



Shoah in the News: Patterns and Meanings of News Coverage of the Holocaust

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Patterns and Meanings of News
Coverage of the Holocaust**

by

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**Discussion Paper D-27
October 1997**

The Joan Shorenstein Center
PRESS • POLITICS



•PUBLIC POLICY•

Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government

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INTRODUCTION

James Carroll, for whom “why?” is a frequent question and “ethics” a compelling concern, spent his springtime ’97 fellowship at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard researching and writing this extraordinary essay. “Shoah in the News: Patterns and Meanings of News Coverage of the Holocaust” is a thoughtful, provocative and powerful study that deserves wide distribution and analysis.

Carroll, who is a columnist for the *Boston Globe* and author of many books, including *An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War That Came Between Us*, which won the 1996 National Book Award, raises a set of questions that at first seems only fascinating but on closer examination emerges as a profound portrait of the press, politics and personal loss—and in the background yet another question that has absorbed Carroll for many years: what explains the Vatican’s problematic approach to the Holocaust?

Carroll in this essay examines the years 1995-1997 and wonders why, after decades of soft-pedaling the story and for many years simply ignoring it, the press has suddenly been devoting so much front-page attention to the Holocaust. More than 600 stories have appeared in the *New York Times* in this relatively brief period—just about one a day. Thousands of others have appeared in other American media. Whether the stories have focused on Swiss banks, plundered artwork, Madeleine Albright’s recently-discovered Jewish roots or Daniel Goldhagen’s book on *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, the Holocaust angle has been prominently featured.

Why? Why now? “What historical event,” Carroll asks, “has generated as much or more news coverage” fifty years after it was first reported, in the spring of 1945, as this one? Other 50th anniversary stories, such as the end of World War II and the first use of atomic weapons in war, were also treated as major stories in 1995, but two years later they could no longer lay claim to the front page of any newspaper. They were already comfortably ensconced as history. But not so the Holocaust, which not only remained a major story but seemed almost to grow in scope. Part of the reason would appear to be that as this millennium draws to a

close people are attempting to define its principal characteristics. Among them none apparently stands more gauntly on center stage than the Holocaust. “The Nazi death camps,” writes Carroll, “have become the pre-eminent symbol of the world gone mad, a distillation of the evil that swamped the century.”

The Holocaust, as a news story, has a very strange, twisted history. During the war, when it occurred, it barely intruded into the mainstream press. Intelligence filtered out of the Third Reich to the effect that hundreds of thousands and later millions of Jews were being systematically slaughtered—gassed and burned by the ovenful; and yet when occasionally this news appeared in the *New York Times* or the *Boston Globe*, it was almost as an afterthought, a brief three or four paragraph story on page 15, a neutral bow in the direction of historic horror. Even when the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, *Times* correspondent C. L. Sulzberger reported from Moscow that 4,000,000 people had been killed at the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. Though he himself was Jewish and a member of the Sulzberger family, which owned the *Times*, he did not mention the rather inescapable fact that most of the victims were Jewish.

After the war, as one decade of cold war rolled into another, leading to the 50th anniversary celebrations of the end of World War II, Carroll notes in his careful research that there were appropriate moments when the Holocaust was mentioned in the press—in 1965, on the 20th anniversary of the discovery of the death camps, in 1985, on the 40th anniversary—but it was rare. Indeed, the word “holocaust” did not appear in the *Times* index until 1980.

In 1995-1997, though, as the Holocaust became big news in the American media, for reasons Carroll discusses, the stories broke into four categories: confessions, challenges, newly-discovered information and finally old information freshly-packaged. Confessions included powerful statements by leaders, such as, Germany’s von Weizacker in 1985 and Poland’s Lech Walesa in 1991. Challenges pitted Jewish leaders against Swiss banks and French art dealers. New information highlighted declassified U.S. and Soviet archival data. Old information, republished with a new top, also became

big news, and this struck Carroll as “most provocative.”

After all, it had been known for some time that the Nazis had stashed much of their plunder in secret Swiss accounts and that many Jews, “as they saw the Nazi cloud approach,” had put their assets into Swiss banks, assuming both confidentiality and financial security. Those Jews killed in the camps never returned to claim their assets, and the accounts grew. In the 1970s and 1980s, this story appeared in many newspapers and magazines, though it was usually not fronted or featured, and in the early 1990s John Loftus, who once headed the State Department’s Office of Special Investigations, wrote two books (*Unholy Trinity* in 1992 and *The Secret War Against the Jews* in 1994) detailing the exceptional story of secret Swiss bank accounts opened decades before by the Nazis and by Jews fleeing the Nazis. And yet, obviously, the story of the secret Swiss bank accounts did not make any waves—there was, to use publishing parlance, no buzz. As late as 1992, a Nexis search of the *Times* produced not a single news story. In 1995, according to Carroll’s research, there were only four stories.

Then the latest remarkable chapter in the Holocaust story began—two years of one story after another, from every possible angle; and there does not yet appear to be a let-up. Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that the “aging and dying people” of the World War II generation are coming to terms with the “unfinished business” of those years. Carroll notes deathbed revelations by Poles, French and Dutchmen to their middle-aged sons and daughters that they were really born Jews. Or maybe it takes fifty years to be able to face the truth of what Carroll calls “a continent-wide complicity” in the murder of millions of innocent people.

Carroll in fact cites many possible explanations for the upsurge of press interest in the Holocaust, but he returns to one more often than to any other—the approaching end of the 20th century springing memory and conscience to face the truth of a terrible crime. Swiss President Arnold Koller, speaking in March, 1997, said: “We cannot and must not leave the century in a state of uncertainty, confusion, and embarrassment.” The press helps this educational process, not only reporting such gripping stories as Albright’s religious roots, deathbed revelations, Swiss bank accounts and new archival discoveries focusing on old and embarrassing secrets but by reporting on all these issues helping to wash clean the conscience of

civilization before the 20th century enters the history books. The press in this sense belatedly performs a role it should have addressed far more seriously half a century ago. Carroll could—perhaps, should—have been more critical of the press’s performance on this story.

As Carroll concludes his essay, he reaches for Kierkegaard. Life is lived forward, the philosopher once said, but understood backward. Carroll carries the thought one step further. “Journalism has to keep its eyes pointed in both directions.”

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SHOAH IN THE NEWS: PATTERNS AND MEANINGS OF NEWS COVERAGE OF THE HOLOCAUST

by James Carroll

I. *Jews Out*

On Friday, November 11, 1938, automobile traffic in New York City halted at exactly 11 A.M. For two minutes no car, bus or truck moved, and no horn sounded. Taps was blown in Times Square in commemoration of the exact moment when the Great War had ended twenty years before. New Yorkers standing at solemn attention while the bugler played might have let their eyes drift across to the Times Building and its headlines whipping by on the newfangled ribbon of flashing lights. They would have read versions of the headlines that had blared from that morning's *New York Times*—the literal first phase of news coverage about what would come to be known as the Holocaust.

"Nazis Smash, Loot and Burn Jewish Shops and Temples Until Goebbels Calls Halt," ran the top right, page one, headline. Echoes of this story and its aftermath would resound in the *New York Times* for 60 years, but almost always faintly. Not until the mid-1990s would news of the Nazi attack on Jews again receive prominence like that given to reports of what occurred throughout Germany and Austria on the night and day of November 9th and 10th, 1938. The sub-headline of the lead story, filed from Austria, continued, "All Vienna's Synagogues Attacked; Fires and Bombs Wreck 18 of 21. Jews are Beaten, Furniture and Goods Flung From Homes and Shops. 15,000 Are Jailed During Day. 20 Are Suicides."

A story adjacent on the page, filed from Berlin, carried these headlines; "Bands Rove Cities. Thousands Arrested for 'Protection' as Gangs Avenge Paris Death. Expulsions Are in View. Plunderers Trail Wreckers in Berlin. Police Stand Idle. Two Deaths Reported."

These headlines refer, of course, to the *Krystalnacht* assaults which took their collec-

tive name from smashed glass. The *New York Times* would be typical of the American news media in the scant attention it paid in the early 1940s to the unfolding horror of the anti-Jewish genocide: the *Times* was nearly silent about the Final Solution as it occurred. What stories it did publish often downplayed the expressly anti-Jewish character of the Nazi program. In the decades-long aftermath of the Holocaust, rules of so-called objective journalism inhibited editors from fully following up on the genocide, with the result that the *Times*, like other papers, continued to look away from the reality of what had happened.

