to mourn and to pray for strength. Edward Murrow, the American broadcaster, reported in his radio address of December 13, 1942 that “millions of human beings, most of them Jews, are being gathered up and ruthlessly and efficiently murdered…there are no longer ‘concentration camps,’ we must speak now of ‘extermination camps.’”

After confirmation of the Riegner report, many people who had personal ties to the massacre began to realize the truth. W.A. Visser’t Hooft, the Protestant theologian and first secretary of the World Council of Churches, began to comprehend the full potential of the Nazi disease when he had a conversation in 1943 with a young Swiss businessman who had made a trip to Russia in late 1941. The young man was invited by the Nazis to witness the mass killing of the Jews as if he was being invited to a hunting

109 Edward R. Murrow radio address transcript, December 13, 1942.
excursion or sporting event. In Hooft’s words, the young man told him that “group after group of Jewish men, women and children were forced to lie down in mass graves and were then machine-gunned to death…From that moment onward, I had no longer any excuse for shutting my mind to the information which could find no place in my view of the world and humanity.”\textsuperscript{110}

Although people such as Visster’t Hooft knew the truth, and although reports such as Riegner’s were available, still many were in doubt and not motivated to act. It is hard to believe that such stories could not overwhelm the front pages of the major American newspapers. How could it not lead the New York Times at least once in the whole history of the Holocaust? The truth is that in some circles it was the only topic of conversation and in some places it was the only thing that mattered. But those circles were not in the United States and those places were not the places that could prevent the impeding disaster.

In Great Britain, one newspaper stood out above all others in their quest to announce the truth in December 1942: London’s\textit{ Jewish Chronicle}. Their most bold headline read, “Two Million Jews Slaughtered. Most Terrible Massacre of All Time!”\textsuperscript{111} An editorial appeared that very day that read, “this paper has striven to awaken the public mind to the facts of the Jewish extermination being carried on by the Nazi masters in Europe. Again and again it has cried aloud that the oft-repeated Nazi threat of Jewish annihilation was seriously intended.”\textsuperscript{112}

However, despite the acknowledgement of the truth and the outcry against it, there was no rescue effort made. There have been excuses made regarding this lack of action, including that no one could stop the death camps from existing. Historian Gerhard Weinberg claims that the total number of Jews saved by winning the war as swiftly as possible was enormously greater than the total number who could have been saved by any rescue efforts proposed by anyone between 1941 and 1945.\textsuperscript{113} It is hard to say whether this is the truth. I am inclined to believe, like many, that any action at all was better than none. Words are strong but action is indeed the most powerful.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Jewish Chronicle} (London), December 11, 1942, 1.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Gerhard Weinberg, \textit{A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
The story of the Riegner report, and how it was handled not only by top American officials but also by the American press, speaks volumes for the treatment of the Holocaust by the same factions. From the time the Nazi party took over in Germany in 1933, Americans at home met accusations of systematic persecution of the Jews in Europe with disbelief. As the war drew near, and eventually overtook the United States, stories more pertinent to American lives superseded those of the liberations. This, coupled with the clear disbelief that such atrocities were occurring, led to a certain apathy in America. Some reporters strove to minimize this skepticism, but their efforts did little. In an April 1943 editorial column in the New York Post, Dorothy Thompson condemned American beliefs that the atrocity stories coming out of Germany were “greatly exaggerated” at best or “merely propaganda” at worst.\footnote{Dorothy Thompson. “On the Record,” New York Post, April 2, 1943, 29.} In January of 1944, in the Sunday New York Times Magazine, Arthur Koestler wrote of his disdain for Americans who expressed disbelief in “the grim stories of Nazi atrocities.”\footnote{Arthur Koestler, “The Nightmare is a Reality.” The New York Times Magazine, January 9, 1944, 5, 30.} Appallingy, the Christian Century magazine replied to Koestler’s article by saying that there was “no point in screaming” about the atrocities against the Jews because this would only “emotionally exhaust” Americans whose sole goal was “building peace after the War.”\footnote{The Christian Century, February 16, 1944, 204-06.} Despite the majority, a few journalists believed that by releasing more credible information, they could influence public opinion.

In March of 1944, the situation for Hungarian Jews became increasingly more perilous. Although Hungary had entered the war in June of 1941 on the side of the Germans, no formal actions of deportation or incarceration were taken against their Jews by their government. Although their population rode waves of anti-Semitism, their Jewish population was more protected than others. In March of 1944, as the tide turned against the Germans, the Hungarian government pulled away from Nazi party ideology and support. In March of 1944, the Nazis instated a puppet government in the Hungarian capital of Budapest. It soon became clear that one of its main goals would be to deport the Jews that had lived there in relative safety since the outbreak of the war. By July 7, a mere four months later, over 480,000 Jews had been deported to concentration camps.
The news of these developments was well-documented and therefore extremely difficult to deny in the press. The rumors about a Final Solution were now more than two years old and very tough to reject. This, coupled with the reports from neutral ambassadors in Hungary that the government planned to deport one million Jews total, made the Hungarian threat all the more real. There was really no way to accuse these diplomats of brewing propaganda such as this solely to incite antagonism against the Hungarian people. There was only one obvious reason why the Nazis were devoting manpower, energy, and force to deporting the Hungarian Jews, and that reason was extremely hard for many members of the press to believe. If the Nazis were on their way to defeat, the only reason that they would waste so much energy on the Hungarian Jews was if they were waging a separate but parallel war against all European Jews. Although this principle had been established with reports about the Final Solution, it was extremely hard, from a military standpoint, to establish why the Nazis were pursuing this course of action.

News of this late push for the annihilation of a relatively safe group of people was, like almost all other reports, a war sidebar. Some reporters were astute, including Paul Winkler of the Washington Post. He stated that because of the brutality and speed with which the Nazis were moving in Hungary meant only one thing: that they “intended to leave no Jews alive behind them.” Joseph Levy of the New York Times bluntly concluded that the new Hungarian government’s “special baths” are really “[baths] in huge gas chambers arranged for mass murder, like those inaugurated in Poland.” Levy followed this story closer than most of his colleagues, running columns on it on May 4, May 18, and June 2. However, all these stories appear in the back pages, where readers would have to dig to find the truth. The only other reporter to follow the story as closely was the Christian Science Monitor’s J. Emlyn Williams. “Sixty-five concentration camps have been established to which Jews have been herded prior to transport to the execution camps of Poland.”

