

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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FDR signs the declaration of war against Germany, Dec. 11, 1941

Murray Polner

FDR, The Jews And World War II

plus

Stefan Merken ◦ **L'shana tova**

Rabbi Phil Bentley ◦ **Al Vorspan, JPF's Heschel Award recipient**

Lawrence S. Wittner ◦ **Nukes: The past is still present**

Elana Bell ◦ **'Language in the mouth of the enemy'**

Ken Butigan ◦ **Daniel Ellsberg, lifelong resister**

Rabbi Arik Ascherman ◦ **Justice for Israel's Bedouin**

Stefan Merken

L'shana tovah ✧ לשנה טובה

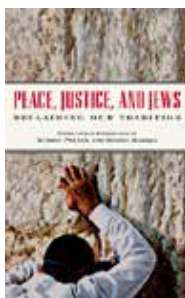
ON BEHALF OF THE SHALOM EDITORIAL STAFF and the JPF Board, we wish our friends and readers a very happy and healthy (5774) New Year.

And while I am on the subject of the New Year, please don't forget the Jewish Peace Fellowship. All donations, large and small, are greatly appreciated. ✧

STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.



People buying Rosh Hashana greeting cards from a street vendor in Tel Aviv, 1955.



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Rabbi Phil Bentley

Albert Vorspan Receives JPF's Heschel Award

AL VORSPAN HAS RECEIVED THE ABRAHAM JOSHUA Heschel Peace Award, and this is long overdue. Al has been a significant figure in Tikkun Olam for a very long time. His experience as a World War II veteran inspired him to seek justice for African-Americans who suffered discrimination on the ships on which he served. By the 1950s he was fully engaged in the work of seeking justice, both on behalf of his employer, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism), in New York City, and elsewhere. He became the living symbol of the Reform movement's social action programs. His work includes writing several inspirational books on Tikkun Olam themes, which became standard textbooks in Reform Jewish religious schools.

During the Vietnam era he was an outspoken critic of the war and famously drew the ire of Connecticut's Senator

Rabbi PHIL BENTLEY is JPF's honorary president.

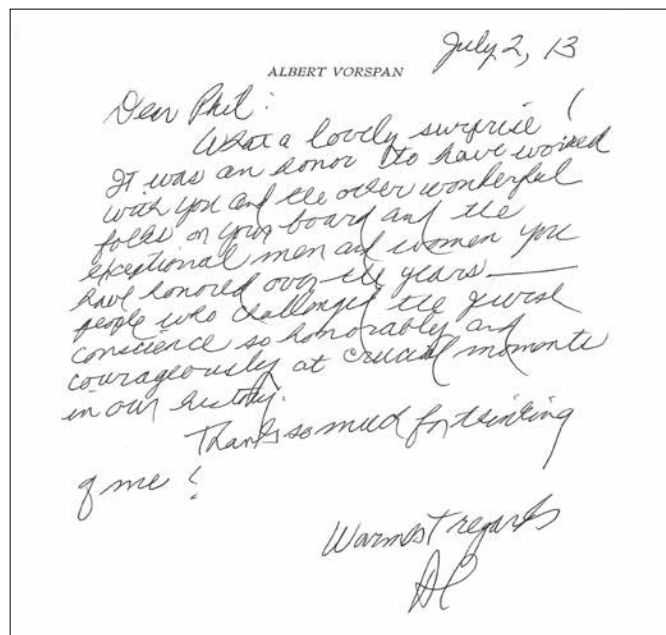
Thomas Dodd. He was not afraid to speak out against Israeli policies and actions that he felt violated Jewish principles, and for this he took a good deal of criticism. I know that because

of his prominent position with Reform Judaism he could not say or do all that he wanted to, but I know personally how committed he was and remains in the pursuit of peace.

I should say something about the man too. His presence is a strong one and he is one of the most effective speakers I have ever encountered. A sense of humor is absolutely essential for someone who speaks truth to power, and Al is able to make people laugh, even people who disagree with him. He has written books such as *My Rabbi Doesn't Make House Calls* and *Start Worrying: Details to Follow*. The last time I saw him he got off a wisecrack (which I cannot repeat here) that left me laughing out loud.

At eighty-nine, I am told he is still youthful. I would expect nothing less.

Mazel tov, Al. ✨



July 2, 2013

Dear Phil:

What a lovely surprise! It was an honor to have worked with you and the other wonderful folks on your board and the exceptional men and women you have honored over the years — people who challenged the Jewish conscience so honorably and courageously at crucial moments in our history.

Thanks so much for thinking of me!