But not at first. The *Krystalnacht* story received the sort of dramatic display reserved for rare, major events. Both headlines and stories emphasized that Jews were the target. The lead dispatch of that November 11 edition, reported by Otto D. Tolischus, vividly and immediately grasped the implications of the Nazi assault; "Berlin. Nov. 10. A wave of destruction, looting and incendiarism unparalleled in Germany since the Thirty Years War and in Europe generally since the Bolshevik Revolution swept over Russia occurred in Great Germany today as Nationalist Socialist cohorts took vengeance on Jewish shops, offices and synagogues for the murder by a young Polish Jew of Ernst von Rath, third secretary of the German Embassy in Paris."

This contemporaneous report of the assault on Jews contained the essential information about the horror of *Krystalnacht*. Americans were alerted to the massive pogrom at its very outset. "Beginning systematically in the early morning hours in almost every town and city in the country, the wrecking, looting and burning continued all day. Huge but mostly silent crowds looked on, and the police confined themselves to regulating traffic and making wholesale arrests of Jews 'for their own protection.' . . . Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels issued the following proclamation; 'The justified and understandable anger of the German people over the cowardly Jewish murder of a German diplomat in Paris found extensive expression last night.'"

"It is assumed that the Jews who have now lost most of their possessions and livelihood will either be thrown into the streets or

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put into ghettos and concentration camps, or impressed into labor brigades, and put to work for the Third Reich, as the children of Israel were once before for the Pharaohs. . . Before synagogues, demonstrators stood with Jewish prayer books from which they tore leaves as souvenirs for the crowds."

Other page one headlines that day read, "Pearl Buck Wins Nobel Literature Award," and "Batista Sees Hull." But this story was also featured; "Italy Intensifies Curbs Upon Jews. Cabinet Decrees Exclude Them From Official Employment, Limit Property Holdings."

Thus, in one morning's newspaper in 1938, American readers were shown a concrete, relatively complete picture of the situation facing Jews under Nazi controls. Already evident were the German government's readiness to violate laws and loose violence upon people solely for being Jews. The program of *Judenrein*, "Jews out!," was exposed, the existence of concentration camps publicized (though who could then imagine the uses to which they would ultimately be put?), and the initial Nazi strategy of forced Jewish emigration was apparent. All of this is clear from a day's news reports in one American paper.

The *Krystalnacht* story, in the argot, had legs. Every day for a week, it appeared as the *Times* page one lead; "Arrests (of Jews) Run to Thousands," *New Yorkers* read on November 12; "No Regret Voiced; Goebbels Declares That Nation Followed its Healthy Instincts." On November 13; "Reich Bars Jews In Trade, Fines Them Billion Marks. Jews Must Pay For Damage by Rioters."

On November 15, the top *Times* headline read, "Washington Calls Envoy From Berlin," and the lead story detailed Roosevelt's furious reaction to the Nazi assaults. But the accompanying story—a major development reported from London—had an equally prominent headline; "Chamberlain Plans to Ask Roosevelt to Join in Movement to Rescue Jews." The Nazis wanted the Jews out of the territory they controlled, and Berlin was sending signals it would let them go. But already the problem had surfaced—go where? Knowing that the British grip on Palestine would slip if waves of European Jews were allowed to go there, Chamberlain proposed Guyana, or desert camps in North Africa. "Nobody knows yet," the *Times* "rescue" story read, "where the emigrants can settle permanently, although the United States can take 30,000 annually under the quota system."

Thus, within days of reading the first

major news of the brutal Nazi assault against Jews, Americans were reading of the British-American arrival at the impasse—who will take the Jews?—which would be used, first, to justify inaction, and, second, to undercut public knowledge of the anti-Jewish program that might make that inaction unpopular. (This discussion, of course, took place before the six million were murdered; before, that is, the human imagination had reason to take such an unprecedented and grotesque prospect into account. When, in the 1990s, United Nations relief agencies cooperated in the removal of threatened populations in the former Yugoslavia, they were faulted for enabling "ethnic cleansing." If Jews had been "rescued" in 1938, would history fault Chamberlain and Roosevelt for enabling the Nazi policy of *Judenrein*? In other words, how would the Allies be judged now if they had cooperated in Hitler's eradication of Jewish life in the heart of Europe by supporting the emigration, even helping with it?)

During the days after *Krystalnacht*, the *Times* reported on a storm of pro-Jewish reaction in America; "Catholics of U.S. Score 'Atrocities,'" was a page one headline on November 17. "Nazi Cancer Denounced by Prelates." This story included the line, "The Catholic prelates emphasized the persecution of Jews rather than of Catholics in Germany." But other headlines that same day hinted that already a strategy of downplaying the plight of Jews was being adopted by the U.S. government; "Roosevelt Rebuke Declared General" This is from page one, November 17. "Reproof of Nazis Applied to Attacks on Catholics As Well As Jews."

By Friday, November 18, the situation of Jews in Germany was no longer the lead story. By November 20, a subtle shift had taken place in how the victims were referred to; "President Asks Prayers for 'Unfortunates.'" Soon no one was calling even for prayers. The drumbeat of the coming war continued to make the news in America, but stories about Jews, having fallen quickly from page one, soon disappeared altogether. The *Times* coverage of events of *Krystalnacht* leaves the distinct impression that, after an initial burst of official sympathy for Jews, both the British and American governments realized the only possible "rescue" would involve the accommodation of many thousands of refugees—something neither was remotely willing to do. Though Nazi policy through late 1941—for three years after *Krystalnacht*—encouraged Jewish emigration from German-held terri-

tory, there remained no place for them to go. David S. Wyman, in his book *The Abandonment of the Jews*, points out that a total of about 21,000 Jews were admitted to America as refugees during the war, far short even of the legal quota, referred to above, of 30,000 per year.

Public pressure never built to admit Jewish refugees, in part because the U.S. government discouraged the dissemination of news of the catastrophe, and in part because ingrained anti-Semitism clouded American perceptions throughout the war. In his book *The Holocaust as History*, Michael Marcus (p. 162) cites one study that showed, in 1944, 44 percent of Americans regarded Jews as a threat to national welfare, while 9 percent harbored this attitude toward the Japanese as a group, and 6 percent toward the Germans. Even if such feelings weren't an issue, what news was published about the anti-Jewish atrocities was given so little emphasis by news editors that Americans either did not notice or did not take it seriously.

Consider one example from Wyman's research; In June of 1942, the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland issued a report detailing the murders of 700,000 Jews. The first American newspaper to publish this was the *Boston Globe*. Its June 26, 1942 edition included the headline, "Mass Murders of Jews in Poland Pass 700,000 Mark." But this story appeared at the bottom of page 12. The next day, the *New York Times* gave the Bund Report two column inches. When the *Times* ran a full story on July 2, it was carried on page 6.

Wyman makes the point that Americans had learned to be skeptical of reports of German atrocities during World War I, and therefore many were prepared to discount these atrocity reports too. But their skepticism was powerfully, if implicitly, reinforced by the manner in which major newspapers published such news. Wyman says that while the *Times* published 25 items on the removal of Jews from France to death camps in Poland in the summer of 1942, only two appeared on the front page—and even then briefly, near the bottom. On July 2, 1944, the *Times* published "authoritative information" concerning the organized murders of 750,000 Hungarian Jews—on page 12, in four column inches. "The mass media," Wyman comments, "treated the systematic murder of millions of Jews as though it were minor news."

One direct result of these decisions by editors was that Churchill and Roosevelt could, at their Bermuda Conference in April of 1943, take a conscious and well-informed decision to do

nothing to rescue Jews without fear of any public protest. News editors had neither the information nor the power to influence war policy, but the manner in which they published what news there was of the unfolding genocide played a part in its continuing unchallenged for so long.

Public indifference and editorial detachment went out the window when the concentration camps were liberated in the Spring of 1945. "The American press," Wyman writes, "which for so long had barely whispered of mass murder and extermination, exploded with news of the German camps." Gruesome photographs and detailed coverage were featured day after day for more than a month—perhaps the first time since *Krystalnacht* that Americans were given information in a manner matching its grave significance. Yet by now, apparently, the American press had formed a habit of deflection, for the news that Jews as such were the main victims of the Nazi camp system, as Wyman says, "did not come across very clearly." The victims, to use Roosevelt's generic word of 1938, were "unfortunates."