Although these articles were few and far between, talk of rescue efforts ensued. The American Jewish Conference proposed opening the borders of Palestine for all Jews

117 Washington Post, April 11, 1944, 8.
who could reach it. The editorials, at least, of the major newspapers, notably the New York Herald Tribune, the New York Post, and the Christian Century, along with all of the Hearst newspapers, called for some semblance of action to begin rescue efforts. More than 40,000 refugees from death camps eventually found solace in Spain, who was very liberal with their immigration policy. Many were housed in squalor and begged for the opportunity to go to America or to Great Britain. Many did not get that chance.

As all of these events came to fruition, there were certainly examples of printed protest against the situation in Europe. An October 1942 article by William Kernan in The Churchman describes how the Nazis were building concentration camps in the European states they were occupying and that “already more than 2,000,000 men who were Jews have been murdered…stop Anti-Semitism and you stop Nazism dead in its tracks.” Even before formal confirmation of the Riegner report, journalists like Kernan were perceptive and bold enough to decry Nazi practices in Europe.

Other columnists printed their opinions during and after the liberations, and those who visited sites like Ohrdruf seemed to be the most vocal. On April 10, 1945, the Washington Post devoted a fraction of its third page to articles and pictures of the discovery of Ohrdruf taken by its correspondents overseas. One article described Ohrdruf as a “murder asylum” where almost “20,000 political prisoners, Jews, and slave laborers were put to death.” Edward Folliard, the Washington Post’s war correspondent, admitted his previous skepticism in an article on April 16, 1945. Having recently visited Ohrdruf, and consequently made a believer, he wrote, “[This] correspondent, who has been a skeptic ever since the last war when men argued about Edith Cavell and the Belgian babies who were supposed to have their hands cut off, drove all the way up here from Frankfurt to join the grim procession. The thing we had heard about was right before our eyes in the yard of the concentration camp…yes, there it was.” Folliard’s emotion is clearly evident in his description. He was obviously sickened by the sight, and

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120 The Churchman, October 1942, 1.
from that point on, he devoted several columns to convincing the American people that these atrocities did indeed occur.

An editorial article in the Florida Times-Union, published in Jacksonville, Florida, proves that some citizens were indeed stricken by the small amount of information they heard regarding the liberations. A citizen of Jacksonville who had recently read the detailed reports coming out of Ohrdruf called for action and condemned “an easy peace for Germany.”

The remarks of this anonymous civilian call attention to the transgression that would befall America if it took Germany’s surrender and did not hold them accountable for atrocities. After detailing the horrors, the author remarks, “Some think it is wrong to bring to light facts concerning such atrocities as herein described. They doubtless would frown upon punishment for the criminals, if they were captured. If punishment were possible, the only kind that would adequately fit the crimes would be to combine the suffering of all victims of the Nazis and force each German criminal to endure it through eternity.”

In response to cries like these, the International Military Tribunal, which consisted of judges from Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States, indicted and tried twenty-two high-ranking German officials in late 1945 for war crimes and atrocities against humanity. However, the “Holocaust” as we now know it was never tried. Many who were indicted defended themselves by stating that they simply “followed orders.” Nineteen were convicted.

Despite all of the articles mentioned above, many Americans remained in doubt despite considerable documentary evidence collected by liberating troops in 1945. On April 19, 1945, the Washington Post’s Folliard noted, “where atrocities are concerned, most Americans are skeptics. They have to be shown.”

His point was valid. There were critics who argued that the United States government fabricated and implanted the reports, photographs, articles, and film detailing the horrors of the camps in order to instill a feeling of vengeance in American citizens. Many doubts came from the

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124 Ibid.
inconsistencies in numbers being released by Allied officials overseas. Milton Mayer of the Progressive questioned the legitimacy of the films and reports of the liberations because “there are sure to be fantastic discrepancies in the reports.”

Joseph Pulitzer, publisher and editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, visited Buchenwald and Dachau in May of 1945. When he returned, he wrote an article entitled “A Report to the American People.” He reprimanded all Americans who believed that “this talk of atrocities is all propaganda,” and called for American support for the survivors.

Another reason for American apathy was the lack of credible sources journalists used to verify their information. For example, an October 1944 article in the New York Times is titled “Germans Kill 346 of 350 Women in Auschwitz Concentration Camp.” There are various stats and figures, and details of the killings. However, it summarily lends its credibility to the fact that “this news has been brought to Paris through trustworthy channels.”

Throughout the war, numerous journalists stated that information about deportations and executions did not come from eyewitnesses who could personally corroborate what happened. Therefore, reporters were hesitant to treat such reports as truth. More importantly, much of the information that Allied journalists did receive came from German statements, broadcasts, and newspapers. If anything these sources denied, not verified, horrific information. Even when the press did encounter live witnesses, it often rejected their testimony because they were not considered ‘reliable’ or ‘impartial.’

Other avenues served to perpetuate the secrecy surrounding the Nazi death camp system. The American press, still wary from the mishaps of World War I, was slow to announce the horrors of the concentration camps. When hard evidence was found by American troops, and reporters had front-row seats to the carnage, they were still cautious to report only corroborated stories. Most of these stories never made the front page. Numerous reasons can be cited for this. By April of 1945, the Nazi threat to exterminate the Jews was a documented reality. With the abundance of evidence, there

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130 Lipstadt, Beyond Belief, 245.
was little reason to deny that this systematic annihilation occurred as part of a planned government operation in Germany. However, much of the evidence never reached the right hands. If it was printed, it targeted the wrong audiences. Worse, it was hardly ever deemed front-page news. Even as the liberations took place, many of the articles detailing the scenes appeared on the inside pages. The press reasoned that many other significant events occurring concurrently with the liberations were more important. Subsequently, these were reported on the front pages of American newspapers instead of the horrors of the liberations.