Warmest regards,
Al

SHALOM Jewish Peace Letter

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Lawrence S. Wittner

Still Preparing for Nuclear War

The US government continues the policies of the past

NEARLY A QUARTER CENTURY AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the US government is still getting ready for nuclear war.

This fact was underscored on June 19, 2013, when the Pentagon, on behalf of President Barack Obama, released a report to Congress outlining what it called the US government's Nuclear Employment Strategy. Although the report indicated some minor alterations in US policy, it exhibited far more continuity than change.

In 2010, the administration's Nuclear Posture Review declared that it would work toward making deterrence of nuclear attack the "sole purpose" of US nuclear weapons. The 2013 report, however, without any explanation, reported that "we cannot adopt such a policy today." Thus, as in the past, the US government considers itself free to initiate a nuclear attack on other nations.

In addition, the 2013 "Nuclear Employment Strategy" continues US government reliance on a "nuclear triad" of ground-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, and bomber-launched nuclear weapons. Although the need for one or more legs of this "triad" has been debated since the early 1990s, the 2013 report concluded that "retaining all three triad legs will best maintain strategic stability."

The 2013 "Nuclear Employment Strategy" also retained another controversial aspect of US nuclear policy: counterforce strategy. Designed to employ US nuclear weapons to destroy an enemy nation's nuclear weapons, delivery systems and associated installations, counterforce is potentially very destabilizing, for it provides an incentive to nations caught up in a crisis to knock out the opponent's nuclear weapons before they can be used. And this, in turn, means that nations are more likely to initiate nuclear war and to desire large numbers of nuclear weapons to avoid having their weapons totally destroyed by a preemptive attack. Consequently, as

Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists has noted, the report's emphasis on counterforce "undercuts efforts to reduce the role and numbers of nuclear weapons."

Furthermore, despite a growing desire among Western nations to have the US government remove an estimated two hundred nuclear-armed B-61 gravity bombs — weapons dating back to the 1960s — deployed in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey, the Pentagon report made no proposal along these lines. These Cold War relics, too, remain untouchable.

One shift in emphasis indicated in the Nuclear Employment Strategy is a presidential directive to Pentagon officials to "reduce the role of 'launch under attack.'" Currently, it is US policy to fire nuclear weapons at an opponent on short notice if there are signs that a nuclear strike is under way against the US or its allies. But this reduction in the likelihood of sliding into a full-scale nuclear war would be more reassuring if the president's directive did not also command the Pentagon to retain a launch-under-attack capability in case the president decided to use it.

But what about Obama's lofty rhetoric of April 2009 in Prague, where he stated that the US government was committed to building a nuclear-weapons-free world? Also, didn't he renew that approach in his Berlin speech of June 19, 2013, only hours before the issuance of the Pentagon's Nuclear Employment Strategy, when he called for nuclear disarmament negotiations with the Russians?

Yes, the rhetoric of 2009 was very inspiring, landing Obama a Nobel Peace Prize and raising hopes around the world that the nuclear menace was on the verge of extinction. But fairly little came of it, with the modest exception of the New START Treaty with Russia.

The Berlin speech, too, was substantially overrated. Although many media reports implied that Obama had proposed decreasing the Russian and American nuclear arsenals by a third, the reality was that the president suggested his readiness to support a reduction of "up to" a third of *deployed* Russian and American *strategic* nuclear weapons. Under the New START Treaty, the limit to the number of these kinds of weapons in each nation is fifteen hundred and fifty. Thus, in reality, Obama announced that he favored an agreement

LAWRENCE WITTNER is professor of history emeritus at the State University of New York/Albany. His latest book is a satirical novel about university life, *What's Going On at UAardvark?* (Solidarity Press). He is also a SHALOM contributing editor.



Nobel Committee Chairman Thorbjorn Jagland presents President Barack Obama with the Nobel Prize medal and diploma during the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Raadhuset Main Hall at Oslo City Hall in Oslo, Norway, Dec. 10, 2009.

for each nation to eliminate one to five hundred and seventeen of them. From the standpoint of nuclear disarmers, that reduction would certainly be welcome — if, in the face of Republican resistance, it is ever consummated. But, it should be noted that at present the US government possesses approximately seventy-seven hundred nuclear weapons.

Another indication that the Obama administration is in no hurry to fulfill its promises about building a nuclear-weapons-free world is found in its fiscal 2014 budget proposal to Congress. Here, amid sharp cuts for a broad variety of programs, there is a proposed nine percent increase in federal funding for the Energy Department's US nuclear weapons activities, including upgrading nuclear warheads (like the B-61 gravity bomb, slated for a \$10 billion makeover) and modernizing nuclear weapons production facilities.

