Hitler expresses his love for Munich.

Source: Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf. 1st

CHAPTER IV

Munich

In the spring of 1912 I came at last to Munich.

The city itself was as familiar to me as if I had lived for years within its walls. This is accounted for by my study which every step had led me to this metropolis of German art. Not only has one not seen Germany if one does not know Munich — no, above all, one does not know German art if one has not seen Munich.

In any case, this period before the War was the happiest and by far the most contented of my life. Even if my earnings were still extremely meager, I did not live to be able to paint, but painted only to be able to secure my livelihood or rather to enable myself to go on studying. I possessed the conviction that I should someday, in spite of all obstacles, achieve the goal I had set myself. And this alone enabled me to bear all other petty cares of daily existence lightly and without anxiety.

In addition to this, there was the heartfelt love which seized me for this city more than for any other place that I knew, almost from the first hour of my sojourn there. A German city! What a difference from Vienna! I grew sick to my stomach when I ever thought back on this Babylon of races. In addition, the dialect, much closer to me, which particularly in my contacts with Lower Bavarians, reminded me of my former childhood. There were a thousand and more things which were or became inwardly dear and precious to me. But most of all I was attracted by this wonderful marriage of primordial power and fine artistic mood, this single line from the Hofbräuhaus to the Odeon, from the October Festival to the Pinakothek, etc. If today I am more attached to this city than to any other spot of earth in this world, it is partly due to the fact that it is and remains inseparably bound up with the development of my own life; if even then I achieved the happiness of a truly inward contentment, it can be attributed only to the magic which the miraculous residence of the Wittelsbachs exerts on every man who is blessed, not only with a calculating mind but with a feeling soul.

What attracted me most aside from my professional work was, here again, the study of the political events of the day, among them particularly the occurrences in the field of foreign affairs. I came to these latter indirectly through the German alliance policy which from my Austrian days I considered absolutely mistaken. However, the full extent of this self-deception on the part of the Reich had not been clear to me in Vienna. In those days I was inclined to assume — or perhaps I merely talked myself into it as an excuse — that Berlin perhaps knew how weak and unreliable the ally would be in reality, yet, for more or less mysterious reasons, held back this knowledge in order to bolster up an alliance policy which after all Bismarck himself had founded and the sudden cessation of which could not be desirable, if for no other reason lest the lurking foreigner be alarmed in any way, or the shopkeeper at home be worried.
Cheering crowd at Odeonplatz in Munich upon hearing the announcement that Germany had declared war against France, July 28, 1914. Hitler, 25 years old, in circle.
Source: Brian Deming and Ted Lilf, *Hitler and Munich* (date?)
If propaganda is to be effective for the movement, it must be addressed to only one quarter, since otherwise, in view of the difference in the intellectual training of the two camps in question, either it will not be understood by the one group, or by the other it would be rejected as obvious and therefore uninteresting. Even the style and the tone of its individual products cannot be equally effective for two such extreme groups. If propaganda renounces primitiveness of expression, it does not find its way to the feeling of the broad masses. If, however, in word and gesture, it uses the masses' harshness of sentiment and expression, it will be rejected by the so-called intelligentsia as coarse and vulgar. Among a hundred so-called speakers there are hardly ten capable of speaking with equal effect today before a public consisting of street-sweepers, locksmiths, sewer-cleaners, etc., and tomorrow holding a lecture with necessarily the same thought content in an auditorium full of university professors and students. But among a thousand speakers there is perhaps only a single one who can manage to speak to locksmiths and university professors at the same time, in a form which not only is suitable to the receptivity of both parties, but also influences both parties with equal effect or actually lashes them into a wild storm of applause. We must always bear in mind that even the most beautiful idea of a sublime theory in most cases can be disseminated only through the small and smallest minds. The important thing is not what the genius who has created an idea has in mind, but what, in what form, and with what success the prophets of this idea transmit it to the broad masses.

The strong attractive power of the Social Democracy, yes, of the whole Marxist movement, rested in large part on the homogeneity and hence one-sidedness of the public it addressed. The more seemingly limited, indeed, the narrower its ideas were, the more easily they were taken up and assimilated by a mass whose intellectual level corresponded to the material offered.

Likewise for the new movement a simple and clear line thus resulted:

Propaganda must be adjusted to the broad masses in content and in form, and its soundness is to be measured exclusively by its effective result.

In a mass meeting of all classes it is not that speaker who is mentally closest to the intellectuals present who speaks best, but the one who conquers the heart of the masses.

A member of the intelligentsia present at such a meeting, who carps at the intellectual level of the speech despite the speaker's obvious effect on the lower strata he has set out to conquer, proves the complete incapacity of his thinking and the worthlessness of his person for the young movement. It can use only that intellectual who comprehends the task and goal of the movement to such an extent that he has learned to judge the activity of propaganda according to its success and not according to the impressions which it leaves behind in himself. For propaganda is not intended to provide entertainment for people who are national-minded to begin with, but to win the enemies of our nationality, in so far as they are of our blood.