One of the only newspapers to explicitly announce its skepticism in print was the Chicago Tribune. In an article dated November 26, 1944, it prefaced a story about Auschwitz outlining the rumors of German atrocities by saying, “[only] some of [these] have been verified.”131 Although pictures accompanied previous reports, the Tribune stated, “no pictures were released to corroborate the atrocity story released today” and therefore dismissed the claims as false.132 However, they failed to mention that at this point, Auschwitz was still in German control and therefore obviously no pictures had been released to the general press. Also, as mentioned before, the news was coming out of Soviet Russia who was distrusted by many United States citizens as late as 1944. Even when concrete and damning evidence about Auschwitz was uncovered and made available, the news did not make the front page. The New York Daily News relegated its story to page eight, stating in rather small type that “4 Million Slain in One German Camp, Reds Say.”133 The fact that it mentioned who made the claim in the headline speaks volumes.

Other factors contributed to the lack of credible information. The Stars and Stripes, America’s newspaper for its armed forces overseas, had correspondents all over the globe. However, the paper operated extremely close to the front lines. Stories concerning military maneuvers or placement had to be censored, and only news already known by the enemy could be reported. Consequently, many headlines read “Nazis Report…” or “Japs say…” Reports coming from liberated concentration camps were intentionally delayed. For example, staff writer Peter Furst wrote on April 29, 1945 that

131 Chicago Tribune, November 26, 1944, 1.
132 Ibid.
“Three days ago, the SS men evacuated 6,000 to 7,000 German and Russian political prisoners to an unknown destination.” His article was not published until May 3. The fact that atrocity stories were preceded by a disclaimer concerning their origin is critical; many troops would be disinclined to believe tales out of their enemy’s mouth. On a copy of the May 5, 1945 edition of the *Stars and Stripes*, an unknown soldier wrote a note to his family in America. He drew an arrow to a picture on page 5 showing a shocked United States Senator, Alben Barkley, standing over a pile of naked corpses at Buchenwald. The soldier had scrawled, “They couldn’t believe it. I guess you have to see it with your own eyes. You can be sure its true. I can tell you that much.”

Even victims themselves realized their plight in searching for belief among the Allies. As late as 1944, eyewitness accounts did not constitute irrefutable evidence unless they came from independent sources and verified each other. The probability of finding more than one survivor or escapee of a camp such as Auschwitz, much less having both corroborate each other’s stories, was slim to none, especially since every victim’s story was slightly different based on their own experiences and interpretations. These inconsistencies led to severe doubt among not only journalists unwilling to print such tales, but also among Americans on the home front who could not relate to such tragedies. Factually sound, corroborated stories did not occur until U.S. troops saw the camps through their own eyes during the liberations; therefore, many accounts were edited out of newspapers before this time.

Despite all these barriers, visits by journalists themselves to the newly liberated camps should have dissipated these doubts. However, like much of Europe, American citizens were experiencing a vast anti-Semitic wave at this time. Historian Deborah Lipstadt noted, “even when war had virtually ended and the camps were being liberated, reporters continued to incorporate the fate of the Jews into that of all other national groups that had been incarcerated and murdered at the camps.” Edgar Snow of the *Saturday Evening Post* wrote that at Maidanek, “Jews, Germans, and Europeans were all

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robbed in common and were all fed to the same ovens.”136 Newspaper accounts universalized the victims. For example, what was really the murder of 1,000 Jews was described as the murder of 1,000 Poles, Soviets, or innocent civilians. “American and British leaders had been intent on avoiding mention of Jews as the specific victims of Nazi hostility as early as 1938 at Evian, and their policy had not substantially changed since.”137 Both killers and bystanders, by depersonalizing the Jews of Europe and lending them no identity, marked them for death under Hitler. Because of this, many Americans, although possibly believing the evidence, simply did not see this as a pressing issue. The war in Europe was over, and atrocities had undoubtedly occurred, but they did not enter the realm of consciousness for many Americans who believed the loss of their husbands, fathers, and sons was enough.

The fight for equality was happening in the United States as it was happening elsewhere. In the 1930’s, over 4.8 million Jews lived in America. Over 2 million of those lived in New York City. Elsewhere, they were barred from living in certain neighborhoods and quotas were established for acceptance to certain colleges. The vast majority were poor and uncomfortable about their status in America. They heard the rumors from abroad, and they noticed the tightening of the anti-Semitic strings in the United States as well.138

Anti-Semitism was not new to the United States. For the most part, American foreign policy towards the Jewish population in Europe at this time was lethargic. As previously mentioned, Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt established a War Crimes Commission in 1942. However, no initiative existed in America to save the Jewish people from persecution under Hitler.139 Later, when liberation occurred, the War Crimes Commission declared that it could only act on prison-camp horrors through direct evidence and arrests by Allied soldiers, and that it had “no powers to carry out actual investigations of Nazi war crimes.”140 The reasons for such indolence are numerous. Not only was America’s turn towards isolationism post-World War I coupled with a vast feeling of anti-Semitism that reached its peak only after the end of World War II, but

137 Lipstadt, Beyond Belief, 250.
138 Hilberg, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders, 231.
139 Morse, While Six Million Died, 24.
Western Europe turned towards “totalitarianism, Fascism, and unfettered nationalism.”

As historian Frank Brecher describes, “Franklin D. Roosevelt’s election was to usher in an era of innovation and socially progressive policies on the domestic front; but no similar flexibility was to become evident in international affairs, where prudence was the hallmark of policy.” Hitler’s annihilation of European Jewry ran its course without significant interference from the Allied nations. Even when the liberations occurred and the evidence was substantial, the desire to avenge what was to be forever known to history as “crimes against humanity” did not top lists of government priorities.