This administration's unwillingness to discard the im-

Elana Bell

Language in the Mouth of the Enemy

I am afraid that this poem
will contribute to the destruction of Israel.
I am afraid that if I visit Adel Handal and his family
in Bethlehem one more time
I am betraying the Jewish state.
If I go to Daher's Vineyard and plant an olive tree,
if I teach the women of Nahalin poetry,
if I give voice to their rage,
what great-aunt of mine shot in the back
before an unmarked grave will have died then,
again for nothing?
If I love the suffering of the Palestinians — it is so bright —
more than the suffering of my own,
if I work for a better life for that dark-eyed boy
in Aida refugee camp who chased after our bus with arms
spread like a hawk's wing-span — who lifted a finger
to save the child in Warsaw, Lodz, Berlin? —
If that boy grows strong and straps a bomb
or worse, writes an article, a play, the perfect
argument against the Jewish state
then what have I done? What have I
done? What have
I done?

ELANA BELL received the 2011 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets for Eyes, Stones (Louisiana State University Press, 2012). She has led creative writing workshops for women in prison and for the pioneering peace building and leadership organization, Seeds of Peace. Reprinted by permission of Louisiana State University Press from Eyes, Stones by Elana Bell. Copyright © 2012 by Elana Bell.

mensely dangerous, outdated nuclear policies of the past flies in the face of public support for abolishing nuclear weapons, whether expressed in public opinion polls or in the resolutions of mainstream bodies like the National Council of Churches and the US Conference of Mayors. But unless there is a substantial public mobilization to end the American government's reliance on nuclear war, it seems likely that US officials will continue to prepare for it. ✧

Ken Butigan

Daniel Ellsberg's Lifelong Resistance

NOT LONG AGO IN *THE WASHINGTON POST*, DANIEL Ellsberg published a thoughtful opinion piece on Edward Snowden's decision to leave the country after releasing information about the National Security Agency's massive surveillance program. Ellsberg highlighted how Snowden's self-imposed exile is itself a critically important nonviolent action that is multiplying and extending his original act of conscience. Nonviolent resistance is not confined to the specific, isolated, dramatic act, Ellsberg seems to suggest. It opens opportunities for new action, and can come to be seen as part of an ever-expanding drama, with many acts and episodes, all potentially furthering the opportunity for nonviolent change.

This speaks to Edward Snowden's case — but it might apply even more to Ellsberg himself.

Releasing the Pentagon Papers in 1971 was an historic act. Since then Ellsberg has relentlessly built on and expanded upon this particular nonviolent action in innumerable ways. Retirement doesn't seem to apply to the job of making the world a better place, as Ellsberg proves almost daily.

Snowden has been criticized for fleeing the country. Some have compared him disapprovingly to Ellsberg, who, after leaking the Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times* and other papers in 1971, came forward and was eventually tried in a court of law. In his piece, Ellsberg challenged this negative comparison by carefully illuminating his own case in his fervent support of Snowden.

After *The New York Times* began publishing the docu-

ments demonstrating how the US government misled the public about the roots and conduct of the war in Vietnam, Ellsberg went underground so that, once the *Times* was en-

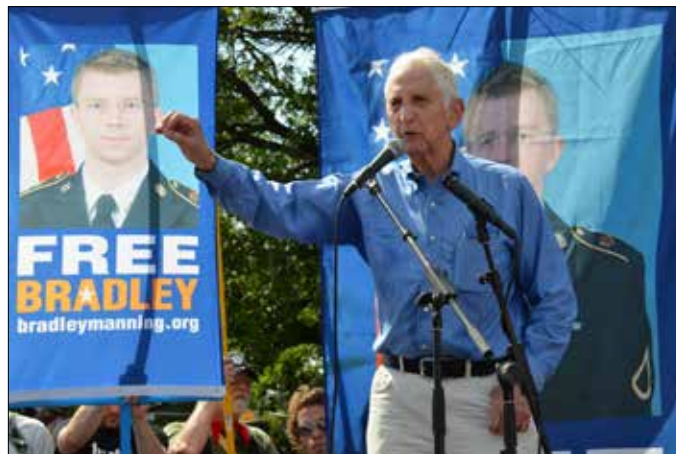
joined by federal injunction to halt publication, he could continue to feed copies to other news agencies. Eventually, seventeen papers across the US got the information out, but this would not have happened if he had turned himself in immediately.

