

# Remember the Holocaust

by Michael Curtis



“No monument stands over Babi Yar, a steep cliff only, like the rudest headstone.”

**On the eve of Rosh Hashanah.** Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the second woman and the first Jewish woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, a historic figure, legal, cultural, and feminist icon, died on September 18, 2020. On appointment to the Court in 1993, she said, “I am a judge born, raised, and proud of being a Jew.” The Jewish tradition influenced her life and career, and she displayed the Hebrew injunction to pursue justice on an image on the walls of her chamber. The demand for justice, she held, runs through the entity of Jewish history and Jewish tradition.

Two new studies have appeared, indicating the lack of justice for Jews, and even knowledge of the hideous truth about Holocaust. One is a comprehensive national survey in the U.S. of Holocaust awareness and knowledge among U.S. adults, using a sample of 1350, which was commissioned and issued in spring

2020 by the Claims Commission, CC, in the UK. The second is a report on the massacre of Jews at the ravine of Babi Yar (Babyn Yar) outside of Kiev (Kyiv), capital of Soviet Ukraine.

Though there are encouraging notes in the CC survey, it finds there are significant gaps in awareness of basic facts, and of detailed knowledge of the Holocaust. Most of the respondents said they had heard of the Holocaust: three quarters had definitely heard of it and another 10% probably had. Yet 10% said the Holocaust did not happen, and 23% said it was a myth, or was greatly exaggerated, or they were not sure.

There was more agreement on responsibility for the Holocaust. Of the whole number in the survey, 83% thought that Adolf Hitler had caused it, and 67% thought that the Nazis were responsible, and Germany 36%. However, three significant and disturbing facts are found. One is that these figures were lower for millennials than for the general group. This confirms other studies indicating that younger people are less aware of or less interested in the realities of the persecution of Jews. The second is that more than 11% of U.S. adults (15% millennials) under 40 believe that Jews caused the Holocaust, and 28% thought the Holocaust was a myth.

A third is unexpected ignorance of reality, in spite of the number of books, films, and TV programs that deal with the issue of the Holocaust. During World War II there were over 40,000 concentration camps and ghettos in Europe, but 45% of the survey could not name a single one. Of those who could name an infamous camp, about 56% were unable to identify the exact nature of Auschwitz: 40% said it was a concentration camp (millennials 22%); 23% thought it was a death camp (millennials 11%) and 1% a labor camp.

There is also a lack of precision about the number of Jews killed. 63% did not know that six million were murdered, and 36% thought two million or fewer were killed.

Three comments may be made. One can conclude there are indeed considerable gaps in awareness of basic facts, let alone details, of the Holocaust. Fewer people are interested in the subject than used to be the case. Secondly, younger adults are less interested than their elders and have less accurate information. Thirdly, the main source of information for those surveyed is the social media which often publishes and perpetuates ideas of denial or false information of the Holocaust. This raises again the difficult question of whether limits on free speech should be imposed. Should social media be required to remove false or biased content from their websites? Interestingly, accurate information varies widely in the U.S.: at the bottom are Arkansas, Mississippi, and Florida; most informed personnel are in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.

One can argue that the Holocaust began in a ravine in Ukraine. Important information has recently been revealed about the event in that ravine that in some ways can be characterized as one of the worst horrors of World War II, the beginning of the Holocaust, the start of the Final Solution. A report has been issued done under the direction of Dr. Martin Dean, former crimes investigator for the Metropolitan Police in the UK. He investigated the slaughter on September 29-30, 1941 of 33, 771 Jews in Babi Yar, Babyan Yar, in Kiev. They were killed in a 48 hour period in a canyon, 150 meters long, and their bodies were covered by Russian POWs with soil and rubble. Dean's report provides exact details of the massacres, the manner on which it was carried out, the location, and identity of many of the victims.

The explanation for the massacre is that it was a response for explosions in the city of Kiev planted by Soviet secret police and military engineers. This was used as a pretext to murder all the Jews of Kiev. The Nazi authorities published an edict in three languages, Russian, Ukrainian, and German, that all Jews of the city of Kiev and its vicinity had to appear

by the morning of September 29, 1941 with documents, money, valuable, and warm clothing. Anyone disobeying the order would be shot. More than 30,000 arrived at the given location, believing they were going to be resettled.

A number of comments can be made. First, the victims were women, children, some of whom were beaten to death, and the elderly. They were ordered to strip naked. Previously, the Nazis had murdered able bodied men, and women and children were mostly spared. The victims were killed in large groups by machine guns and fast action pistols. Secondly, It was up to that point the largest mass killing on the Eastern front, until the event the next month in Odessa, then under Romanian control, on October 22-24,1941, when 50,000 Jews were murdered by Romanian soldiers, Einsatzgruppe SS, and local ethnic Germans.

A third point is that though the decision to carry out the massacre was made by the German military governor in Kiev, it was carried out by a mixture of Nazis and their collaborators. The consisted of the Sonderkommando, SD and SiPo men, a Waffen SS battalion, and a police battalion, reinforced by the Ukrainian auxillary police and local collaborators. In other words, both the regular German Wehrmacht, supposed to be "clean" and not to have been involved in the Holocaust, and Ukrainians were involved. The event was an example of the pivotal role of the ethnic Germans in Ukraine in implementing Nazi policies; they were not victims or either Hitler or Stalin.

The main commander of Babi Yar was a man named Paul Blobel, commander of the Sonderkommando, work units made up of Nazi death camp prisoners. He choreographed the mass execution. He also supervised the attempts by the Nazis to eliminate any evidence of the action as the Nazis hid the evidence by exhuming the bodies and burning them. He was found guilty of crimes against humanity at the U.S. Nuremberg Military Tribunal and hanged in June 1951.

No official account of the event was published in the Soviet Union, though Yevgeni Vevtushhko wrote a poem in 1961 that there were no monuments to Babi Yar, only coarse earth heaped roughly on the ground. Dmitri Shostakovich in 1962 subtitled his Symphony no. 13 as Babi Yar and denounced antisemitism. A large monument was built in June 1976 but it did not mention Jews. In 1992, a Jewish organization put up a different one.

Yet, the ravine has been covered up and is now a park. Children play over dead bodies. It would be a more significant tribute to Justice Ginsburg if the children of Kiev, as well as many Americans, learned about the reality of the Holocaust.