Take two examples from my review of *Times* coverage. On May 1, 1945 a front page headline declared, "Dachau Captured by Americans Who Kill Guards, Liberate 32,000." This story of the liberation of the Bavarian concentration camp and its prisoners was long and richly detailed, but made no mention of Jews. The word never appears. But then Dachau had many victims besides Jews—Communists, resisters, POW's. Many Jewish prisoners had, in fact, been moved to the death camps farther east. One week after publishing news of the liberation of Dachau, however, the *Times* carried news of a camp where those murdered were overwhelmingly Jewish. "Oswiecim Killings Placed at 4,000,000," a headline declared. The long story, filed from Moscow, depended on a Soviet report of what the Red Army had found when it liberated the camp the previous January. Though years later it would become clear that the number of victims at Auschwitz, which is the German word for the Polish 'Oswiecim,' was overstated, perhaps by a factor of more than two, other details of the Soviet report were accurate. The gas chambers, piles of ashes and mounds of corpses were carefully described, and even the manufacturer of the crematoria—Topf and Son—was named. But the victims were identified only as "more than 4,000,000 citizens" of various nations—France, Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Poland. The *Times* reporter went on, "Such a report would seem incredible to

American readers, except that now they have been 'conditioned' by the horrors of Buchenwald which have already been fully investigated." And 'conditioned,' apparently, to something else. This story was printed on page 12. Like the report on Dachau, this report on Auschwitz never once mentioned Jews. Neither the Soviets who were the source of the information, nor the *Times* reporter who passed it on, seemed to think this odd. His name was C. L. Sulzberger.

That day's page one would not have had room for the Auschwitz story in any case since it carried the banner headline, "War In Europe Is Ended. Surrender is Unconditional. V-E Will Be Proclaimed Today." The date was May 8, 1945. On Armistice Day, eight years earlier, the Jews were at the center of the news, and the word "Jewish" was in the headlines. But by the end of the war in Europe, Jews had nearly disappeared not only from the continent, but from the news stories about the places where they were murdered.

II. Day After Day

"You cannot have the Holocaust day after day," Elie Wiesel told the *New York Times* in March of 1997, but by then that was exactly

what "you" seem to have had. Even the most casual reader of the news may have noticed by early 1997 the regularity with which Holocaust stories were appearing, often on the front pages of newspapers and the covers of news magazines—this more than fifty years after the event.

Indeed, this examination of press reports began with the question—Why are so many Holocaust stories showing up in the news now? The controversy surrounding Daniel J. Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, the Swiss banking scandal, Madeleine Albright's Jewish roots, the last war criminals—these were the subjects of major news stories in 1996, into 1997, one following the other in a steady and unprecedented progression. Especially given the way this story was buried when it mattered, the question forced itself on us—why now?

A brief look at several news indexes showed that the impression left by those high-profile stories was accurate. An extraordinary change in the quantity of news coverage about the Nazi genocide of the Jews had occurred. Here, for example, is a snapshot of the numbers of Holocaust-related stories and articles that ran in the major English language magazines and journals, as tracked by the *Reader's Guide to*

READER'S GUIDE TO PERIODICAL LITERATURE

50 Years of Holocaust Coverage

Years	Number of Articles	Some Typical Subjects
1945-47†	180	(Camps, Nuremberg Trials)
1949-51†	15	(Israel)
1955-57†	4	(Anne Frank)
1959-61†	29	(Eichmann)
1965-67†	61	(Statute expires, Six-Day War)
1969-71†	5	("Judgement at Nuremberg")
1975-77†*	12	(Elizabeth Holtzman, War Criminals)
1980-81*	21	(Wallenberg)
1985-86 *(c.1 year)	104	(40th anniv., TV Mini-Series, Demjanjuk, Barbie, Bitburg)
1990-91*	37	(USSR Archives, Museums)
1995-96 *(c. 1 year)	121	(50th anniversary, Goldhagen, Swiss Banks)

†Index categories are "WWII - atrocities," "-Jews," "war criminals"

*Index category is "Holocaust," which appears for first time, Nov. 1973 ("Survival of Jews" by E. L. Feckenheim, *Center Magazine*)

Periodical Literature over the long span since the end of World War II. (Note that this compilation involved a search of the bound index volumes under the headings “World War II—atrocities;—Jews;—war criminals.” The word “Holocaust” appears as a *Reader’s Guide* index category for the first time in 1973.)

These numbers indicate that:

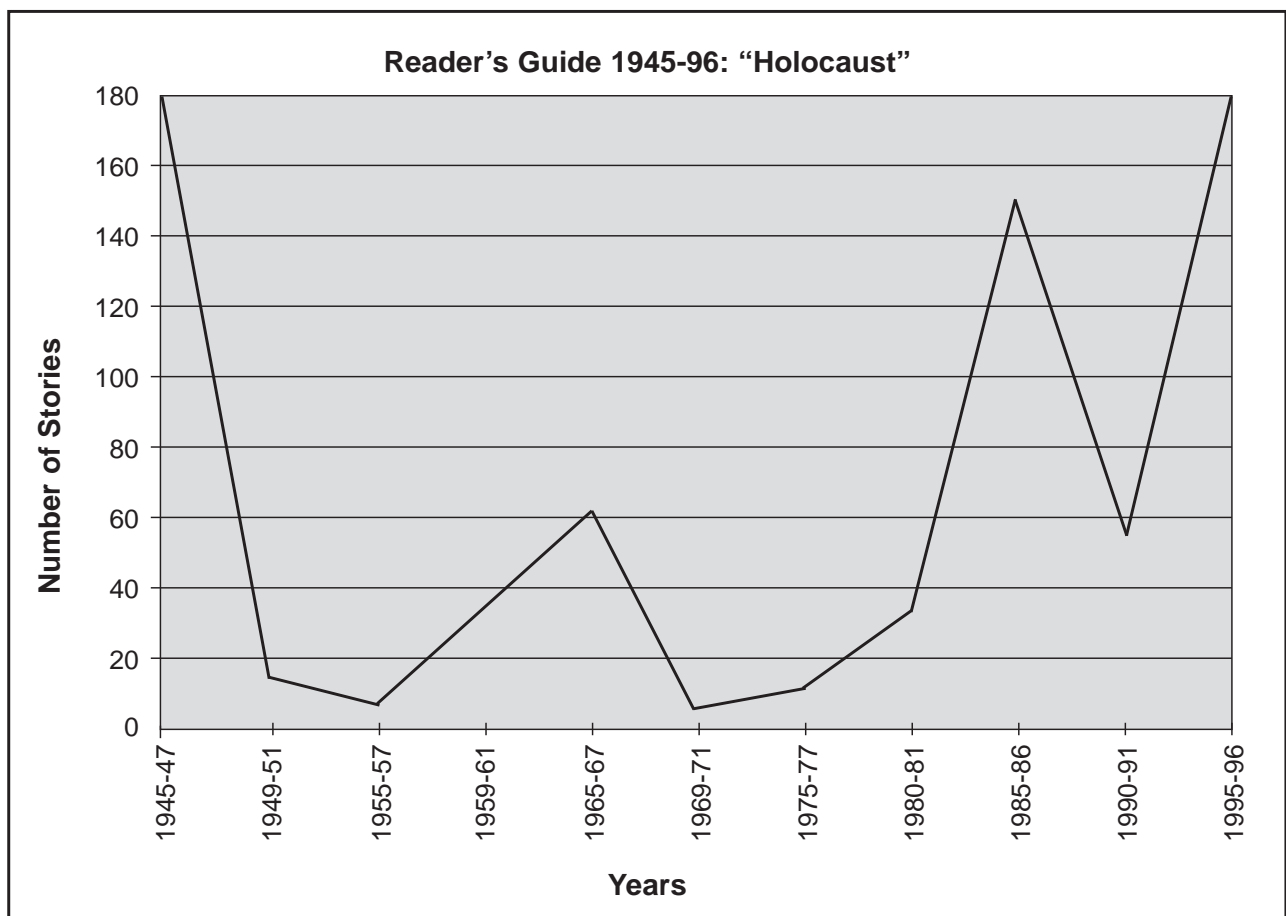
† After the first shock of the discovery of the death camps and the war crimes trials that followed, the story about what happened to Jews during World War II essentially dropped out of the periodical literature for more than thirty years, with the exception of a spate of articles around 1965 devoted not just to the anniversary,

but to the crisis of an expiring statute of limitations for war crimes.