Ellsberg also points out that he was free on bail both before and during his trial, which allowed him to criss-cross the country to speak to the media and the general public to magnify the meaning and implications of the

Pentagon Papers. Though he was prosecuted under US espionage laws and faced a hundred and fifteen years in federal prison, he was released on his own recognizance and was free to engage in a conversation with American society about the war. America, he says, is a very different place today. As the Bradley Manning case suggests, Snowden would likely have been sequestered as soon as he surfaced. There would be no extended conversation with the country once he turned himself in to the authorities.

"Snowden believes that he has done nothing wrong. I agree wholeheartedly," Ellsberg wrote. "More than forty years after my unauthorized disclosure of the Pentagon Papers, such leaks remain the lifeblood of a free press and our republic. One lesson of the Pentagon Papers and Snowden's leaks is simple: secrecy corrupts, just as power corrupts." Ellsberg went on to say that what Snowden "has given us is our best chance — if we respond to his information and his challenge — to rescue ourselves from out-of-control surveillance that shifts all practical power to the executive branch and its intelligence agencies."

This essay, worth reading in full, is the kind of gift Ellsberg has been placing in our hands for decades: an intelligent, documented and detailed assessment that unpacks,



Daniel Ellsberg speaks at Free Bradley Manning protest at Fort Meade, June 1, 2013.

KEN BUTIGAN is director of *Pace e Bene*, a nonprofit organization fostering nonviolent change through education, community and action. He teaches peace studies at DePaul and Loyola universities in Chicago. This article originally appeared on *Waging Nonviolence.org*.

‘One lesson of the Pentagon Papers and Snowden’s leaks is simple: secrecy corrupts, just as power corrupts.’

illuminates and reveals the particulars at hand — in this case, the risky business Snowden has taken on — but always at the same time aimed at plumbing the dangerous waters into which both the nation and the world seem to be headed. While he sometimes draws on his own experience as a uniquely positioned whistleblower in making his argument — this is especially the case in his superb book *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* — his blogs, essays and books are not about reliving the increasingly distant past but about grappling with the present. Each new essay or speech sparkles with an urgency about what we are up against *now*, whether that’s the ever-present threat of a US invasion of Iran, the ongoing threat of nuclear weapons or the threat of comprehensive surveillance — and calls us to a considered understanding of both the dangers we face and the options before us.

To me, these innumerable dispatches of wisdom — analytic, principled and often somber — are of a piece with the other way Ellsberg has tried to get our attention over the past four decades: nonviolent civil disobedience. “After leaking the Pentagon Papers, you could have sat on your laurels,” I once said to him in an interview. “Why didn’t you?” He looked at me with bewilderment. Though such a thing might have occurred to someone else — taking such a risky step, after all, is trouble enough for a lifetime — for him the work wasn’t finished. In fact, releasing the papers seemed to release something in him, so that he plunged feet first into the roiling waters of nonviolent movements using the most powerful symbol he had at his disposal to back up his words and his analysis: his own vulnerable body.

The interview we did, for example, concerned his active participation in the waves of nonviolent action at the Nevada Test Site in the 1980s. The US detonated nuclear weapons at the site north of Las Vegas on average once every eighteen days beginning in 1951. Ellsberg took part in the nonviolent resistance organized by Nevada Desert Experience and other organizations to stop this, but he also participated in actions riskier than simply crossing the line at the facility’s entrance. In 1985 he and a couple of members of Greenpeace walked deep into the site just before a nuclear device was scheduled to be detonated. Via walkie-talkie, they made contact with the test site authorities to say that they were in the area and that they should not follow through with the test. Not only

was the test delayed, Ellsberg managed to communicate with some friends in Congress who used the news of this action to help pass a bill in the House calling for an end to testing. (It was killed in the Senate.) These actions contributed to those by many others in the US and around the world to establish the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the early 1990s.

But there are so many other times when he was arrested for nonviolent civil disobedience: at an historic action when hundreds were arrested at the CIA headquarters; as part of the campaign at Concord Naval Weapons Station, where his friend, Brian Willson, was run down by a train carrying arms bound for Central America; and innumerable protests against the Persian Gulf War and the later wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has been arrested at the White House and at Red Square in Moscow.

One of my favorite examples is the yearlong campaign at Rocky Flats, the facility outside Denver that manufactured the plutonium pits used in nuclear arms. He and others took part in waves of resistance month after month. Dubbed the Rocky Flats Truth Force, the protestors sat on a strategic railroad spur to “stop the arms race in its tracks” and interfere with the smooth functioning of nuclear weapons assembly and production. Many were arrested and tried. A few years later the facility was shuttered.