Hitler at opening of German art exhibit at Haus der Deutschen Kunst on
directives prohibiting it. One town in which the looting was especially extreme was Bad Nauheim. The anti-Semitism in the town could have been much worse than it was had it not been for the actions of the local Nazi Party leader, Friedrich L., who was a genuine Old Fighter, having joined the party in 1923. In addition to his party duties, the thirty-six-year-old Nazi was the chairman of Bad Nauheim's local health insurance board. When the violence began on the morning of November 9, he was at work in his office in a neighboring town. In his absence, Karl S., the leader of the local SA, took the initiative in getting the pogrom started. Friedrich L. rushed back to Bad Nauheim and gathered key members of the party, instructing them to exercise restraint. This did not mean that the pogrom was halted in Bad Nauheim, where Jewish shops were invaded and demolished. But Jewish homes remained largely off-limits, and Jews were not subjected to physical beatings.

Despite this relative restraint, the extent of the looting was especially great in Bad Nauheim. Many of the townspeople who had played no part in the violence engaged in the systematic plundering of the vandalized Jewish shops almost all day long on November 9. The majority of the looters were women. Many had been standing outside the shops as the vandalism unfolded, helping themselves to merchandise that the SA men threw out onto the street. Others who were more bold went into the shops to pick through the spoils. The most popular items were articles of clothing, toys, and small pieces of furniture. When looters covered bulkier items, they arranged for local youths to do the heavy lifting for them.

Most of the looting on November 9 and 10 was spontaneous. But there were also many examples of premeditated exploitation of the pogrom for personal enrichment. Two especially egregious cases occurred in Munich. The first involved Christian Weber, a prominent local figure in the Nazi Party notorious for financial corruption. Weber had proved adept at manipulating the "Aryanization" of Jewish property for his own financial advantage. On the night of November 9, he led a group of SS men from Munich to the suburb of Pianegg, where Baron Rudolf Hirsch, the scion of a wealthy Jewish family, had his estate. Since the summer of 1938, Hirsch had been involved in negotiations with the city of Munich over the "Aryanization" of his property. Weber's aim on the night of November 9 was to force Hirsch to expedite that process, from which he hoped to profit personally. His group included Hermann Fegelein, who during World War Two would command an SS unit responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews in the Soviet Union (and who would also marry Eva Braun's younger sister). After arriving at the Hirsch estate, the SS men shoved Hirsch around and did some damage to the villa. They burned several rooms, though the building, which Weber hoped to acquire, remained largely intact. On November 10, Baron Hirsch was arrested and sent to Dachau, where he was badly abused, and from which he was eventually released only after promising to sell his property immediately.

No less voracious than Weber were the members of a group of Hitler Youth leaders in Munich, who on the night of November 9 conspired to exploit the pogrom to extort money from local Jews. The leader of the group, Emil Klein, was a thirty-three-year-old Nazi who had participated in the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. Much like Christian Weber, Klein was a genuine Nazi "Old Fighter" who found a way to combine authentic ideological commitment with a drive for personal enrichment. In November 1938 Klein was the chief of the Hitler Youth Division "Hochland." On the evening of November 9, he attended the meeting of Nazi leaders in the Munich Old Town Hall, where he heard Goebbels deliver the instructions regarding the pogrom. From there Klein went to a nearby theater, where a number of his subordinates were attending a performance. Klein found them during an intermission and ordered them to assemble later at the Hotel Excelsior. The meeting in the hotel took place at around 1:00 AM. Klein and his men hatched their plan to extort money from wealthy Jews. They targeted in particular members of the Bernheimer family, which over several generations had amassed a fortune through its operation of one of Europe's most successful and prestigious art and antiques dealerships.

Account of "Kristallnacht" events in Munich.
Source: Alan Steinweiss, Kristallnacht 1938 (2009), pp. 79-82.
The first to be visited was one of the younger members of the family, Paul Bernheimer. Several of Klein's men drove to Bernheimer's villa in the middle of the night. They were admitted into the Bernheimer home after claiming that they were engaging in a "security check." One of the men told Bernheimer that, in view of the death of Ernst vom Rath, Bernheimer would be given an opportunity to express his remorse through a financial contribution to the Hitler Youth. The money, they assured Bernheimer, would be used to educate young Germans. Bernheimer asked how much money was involved. The response was that the amount would be up to him, though the men reminded him that they knew he was very wealthy. After some back and forth, the men named their price: five thousand Reichsmarks. Bernheimer made out a check for that sum and handed it over. He was also compelled to sign a statement condemning the killing of vom Rath and declaring that his payment to the Hitler Youth was voluntary.