† With the exceptions of 1955 and 1975, the ten year anniversaries have coincided with pronounced increases in Holocaust articles.

† There has indeed been an upsurge in writing on the subject since 1995. Owing to changes in the *Readers’ Guide* indexing system, the figure of 121 for 1995-96 represents a period shorter by almost a year than the figure of 180 for 1945-47. By this scale, the later number of Holocaust articles is roughly equal to the number published as the event was first uncovered.

In this graph, the trend is dramatic:



A look at the index of the *New York Times* is equally telling. These figures were compiled through a combination of paper-index and Nexis searches. Again, the subject headings shift over time. Thus, "World War II—atrocities;—crimes;—criminals;—prisoners; and—interned

simply "catastrophe." The recently established annual Jewish commemoration of the Holocaust which takes place in the first week of May, the anniversary of the liberations of camps, is called "Yom Hashoah." The word "Shoah" has yet to appear in the indexes as a category for the anti-

New York Times, 1945–97			
Bound Index/Nexis Search			
"Holocaust & Jews"			
<u>Dates</u>	<u>Numbers of Stories</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Number of Stories</u>
1945*	*c250	1980‡	53
1950†	89	1985	267
1955	59	1990	181
1960	140	1995	252
1965	194	1996	280
1970	54	1997 (J,F,M)	134
1975#	82		

* "W.W.II—atrocities, crimes & criminals, prisoners & interned civilians (few Jews)"

† "W.W.II—crimes & criminals, prisoners and interned civilians, Jews - anti-Semitism in Germany, Displaced Persons"

"W.W.II—crimes, Nazi Policies Toward Jews"

‡ Nexis Search; "Holocaust and Jews" (1980, first entry "Holocaust") A reader might wonder if a Nexis search produces more entries than a paper search, but the paper search yielded 86 in 1980 (compared with 53 ‡Nexis), and 347 in 1985 (compared 267).

civilians" were the relevant categories in the counting of stories related to the anti-Jewish genocide in 1945. Consistent with the *Times* stories of the liberations of Dachau and Auschwitz, there were almost no war-related index entries under the subject "Jews."

By 1950, stories are showing up under the topics "Jews—Anti-Semitism in Germany," "Jews—Displaced Persons," and "Minorities—Nazi Policies."

In 1975, a new index category appears: "Nazi Policies Toward Jews."

In 1980, "Holocaust" appears in the *Times* index for the first time, modified by "See also Nazi Policy." (The word "Holocaust" became commonly used for the anti-Jewish genocide after Elie Wiesel's work popularized the term in the 1960's. The word comes from the Greek, meaning "burnt offering," and evokes the biblical image of altar-sacrifice. The liturgical echo, and the implication of a redemptive, even holy ritual action has led some to abandon "Holocaust" in favor of "Shoah," a Hebrew word which means

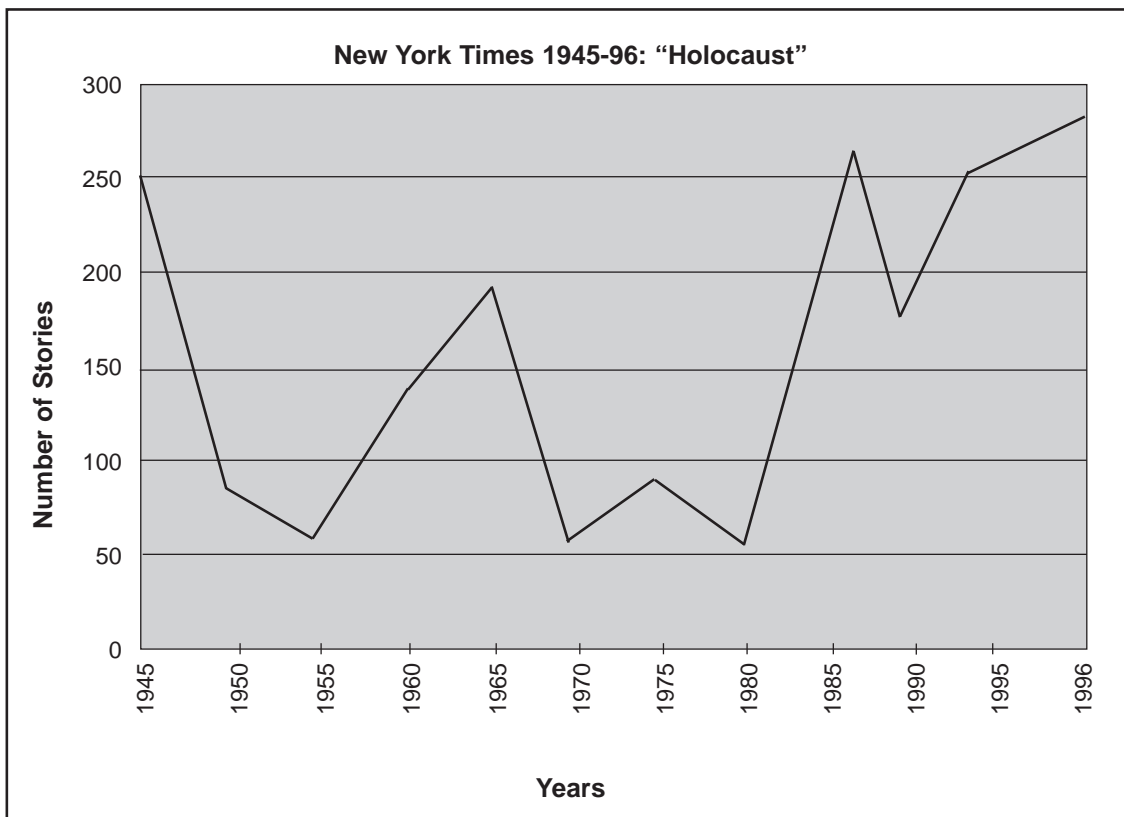
Jewish genocide. The word "genocide" itself was coined in 1943 by the jurist Raphael Lemkin.)

This set of figures suggests:

† The 1950s and 1970s are remarkable for the relative paucity of coverage.

† The dramatic upswing in 1985 involved the 40th anniversary observances, and, especially, the many news stories generated by President Reagan's controversial visit to the German military cemetery at Bitburg, Germany, a site at which remains of some members of the notorious S.S. were buried.

† The 50th anniversary of the end of World War II generated an upsurge in Holocaust related stories that has yet to abate. If the rate of stories that ran in the first three months of 1997 were to continue, there would be double the number that ran in 1945. There is no precedent for this pattern—and no comparable phenomenon associated with other aspects of the World War II commemoration. For example, editors who commissioned anniversary reports, articles and essays about Hiroshima turned away from that



story as soon as the anniversary passed. (Why has the American use of the atomic bomb, together with its strategy of mass bombing of cities, not been comparably revisited as an unfinished moral problem? Because the Americans won? Because the bombing even of non-combatants furthered Allied war aims, while the death camps came at the expense of Hitler's war aims?)

The deaths of six million Jews has become the main lens through which are viewed the events of World War II, in which perhaps a hundred million people died, most of them civilians. Patterns of news coverage suggest that, at the time, the deliberate mass-murder of Jews was only one of a multitude of horrors. In the years since, the Nazi death camps have become the pre-eminent symbol of the world gone mad, a distillation of the evil that swamped the century. Perhaps that is the meaning of the return, at century's end, of the Holocaust as a dominant news story. In any case, there is no precedent for this pattern of news coverage. What historical event has generated as much or more news coverage fifty years later as it did when the event first occurred?

What is the news here?

Over 600 Holocaust stories have run in the exceptional period 1995-97, but a sample of 33 titles gleaned from Nexis and by clipping is

instructive both because it suggests the range of questions being asked, and indicates something of the dynamic that may be driving this coverage. Here is a chronicle of some of the stories that have run, mainly in the *New York Times*, since the year of the 50th anniversary.