“As a former official speaking on so many matters which so many officials have concealed, denied and lied about over the years, I was glad to have the opportunity in court to testify to my knowledge and beliefs,” Ellsberg wrote about his testimony in *A Year of Disobedience*, a book by Keith Pope about the campaign. “I revealed the Pentagon Papers because I believed that decades of secrecy surrounding official decision making in Vietnam, by promoting public ignorance and passivity, had prolonged a needless and wrongful war and threatened the survival of our democracy.”

The ongoing threats to our democracy persist, and Ellsberg continues to sound the alarm with his words and with his body. For example, on August 6, he was a keynote speaker at the annual protest at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, marking the sixty-eighth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Like Edward Snowden, Daniel Ellsberg persists with peaceful but determined resistance. He reminds us that at any point in our lives — Ellsberg recently turned eighty-two — there’s work to be done. ✧

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Rabbi Arik Ascherman

Three Myths About the Bedouin

MANY YEARS AGO, A CHRISTIAN FRIEND OF MINE accompanied me to a local production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. She burst into tears at the end because of what “her people” had done to mine.

Now, I find it increasingly difficult to hold back the tears as the Begin/Praver Bill moves through the Knesset legislative process. However, my faith in the basic goodness and decency of my people is justified by the mounting evidence that, when the disinformation is stripped away, the majority of Israelis oppose this plan. It is not in our nature to destroy tens of Negev Bedouin villages, transfer up to forty thousand Israeli citizens from their homes to poverty and unemployment-wracked townships, or to dispossess them from most of their lands. Israelis have carried out similar acts, but without public knowledge or in the fog of war, and nothing of this magnitude in recent years.

Theodore Bikel, known for playing Tevye in “Fiddler” countless times, states, “What hurts even more is the fact that the very people who are telling them [the Bedouin] to ‘get out’ are the descendents of the people of Anatevka. My people.” (His statement can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLeWQ47oG6o&feature=youtu.be>.)

Our Torah teaches, “And you shall not oppress the non-Jew who lives among you, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9)

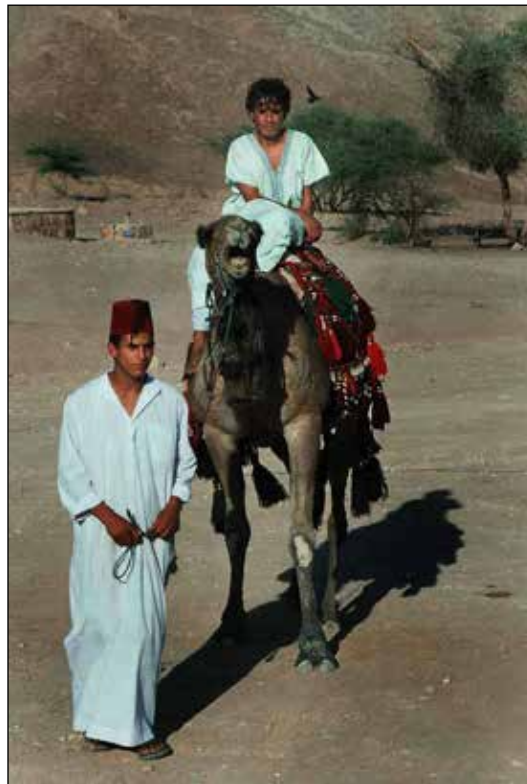
Three widespread myths about the Bedouin are: one, “the Bedouin are taking over the Negev”; two, the Bedouin never owned the land; three, this plan is for the Bedouins’ own good.

Rabbi ARIK ASCHERMAN served for fifteen years as executive director of Rabbis for Human Rights, and now manages special projects and strategic thinking for the organization.

Panels Ltd. recently conducted a poll for Rabbis for Human Rights. Initially, 87 percent of Jewish Israelis agreed that “The Bedouin are taking over the Negev,” on an average believing that the Bedouin claim 43.9 percent of the Negev. After learning that the Bedouin claim only 5.4 percent of the

Negev, a majority indicated that this was fair (47 percent vs. 34.6 percent).

Many insisted that the Bedouin don’t really own land. We have been told, “Bedouin claims were disproved in court.” Some villages, such as El-Araqib, have Turkish, British and even Israeli documentation of ownership, based on “Western” bills of purchase, titles, etc. However, the government is currently asking the High Court to reconsider its ruling that El-Araqib residents must have their day in District Court. The High Court rejected the government’s claim that their proofs of ownership are moot because the land was expropriated in 1953. The Begin/Praver plan could “solve” the government’s problem. The bill contains a map of where Bedouin will be allowed to live, chillingly reminiscent of the map defining where Jews were allowed to live in late nineteenth-



Bedouin boys of the Negev Desert.

century Russia. El-Araqib is outside the permitted zone.