The men returned to the Excelsior Hotel and presented the check to their chief, Emil Klein. Although Klein was disappointed in the amount collected from Bernheimer—who, Klein argued, could have paid ten times as much—he was pleased by the success of the tactic, and he ordered his men to repeat it. The next target would be Otto Bernheimer, the owner of the famous business. Klein sent a team to the Bernheimer home with orders to collect 50,000 Reichsmarks. When the men arrived at the home, they were met by Otto's son, Kurt, who explained that the family would need time to arrange payment. He appealed the men temporarily by writing out a check for 800 Reichsmarks. A little while later, after some middle-of-the-night scrambling and a telephone conversation with a banker, Bernheimer turned over a money order for 48,000 Reichsmarks.

The operation continued along in this way throughout the night. The Hitler Youth officials extorted 50,000 Reichsmarks from yet another member of the Bernheimer family, in addition to 10,000 from Fritz Kohn, 5,000 from Max Löwenhals, 5,000 from Max Uhlfeld, and 4,000 from Emil Kraemer. The financial extortion was only part of the plan. Emil Klein and his men were also involved in several attempts to force the "Aryanization" of Jewish homes through acts of intimidation. Klein's men occupied two Jewish-owned villas after telling the residents that they would have to leave immediately.

On November 10, Klein dispatched a couple of his men to a branch of the Deutsche Bank to cash the checks that had been collected overnight. In broad terms, the men explained the circumstances in which they had acquired the checks. The bank employees were cautious, claiming that some inquiries would be necessary before they could cash the checks. Klein's men then tried their luck at a second bank, Merk, Fink, and Co. Again they explained that the Hitler Youth had acquired the money during the events of the previous night. As the men haggled with the bank employees, two Gestapo officers arrived to arrest them. The magnitude and audacity of the extortion was too much even for the Nazi Party, which later tried and expelled some of the Hitler Youth officials.

Most of the extortion capers that unfolded during the pogrom were more petty. In Nuremberg, Jews were beaten until they signed papers pledging to transfer their property. In Berlin, some Jews were taken to the cellar of the synagogue in Pestalozzistrasse, where they were beaten and then made to stand without a latck for a long period of time. Their captors demanded money in return for their release. Like the widespread looting and the elaborate blackmail that was attempted in Munich, these forms of stealing were ultimately predicated on the assumption that Jewish wealth had been acquired illegitimately and was, therefore, fair game.

German youths played a central role in the violence of the Kristallnacht. In many cases the beatings of Jews and the destruction of Jewish property were carried out largely, or even mainly, by teenage boys. Often they were mobilized by school administrators, teachers, or officials of the Hitler Youth. But in many instances they acted spontaneously,
Father Rupert Mayer (1876-1945), who preached in Munich (including in the Stadt) was an outspoken critic of the Nazis from the days when the NSDAP was gaining strength in Munich throughout the Third Reich. A German patriot who had lost a leg in World War I, Mayer spoke out in public and from the pulpit against Nazi infringements on Catholic Church prerogatives. He was arrested three times by the Nazis, and held in Landsberg Prison, Cloister Ettal, and Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. He survived the war, but died of a stroke six months after German surrender. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1987. 

Source: Brian Deming and Ted Lilf, *Hitler and Munich* (date?)
In 1942 Hans Scholl, a medical student at the University of Munich, his sister Sophie, Christoph Probst, Willi Graf, and Alexander Schmorell founded the "White Rose" movement, one of the few German groups that spoke out against Nazi genocidal policies.

Nazi tyranny and the apathy of German citizens in the face of the regime's "abominable crimes" outraged idealistic "White Rose" members. Many of them had heard about the mass murder of Polish Jews; as a soldier on the eastern front, Hans Scholl had also seen firsthand the mistreatment of Jewish forced laborers and heard of the deportation of large numbers of Poles to concentration camps.

The group expanded into an organization of students in Hamburg, Freiburg, Berlin, and Vienna. At great risk, "White Rose" members transported and mailed mimeographed leaflets that denounced the regime. In their attempt to stop the war effort, they advocated the sabotage of the armaments industry. "We will not be silent," they wrote to their fellow students. "We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace!" Because the students were aware that only military force could end Nazi domination, they limited their aims to achieve "a renewal from within of the severely wounded German spirit."

After the German army's defeat at Stalingrad in late January 1943, the Scholls distributed pamphlets urging students in Munich to rebel. But in the next month, a university janitor who saw them with the pamphlets betrayed them to the Gestapo (German secret state police).

The regime executed Hans and Sophie Scholl and Christoph Probst on February 22, 1943. Officials also eventually arrested and executed philosophy professor Kurt Huber, who had guided the movement, and the rest of the "White Rose" members.