Press Coverage of the Holocaust: A Chronicle of 1995-97

1. *NYT*, Jan 27, 1995 (pA3) "German bishops cite Catholic 'denial and guilt' at Holocaust" by Stephen Kinzer
2. *NYT*, May 2, 1995 (pA14) "Holocaust Survivors" (editorial) (50th anniversary of liberation of Nazi concentration camps)
3. *NYT*, May 17, 1995 (pA7) "Pope Talks of Horrors of World War II" (in Rome, anniversary)
4. *NYT*, July 17, 1995 (pA1) "Chirac Admits France's Guilt in Fate of Jews" by Marlise Simon
5. *NYT*, Apr 1, 1996 (pC11) "Challenging a view of the Holocaust" by Dinitia Smith (Daniel J. Goldhagen, beginning of the controversy; fueled by A.M. Rosenthal)
6. *NYT*, May 30, 1996 (pA6) "Priest Said to Leave France After Criticism" (Abbé Pierre, & Roger Garaudy's Holocaust denial)

7. *NYT*, May 25, 1996 (pA8) "War Crimes Suspect Loses His Citizenship"
8. *NYT*, Sept 24, 1996 "5.5 Billion Missing" by A. M. Rosenthal (The *NYT*'s centenary exhibit at the New York Public Library acknowledges that newspaper's failure to report adequately on the Holocaust in Europe as it was happening.)
9. *NYT*, Sept 27, 1996 (pB1) "Bank's Gold Inspires Tales of Plunder" by Clyde Haberman (Federal Reserve Bank in NYC, gold reserves from World War II)
10. *NYT*, Oct 23, 1996 (pA1) "Swiss Used Nazi Victims' Money for War Payments, Files Reveal" by Alan Cowell
11. *NYT*, Nov 3, 1996 "The New Old News of Nazi Loot" by Barry Meier
12. *International Herald Tribune*, Nov 11, 1996 (pA1) "A New, Disturbing Chapter Emerges in Holocaust History" (Ultra intercepts declassified, showing genocide began earlier [1941] and may have caused 7 million dead Jews, not 6)
13. *NYT*, Nov 24, 1996 (pE2) "Decoding the Holocaust" by Alan Cowell (Ultra)
14. *NYT*, Dec 5, 1996 (pB1) "Holocaust Children Who Did Not Grow Up" by Ralph Blumenthal
15. *NYT*, Dec 19, 1996 (pA17) "Red Cross Admits Knowing of Holocaust During War" by Irvin Molotsky (Red Cross archivist admits failure of "silence")
16. *NYT*, Jan 1, 1997 (pA4) "Swiss President Calls Pleas for a Holocaust Fund Blackmail"
17. *USA Today*, Jan 29, 1997 (pA1) "Hunting the Last Nazis; Soviet Documents Revive Trails to WWII Criminals" by Peter Eisler
18. *NYT*, Jan 28, 1997 (pA1) "Swiss Envoy to US Resigns; He Urged 'War' Over Holocaust Fund Dispute" by David K Langer (pA1) "France to Look for Property Stolen from Jews in World War II" by Roger Cohen
19. *Wash. Post*, Feb 2, 1997 (Mag) "Out of the Past" by Michael Dobbs (Madeleine Albright)
20. *NYT*, Feb 5, 1997 (pA1) "Albright Grateful for Her Parents' Painful Choices" by Steven Erlanger
21. *NYT*, Feb 6, 1997 (pA1) "3 Swiss Banks Plan to Establish Fund for Nazis' Victims" by Alan Cowell (World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato) Editorial; "Madeleine Albright's Family"
22. *Time*, Feb 24, 1997 (cover) "Echoes of the Holocaust" (In April "US Undersecretary for International Trade Stuart Eizenstat will unveil a potentially explosive examination of American wartime records, including the controversial US role in tracing Nazi assets.")
23. *NYT*, Feb 25, 1997 "'Schindler' Sets a TV Record" (65 million viewers)
24. *NYT*, Feb 26, 1997 "Albright Comes Home" by Frank Rich
25. *NYT*, March 3, 1997 (pA2) "The Past Erupts in Munich as War Guilt is Put on Display"
26. *Boston Globe*, March 4, 1997 (editorial) "Censorship & Schindler's List"
27. *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 1997 (oped) "Moscow's Trove of Bank Records" by Konstantin Akinsha & Grigorii Kozlov
28. *NYT*, March 5, 1997 (pC1) "An Unofficial but Very Public Bearer of Pain, Peace & Human Dignity: Elie Wiesel" ("There is no final chapter to the Holocaust . . . [Yet] There is a statute of limitations on morbidity. One is not supposed to mourn too long. So you cannot have the H. day after day . . . The H. has become a fad. Books and films on it are doing so well. It became commercialized, cheap.")
29. *Boston Globe*, March 10, 1997 (pA1) "No Direct Evidence is Found of Swiss Bank Tie to Nazi Loot" by Laura Myers (AP)
30. *Boston Globe*, March 16, 1997 (pA1) "In France, An Uneasy Look Inward: The 'Lost' Masterpieces" by Walter V. Robinson
31. *Boston Globe*, March 23, 1997 (editorial) "The Swiss Account" (Swiss President Arnold Koller apologizes.)
32. *Boston Globe*, March 24 1997 (pA4) "Book Says Swiss Hid WWII Bank Schemes" (Deposits in 1941 = 332 million S.Fr.; in 1946 = 846 million. Gold reserves from \$503m to \$1.04b)
33. *Boston Globe*, March 29, 1997 (pA2) "Report To Rip Swiss Role as Nazi Bankers" By David Lee Preston (US State Dept. Findings Coming in April)

Each of these stories—the Swiss banks, Goldhagen, the plundered artworks, Albright, "Schindler's List" on television—has itself generated spates of other stories, adding up in the case of the *New York Times*, according to a Nexis search under "Holocaust and Jews" to more than 600 stories in just over two years—an average of nearly one story every day.

There are at least four kinds of news events reported, which, while overlapping, can be distinguished:

- confessions
- challenges
- new information
- old information more broadly published.

Of the 33 stories listed here, five tell of confessions of failure during the Holocaust:

- 1 - Bishops confess for German Catholics
- 4 - Chirac confesses for France
- 8 - The *New York Times*, in an exhibit, confesses its failure to report
- 15 - The archivist confesses for the International Red Cross
- 31 - Koller confesses for Switzerland

These acknowledgments of failure, of course, come after the powerful confessions for Germany by Richard von Weizacker in 1985; by Helmut Kohl in 1989; by Lech Walesa for Poland in 1991; and by President Thomas Klestil for Austria in 1994. Each of these events generated important news in those years. Clearly, as leaders of nations most involved confront the unfinished moral legacy of the Holocaust, leaders of other institutions, even including the *New York Times*, through its exhibit and through A. M. Rosenthal, are prompted to do so as well.

Such moral reckoning often comes about because challenges are directly put, and the past forces itself upon the present. Many of these stories recount how that has been happening since 1995:

- 5 - Daniel J. Goldhagen challenging Germany, and senior historians
- 7 etc. - Investigators challenging war criminals
- 14 etc. - Jewish leaders challenging Swiss banks
- 18 - Jewish leaders challenging French property owners
- 24 - The *Washington Post's* Michael Dobbs challenging Madeleine Albright
- 30 - Press challenging French art museums

New information is the subject of other stories:

- 10 - Declassified U.S. files enable bank records to be tracked

- 12 - Ultra intercepts declassified, expand Jewish casualty estimates to 7 million
- 17 - Archives of former Soviet Union open up, lead to money and criminals
- 32 - U.S. Treasury files reveal Swiss schemes

The fourth category of Holocaust story—old information more broadly published—is, in a way, the most provocative. Take the Swiss banking story. As readers have been presented with more and more “news” of the connection between looted bank accounts of long-murdered Jews and present holdings of respectable banks, they have been entitled to a more than slight sense of déjà vu. Indeed, this reverberation is itself the subject of story # 11, “The New Old News of Nazi Loot.” That much of the Nazi plunder had been salted away in secret Swiss accounts was well known at the end of the war. It was equally known that many affluent Jews, as they saw the Nazi cloud approach, had opened accounts in Switzerland. “Project Safehaven” was a secret, post war U.S. Treasury Department attempt to track these monies.