Many Bedouin do not have “Western” proofs of ownership. However, their meticulous land ownership system was honored by the Ottomans and the British and recognized by the pre-state Zionist movement. The British kept a written record of Bedouin land ownership that mysteriously disappeared in the state archives. Scholars have found part of these records. In 1920, the Palestine Land Development Company of the Zionist Federation recorded 2.6 million dunam of land in the Negev as owned by the Bedouin. Today, the Bedouin are claiming a mere six hundred and fifty thousand dunam. These documents are available for all to see. We cannot say

that the Bedouin did not own their lands.

Many argue that Israel must concentrate the Bedouin to provide water, electricity, jobs and training. In the Negev there are smaller and more far-flung Jewish communities receiving services — even single family farms. More communities are planned. We wouldn't refuse water and electricity to Jewish communities. The state would not tell me, "We are going to move you for your own good." Furthermore, government statistics show that poverty and unemployment are four times higher in the townships than in the recognized villages. Recognizing the thirty-five "unrecognized" villages is simply better policy than transfer to the townships.

The question of where the Bedouin should live must be separated from the question of land ownership. Will the Bedouin be "better off" without their land? The best possible outcome for those who live within the Bedouin pale of settlement, and whom a committee created by the bill will determine to be deserving, is that they will receive fifty percent of their land (or alternative land) and compensation.



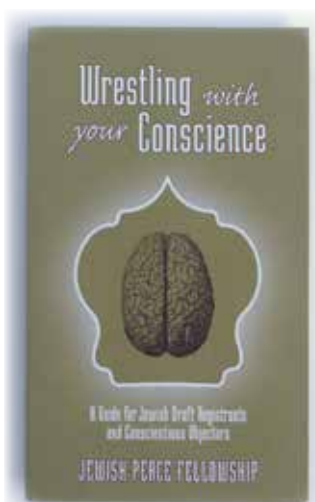
May 12, 2010: Bedouins protesting in Tel Aviv in demand to return to their village, El-Araqeab.

Avri Gilad made a second trip to the Negev, met with the Bedouin, and saw aerial photographs of extensive pre-1948 Bedouin agriculture, he apologized for the hasty conclusions he had drawn after touring with the right-wing village of Regavim. He wrote that there is plenty of good will among the Bedouin and that a solution could be reached if everybody were put in one room to talk to each other. Talking to the Bedouin as equal citizens is a radical idea, but I agree. This is in fact what the Bedouin are asking: "Yes, these issues must be resolved. Shelve Begin/Praver, and begin truly speaking with us." ☆

If neighbors don't cooperate, that percentage goes down to twenty percent. If one doesn't sign everything else away, one receives nothing.

MK Issawi Freij summed it up best: "We will give you water if you give us your lands." Ya'akov once said to Esau, "I will give you food if you give me your birthright." He thought he was being clever, but the price was anger, enmity and twenty years of exile and estrangement from his brother.

There is another way. After Israeli media personality



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Murray Polner

Roosevelt, the Jews and World War II

I OFTEN VISITED FRIENDS IN MANHATTAN'S WASHINGTON Heights neighborhood during and after World War II. Nicknamed the "Fourth Reich" because of its large number of Central European Jews (the Kissinger family among them), they were among the lucky ones who had escaped the Nazis. Whether they were eligible to vote or not, they overwhelmingly supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt, grateful for having been welcomed into the country. Nearby, a goodly number of them lived on the Upper West Side, all well-served by German-Jewish cultural and social societies and *Aufbau*, a literate, once-thriving German-language Jewish newspaper.

Since then Franklin Delano Roosevelt, elected four times with overwhelming American Jewish support and revered by millions of other Americans for his New Deal reforms and efforts to win the war, has been subjected to decades of revisionist, often bitter, criticism for allegedly having forsaken European Jews in their time of greatest need.

Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died*, published in 1968, caused a sea change among many American Jews when he charged that FDR had done far too little to rescue Jews caught in Hitler's deadly trap. David Wyman, who was not Jewish, brought his condemnation of FDR's supposed failures to the pages of *Commentary*, where he wrote that hundreds of thousands of imperiled Jews might well have been saved had the US

acted early and with courage. Soon after, his well-received history, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, set the tone for other books and articles, and many readers and commentators began claim-

ing that FDR was an anti-Semite (wrong) and a cadre of State Department officials were motivated by an intense dislike of Jews (right).

