

# Kristallnacht and Veterans' Day 2019



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Berlin Jewish storefront Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938

By Jerome B. Gordon [\[i\]](#)

Shabbat, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 marks the 81<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht – “the night of broken glass” – in 1938, when Hitler perpetrated a nation-wide pogrom against Germany’s Jews in response to the assassination of a German diplomat Ernst Von Rath at the Paris Embassy by a 17-year-old Polish Jew Herschel Grynspan. The Nazi SA and Hitler youth rampaged through Germany and Austria 7,500 Jewish homes and businesses were ransacked, 267 synagogues were attacked, 76 were destroyed, nearly 100 Jews were killed. Most significantly

30,000 Jewish men were sent to Nazi concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen. German Jews were fined over \$400 million for the cleanup of the Nazi pogrom. It marked the end for Jews in Germany. Many consider it as the precursor for Hitler's Final Solution, the murder of six million European Jewish men, women and children in unspeakable ways.

On this Veterans' Day weekend, Kristallnacht is personally entwined with eyewitness testimony of the parents of a roommate at Boston University with whom I shared a triple my freshman year. His parents were survivors of the Nazi pogrom. His father was a cattle dealer in Wurzburg, Germany and until the enactment of the notorious 1935 Nuremberg racial laws was captain of the town's soccer team. His mother was a beautiful blonde blue-eyed Jew. Following the Nazi orgy of judenhas, Jew hatred, on Kristallnacht, my roommate's father, like thousands of other German Jewish men, was detained and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. It was only through the intervention and bribery of the camp's Nazi SS officials by my roommate's mother that her husband was freed and via sponsorship of relatives in America they were among the fortunate German Jews to have escaped the Holocaust. That experience was not lost on my roommate. He signed up for US Air Force ROTC and following graduation went through flight training to become a pilot serving during Vietnam and ultimately retiring with the rank of Colonel.

Ask yourself what the reaction of other nations was to Kristallnacht- the British and especially FDR and the US? A new book by Rafael Medoff, Executive Director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, [\*The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust\*](#) reveals the sorrowful record. The government of Munich appeaser, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain allowed the famous Kindertransports that brought 10,000 Austrian, Czech and German Jewish children below the age of 15

to obtain sanctuary in England. Then there were the 15,000 young German Jewish women who were entered England as maids and nannies. This contrasts with the 1939 British White Paper denying European Jewish immigration to Palestine

But what of FDR's Administration actions to save Jews following Kristallnacht?

FDR's responses to Kristallnacht at a press conference a few days after the Nazi pogrom called it "unbelievable" without identifying the Hitler regime perpetrators, not even identifying the victims- Jews. This contrasted with headlines in US and foreign newspapers drawing attention to the Nazi existential threats to Germany's Jews. FDR's State Department even ruled against offers by the Governor of the US Virgin Islands to take in German Jewish refugees. Medoff pointed out the little-known offer from the Dominican Republic, made earlier than Kristallnacht in 1938, to take in over 100,000 German Jews. In the end they took in less than 1,000 in the settlement of Sosua. The FDR Administration was concerned that these German Jewish refugees would ultimately infiltrate the US! That was reflected less than seven months later in June 1939 when the 930 German Jews aboard the fateful ship the St. Louis were barred entry by the State Department, many of whom went to their deaths in Nazi killing centers. Medoff noted FDR didn't want strong action against Hitler's Germany for fear of triggering a war and impacting trade during the economic Depression. Hollywood's Jewish moguls didn't want to lose export markets in Germany for film productions. Many Jewish leaders remained silent for fear of anti-Semitism, while a few demonstrated against the Hitler Nazi regime. The FDR White House followed that with lobbying against a Congressional bill in 1939 to let in 20,000 German Jewish youths below the age of 15. An act, which if passed, that would have saved both Ann and Margo Frank, who were eligible. The only concession made by the FDR Administration was to have 5,000 German Jews who held valid tourist visas to remain here.

Where did the title of Medoff's book, "The Jews Should Keep Quiet" come from? In March 1943, a protest march by 400 Orthodox Rabbis at the White House was organized by the five Palestinian Revisionist Jews of the Bergson Group with a petition calling for rescue of Europe's Jews. President FDR's private assimilated Jewish advisers suggested ignoring the protest, while the President left via a back entrance avoiding meeting with the Rabbis. The Rabbis were outraged which led to others to express criticism. But not Rabbi Wise, the revered American Jewish leader who was told "The Jews should keep quiet".

FDR's opposition to wartime European Jewish rescue came in the face of a major shift in US public opinion from the 1930's to the 1940's during WWII. With growing allied victories at Stalingrad, North Africa, Sicily and the surrender of Italy in 1943, public opinion in the US overwhelmingly favored unlimited numbers of Jews to temporarily reside in the US. In April 1944, the FDR White House commissioned a Gallup poll that found that 70 percent approved this policy. The reality was that FDR admitted less than 982 European and Jewish refugees in 1944 housed at an abandoned US Army Camp in Oswego, New York, the hometown of the late Bill Allen for whom this Veteran's Day weekend event is memorialized.

But what about the controversy over the allied air forces bombing the approaches, rail network and especially the bridges led to the Auschwitz – Birkenau killing center? Here too, the Roosevelt Administration said, 'it would divert resources for ending the war against Nazi Germany". As late as early 1944, 800,000 Hungarian Jews could have been rescued, before the country was occupied by the Nazis. In less than 90 days from May to July, 1944, more than 333,000 Hungarian Jews were murdered at the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center.

Medoff suggests that this and other opportunities were squandered by FDR. Medoff points to excuses of critics who said that it would have resulted in casualties of killing

center inmates. These critics pointed out German resilience in repairing bombed rails. However, Medoff noted that requests to bomb bridges betrayed that facts that Allied air forces bombed them, as they were difficult to repair, denying transit of troops and equipment. Bombing the bridges along the deportation route to Auschwitz might have saved tens of thousands of Jewish lives.

Medoff criticizes the current US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC on America and the Holocaust as a “whitewash” of FDR’s tawdry record.

Please stand while rabbi Samuel Waidenbaum intones the El Malei Rachamim, memorial prayer for the Six Million Jewish men, women and children murdered in unspeakable ways and those valiant American servicemen and women who lost their lives to ensure liberty and freedom for all Americans.

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[\[i\]](#) Jerome B. Gordon is a senior editor of *The New English Review*, producer and co-host of [Israel News Talk Radio – Beyond the Matrix](#). Mr. Gordon delivered these remarks at erev shabbat services, November 8, 2019 in commemoration of Veterans’ Day at B’nai Israel Synagogue, Pensacola, Florida. Mr. Gordon served during the Vietnam era attaining the rank of Captain, US Army Intelligence and Security