At his trial Huber remained loyal to the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant's ethical teaching, as he concluded his defense with the words of Kant's disciple Johann Gottlieb Fichte:

And thou shalt act as if
On thee and on thy deed
Depended the fate of all Germany,
And thou alone must answer for it.

Resources


Die Weisse Rose / The White Rose [videorecording]. Waltham, Mass.: National Center for Jewish Film, Brandeis University, 1983.
Hans Scholl, Ulm, born September 20, 1918, medical student, executed February 22, 1943

Christoph Probst, born November 6, 1919, medical student, executed February 22, 1943

Sophie Scholl, Ulm, born May 9, 1921, biology and philosophy student, executed February 22, 1943
It is impossible to engage in intellectual discourse with National Socialism because it is not an intellectually defendable program. It is false to speak of a National Socialist philosophy, for if there were such an entity, one would have to try by means of analysis and discussion either to prove its validity or to combat it. In actuality, however, we face a totally different situation. At its very inception this movement depended on an deception and betrayal of one's fellow men; even at that time it was inwardly corrupt and could support itself only by constant lies. After all, Hitler states in an early edition of "Hitler" book (a book written in the worst German I have ever read, in spite of the fact that it has been elevated to the position of the Bible in this nation of poets and thinkers): "It is unbelievable, to what extent one must betray a people in order to rule it." If at the start this cancerous growth in the nation was not particularly noticeable, it was only because there were still enough forces at work that operated for the good, so that it was kept under control. As it grew larger, however, and finally in an ultimate spurt of growth attained ruling power, the tumor broke open, as it were, and infected the whole body. The greater part of its former opponents went into hiding. The German intellectuals fled to their cellars, there, like plants struggling in the dark, away from light and sun, gradually to choke to death. Now the end is at hand. Now it is our task to find one another again, to spread information from person to person, to keep a steady purpose, and to allow ourselves no rest until the last man is persuaded of the urgent need of his struggle against this system. When thus a wave of unrest goes through the land, when "it is in the air," when many join the cause, then in a great final effort this system can be shaken off. After all, an end in terror is preferable to terror without end.

accepted as fact and put out of mind. The German people slumber on in their dull, stupid sleep and encourage these fascist criminals; they give them the opportunity to carry on their depredations; and of course they do so. Is this a sign that the Germans are brutalized in their simplest human feelings, that no chord within them cries out at the sight of such deeds, that they have sunk into a fatal consciencelessness from which they will never, never awake? It seems to be so, and will certainly be so, if the German does not at last start up out of his stupor, if he does not protest wherever and whenever he can against this clique of criminals, if he shows no sympathy for these hundreds of thousands of victims. He must evidence not only sympathy; no, much more: a sense of complicity in guilt. For through his apathetic behavior he gives these evil men the opportunity to act as they do; he tolerates this "government!" which has taken upon itself an infinitely great burden of guilt; indeed, he himself is to blame for the fact that it came about at all! Each man wants to be exonerated of guilt of this kind; each one continues on his way with the most placid, the calmest conscience. But he cannot be exonerated; he is guilty, guilty, guilty! It is not too late, however, to do away with this most reprehensible of all miscarriages of government, so as to avoid being burdened with even greater guilt. Now, when in recent years our eyes have been opened, when we know exactly who our adversary is, it is high time to root out this brown horde. Up until the outbreak of the war the larger part of the German people was blinded; the Nazis did not show themselves in their true aspect. But now, now that we have recognized them for what they are, it must be the sole and first duty, the holiest duty of every German to destroy them henceforth.

We are not in a position to draw up a final judgment about the meaning of our history. But if this catastrophe can be used to further the public welfare, it will be only by virtue of the fact that we are cleansed by suffering; that we learn for the light in the midst of deepest night, summon our strength, and finally help in shaking off the yoke which weighs on our world.

We do not want to discuss here the question of the Jews, nor do we want in this leaflet to compose a defense or apology. No, only by way of example do we want to cite the fact that since the conquest of Poland three hundred thousand Jews have been murdered in this country in the most heinous way. Here we see the most frightful crime against human dignity, a crime that is unparalleled in the whole of history. For Jews, too, are human beings—no matter what position we take with respect to the Jewish question—and a crime of this dimension has been perpetrated against human beings. Someone may say that the Jews deserved their fate. This assertion would be a monstrous iniquity; but let us assume that someone said this—what position has he then taken toward the fact that the entire Polish aristocratic youth is being annihilated? (May God grant that this program has not fully achieved its aim as yet!) All male offspring of the houses of the nobility between the ages of fifteen and twenty were transported to concentration camps in Germany and sentenced to forced labor, and all girls of this age group were sent to Norway, into the bordello of the SS! Why tell you these things, since you are fully aware of them—or if not of these, then of other equally grave crimes committed by this frightful sub-humanity? Because here we touch on a problem which involves us deeply and forces us all to take thought. Why do the German people behave so apathetically in the face of all these abominable crimes, crimes so unworthy of the human race? Hardly anyone thinks about that. It is

to be oppressive, they are broken.