None of these charges of apathy, hostility and indifference should have been surprising given the enormity of what many years later came to be called the Holocaust. In the midst of the most devastating and destructive war in recorded history, Europe's Jews were singled out, slaughtered, gassed; and far from the concentration camps in Eastern Europe, vast numbers of Russian Jews were murdered by the *Einsatzgruppen* (German death squads). Historian Christopher Browning called them *Ordinary Men*, working- and lower-middle class German volunteers who executed tens of thousands of Jews in White Russia and Ukraine, probably some of my father's family among them. What was most difficult to believe, at least at the beginning of their carefully planned, systematic mass butchery, was that it was conceived and carried out by a nation once respected

for its cultural and intellectual achievements.

But FDR has also had his defenders, such as William Rubinstein, in *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis*, and the historian Deborah Lipstadt, who once accused the British writer David Irving of denying that the Holocaust ever occurred. (Irving sued her for libel and lost in a British court.)



December 11, 1941: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the declaration of war against Germany, marking US entry into World War II in Europe. Senator Tom Connally stands by holding a watch to fix the exact time of the declaration.

MURRAY POLNER is co-editor of SHALOM.

Into this emotional and explosive arena enter Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, both of whom hold identical rank as distinguished professors of history at American University. (Breitman also edits the prestigious journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.) In their new book, *FDR and the Jews*, they explain that they want to show FDR and his Jewish and non-Jewish advisors in the context of war, the Great Depression and a good deal of domestic anti-Semitism. The result is a bit revisionist, critical at times, but essentially sympathetic to what FDR and his administration did and could not do.

Contentious arguments were raised in the 1980s demanding to know why the US did not bomb railway lines and junctions leading to Auschwitz and its crematoria, and why the passenger ship *St. Louis* was denied landing rights in Cuba and forced to return to Europe, its nine hundred and thirty-seven refugee passengers abandoned to their fates.

For one thing, precision bombing of Auschwitz would not have been easy though it was certainly doable by 1944. Breitman and Lichtman, both Jewish, argue that such a campaign would, however, have been nothing more than a symbolic gesture since “Despite the contrary claims of FDR’s critics, the bombing of Auschwitz would not likely have forced the Nazis to cease or reassess the Final Solution.” In fact, some quarter of a million more Jews were executed between the closure of Auschwitz and the end of the war. In October 1944, for example, ninety-eight thousand Jews were killed by Germans and their Hungarian allies “without any recourse to Auschwitz.”

Moreover, the bombing could not have helped hundreds of thousands of Russian and Balkan Jews who were dying far from the camps. In the US, the authors stress, the issue was never seen as more important than winning the war. It was not mentioned by the presidential candidates in the election of 1944. More significantly, American Jewish leaders, other than some ultra-



S.S. St. Louis in the port of Havana, June 1939.

Orthodox rabbis and the Zionist activist Peter Bergson, were deeply divided about the best course to follow.

The *St. Louis* departed Hamburg in May 1939 for Havana, a dramatic if abortive journey popularized by the film *The Voyage of the Damned*. Cuba had by then given sanctuary to five to six thousand Jewish refugees. But pressured by Cuban anti-Semites it unexpectedly refused to allow the ship’s passengers to land, or so the authors claim. FDR, they write, was ill at the time and

the State Department handled the details and rejected the possibility of a haven in the US Virgin Islands. FDR has also been accused of ordering the Coast Guard to take all measures to prevent passengers from landing on American soil, a charge the authors rightly deem false since no evidence exists that an order of such magnitude was ever given. Argentina, with a sizable Jewish population, and Brazil and Mexico, also sharply limited the number of refugees permitted entry.

But surely the US could have done more to relieve the situation, even as the authors claim that Cuba and Lawrence

Berenson, its Washington-based lobbyist, “bear much of the responsibility,” which seems a rather lame and unconvincing explanation. Desperate men, women and children aboard ship could very well have been granted a haven somewhere, anywhere, on US territory. Here FDR displayed his gross insensitivity and a lack of nerve (just as with his infamous Executive Order which incarcerated American-born Japanese on the bogus grounds of vital “national interests.”) But Roosevelt, the authors hasten to explain, “politically pragmatic, decided not to risk political jeopardy through an uncertain battle with Congress over the fate of the *St. Louis* — which could have cost him capital with Congress in his battle to revise the Neutrality Act” — and his single-minded goal of defending Great Britain. In the end, the *St. Louis* was forced to return to Europe, two hundred and fifty-four people dying eventually in Nazi-controlled Europe,



Passengers from the S.S. St. Louis in France after the ship returned to Europe.

while about one-third managed to find safety elsewhere. Ironically, some thirty months later, two thousand Jews were granted asylum in Cuba “primarily by paying exorbitant fees and bribing Cuban officials.”