In the 1970’s and 1980’s much of this history was made public, especially by the former head of the U.S. State Department’s Office of Special Investigations, John Loftus. His books *Unholy Trinity* and *The Secret War Against the Jews* elaborated the details of such transactions. But until recently, this story attracted little attention from the general news media. In 1980, for example, a Nexis search of the *New York Times* under “Swiss bank and Jews” turns up zero stories. In 1992, likewise, there were no such stories on the subject. In 1995, there were four. In 1996, there were 23, and in the first three months of 1997, there were 33.

Why is the Swiss banking story surfacing now? The February 24, 1997 issue of *Time* (the cover headline reads, “Echoes of the Holocaust”) attributes the breaking of the story to Edgar Bronfman, head of the World Jewish Congress. In the summer of 1996, he followed up on *The Swiss Account*, a novel by Paul Erdman that included allegations of the collusion, by bringing pressure to bear against the Swiss Bankers’ Association. Bronfman’s position as a high profile business figure and, especially, as the head of the powerful, worldwide Jewish organization, brought the spotlight to the case. Mothlike, news editors were drawn to it. In October of

1996, 12,000 Holocaust survivors filed a \$20 billion class-action suit against four Swiss banks, and the media reported on the alleged Swiss malfeasance as if it were "news." But in 1942, as we saw, the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland had provided editors with information as accurate as it was urgent about the contemporaneous murders of 700,000 Jews, and the editors reacted with disinterest. What is different now?

These stories themselves suggest part of the answer with their reports of newly opened archives and declassification. The Swiss bank story is driven by the recent unsealing of "Project Safehaven" documents, but many other secrets of the Holocaust remain unknown. Since most of the actual murders of Jews took place in territory that fell behind the Iron Curtain, much remains even now to be learned of the basic factual data.

In the news business as it exists today, one set of high profile questions can easily lead to another. For example, now that the Swiss banking industry has been called to account, German banks themselves will surely be scrutinized again. The disappearance of its money by war's end has long secured the Reichsbank a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as site of history's most successful bank robbery. Will the *New York Times* not soon be inquiring into that? Similarly, Jewish claims against banks have prompted claims against insurance companies, as reported on page two of the *Times* on April 11, 1997. That story was headlined, "German Group to Investigate Claims of Nazi Victims."

Disclosures about the U.S. Government's role in all of this promise to fuel another wave of Holocaust stories. A *Boston Globe* page two headline on April 10, 1997 read, "U.S. Said to Have Let Nazis Shift Gold." The U.S. Government's official study of the matter was conducted by Undersecretary of Commerce Stuart E. Eizenstat, involved investigations into the work of 11 separate agencies, and covered 15 million documents, thousands of which were only now declassified. The Eizenstat report was released, May 7, 1997; on that day, in anticipation, a Reuters story in the *Globe* was headlined "Study Reportedly Criticizes U.S., Swiss Handling of Nazi Gold," and sure enough, the next day's *New York Times* ran the story under the sub-head "Truman Cabinet Also Failed Holocaust Victims." The *Globe* headline proclaimed, "U.S. Blasts Swiss Role in Financing of Nazis," with that day's story following Eizenstat's lead in downplaying the U.S. role, despite these sentences; "The United

States is also criticized in the report for failing to press the Swiss government after the war to make a complete accounting of its dealings with the Third Reich. After difficult negotiations, Washington settled all gold claims for \$58 million, a fraction of the sum actually deposited in Swiss banks." And where had the gold come from? The report established that German gold reserves stored in Switzerland included resmelted dental filings from the mouths of Jews.

Years before these disclosures made it to page one, Loftus with his books and official reports, and other writers like Burton Hersh, author of the CIA history *The Old Boys*, had exposed the various ways in which American officials aided Nazis, especially at war's end. Soon, no doubt, news editors will "discover" these stories too. Allen Dulles' role, for example, in moving assets for various German clients into Swiss banks surely deserves to be revisited, and probably will be. But neither new revelations, nor long neglected information alone explain the upsurge in press interest in the Holocaust.

Other factors suggest themselves. It may be that aging and dying people of the World War II generation are coming to terms with the unfinished business of those years. There are reports, for example, of deathbed revelations by Poles or French or Dutch people to their middle-aged sons and daughters that, in fact, they were born as Jews, "rescued" when their real parents were hauled off to the camps. Conversely, many members of the postwar generation of Europeans are at last able to face directly the truth of a continent-wide complicity in the Holocaust without having to personally judge their now deceased parents. Some social upheavals are so traumatic that it takes a generation or more to face them fully. Is that why younger men like Spielberg and Goldhagen are playing such a pivotal role in this?

One of the *Krystalnacht* stories cited earlier evoked the image of the "children of Israel" oppressed by Pharaoh. As Rachele Linner, the author of *City of Silence: Listening to Hiroshima*, points out, it was not for nothing that the liberated Hebrews had to wander in the desert for 40 years before coming into the Promised Land; those still bound by the mentality of slavery had to die before the new community could establish itself as a society of free men and women. Such massive social mutation takes place not over years, or even decades, but over generations. What inhibiting mentality have these fifty years purged both in editors and readers to make

us ready at last to hear the full story not only of Auschwitz but of the Jews who received no mention by the *Times* that day in 1945?

III. The Moral Reckoning

"There is a statute of limitations on morbidity," Elie Wiesel told the *Times* in the March, 1997 story cited above. Wiesel was worrying about the recent upsurge in interest in the Holocaust—not only journalistic, but commercial. Yet one wonders, Does "morbidity" define the hidden character of what drives this interest? Perhaps the question should be, What is the statute of limitations on mourning? To grieve is to confront loss, guilt, and the absolute nothingness of death. What do the patterns of human mourning indicate about what is happening here?

Psychologists tell us that grief denied can become a curse, condemning a person to long-term, low-grade but chronic depression. Analogously, social scientists describe the potentially drastic consequences if a great wound to the body politic is allowed to go untreated. In the United States, one need think only of slavery and the war fought to end it to recognize an example of this problem. The legacy of slavery is still palpable in the discrimination faced by African-Americans, and the Civil War remains a point of sharp conflict—and not only in the south. At Harvard University, to cite only one example, the agony continues as some members of the university community seek to have the names of Harvard alumni who died as Confederates added to the honor roll at Memorial Hall. As a moral phenomenon, slavery has not yet been fully reckoned with, leaving a twin legacy of anti-black racism and mutual North-South miscomprehension that continues to infect American democracy. When it comes to perpetrators, the requirements of justice are clear, and so is the shape of closure, but how do an indirectly implicated society or its institutions accomplish a moral reckoning, whether the issue is slavery or the millions of murdered Jews?

That this question has broad, worldwide importance is implied by the fact that the same May 8, 1997 issue of the *Boston Globe* which carried news of the Eizenstat report also contained two other relevant stories. "South African Ex-Defense Aide Pleads Against Digging Up the Past," read the headline of one. A leader of the former apartheid regime had warned that country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "By your incessant probing into

the past you may create a reaction which will be difficult to control . . . Let not our past destroy our future." But, as if speaking for all those engaged in such tasks around the world, the commission chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu replied, "We want the truth for the sake of healing."

In the same paper a page one story was headlined, "Bosnian Serb Convicted of War Crimes." The story was datelined The Hague, and began, "In the first war-crimes verdict since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials after World War II, an international court yesterday convicted a Bosnian Serb police reservist of war crimes and crimes against humanity during ethnic cleansing in the Bosnian war . . ." The *New York Times* covered the same story on the front page, with the headline "U.N. Panel Convicts Bosnian Serb of War Crimes." It seems oddly fitting that such a story should be on the *Times* front page on the same date, 52 years later, that it had published news of Auschwitz, the ultimate crime against humanity—without mentioning Jews.

In 1969, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross suggested that an individual grieves as a way of accomplishing a personal moral reckoning. In her book *On Death and Dying*, she wrote of the "stages of grief," suggesting that each must be completed if normal life is to resume after the death of a loved one. She identified those stages as shock, denial, anger-depression (depression defined as anger turned against the self), bargaining, and acceptance. It was in reviewing the pattern of news coverage of the Holocaust as reflected in the *Reader's Guide* 50-year chronology that the question first occurred to me: Are Kubler-Ross's stages of grief a progression that by analogy illuminates society's half-century old confrontation with the moral chaos of the Holocaust? There are, of course, essential differences between the processes of change for individuals and societies; any comparison between personal grief and a society-wide moral reckoning can be no more than a heuristic device. Yet perhaps, even as such, Kubler-Ross's scheme can illuminate something here.