While on average the American Jew knew more than his non-Jewish counterpart, many knew little of the happenings in Europe. If the mainstream press was virtually silent, the Jewish press followed suit. It has been argued that the Jewish press deliberately downplayed the Holocaust in order to keep up morale during the war. However, there were instances of outcry from both the Jewish-American community and non-Jewish members of society. In January 1944, the United States Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., persuaded President Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board (WRB). The WRB worked with Jewish organizations, diplomats from neutral and Allied countries, and resistance groups in Europe to rescue Jews. It also appealed to Allied leaders to issue war-crime warnings, looked for safe places for escaping refugees to hide, and even tried to send relief supplies into the concentration camps. Despite the evidence of Jewish persecution, only two of the war-crime warnings condemned Axis atrocities against Jews, the last being in December of 1942.

German citizens also struggled with the truth behind their regime. As some authors have pointed out, the Nazi government used threats and coercion among their citizens in order to achieve their goals. However, German citizens were for the most part willing to accept the Nazis and even proclaim their support for Hitler. He made their streets safer by eliminating criminals and undesirables, and he promoted peace and order on German streets. Hitler, to many Germans, was a breath of fresh air after a long period of uncertainty and poverty. Today, however, many Germans living on the home front

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141 Brecher, Reluctant Ally, 91.
142 Ibid., 71.
144 Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews, 255.
during the war are cautious to admit the horrors that occurred. Alison Owings, in her book Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich, tells of a conversation with Frau Regina Frankenfeld who lived in Germany on the home front during the war. She writes, “[Frau Frankenfeld’s] remark elicited a sputtered challenge to comments about the thousands of Jews in the Soviet Union being lined up and shot [by German troops.] She paused, chewing. ‘It is a criminal act. Absolutely. If it happened.’” Owings replied, “It’s been proven. Some German soldiers themselves…’ [Frau Frankenfeld] interrupted softly, as if being helpful. ‘Furthermore, you may also not forget that in war, it was a military order.’”

Even today, the ideology that the Nazis preached is ingrained in German citizens who lived through the war. Either by choice or for security, citizens either deny that the atrocities happened or claim that they had no knowledge about what happened behind the walls of the concentration camps.

However strong his persuasion was inside Germany, Hitler could not keep the concentration camps a secret from the outside world. The Nazis used secrecy as a vital part of their system; not only could the Allied nations not discover the true purpose of the death camps, but the Jews themselves still in ghettos could not hear of their eventual fate. Concealment was crucial. However, 1942 was an important year in both Holocaust implementation and Allied detection of the Final Solution. That year, starting in June, Allied radio broadcasts began to depict the suspected fate of the Jews. Did the Jews find out about the plans in progress to annihilate them? This question brings in to focus the debate of complicity and resistance during the deportations and in the camps. It is obvious that some Jews knew; events like the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which was at least partially precipitated by incoming accounts about Treblinka, prove this. One survivor, Udel S., who was from the Upper Selesian city of Bedzin, near Auschwitz in Poland, remembers,

At that time [before 1942] it wasn’t yet known for what purpose the Jews were sent away. It was said that Jews were being resettled to other districts where they could continue to live. But [in 1942] information leaked through that such a thing as Auschwitz had been created. A

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146 Niewyk, ed. Fresh Wounds, 9.
woman from Bedzin managed to escape – in what way is not exactly known – but she escaped from that hell, and she reported exactly how things occurred there.\textsuperscript{147}

In another interview, Jürgen B. recounts his upbringing in a small town in Western Germany. His family, like many others, believed that there was safety in numbers and moved into Berlin for its support system, namely the Berlin Jewish Community Council. When asked if he knew the truth, he stated, “No. And I have the impression that even the Jewish Council did not know because…[when I was arrested] they supplied us with soap and pieces of clothing…We just didn’t know what was happening.”\textsuperscript{148}

At first glance, it seems that the Nazi Final Solution and its implementation in Europe were shrouded in secrecy and disbelief. German citizens who lived in close proximity to the concentration camps still claim that they knew nothing of the horror occurring inside their walls. However, when one digs slightly deeper, evidence of the Nazi Holocaust was everywhere. Death camps often existed in the middle of towns. Prisoners, starved, dirty, and forlorn, appeared in villages throughout German-occupied territories. It is extremely hard to believe that Germans on the home front and citizens in conquered nations were completely blind to what was occurring in the camps.

Although the ignorance or denial in Germany and in Europe could possibly have played a role in the Allied press’ reaction to atrocity stories, it does not provide an adequate excuse. In studying the reasons that the press was not especially eager to print the news of the liberations, it is just as important to analyze what stories were printed on the front page. In the beginning of April, most newspapers focused their attention on Allied military victories. This is not surprising. Perhaps the liberations, occurring mid- to late-April, would have been given front-page coverage had another event not stunned the United States on April 12, 1945. As the Atlanta Constitution reported, “death today removed Franklin Delano Roosevelt from a war-torn world and left peace-expectant millions shocked and stunned.”\textsuperscript{149} When President Roosevelt died of a massive cerebral

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., interview with Udel S., 48-49.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., interview with Jürgen B., 258-263.
\textsuperscript{149} Merriman Smith, “President Roosevelt Dies At Home in Warm Springs,” Atlanta Constitution, April 13, 1945, 1.
hemorrhage in April, the Allies were in the midst of pushing into Germany. The world desperately needed his leadership and mourned his passing with heavy hearts. Even the concentration camp inmates, when hearing of his death upon liberation, grieved for him. Because it was an unexpected event, his death, his funeral, and the subsequent inauguration of Vice President Harry Truman were front-page news for many days.

Aside from this monumental occasion, many other events occurred in April and May of 1945 that made the liberations of the concentration camps secondary news. The Soviet Army was driving on Berlin, closer into the heart of Germany than the Allies had progressed. On April 15, 1945, the New York Times reported, “Russian Army forces yesterday had broken into powerful fortifications thirty miles east of Berlin in a [sic] offensive that had already developed into a big armored battle on the imperiled German capital’s approaches.”150 On April 16, Heinrich Himmler, Albert Kesselring, and Martin Bormann desperately “decreed the existence of two autonomous German governments ‘for northern and southern defensive Gauss’ with independent political and military staff and [Nazi] party directors in each.”151 This decree made no mention of Adolf Hitler, and speculation ensued over his abdication and/or death.

