



AN UNTOLD
STORY OF THE
HOLOCAUST



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Event Program

THE LAURIE AUDITORIUM
TRINITY UNIVERSITY

*Wednesday, November 10, 1999
7:30 p.m.*

7:30

Welcome

DR. GARY KATES

DEAN OF HUMANITIES AND ARTS, TRINITY UNIVERSITY

7:35

"Kristallnacht—" *The Turning Point*

DR. SYBIL MILTON

VICE PRESIDENT, INDEPENDENT EXPERTS COMMISSION:

SWITZERLAND—WORLD WAR II

7:50

Conversations with Survivors

JOSEPH KEMPLER, MAX LIEBSTER

8:00

Getting Away with Murder?

Legal Accountability for Persecution in Prewar Nazi Germany

DR. JONATHAN BUSH

VISITING PROFESSOR OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS LAW SCHOOL

8:15

Conversations with Survivors

RUDOLF GRAICHEN, SIMONE LIEBSTER

8:25

Introduction to the Documentary

JAMES N. PELLECHIA

PRODUCER AND ASSOCIATE EDITOR, WATCH TOWER SOCIETY

8:30

*Showing of the classroom edition of
Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*

9:00

Jehovah's Witnesses in Buchenwald—Prisoners of Conscience

DR. DAVID A. HACKETT

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND HISTORY CHAIR,
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

9:15

Jehovah's Witnesses—Forgotten Victims of the Holocaust

DR. SYBIL MILTON

9:30

Closing thoughts from Survivors

Speakers' Highlights

Speaker: Dr. Jonathan Bush, Visiting Professor of Law, University of Texas Law School

Theme: Getting Away with Murder? Legal Accountability for Persecution in Prewar Nazi Germany

Abstract: In the 1930's, the persecution of domestic political enemies and of racial and religious minorities in Nazi Germany was widely known. During the last years of the war, officials in the U.S. War Department were planning for the occupation of a defeated Germany and clearly intended that trial and punishment of those 1930's persecutors would be an important feature of postwar policy. Yet, in the end, few Germans were ever punished for prewar acts of persecution. A review of the ultimately successful political and legal arguments against punishment tells us something about the Allied occupation and the nature of the postwar German consensus, and about possible risks to the present efforts to punish war criminals from former Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

Speaker: Dr. David A. Hackett, Associate Professor of History and Chairman of the History Department, University of Texas at El Paso

Theme: Jehovah's Witnesses in Buchenwald—Prisoners of Conscience

Abstract: Hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Details of their experience in the camp can be found in the published documents of the Buchenwald Report. The Witnesses occupy an important position in the history of the Nazi era because of their courageous stand of conscience based on their religious beliefs.

Speaker: Dr. Sybil Milton, National Judicial College; Vice President, Independent Experts Commission: Switzerland—World War II

Theme: "*Kristallnacht*" The Turning Point

Abstract: The November 1938 pogrom in Nazi Germany and incorporated Austria was an organized rampage of arson, looting, and vandalism directed against German and Austrian Jews. It was also a turning point in the evolution of Nazi genocide, providing a trial run for later deportations. Although Nazi violence in November 1938 shocked the world, tangible help remained inadequate. Although most Germans disapproved of the wanton destruction of property during the pogrom, a few displayed acts of courage and compassion.

Theme: Jehovah's Witnesses as Forgotten Victims of the Holocaust

Jehovah's Witnesses in Nazi Germany and in occupied Europe suffered a little-known fate. The coercive anti-democratic nature of Nazi dictatorship and the expanding use of systematic repression and brutality against Jehovah's Witnesses began in 1933. This religious group was maligned and assaulted for their alleged "internationalism" and persecuted because of their refusal to render unconditional obedience to the Nazi state. The Witnesses' religious resistance is generally unknown and their story is often neglected in literature about Nazi Germany.

Speaker: Dr. John Weiss, Professor Emeritus of European History, Lehman College and the Graduate Center of the University of the City of New York

Theme: Religious Response to Nazism—A Study in Contrasts

Abstract: The history of European anti-Semitism spans centuries, but only in Germany did racist stereotypes spawn an ideology that produced the horrors of the Holocaust. Religiously based anti-Semitism contributed to the culture of racism, and millions of church members willingly participated in genocide. Jehovah's Witnesses were among the few who, for religious reasons, refused to accept and support Nazi racial policies.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the Nazi Era