We can at least partially account for a 50-year pattern of Holocaust news coverage by demographics (The World War II generation dies); politics (Iron Curtain archives open); the determination of some Jews to remember (Spielberg, Goldhagen, Bronfman), or even changes in journalism itself (the post-Watergate investigative impulse). But might it not also reflect a kind of quiet movement of human consciousness?

The first note of Kubler-Ross's scheme is the most striking: shock. What better word to describe the 180 articles and stories that ran in major English periodicals in 1945-47? The *New York Times'* record of about 250 Holocaust news stories in 1945 reflects the promulgation of raw information concerning what the Allies found in the ruins of the Third Reich. Among individuals, the more traumatic the shock, the more efficiently do physical and psychological systems of perception shut down. Given the moral horrors that the liberators uncovered in the spring of 1945, and given the fact that Allied governments and institutions—from journalism to rescue operations like the Red Cross—were now faced directly with what they had consciously avoided, an extreme reaction of shock might alone have generated the second turning away from the reality of the anti-Jewish genocide that followed. Clearly, shock opens into denial. If the institutions of the West had openly and fully confronted what the death camps revealed, they would have had to confront the meaning of their own action—or inaction.

Robert Jay Lifton, in studies both of Third Reich doctors and of soldiers in combat, has described what he calls "psychic numbing," but Kubler-Ross's word "denial" is as good as any for characterizing the quick, postwar collapse of news interest in the Holocaust. But it is also true that, by 1947 any normal coming-to-terms with the huge trauma of the Nazi genocide was interrupted by the onset of the Cold War, with its reversal in the roles of the Soviet Union and Germany.

The *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* table suggests that, counted in the five-year intervals, there were 30 articles in 30 years, almost half of them in 1965. The *Times* schema shows something similar. From 1947 to 1985, with few exceptions, editors felt little impulse to provide readers with news or analysis about what had happened in the heart of Europe between 1933 and 1945. Additionally, much of what sparse attention was paid reinforced denial by offering false consolation—from the saccharine Broadway version of Anne Frank's story in 1955 (Bruno Bettleheim pointed out that the play ends with the girl's disembodied voice floating across the darkened theater; "I still believe that human beings are good at heart.") to the sentimentalism of the 1980 television mini-series "Holocaust." ("The failure of 'Holocaust,' Lawrence L. Langer wrote, "is a failure of imagination. The vision which

plunges us into the lower abyss of atrocity is not there.")

And even if a kind of society-wide psychological shutdown had not been prompted by the sheer horror of the Holocaust, the politics of the Cold War would have done something similar. When the Iron Curtain fell from the Baltic Sea to the Aegean, Americans felt a need to quickly leave behind any impulse to look too closely at what Germans had done to Jews. Even disarmed, Germany was to be the bastion nation of Europe's resistance to Communism, and Stalin was a living devil, while Hitler had the virtue—his only one—of being dead. The Soviets had their own reasons for cloaking the real history of the Holocaust—not the least of which were vibrant Soviet anti-Semitism, and Soviet enmity of Israel. It wasn't until the Cold War thaw had begun to warm the climate of the 1980s, for example, that historians were able to calculate with any accuracy the real numbers and identities of death-camp victims in Eastern Europe. Even now, the numbers of murdered Jews are still being added up (see the Nov. 24, 1996 *NYT* story about Ultra revelations).

Kubler-Ross suggests that eventually a grieving person lets go of the need for denial. Typically, manifestations of anger follow, and it is possible to see this reflected in the kinds of Holocaust stories that began to show up in increasing numbers around 1985—the 40th anniversary of the end of the war. Think, especially, of the furies generated by Ronald Reagan's decision that year to honor the German dead, including an S.S. regiment, at the cemetery in Bitburg. In the same period, Pope John Paul II roused the anger of many by bestowing a papal knighthood on Kurt Waldheim, the former U.N. Secretary General who had been revealed to have a Nazi past. These controversies demonstrate what happens when issues become politicized, when past events, that is, are yoked to subsequent, and perhaps unrelated, currents. Critics of Reagan's conservatism could see his insensitivity to the memory of the murdered Jews as yet more evidence of what they regarded as a broad insensitivity. And so with critics of Pope John Paul II.

But in that same period, heated debates broke out over other questions of war crimes charges. The Cleveland auto worker John Demjanjuk, for example, made headlines when he was extradited to Israel, where he was convicted of having served as a guard at Treblinka—but then his conviction was reversed by a higher court. The debates sparked

by the Demjanjuk case were furious, and included assertions that the crimes of which he was accused hadn't occurred at all.

Given the media's record of the previous 40 years, it should not have been surprising that the crackpot phenomenon of "Holocaust denial" should have been one reaction to the mid-1980s upsurge in the quantity of stories. Such denial generated its own heat, but so, even, did the impulse to memorialize those lost to the Holocaust. In the 1980s several major Holocaust museums and memorials were planned, funded, and construction begun. This generated surprisingly angry denunciations from Jews who felt the Shoah was being trivialized and commodified by these establishments; from Jews who worried that the Holocaust could replace the Torah as the central fact of Jewish identity, enshrining the people's victimhood; and from members of other groups like Native Americans, African-Americans and Armenians whose historic agonies had been and were still being ignored.

Nevertheless, once the Iron Curtain fell, the readiness of a broad public to finally confront the Holocaust proved unstoppable. Nothing shows this more dramatically than the public's reaction to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., which opened in the spring of 1993. "Against almost everyone's expectations," Langer writes, "it quickly became the most visited museum in the nation's capital, which is a tribute not only to the designer, but also to a latent need in the population for a chance to admit the disaster into their consciousness in a gradual but relentless and unsentimental progression toward the truth."

Kubler-Ross describes the fourth stage of grief as a kind of bargaining, and indeed there is something of that in the relatively recent phenomenon reflected in news stories about the Swiss banks, the looted art or the purloined real estate. These disputes represent attempts at a quite literal accounting not only for the losses Jewish victims suffered, but for the failures of institutions to help them. "An ignominious legacy," ran the headline of a front page story in the *Boston Globe* on April 25, 1997. The reporter, Walter V. Robinson, described a process exactly of bargaining as Sotheby's "helped arrange a confidential six-figure settlement" between the heirs of a murdered Jewish collector from whom a Botticelli had been stolen, and the Italian collector who had acquired it since the war. In Kubler-Ross's terms "bargaining" amounts to a survivor's insisting upon what is

necessary to put the loss of death behind and get on with life. The large public process now underway, as one nation and institution after another is called to account for its behavior in relation to the murdered Jews, approximates a society-wide version of this. As Elie Wiesel seemed to be saying in the December *Times* interview, it is time to settle up and get on with life.

Whether we think of this process in Kubler-Ross's terms or according to some other construct, the question remains: How do peoples remember and, where necessary, repent? How are perpetrators, once identified and punished, admitted back into the circle of society? "I and most of my generals," said the South African apartheid regime's defense minister Magnus Malan, "are in the autumn of our lives. It is understanding and forgiveness we really seek, not legal pardons." How do banks, art museums, governments, churches, universities and newspapers accomplish a reckoning of their involvement in the Holocaust? The question is especially pointed for Jews because, in the absence of such reckoning, the Holocaust continually threatens to pre-empt the central place in Jewish consciousness, giving Hitler himself a kind of ignominious permanence. In this state of unfinished moral reckoning, Jews are in a way held hostage to the clinging denial of others. Unlike those who have so long lived in a state of willful avoidance, Jews have found ways to face the Holocaust. Nothing demonstrates this more dramatically than the number of Holocaust-related stories published in the *Jerusalem Post*. We have already seen what a search of *New York Times* indexes shows, but here is a comparison of the publishing patterns of three other key papers. As with the *NYT*, the Nexis search was keyed to "Holocaust and Jews."