Good fortune, alas! builds itself upon misery. Good fortune, alas! is the mask of misery. What will come of this? We cannot foresee the end. Order is upset and turns to disorder, good becomes evil. The people are confused. Is it not so, day in, day out, from the beginning?

The wise man is therefore angular, though he does not injure others; he has sharp corners, though he does not harm; he is upright but not glib. He is clear-minded, but he does not try to be brilliant.

Lao-Tzu

Whoever undertakes to rule the kingdom and to shape it according to his whim—I foresee that he will fail to reach his goal. That is all.

The kingdom is a living being. It cannot be constructed, in truth! He who tries to manipulate it will spoil it, he who tries to put it under his power will lose it.

Therefore: Some creatures go out in front, others follow, some have warm breath, others cold, some are strong, some weak, some attain abundance, others succumb.

The wise man will accordingly forebear excess, he will avoid arrogance and not overreach.

Lao-Tzu

Please make as many copies as possible of this leaflet and distribute them.

If the people are barely aware that the government
CHOOSING LIFE:
OUR PARENTS, OURSELVES

Samuel Norich
General Manager, Forward Association

I was born in Feldafing, Germany, in 1947. We left for the States, for New York, in 1957, and ten years later, in the summer of 1967, I went back for a visit. I got a grant from my college to spend the summer doing research on political ideology in the Jewish DP camps in a number of archives in Israel, Germany, and at the Wiener Library in London. At least, that was the excuse for my trip. The reason was that, even though I was already 20, this was an adolescent odyssey for me. I went to find myself.

As it turned out, I found much more of myself in Israel, where I had never been than in Germany, where many memories connected me—and connect me to this day—to friends I grew up with and to places I remember.

I decided I would have to go back to Israel for a longer stay, and I did, two years later. I spent the 1969–1970 academic year, my second year of grad school, at the University, taking courses with several of the great teachers of that great university seminar with Yehuda Bauer on the Sh'etra b'Ezra. That course confirmed in me a fascination with the history and culture of the place and time in which I didn't become a scholar of it, but I remain a student of it.

I must tell you that for me, the central mystery of my parents' lives was, and what happened to them, in the years from 1940 to 1945, but what they managed to do in the years just after 1945. My father, tsu lange yor, never spoke about the war years. My mother, z"l, never ceased to speak about the war, and I think—though she gave birth to and brought up two children, and made a warm home for Anita and me and our father for another four decades—I think she never quite recovered from the anguish of losing her mother Khane, her sister Gita and her sister's baby Talya, and my mother's little brother Moyshe, in Auschwitz. I think I feared that if I were to approach the events of those years too closely—even if vicariously—I would be hurt, maimed.

The mystery of my parents' and other survivors' lives after liberation was, simply, where did they find the strength to choose life? What did they think they were doing? That is, how did they understand themselves at that time? What, precisely, was the psychological or the cultural well from whence they drew their strength?

The fact that most of our parents, most of the time, did find the strength to choose life may blind us to the possibility that they could have chosen otherwise. I remember the impression made on me by my first reading, in the late 1960s, of Bruno Bettelheim on psychological trauma in the concentration camps, and especially his description of the extreme passivity to which some inmates succumbed. Such people were called "muselmen," and Bettelheim describes their extreme personality change as follows:

1Hebrew abbreviation for "May her memory be for a blessing."—Editor's note
...[They were people so deprived of affect, self-esteem, and every form of stimulation, so totally exhausted, both physically and emotionally, that they had given the environment total power over them... all conscious awareness of stimuli coming from the outside was blocked out, and with it all response to anything but inner stimuli. [They became] objects, but with this they gave up being persons... they behaved as if they were not thinking, not feeling, unable to act or respond, moved only by things outside themselves.

Why didn't most of our parents, most of the time, become zombies of this sort, not during the concentration camps, and not after? And the fact is that they didn't. On the contrary, as you heard from Professor Bauer last night, they demonstrated a degree of initiative, inventiveness, determination — gevurekh—which played the key role in lowering the curtain on the British Empire in Eretz Yisrael. They couldn't have done what they did without the eventual help and direction of the Jewish Agency's shlitchim, of the Joint, and the Jewish chaplains of the American and British armies. But they began to organize themselves before the Jewish Brigade arrived in late June 1945, and before the Joint came on the scene in August of that year. The Brichta organization and the central and camp committees in the American and British zones remained their show. To be sure, not everyone was an Abba Kovner, a Yossel Rosensaft, a Samuel Gringas, a Zalman Grinberg, a Treger, a Shalkit,2 but there were quite a few of them, and there were so many others who put their shoulders to the wheel, who were willing, in the later idiom of my generation, to put their bodies on the line.