In Israeli historian Shlomo Aronson’s new book, *Hitler, the Allies, and the Jews*, based in large part on new Western intelligence documents, most nations would not accept Jewish refugees. Aronson points to the British, who refused refugees entry into Palestine. Denied access to Palestine and with the Final Solution at hand, Europe’s Jews seemed doomed. But what was to be done? The Allied policy of “unconditional surrender” forbade dealing with the Nazis, even if they were seriously interested in striking any bargains. And, writes Aronson, even Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion were too late and too unsuccessful in halting or reducing the slaughter.

As for FDR and his administration, the authors recognize that during his first two terms in office he did little to rescue trapped Jews. His attention was riveted on the home front, where the Depression was wreaking havoc, joblessness rising, and misery widespread. To ask that European Jews be welcomed en masse while millions were without work placed enormous political constraints on his administration. Nor was anyone sure that many Americans, infinitely less tolerant than today, would have welcomed masses of Jewish refugees, many of them alleged to be Reds.

In truth, many Americans simply did not care much for Jews, as evidenced by the enormous popularity of the bigoted Catholic “radio priest” Charles Coughlin, and anti-Semitic Protestant and Roman Catholic churches and their parishioners. In Brooklyn, for example, *The Tablet*, the diocesan newspaper, and Christian Front thugs in Manhattan’s Yorkville section, made no secret of loathing Jews. Elsewhere, racists and fascists like Gerald L.K. Smith, Elizabeth Dilling — who passionately hated FDR — and William Dudley Pelley and his Silver Shirts were among other anti-Semites who flourished, at least until Pearl Harbor.

By mid-1940, the Nazis had swept across western Europe and were threatening Britain, strengthening FDR’s opponents in America First, the noninterventionist mass movement whose influential members included Chester Bowles, William Saroyan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Norman Thomas, e.e. cummings, Walt Disney, Theodore Roosevelt’s daughter Alice Longworth, Sinclair Lewis and progressive Midwestern politicians. Even so,



November 6, 1944: FDR campaigns with Henry Morgenthau, Jr. at Poughkeepsie, New York.

world of the 1930s and the 1940s was a very different place, and that Roosevelt had both political and international constraints that we don’t think about today.” Books written long after either oversimplified or overlooked the very hard choices FDR faced.

It was in 1943 and especially in 1944 that FDR started to rescue European Jews in the face of anti-Semitic State Department bureaucrats and his immobile Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who did little or nothing to counter the odious Breckinridge Long, his State Department subordinate who obstructed every rescue plan. The authors also take pains to cite what FDR did do and which has been largely ignored by his critics. In 1938, he proposed that Latin America be opened to Jewish refugees, a suggestion rejected by most at the time. But by war’s end some forty thousand Jews had received sanctuary in Latin America. It was FDR who recalled the US ambassador to Germany after Kristalnacht; a symbolic move, but the US was the only nation to do so. Much later he would meet with King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and ask him to agree to allow Jews to move to Palestine, a request Ibn Saud rejected.

Most importantly, FDR’s Jewish advisors were deeply divided. Early on Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in any president’s cabinet, and a non-Jew, was the strongest administration advocate for rescuing Jews. Still, FDR established the War Refugee Board, which, though weakened by bureaucratic impediments, saved the lives of possibly two hundred thousand refugees. Breitman and Lichtman conclude, wisely I believe, that FDR’s policies and leadership helped defeat the Afrika Korps in North Africa and prevented a Nazi conquest of Egypt, “which would have ended all hopes for a future Israel.” And, they continue, again rightly, that even though the war always took priority over the rescue of masses of Jews, “Roosevelt reacted more decisively to Nazi crimes against Jews than did any other world leader of his time.” ☆

FDR, Breitman and Lichtman write, believed his most important role was to defeat Germany and Japan, defend Britain, and arm the USSR after Germany’s invasion in July 1941, the latter a controversial move given endemic anticommunism in the US. That, he and his advisors argued, would be the only way to end the slaughter of European Jews and rescue survivors.

Still the question must be asked: Could many more Jews have been saved? Speaking of contemporary revisionists and FDR’s critics, Breitman perceptively told a National Public Radio interviewer that “the