On April 17, 1945, the New York Times reported that Soviet and American forces met in the Elbe River Valley south of Dresden. It also explained the significance of American troops entering the Nazi stronghold of Nuremburg. Despite all this, Dwight Eisenhower “told visiting radio correspondents that the war probably would not end until Allied troops had completely occupied Germany, and no victory would be proclaimed ‘until all important enemy pockets on the Western front have been wiped out.’”152 Because the end was inevitable, but was slow in coming, the press held onto every shred of hopeful news they possibly could. America needed to be buoyed up rather than depressed with horrific images.

Action in the Pacific Theatre also made headlines. As the war in Europe drew to a close, and victory in Europe seemed certain, attention shifted to the continuing war in the Pacific. Fire raids on Tokyo made front-page news. On April 17, 1945, the New York

Times reported, “the attacks, started Saturday morning with a fiery descent of incendiary clusters, brought the capital to its darkest hour.”\(^{153}\) On May 1, Allied troops took the airfields of Okinawa.\(^{154}\) At this point, although victory in the Pacific was tangible, it was unclear how long it would take. Victories overseas meant that American lives would be saved if no invasion of the Japanese home islands was necessary. That news was tantamount to news of impending victory in Germany.

Despite all the above, a few front-page articles focused on the liberations. The first noticeable one occurred on April 18, 1945 in the New York Times, and it documented the forced tour of German citizens of Buchenwald. The article described the camp by saying, “it had gallows, torture rooms, dissection rooms, modern crematoria, laboratories where fiendish experiments were made on living human beings and its sections where people were systematically starved to death.”\(^{155}\) The article is lengthy and accurately describes the camp; however, much of the information is detailed inside the paper. Only the first three paragraphs are actually on the first page. This was not customary for the Times, who throughout the war ran full articles of military operations with pictures on the front page. On April 20, the New York Times reported on the burial of 1,100 prisoners who burned alive. American officials forced citizens of Gardelegen to dig the graves in response to the atrocities, “at the point of bayonets if necessary.”\(^{156}\) Somehow this represented revenge or retribution for the victims.

When news of the liberations reached the United States, one of the most telling reactions of the American press was the almost identical admission that only now were they persuaded that the atrocity reports were genuine. Many had denied or downplayed the truth and significance of claims prior to American troops entering the camps. They then admitted, almost grudgingly, that they were incorrect. The Los Angeles Times’ Norman Chandler admitted, when he saw the camps, that “exaggeration, in fact would be

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difficult." Members of the press were somewhat shocked at the news, but this did not compel them to write more details to make up for their past indiscretions.

Throughout the war, from beginning to end, the overall way that reporters and journalists treated the news of the impending, and later certain, Holocaust is deplorable. That fact is not doubtful. However, why they reacted with such apathy and disregard is the true question. To say that they did not believe the atrocity stories is simply not enough. Yes, it is true that today we are looking in hindsight, where the proper course of action could not be clearer. Any action would have been better than none at all. What occurred, however, was an almost adamant objection to the truth. As bystanders to one of the world’s most tragic and atrocious occurrences, their responsibility was to accurately report the truth in order to provoke action by American citizens and the Allied governments.

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157 As quoted in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 29, 1945, 3a.
CONCLUSION

From the beginning of the war and the Nazi rise to power, Americans viewed almost all of the news of the persecution of the Jews with a skeptical eye. The priorities of journalists, as evidenced by their columns throughout the war, mirrored those of other Americans and their Allied colleagues. It is true that the world was in the throes of a Holocaust, but it was also disrupted by a war so large and terrible that it encompassed almost every nation on the globe. American sons were fighting and dying, at a horrific rate, for the freedom of the United States. The Axis threat was very real in the minds of almost every American. For this reason, the Holocaust was swallowed by the larger picture of the time – and one that was much more pertinent to Americans. World War II dominated the news more than any event before or since. For over six years publishers printed on their front pages what they deemed important to their readership, which rarely included even American Jews. It was impossible for the world to get away from the war.

However, this does not explain why almost all the stories regarding the destruction of the European Jewry appeared inside the newspapers and magazines rather than on the front pages or the covers. Many historians and authors claim that this was a result of pure anti-Semitism which was gripping not only Nazi Germany but also free America at this time. David Wyman, in his book The Abandonment of the Jews, concluded that 15 percent of the American people would have “supported” an anti-Jewish campaign, and another 20-25 percent would have been “sympathetic” to such a campaign.\footnote{Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews, 15.} Although anti-Semitism was present in the United States, I find it extremely hard to believe that over 30 percent of the entire American population would have supported or allowed such a campaign as the Nazi Holocaust to occur in America. It is true that when compared to the overall conflict, the Jews’ persecution was deemed rather
small in both numbers and importance by the American press. That we have seen. It is also true that for years prior to the war, Jews had been comfortable scapegoats but most definitely not a race targeted for extermination. But it is simply not possible that the minimized coverage of the Nazi Holocaust was a result of only anti-Semitism. Obviously, as with other historical problems, a host of factors combined to form the Holocaust as we know it. If anti-Semitism in America was the reason it was not covered in full by the Allied press, many of the advocates who fought so hard for rescue and liberation would not have been mentioned in the newspaper pages at all, nor would the press or the American government ever called for war crimes trials after the war.

The enormity of the crimes was so great that even people sympathetic to the Jewish population could not fathom it. Many thought that the Jews, who had been the targets of humiliation and segregation for so long, were simply whining over a wholly exaggerated truth. For example, Frank Roberts, a British diplomat, received a report in 1944 concerning the Nazi use of Jewish corpses. Apparently he sighed with exasperation and said, “The facts are quite bad enough without the addition of such an old story as the use of bodies for the manufacture of soap.”159 Reactions such as these were common, and they were not necessarily the result of intense anti-Semitism. It leads to the next reason why the Holocaust was marginally covered.