There must have been hundreds who worked on the DP newspapers, which Professor Bauer mentioned only in passing. Despite the difficulty of obtaining printing presses and Hebrew type, the first newspapers4 appeared in Landsberg, Landsberger Lager Czajmung, beginning on October 8, 1945, and Munich, Undzer Weg, published weekly beginning October 22, 1945. These were joined in the winter of 1945-46 by others: A Heim in Leipheim, Of der Pray in Stuttgart, Undzer Hoffnung in Eschwege, Undzer Wort in Bamberg, Undzer Leben in Berlin, Undzer Mut in Zeilsheim, Der Nauer Moment in Regensburg, Dos Fraje Wort in Feldafing, Bamidbar in Feuchtenwald, D.P. Express in Munich, and Der Morgen in Bad Reichenhall.

Where did the feverish social and cultural activism of our parents during those days come from? And what explains the unmatched birthrate of the Jewish DP camps in late 1946 through 1948?

For me, the clue to that mystery is to be found in the name they gave themselves: Sh'frir ha-Pletah. That term has a certain currency in Jewish tradition. Sh'frir ha-Pletah means "saving remnant." Not "saved remnant"; that would have been a redundancy. Not even "surviving remnant" as you'll find in the historical overview the Museum prepared and included in our portfolios for this conference. They saw themselves as the remnant that saves, that redeems, the family and the community as a whole, the community from which they came. That is why the first book-length history of the displaced persons, Leo W. Schwarz's 1953 work, was titled, The Redeemers. And when Herbert Agar published a history of the DPs and the Joint seven years later, he called it The Saving Remnant. In the title page of that volume, Agar quotes a sentence from Chaim Weizmann, written in 1933: "If, before I die, there are a half million Jews in Palestine, I shall be content,

2Abba Kovner, who later became one of the foremost Israeli poets, was a Jewish partisan commander in the Lithuanian-Belorussian forests, and a leader of the Bricha. Yosef (Yossel) Rosensaft was the leader of the Jewish DPs in the British zone of Germany. Samuel Gringas, Zalman Grinberg, David Treger, and Levi Shalkit were leaders of the Jewish DPs in the American zone.—Editor's note

3Samuel Norich's reference is to DP camp newspapers published in the American zone of Germany. The first issue of Undzer Shriune (Our Voice) appeared in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp in the British zone on July 12, 1945.—Editor's note
because I know that this 'Saving Remnant' will survive.' The earliest reference to this concept that I'm aware of in Jewish texts occurs in Genesis, chapter 45, verse 7: "Vayisblakhem elokim lifneykhem lashem lakhem shirit ba'aretz u'velebachayot lakhem lifleyta gedolah." It occurs when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, who now fear that the second to the pharaoh in Egypt will exact retribution on them for what they did to him. But Joseph tells them no, that it was in fact God's plan to save them and their family: "And God sent me before you to give you a remnant on the earth, and to save you alive for a great deliverance."

They didn't call themselves survivors, though they knew the term—in Yiddish it is "Lohn-geblibene." Later, when we arrived in America, Americans and American Jews called us "refugees" at first. Still later, when we entered the public consciousness of America, it was as "survivors" and "children of survivors." That term may be fine for external consumption—klapey khitze—but for understanding ourselves and the sources of our parents' motivation, Sh'erit ha-Pletah tells us more. Perhaps we can even get America to use the term "saving remnant."'

Far from the Holocaust having created the State of Israel, it was the instinctive need of the survivors to save Vilna—to save something of the destroyed families and the destroyed Jewish communities from which they had come—that animated them and other Jews who created the Jewish state.

I'd like to close with one more personal recollection. I remember, in 1987, during the shloshim after my mother, standing in a minyan at the Teaneck Jewish Center, when a feeling came over me that it was now up to me to give her life, that the genetic and biological relationship between us—that she had given me life—was now reversed. I know I'm not the only one to have had that feeling while mourning the death of a parent. I don't know whether it's common among children of the Sh'erit ha-Pletah, whether it is in fact a feeling known to every mother's child. But of one thing I am certain: that our parents felt exactly that feeling in 1945 and 1946. And here we are.

"The term Liferet is used earlier in Genesis 32:9, describing Jacob's return to his native land after spending 14 years at the home of his father-in-law, Laban. Concerned about a possible attack from his brother, Esau, Jacob divided his family and possessions into two separate camps, so that if Esau were to attack one of the camps, "the camp which is left shall escape," in Hebrew, "... ha-malkaneh ha-nish'ar lifleyt.""

The one time that the full term "Sh'erit ha-Pletah" is used in the Bible is in Chronicles 4:43, where the descendants of Judah are recorded as having destroyed "the remnant of the Amalekites that had survived," that is, in Hebrew, "... et sh'erit ha'amalek ha-nish'ar lifleyt..."