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- 1933 About 25,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses active in Germany. First concentration camp, Dachau, established in March. April 1, all religious literature printed by Jehovah's Witnesses is banned from circulation in Germany. In June, Prussian State Police ban the work and organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. Some Witnesses sentenced to terms in labor and concentration camps. Watch Tower office in Magdeburg raided and closed. August 16, first mention of existence of concentration camps in the *Golden Age* magazine (now *Awake!*), published internationally by Jehovah's Witnesses.
- 1934 On October 7, telegrams of protest sent to Hitler by Jehovah's Witnesses in 50 countries, including Germany.
- 1935 April 1, Jehovah's Witnesses banned from all civil service jobs and arrested throughout Germany. Pension and employment benefits confiscated. Being married to one of Jehovah's Witnesses becomes legal grounds for divorce. Children of Jehovah's Witnesses banned from attending school. Some children taken from parents to be raised in Nazi homes and reform schools.
- 1936 Mass arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses. Several thousand are sent to concentration camps and some stay there until 1945. December 12, Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Germany secretly distribute in one hour 200,000 copies of the Lucerne Resolution, a protest of Nazi atrocities.
- 1937 At Buchenwald concentration camp, first known use of the purple triangle as a symbol for camp inmates who are Jehovah's Witnesses. April 22, Gestapo order directs that all of Jehovah's Witnesses released from prison be taken directly to concentration camps. June 20, Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Germany secretly distribute the "Open Letter," which supplies detailed accounts of Nazi atrocities.
- 1938 October 2, Watch Tower Society President J. F. Rutherford, speaking over a network of 50 radio stations, denounces Nazi persecution of the Jews. November 9 and 10, Jews experience a nationwide attack in a pogrom called *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass).
- 1939 September 15, August Dickmann, one of Jehovah's Witnesses and the first conscientious objector of the war to be executed, dies by firing squad at Sachsenhausen concentration camp.
- 1940 The magazine *Consolation*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, in its June 12 issue warns: "There were 3,500,000 Jews in Poland when Germany began its Blitzkrieg . . . their destruction seems well under way."
- 1942 January 20, Wannsee Conference of Nazi officials formalize plans for the so-called Final Solution, the extermination of European Jewry.
- 1944 *Consolation* of January 19 reports: "Some 7,000,000 Jews have fallen into the Nazi clutches; and it is Hitler's intention to destroy them all."
- 1945 May 7, Germany surrenders, and the war in Europe ends. The Nuremberg war crimes trials begin in November.



Camp Survivor

On the train an SS guard kicked me into a cell. I landed on top of the man with whom I would travel for the next two weeks. Despite the terror, abuse and uncertainty we faced, he seemed unusually calm.

MAX LIEBSTER

Born in 1915, the son of a Jewish shoemaker, Max was arrested in 1939 for being a Jew. He was 24 years old. He first met one of Jehovah's Witnesses while being transported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The Witnesses were kept in isolation barracks surrounded by electric wire. "The SS often singled out the Witnesses for special torture. . . . One out of every three of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sachsenhausen died in the winter of 1939/40." Max carried his own father's body to the crematorium furnace. He was transferred to the Neuengamme concentration camp, then to Auschwitz. There an SS guard saved his life. In 1945, he was taken to Buchenwald, where all the Jewish prisoners were to be killed. When his turn came, he narrowly escaped death. That same night, the camp was liberated by U.S. troops.



Camp Survivor

The only information that I had about Jehovah's Witnesses was that they could be set free simply by signing a form renouncing their religion.

That concept was totally incredible to me.

JOSEPH KEMPLER

Joseph was born in 1928 in Krakow, Poland, to a devout Jewish family. He was transferred to Plaszow concentration camp in July 1943 and then to the Zakopane, Mauthausen, and Melk camps. In Melk, Joseph first heard of Jehovah's Witnesses. He was liberated in Ebensee on May 6, 1945, weighing 60 pounds and near death. "I survived by focusing on the immediate present to the exclusion of everything and everybody else." His entire family had perished with the exception of his sister, who was hidden by a family of Jehovah's Witnesses in Poland. After more than two years in a displaced persons camp, he emigrated to New York in November 1947. He became one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1958.



Nazi Reform School Survivor

At school I was under more and more pressure to heil Hitler. But I refused because in my heart I could never honor a man in this way as if he were a god who could save people.

SIMONE LIEBSTER

Born in 1930, Simone faced severe trials at an early age. Expelled from high school at the age of 12, she was interrogated under blinding lights by two Nazi agents who tried to force her to reveal the names of other Jehovah's Witnesses. She was sent to a reform school in Konstanz, Germany, for "reeducation." Her parents were sent to concentration camps. "I suffered no mental damage when our family was torn apart. I kept my eyes fixed on my parents' example of integrity." Children at the reform school performed hard labor, were not permitted to speak and were allowed to wash their hair only once a year. After four years, the family was reunited.



Nazi Prison Survivor

I would rather have died than put on a Nazi uniform. When my teacher saw that I had no intention of wearing it, he got angry, and the entire class booed me. In 1938 my sister and I were taken from school and transported to a reform school.

RUDOLF GRAICHEN

Rudolf was born in 1925 in Germany. In 1937 the Gestapo arrested all the male members of the local congregation. His father was sentenced to five years in prison. Rudolf withstood intense pressure to join the Hitler Youth. In 1943 he was sentenced to four years in prison, more than a year of which was spent in solitary confinement in Stollberg. His mother died in Ravensbrück concentration camp shortly before liberation. He was released at the end of the war. In 1950 he was tortured by East German police and sentenced to four years in prison. Finally, in 1954, Rudolf was freed. He married Patsy Beutnagel of Texas in 1962. Now a widower, Rudolf resides in Brady, Texas.

Notes

EVALUATION

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