The Allies were intent on winning the war, not saving the Jews. This important fact cannot be overlooked. As stated above, other military actions took precedent on the front pages over the annihilation of the Jews. Victory in Europe, and later in the Pacific, were absolute necessities to the freedom and honor of the United States. Many American boys were dying every day overseas. These deaths, at least to most Americans, meant more than nameless numbers of European Jews. This, too, was not the result of anti-Semitism, but the product of a desire for family members and friends to come home safe and victorious.

Still other factors combined to force the Holocaust and the liberations off the front pages of America’s newspapers. Journalists who, fearing a loss of credibility, refused to write much concerning the reports they received played a major role. Those who did not truly believe the atrocity claims, which were, in all honesty, extremely difficult to

159 Laqueur, The Terrible Secret, 82.
swallow, had trouble announcing such reports as fact. When the liberations did occur, events happening simultaneous surpassed the importance of announcing that there was indeed truth to the rumors of the Holocaust. Journalism as a trade is intent on covering the facts, not leading the push for the truth. Also, many journalists, like the American people, were at best indifferent and at worst anti-Semitic. And on top of this it must be considered that there was no live television, no faxes or satellite transmissions, and no real-time way to verify the truth. American reporters were, for the most part, not allowed inside Nazi Germany and most certainly not allowed inside the walls of Auschwitz or Dachau or Buchenwald. The journalists of the 1940’s were less prone to sensationalism that those today; they were not always looking for the next big scandal. At a time when everything was an atrocity and the entire world was at war, journalists followed the attitude of the government and supported their boys at the front. Patriotism was rampant. It is possible that there was simply no room for the Jewish annihilation in Europe in the minds of Americans.

This is not an excuse; nor does it absolve journalists then or today of their responsibilities. Historian Michael Marrus wrote, “Writing on bystanders to the Holocaust conveys a persistent and depressing theme – disbelief in reports of mass murder, widespread indifference and unwillingness to break established patterns to help the Jews.” His point is valid concerning the ‘bystander’ journalists, editors, and civilians in the United States. As has been documented, and as historians have generally concurred, members of the Allied press received many substantiated claims concerning the fate of the Jews under Hitler during the war years. It is true that once the United States joined the war, American newspapers could no longer rely on their own correspondents overseas. They were forced to glean information from exiled governments, Jewish groups, German and Jewish newspapers, and intelligence of their own governments. However, when truly horrific, and accurate, documents were thrown

into their hands, oftentimes they printed as little information as possible or reported nothing at all.\textsuperscript{161} Their silence, in hindsight, is deafening.

If journalists, editors, and even the American government received information about the annihilation of the Jews and failed to act, for whatever reason, then what \textit{did} they do with the information? Did rescue schemes, plans to announce the truth to the world, or even a moral dilemma cross their minds? It is impossible to say. The fact that \textit{some} information appeared in the American press means that they did not discredit all atrocity stories. Nearly 1,200 stories concerning concentration camps and especially the Final Solution appeared in the \textit{New York Times} alone.\textsuperscript{162} What made these stories unbelievable? As previously mentioned, the lack of credible sources was one reason. Another was the vast difference in numbers associated with the Holocaust. Many editors most likely concluded that putting the stories on the inside pages would catch less attention and therefore less heat on the newspapers if they indeed proved false.

It is painful to think that as early as 1942, strong evidence existed and should have been disseminated properly to the American public. To some extent, it was; however, its placement and context prove that the press was still wary of printing such detailed information. In December 1942, remember, the United Nations issued an official statement acknowledging that over 2 million people had been murdered under Hitler’s extermination plan. An editorial in the \textit{New York Times} that day read,

\begin{quote}
Despite all that has been written about Nazi persecution of the Jews, the facts in the joint statement issued yesterday in Washington, London, and Moscow in the name of the United Nations will come as a shock to all civilized people who have preserved a modicum of human decency…the most tragic aspect of this situation is the world’s helplessness to stop the horror while the war is going on. The most is can do is denounce the perpetrators and promise them individual and separate retribution. But at least this we know: that there can be no
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{161} The Riegner report is one example; however, many smaller reports reached editor’s desks across the country throughout the war. For specific examples, see Laurel Leff’s \textit{Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper}, 2005.

\textsuperscript{162} Leff, \textit{Buried by the Times}, 334.
compromise with this evil force. It must be driven from the face of the earth.\textsuperscript{163}

With such strong sentiments existing, especially among the leaders of that very important newspaper, it is hard to imagine that the stories were deemed inside information even after they had been confirmed by the three most influential Allied governments.

Journalists, soldiers, and other people who experienced the liberations firsthand often remarked that it was ‘too horrible to imagine, too hard to believe.’ This refrain was common. They had trouble believing the sights before them even when they were touchable. Laurel Leff states that “That [a newspaper’s] internal documents do not contain these profound reservations does not mean much; such internalized and elusive sentiments are not easily conveyed in office memoranda.”\textsuperscript{164} This is true; how often do we as historians express emotion or reason in decisions on what to write or print? Hardly ever. It comes in a complete package, edited and concise, so that little of what went on behind the scenes is actually known. For this reason, we have little evidence of why certain articles were placed on inside pages while others made bold front page headlines.

This is not to say that the annihilation was not acknowledged. On the contrary, there have been many examples, some noted in the preceding pages, which admit that systematic extermination was indeed happening. By the last part of the war, virtually every major American newspaper made some mention of the Final Solution. There were expressions of grief and condemnations of the offenders, but there was no action taken, no protests to Allied governments by the press or the people, and no indication that any action even needed to be taken. It also does not explain why some journalists, armed with no more information than their colleagues, pursued the truth in their writing more openly. Arthur Koestler, mentioned before, as well as W. Randolph Hearst were a few excellent examples.\textsuperscript{165} It is most certainly true that Americans were rooted in anti-Semitism as much as any other nation in the world. Many leaders acted as if they believed the Jews

\textsuperscript{163} New York Times, December 18, 1942, 26.
\textsuperscript{164} Leff, Buried by the Times, 338.
\textsuperscript{165} As Deborah Lipstadt explains, Hearst had a strong stance on rescuing Jews and an outspoken support for a Jewish nation in Palestine. However, to the American government at least, his views were not considered mainstream and his writings were not considered representative of America. (Lipstadt, Beyond Belief, 276.)
“were expendable.”  