In a footnote at page 18 in the 1953 book, The Retemembers: A Saga of the Years 1945-1953, cited above by Sam Norich, Leo W. Schwarz actually discusses the biblical origin of the term "Sh'erit ha-Pletah," and its use by Jewish Holocaust survivors to describe themselves following their liberation: "As there is no exact equivalent of this expression in English, and its use among the liberated people was constant, there has been no alternative but to introduce it into English. The phrase Sh'erit Ha-Pletah is Biblical in origin, being used in the Book of Chronicles to describe the remnant that survived the Assyrian conquest [sic]. At the period in the above page [that is, May 1943] it was used to denote the Surviving Remnant of the Destruction during the Second World War, but as time went on, it came to be used with ideas and shades of meaning that are only partly suggested in the Saving Remnant."

"Sh'erit Ha-Pletah in Celle, a July 1945 publication listing 2,134 Jewish survivors in a DP camp near Bergen-Belsen in the British zone by name, previous nationality, date of birth, and town of origin, was one of the earliest times that the term was used in print. (See Isaac Levy, Witness to Evil: Bergen-Belsen, 1945 [London, 1993], 54.) Thus, certainly at first, "Sh'erit ha-Pletah" was primarily a descriptive term to denote those who had survived the Holocaust, that is, the "surviving (or saved) remnant," of European Jewry."—Editor's note
THE CHALLENGE WE FACE TODAY

The Honorable Sam Gejdenson
Member of Congress (Democrat—Connecticut)

Good evening. I was born in a displaced persons' camp in Eschwege, Germany. My parents were displaced Jewish Holocaust survivors. I'd like to begin today by telling you a bit about my own history and where I come from. Like many of you, my parents are from Eastern Europe. My father was born in a small village called Parfianiavo, located in what was then Poland, and what is now Belarus. My mother comes from Vilna. She never lets him forget that he came from a shtetl, a dorf, while she grew up in Vilna—the height of Jewish civilization at that time—Yerushalayim D'Lita, the Jerusalem of Lithuania.

This past June, I traveled to each of my parents' birthplaces. I saw Vilna, the place from which my mother, like so many others, fled during World War II to escape from the Nazis, and Parfianiavo, home to 400 Jews, including my grandparents, who saw their last day in 1941, when they were marched to their deaths by German troops. In Parfianiavo, I met the Catholic woman who saved my father's life. My father and his brother were taken in by Mrs. Stankevich, a Catholic woman, who gave them shelter in her family's barn. I will never forget the story she told me, as she sat on her bed, an elderly woman of 94 years. It was Christmas night, during the height of World War II. Her son, who was working in a business occupied and run by the Nazis, came home for Christmas that night. She saw him and she started wailing. "What's wrong?" he asked. In tears, she responded, "We have eight children and not enough food. I'm hiding two Jews in the barn, and now that I've told you, you'll get drunk and tell your friends. Your friends will tell the Nazis and they will come and kill the Jews." "No, mother," she replied. "If I get drunk and tell my friends, the Nazis will kill our entire family and maybe even the whole village."

And that was the truth. This woman risked everything—her life, her home, her children—to do the right thing. Her courage just astounds me.

My family came to the United States on October 13, 1949, on the USS General Steward. We began a new life in America, in Eastern Connecticut. As a young kid, listening to the story of this Catholic woman, I used to ask myself, "If faced with similar circumstances, would I have the courage to act so selflessly?" As a young person, it was fairly easy. Now, as a husband, and the father of four children, the trial is more complex.

Our generation is unique, in the sense that while we experience a lot of angst, anger, hurt, pain, frustration, and fears, we really have no way of knowing the kind of suffering our parents went through. The Holocaust was not on our watch. We weren't tested by this occurrence. And sometimes, I think we forget what a challenge it really was, not just to Jews, but to non-Jews as well.

We face different tests today. As I look around this room, I recognize a lot of the faces here—of people deeply involved in the Jewish community, in Jewish issues. But we've got to do more than that. Think about it for a moment. What if we'd gone back to Mrs. Stankevich and said, "Why didn't you save the two Gejdenson boys when they came to your barn that cold winter night?" And she said, "Oh you know, I was worried about them, but I had to take care of my own family. I had to worry about our own well-being. Our village was in trouble, occupied by the Nazis. I cared, but I couldn't do anything about other people."
Those of us who bear the legacy of suffering cannot accept that answer. We have to lead the fight no matter where it is. And we are tested in strange ways each and every day. Where are the Jewish voices when Bob Jones University demonizes Catholics? Where were we when others tried to denigrate Hispanic Americans by pursuing English-only education? Where are we when gay rights are coming under attack? Where is the indignation we felt when the world was silent to our own suffering?