Human beings accomplish such a difficult, culture-wide moral reckoning in fits and starts. Once they would have done so mainly within the context of religion, which at its best is an ultimate source of moral healing. But in the modern era, the literary imagination took on importance as the source, in Coleridge's phrase, of the "reconciliation of opposites." Indeed, over the post-war decades, an extraordinary body of Holocaust-inspired work has been produced by writers like Primo Levi, Bernard Malamud, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Aharon Appelfeld, Saul Bellow, Anne Frank, Rolf Hochhuth, George Steiner, Leslie Epstein, Elie Wiesel, Ilona Karmel, Jerzy Kozinski, Marcie Hershman, Cynthia Ozick, Tadeusz Borowski, Thomas Kenneally, D. H. Thomas and Piotr Rawicz. The list goes on.

Nexis Search - "Holocaust & Jews"		
Year		Number of Stories
	<i>Washington Post</i>	
1980		31
1985		113
1990		97
1995		127
1996		119
1997(J,F,M)		75
	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	
1980		(na)
1985		162
1990		161
1995		178
1996		190
1997(J,F,M)		88
	<i>Jerusalem Post</i>	
1980		(na)
1985		(na)
1989		470
1990		431
1995		433
1996		456
1997(J,F,M)		226

(This table does not correct for variations in the "news hole," the amount of space given in each paper to news coverage, but it is reasonable to assume that the news hole of the *Jerusalem Post* is the smallest of the three, which emphasizes the point.)

Yet because of the extremity of the horror at the center of this impulse, the literary imagination, reflected even in the work of these artists, has proved to be of limited use in laying bare the memory of the Holocaust. As long-set patterns of news coverage demonstrated from *Krystalnacht* on, we successfully averted our eyes, and have mainly kept them turned away. Recent news coverage, however, raises the question of whether, at last, this has begun to change.

More than the work of artists, the work of journalists gives us our record of progress, or lack of it. As this review of news stories indicates, markers on the calendar, like anniversaries, can be enormously useful as occasions on which to launch our "raids on the unspeakable," as Thomas Merton dubbed the effort to address such questions. In the surveys of *Reader's Guide* and *NYT* indexes, the years of 1965, 1985 and 1995 show the most dramatic surges in the amount of Holocaust coverage, and the pattern is surely a function in large part of the human impulse to mark anniversaries. Psychologists have shown how individuals make use of anniversaries in drawing personal grief to closure. Obviously, so does society. By summoning up an orderly act of remembering, according to the arbitrary structure of the calendar, we impose meaning on a chaotic universe. We continually review past experience, but from the constantly shifting depths of inner awareness.

The recalling we do on anniversaries frees us from the prison of the present moment, and enables us to grasp the soul of what happened in the first place. When this process works as it should, memory becomes distilled, and we are left with the incorruptible truth of experience, for good or ill. That is why, across a range of stories, newspapers depend on anniversaries as aids—"news pegs"—in allowing editors to revisit stories that might seem out of place in the news of the day; in concentrating the minds of news-gatherers; and in focusing the interest of readers. As Kierkegaard said, life is lived forward, and understood backward. Journalism has to keep its eyes pointed in both directions.

But it is impossible not to wonder, as one tracks the recent increase in news coverage of the Holocaust, if another phenomenon of the calendar is not at work here as well. The law of time drives this preoccupation if only because those most traumatized by the Holocaust as victims or perpetrators are dying. Their children, and those of the vast throng of bystanders, are coming fully of age. But an even broader population is affected by another quirk of time—the coming turn in the number of the calendar. Obviously, the approach of the year 2000 works powerfully on the imaginations of the gullible. The comet Hale-Bopp, appearing in 1996 and 1997, was taken to be a "marker" of the millennium by many people. Thirty-nine Heaven's Gate cultists committed suicide in reaction to it, but they were far from the only ones to see the astronomical phenomenon as a sign. "Halley's Comet provoked no such mania when it came by 11 years ago," the astronomer Alan D. MacRobert observed. "We are clearly in a buildup of enthusiasm for paranormal catastrophe as the year 2000 approaches."

But even the most rational people would be foolish to think that society as a whole is immune to the unconscious pull of the idea of the millennium. In the *Apocalypse*, the last book of the Christian Bible, also known as the *Book of Revelation*, the millennium is defined as the thousand year span of time, a reign of peace, which precedes the end of history. Obviously, there has been no thousand-year reign of peace, but that did not stop Christians from fearing the worst as the calendar turned to the year 1000, nor has it prevented lost souls like the Heaven's Gate cultists from treating the upcoming turn like the end. Adolf Hitler felt the pull of the apocalypse, which is why he defined the Third Reich as the thousand-year reign that would usher in the golden epoch of the master race.

One needn't be in the grip of such madness to sense that this turning of the calendar has mythic power. It may seem to stretch credulity to associate patterns of news coverage with a phenomenon so bathed in the aura of New Age enthusiasm, and yet. Why can't the millennium work on the human unconscious—and the impulses of editors—in the way that anniversaries do? Could this be a factor in the steady rise of Holocaust news stories? If the pattern of the previous 50 years had been followed, the number of stories would have dropped after 1995, but in none of the indicators has that happened. On the contrary, the rate of increase continues to grow, right through the first months of 1997. Thus, the millennium begins to take shape as a kind of magnified version of New Year's Day, which individuals use as occasions for conscientious self-scrutiny, and which news media use as markers for a political, cultural, yet always somehow moral summing up.

Pope John Paul II declared in 1994 that the Catholic Church "cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves through repentance of past errors and instances of infidelity." The pope extended this call to an examination even of "acquiescence" before "the violation of fundamental rights by totalitarian regimes." Whether the Catholic Church as such has accomplished such a moral reckoning, particularly in relation to the Holocaust, is another subject. (The Vatican's unfinished business with its own role during the Holocaust was central to an article I wrote for *The New Yorker* on April 7, 1997.) The point is that there was a version of this sentiment about the millennium in what Swiss President Arnold Koller finally said in March of 1997 as a result of the pressures brought to bear by the hundreds of news stories about Swiss banks and the Nazis; "We cannot and must not leave the century in a state of uncertainty, confusion, and embarrassment, for that would be a mortgage that would totally burden the decisions to be made in the next century." A mortgage? Have the limits of the cold language of banking ever been more apparent? Yet the point is that Switzerland too—the watchmaker's country—feels the pressure of this relentlessly ticking clock.

Thomas Sancton, *Time's* Paris bureau chief and main author of the February 24, 1997 cover story "Echoes of the Holocaust," said of the Swiss banking story, "It's all part of a great reckoning that is taking place as the world prepares to turn the page on the 20th century." Could it

be that, at bottom, that is what the varied news coverage about the Holocaust is telling us? Could it be that, in this secular age, in the broad absence of shared religious rituals by means of which human beings once achieved such moral resolution, and in the absence of authentic, culture-wide artistic expression available to more than an elite, the popular news media provide our main public method for accomplishing a final moral reckoning?

There will be no meaningful future for the children of World War II until we confront directly and fully the moral chaos that we have so long tried to bury. This consideration began with the *Times* report of the stilled traffic of New York City on November 11, 1938, when Americans fell silent for two minutes on the anniversary of the end of The Great War. That day marked the true beginning of the Holocaust. Fifty-nine years later, on May 6, 1997, the *Boston Globe* reported on something eerily similar in a story headlined "Israel is Brought to a Halt to Honor Holocaust Victims." The story was datelined Jerusalem; "For two minutes yesterday, air-raid sirens wailed, pedestrians stopped and motorists halted their cars and stood silently beside them in the middle of streets and intersections across Israel . . . the day the nation that rose from the ashes of the Holocaust pays tribute to the estimated 6 million Jews murdered in Adolf Hitler's 'Final Solution.'"

The harshest truths about that crime must be faced no matter where they lead—isn't that the theme of Goldhagen, the Swiss banks, the Austrian insurance companies, Madeleine Albright, and the looted art? Could it be that, instead of just telling us something, these stories are doing something? "Half a century old," Lawrence Langer wrote, "the Holocaust still mocks the idea of civilization and threatens our sense of ourselves as spiritual creatures. Its undiminished impact on modern memory leaves wide open the unsettled and unsettling question of why this should be so." In news stories decades later, we are finally asking this unsettling question. The 20th century will be unfinished, no matter what the date, until it is answered—and so will we. That is why the story of the Holocaust is unfinished. "Our sense of ourselves as spiritual creatures" is at stake. Perhaps the Shoah will be in the news—and should be—until this work is done. Perhaps the news is how, at the end of this fractured century, human beings do it.

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