While few people necessarily wanted to see Jews killed, they were much more inclined to cry out at atrocities against other civilians or against their soldiers overseas.

Laurel Leff, in a paper published before her recent book on the *New York Times*, eloquently stated the following:

You could have read the front page of the *New York Times* in 1939 and 1940 without knowing that millions of Jews were being sent to Poland, imprisoned in the ghettos, and dying of disease and starvation by the tens of thousands. You could have read the front page in 1941 without knowing that the Nazis were machine-gunning hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Soviet Union. You could have read the front page in 1942 and not have known, until the last month, that the Germans were carrying out a plan to annihilate European Jewry...In 1944, you would have learned from the front page of the existence of horrible places such as Maidanek and Auschwitz, but only inside could you find that the victims were [intentionally] Jews. In 1945, liberated Dachau and Buchenwald were on the front page, but the Jews were buried inside.  

This is a legitimate and persuasive point. The information that would have validated the claims in the minds of so many Americans was simply not there, or at the very least not easily accessible.

With all this in mind, the next logical question is: what could have been done if the information had been available and the reporters had saturated the American and British newspapers with graphic stories and images? There was no plausible way for the press itself to stop the killings. Most certainly they could have been more outspoken, calling on citizens and governments to do their part to at least rescue victims in Europe. However, in this case it is hard to determine what the correct course of action should have been. Arguably any action would have been better than none at all; however, many

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166 For more information on this term, as well as documentation on the subject, see Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.)

historians have weighed in on this topic with varying opinions and none have been accepted as the definitive answer. This debate will most likely span a long period; only in retrospection can the truth be seen.

All of these questions do lead somewhere, because between the spring of 1945 and now there has been a tremendous increase in American reactions to the Holocaust. More American authors and historians are weighing in on the topic than ever before. The public also holds a great interest in the Holocaust, more now than ever. An Associated Press article dated January 6, 2006 states, “The museum at Auschwitz in southern Poland logged a record number of visitors in 2005, the 60th anniversary of the death camp's liberation, officials said Tuesday. More than 760,000 visited the site of Nazi Germany's most notorious World War II concentration camp last year.”\footnote{Associated Press, January 6, 2006, Dateline: Warsaw, Poland. <http://www.ushmm.org/newsfeed/wlc/viewstory.php?storvid=6766> Viewed February 6, 2006.} It is apparent that between then and now, coverage of the Holocaust did increase. It appeared in the newspapers, magazines, on the radio, and most importantly on the newsreels of the liberations. If you have ever visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, you will remember that there is an exhibit called “Witness to History: Documenting the Path of American Liberators” in the Wexner Learning Center. The tour takes you through a maze of photographs, animated maps, wartime accounts, movies, eyewitness testimonies, and conversations with Holocaust experts and survivors. A recurring theme is the issue of individual responsibility towards fellow human beings in danger. The museum does not make light of the fact that there were indeed heroes, but there were also bystanders who did little to deter the Nazis and nothing to aid the victims. On October 15, 1945, almost six months after the first concentration camp gates were opened by American liberators, the charges were announced for the Nuremburg Trials. Although over 42,000 people served in the mobile killing units of the \textit{Einsatzgruppen} and over 50,000 served as camp guards, only 24 individuals were charged at Nuremberg.\footnote{Numbers from Dr. William O. Oldson, lecture on “War Crimes Trials,” in EUH 5249: The Holocaust in Historical Perspective, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, November 22, 2004.} Twelve were hanged, seven served life in prison, and three were acquitted. By 1949, the United States had announced plans to prosecute 1,672 individuals but carried out this prosecution ineffectively. By 1950, the grips of the Cold War were closing in on the
United States and there was little manpower to waste on prosecuting the perpetrators of the Holocaust that killed over 13 million people.

With all this said, there is most certainly a problem with analyzing the Holocaust through the lens of politics and worldviews today. “With the benefit of hindsight, of course, the correct course is usually easy to see: to recognize, for example, the flawed strategic visions with which the major powers confronted the outbreak of World War I. As the ensuing catastrophe made clear, something was terribly amiss. But when one views matters as they appeared through the lens of government and public opinion, and above all in the uncertain light of what was actually known at the time, it becomes harder to sort out reasonable from foolish courses of action.”\textsuperscript{170} One might argue that there were no foolish courses of action between 1933 and 1945 because there were no courses of action. Until the liberations, Americans did not penetrate the gates of any camps or rescue any prisoners by government action or order. It was not until American troops and officials literally viewed the camps themselves that any real prosecution or rescue attempts were begun. And this is when the Holocaust genuinely began to show up in American newspapers and magazines and on the radios and newsreels.

Those who were there, the victims and the liberators, the journalists and the politicians, have a different impression of the liberations. They saw it, the smelled it, they felt it, and they suffered from it. Their view was microscopic and immediate. They saw the details as no one else will see them. The historian, on the other hand, and society in general, have quite another view. It is one of macrocosm and of the sheer consequence of these events. The historian must remember that he sees a context which could not be very well understood at the time. The vastness of such information is difficult to comprehend. For example, the number of camps and their functions and purposes, and how they were conceived, built, and run, is almost impossible to grasp. So much of what was done was so ordinary – production lists, inmate records, regular allocations of war material, meetings. The historian must take all of this in. When making remarks about the liberations, and about the Holocaust, the historian must understand the difficulty of what is being analyzed. The aim of this research is not only to examine past history, but to

examine future history. The liberations occurred in the last few weeks of the most deadly war in history, and the Allies had to win it quickly. It was imperative. By winning quickly, they saved lives. Maybe this is an explanation, and maybe it isn’t. There are certainly no justifications for the apathy and indifference on the part of so many during this time. For every one who was a hero, a rescuer, and a symbol for hope, countless others were bystanders, or facilitators, or at worst perpetrators.