This year in Congress, the foreign aid bill originally contained no money for the Wye peace process, no money for Africa, and no money for Latin America. As the senior Democratic member of the House International Relations Committee, I got the Jews together in the House—about 20 of us—and we unanimously decided to oppose the foreign aid bill. Not an easy thing to do. Especially when you consider a lot of the money is going to Israel. A few days later, the money for the peace process was restored. But there was still nothing in there for Africa or for Latin America. We stood firm. This time, I brought in others: Sandy Berger, the White House national security adviser; and Jack Lew, the head of the Office of Management and Budget. Close to a majority of Jews in the House voted against the bill. As a result, we were able to get the funds for Africa and Latin America as well.

As Jews I believe we have an obligation. We bear a unique legacy that obligates us to fight for others in need.

It is a little frightening sometimes. I was sitting in the White House on the eve of the war in Kosovo. To me, it was a simple decision. Do we allow Mr. Milosevic to continue his campaign of ethnic cleansing or do we intervene? Suddenly, one senator gets up and says, Mr. President, I'd be with you, but they haven't killed enough people yet. The numbers aren't that big. It reminded me of my father's story—the Jews of Parshaniavo. One day, the Germans went into the ghetto; they took out the Jews, about 400, and they put them in a little area. They gunned them down and buried them. It wasn't 10,000; it wasn't 6 million; it wasn't a large number. It had been done probably dozens of times before. This wasn't an astounding act. But it was one act of many. And it was only at the end of the war that somebody with a calculator figured out we hit an all-time record.

I was proud to see that the Jewish members of Congress, a number of them Democrats, were the first ones to stand up. There was no perfect answer here. But allowing Milosevic to go through Kosovo and kill people because they were of Albanian ancestry, or Muslims instead of Christians, is something we simply cannot abide by. And with American leadership, we stopped Milosevic. But there are plenty of places we haven't acted. They killed a million and a half Cambodians. Nobody batted an eye. In Rwanda, they killed close to 800,000 people in 90 days. There's murder going on in much of Africa—West Africa and East Africa.

It's not that the world doesn't care about these people. But it's hard to get the world to focus. If I told you that you could save people right here and now, with little or no cost to you, most of you would probably do it. Now, if I said that might entail putting your kids in harm's way, it's an entirely different equation.

Each and every one of us here stands as a legacy of hope, courage, and determination. I challenge you to lead the fight to ensure that none of these hatreds flourish unabated. It's not an easy job. Indeed, it's not just a job for the federation or for Jewish organizations. Reach out to Black and Hispanic members of your community before there's an incident. Don't wait for leaders to solve this problem. It's up to you. You are more powerful than the elected leaders or the religious leaders. At the end of the day, it's the people who make the difference.
I remember a rally on the Mall to fight for the rights of the Soviet Jewry. Close to a quarter of a million people came out: Jews, non-Jews, regular people. There were about a hundred big shots on this podium at the front of the Mall, elbowing their way forward to make sure that CNN and ABC and CBS would get a good shot of them for their own constituencies. I happened to be at the back hamster, not because I don’t need publicity as an elected official, but because I had my two little kids with me and it is hard to elbow people when you are with kids who are only knee-high.

And suddenly, it dawned on me. If there had been no podium, no raised platform for the big shots, 250,000 people would still have been there, and the networks and the live coverage would still have continued. If a hundred heads of organizations, presidents, congressmen, senators, heads of synagogues, and rabbis showed up on the Mall, nobody would care. It would be a blip on the TV screen, a little protest today in Washington from people who do it professionally. But this was real; it was significant. This was real people making a real difference.

I’m not a biblical scholar, but the interesting thing to me about the character of Moses is that he was part of the “establishment.” He wasn’t a slave. He ate with the pharaoh. He was in the country clubs, in the boardrooms. But he joined the revolution to fight for people who were being abused.

For those of us who have attained some power in society, who are no longer on the outside looking in, we ought not take that status as some form of long-term protection. German Jews were in Germany long before the Holocaust. They were heroes of World War I and the military. To the rest of us, they appeared so assimilated that it was hard to recognize our brethren until after the war. Jews may not be the first targeted, but we are seldom the last.

The challenges we face today are much more subtle. Gone are the yellow armbands, the numbered tattoos. In their place are more subtle questions, like aid for parochial schools or the battle over school prayer. How many of us have said, “Well, maybe aid for parochial school wouldn’t be so bad? After all, some of these are even Jewish schools. What’s the harm done in saying a prayer at the beginning of class?” Yet, we fail to realize that the separation between church and state has been critical to making this country great. We neglect to consider the alternatives, places like Bosnia or Kosovo, where religion continues to drive a wedge between people.

We would like to think that we are safe here, that nothing is going to happen to us. But we had better guarantee that it does not happen here. Jefferson said it best. “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,” he said. Take our life and renewal and use it to fight for freedom. Thank you very much.