The Allied press was no stranger to this story. From the beginning, they heard rumors, saw reports, and read stories. Yet they reacted with both skepticism and indifference. Their skepticism and the reasons for it have been thoroughly explained in this paper. They were unwilling to print uncorroborated stories and they were doubtful, as many were, about the truth of the millions that were said to have been murdered under the Nazi regime. The skepticism they exhibited as a whole is somewhat easier to stomach than their indifference. They let other news, news of the war and of the politics between the nations take precedent over a story that should have exploded in print and sound. Do not misunderstand; they did not do this out of sheer anti-Semitism. They did not do this out of hatred for the Jewish people and because of a desire to see them annihilated. The press ignored these stories out of fear of their own credibility and because it was the easiest course of action. Like I said before, it is impossible to tell what the correct course of action could have been. However, this indifference was most certainly not it. Are they to be condemned? Most certainly. Should they be blamed for the annihilation of 11 million people in Europe? Most certainly not. They were acting as the times required, and as their consciences required. We can only look back in hindsight and wish that something more might have been done, that something would have sparked their interest in the horror unfolding before them. Yet it was not, and what is done is done. But the historic problem lives on, because anti-Semitism, selfish objectives and personal doubts never subside. We can only hope that something this catastrophic will never again occur.

Since 1945, Nazism has not died. Its existence is reflected through the influx of Nazi and Neo-Nazi groups, the Klu Klux Klan, and the PLO. The messages of these groups is remarkably similar: “hate, then kill” Jews, Blacks, minorities, and anyone who seems in any way different. A number of hate groups claim that the Holocaust never happened, that Jews were never murdered in concentration camps, and that the
11,000,000 victims were not massacred by the Nazis. However, there are witnesses. There are survivors. There was a gas chamber at Dachau, and it was used. In a May 1, 1945 U.S. Army document describes that California Congressman Eduard Izac climbed on top of it, turned the valves, and smelled the escaping gas trapped in the air vents.\textsuperscript{171} Like Izac, there were many American and British witnesses present at the liberations. Every major American military general, including Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, and 15 others have testified in their writings what they saw in Hitler’s concentration camps. Thousands of common soldiers were also witnesses. Their voices live on, through books, memoirs, music, poetry, and movies. No matter how loud the opposition gets, these are the people that will never let these events be forgotten.

Hitler’s goal was almost accomplished. Nearly all the Jews in Europe were driven out or murdered; even today, Jewish communities are significantly smaller than in pre-World War II years. It is a horrible tragedy, one that will undoubtedly spark the interest of historians for years to come because it is so difficult to explain and so hard to grasp. Judge Aaron Cohn, who earlier described his participation in the liberation of Ebensee, remarked later in his testimony that “today 60 percent of the American population was born after World War II. Does this generation even know enough about the Holocaust to remember it?”\textsuperscript{172} This generation most certainly does, and the generations to come will too. Through places like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, through programs like Florida State’s own Holocaust Institute for Educators, and through the literature left behind by the survivors and witnesses, the story will live on.

Dr. Fred Crawford of Emory University once remarked, “The American soldiers, followed later by nurses, Red Cross workers and UNRRA members, who witnessed the conditions of the Nazi victims in the concentration camps were changed forever by their experiences. When they got back to the states, the war was over and no one seemed interested in the tragedy. But these witnesses knew, and these witnesses have not

\textsuperscript{171} As described by Dr. Fred Crawford, Closing address: “America’s Soldiers and the Nazi Concentration Camps – Then and Now,” at the International Liberator’s Conference, October 26, 1981, United States Holocaust Memorial Council, Washington DC. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Institutional Archives, International Librators Conference Collection, 1997-001.3, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{172} Judge Aaron Cohn as quoted in “Witness to the Holocaust” by Don Fischer, Atlanta Magazine, 1980, 161.
The memory of the Holocaust indeed lives on. Its development, implementation, and, finally, discovery will forever be one of history’s great mysteries and its great tragedies. However, only by understanding how it happened can we avoid such devastation from occurring again. The threat is not invisible, nor has it disappeared. Hans Massaquoi, an African-German persecuted by the Nazis, ends his memoir by saying, “I hope that my story will convey the inescapable lesson I have drawn from the slice of history I was destined to witness from uncomfortably close range: if it happened once, it could happen again; and if it could happen in Germany – a country raised on the wisdom of intellectual giants like Goethe and Schiller and enriched by the timeless contributions of musical geniuses like Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms – it could happen anywhere.”

It is an eerie warning that must be regarded with utmost attention from this point forward. The Holocaust has taught us many things about humanity, cruelty, and sacrifice that we might never have learned elsewhere. But was such a lesson necessary? Only if we learn from it. Even today, genocides are being carried out in nations around the globe. In the 1970’s in Cambodia, in 1994 in Rwanda, since 1989 in Kashmir, in the 1990’s in Bosnia, since 1983 in Sudan, and since 1991 in Yugoslavia have other mass genocides been occurring. Western countries, the United States included, are still undecided on how and whether or not to intervene in such matters. But how can they not? How can they have the Holocaust of World War II in the back of their mind and knowingly not interfere in these warring nations? It is a sad legacy. The Holocaust and its memory lives on, but its warnings and lessons must be heeded for this horror to stop.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kelly M. Farrell is a native of South Georgia. She completed her undergraduate degree in History, Technology, and Society with a Pre-Law minor at the Georgia Institute of Technology in May 2004. While attending Florida State, she was a graduate assistant for the Institute on World War II and the Human Experience. She also held an internship at the Tallahassee Trust for Historic Preservation. Her area of specialty is World War II history, with a focus on the United States and the Holocaust. After completing her Master of Arts degree in May 2006, she will reside in Framingham, Massachusetts with her husband.