HOLOCAUST, RESCUE FROM. In October 1933 the League of Nations established the “High Commission for Refugees (Jewish and Others) Coming from Germany” (see *Refugees) under James G. McDonald. When the commission failed to achieve any significant result, McDonald resigned in protest on Dec. 27, 1935. Another attempt at international action or at least at the perception of international action, was made by President Roosevelt, who called the international *Evian Conference in July 1938; there the U.S. declined to alter her immigration quotas, while Britain refused to change her restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. A similar stand was taken by the Latin American delegates and only the Dominican Republic declared her readiness to accept 100,000 Jews. The ground rules of the Conference which FDR did not attend were that government regulations need not be changed and government funds would not be used. But an Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees was established, under Lord Winterton and George Rublee, to negotiate with the Germans to allow the emigration of Jews and the removal of some of their capital. These negotiations failed in the spring of 1939.

In May 1939 Britain’s White Paper on Palestine restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 over the next five years. “Illegal” immigration to Palestine began in earnest in 1938, but only 15,000 had arrived by the time the war broke out. After the outbreak of war (September 1939) and until early 1941, about 12,000 additional Jews were rescued by “illegal” entry. An abortive attempt was made in 1942 to bring 769 Jewish refugees to Palestine on the freighter Struma, but Britain refused to admit them to Palestine and Turkey and sent the boat into the Black Sea, where it sank on February 24, with the loss of all on board except one survivor, David Stoliar.

During 1939–41, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and HICEM managed to rescue over 30,000 European Jews, most of whom reached the U.S. via Italy, and from June 1940, via Portugal and Spain. Working in Southern France, Varian Fry of the Emergency Rescue Committee brought to the United States internationally known artists and musicians, philosophers and writers, scientists and mathematicians. It was the elite rescue of the truly gifted. Working on his own, without instructions, Hiram Bingham of the American Consulate assisted him. Between the summer of 1940 and early 1941 some 2,400 Polish Jews escaped from Lithuania to Japan and the U.S., and a few hundred went to Palestine via Odessa. A number of Polish Jews left the U.S.S.R. in 1942 with the Polish army of General Anders, including 850 children, mostly orphans, who reached Palestine in 1943. After the entry of the U.S. into the war, escape to the West was limited to those who were already in neutral countries. Immigration to Palestine in late 1942 and 1943 was limited to 350 Jews from Europe. News regarding the Holocaust became generally known only in late 1942, and on December 17 the Allies issued a declaration condemning the mass murders; however, no concrete attempts to rescue Jews were made by the Allies until early in 1944. The Anglo-American *Bermuda Conference in April 1943 produced no results. It was doomed to failure in the first place because it refused to deal with the fate of Jews under German occupation; it only related to refugees who had reached neutral countries. There were efforts at self-rescue within German-occupied Europe by Jews. Money sent from the United States into German-occupied Europe was used to finance the transfer of Jews from more to less threatening locations and contributed to the saving of lives. An offer by *Eichmann’s deputy in Bratislava, Dieter *Wisliceny, to the working group of Jewish leaders there (see Gisi *Fleischmann, Michael *Weissmandel) to purchase the rescue of the Jewish remnant in Europe, was transmitted to the U.S. government but the matter was not followed up. The offer was dealt with by the Germans at a very high level (Himmler) and can be perceived as an episode, which later led to a German initiative on Jewish rescue – the “Trucks for Jews” offer. In 1943 and 1944 attempts were made both by Jewish organizations and by individuals in Switzerland to send South American passports or nationality papers to individual Jews in Europe. Individuals, mainly in Poland, Holland, and Belgium, were also informed that Palestine immigration certificates were waiting for them. A number of South American governments refused to take steps to protect the holders of these mostly false papers, and only in 1944 did this attitude change. Nevertheless, small groups of bearers of these papers were kept by the Nazis in special camps, and some of them survived the war. From Switzerland, and partly also from Lisbon, Iran, and Palestine, a number of bodies such as the JDC, the *Jewish Agency, the Orthodox Va’ad ha-Hatzalah, and others corresponded with and sent parcels to Jews. He-Halutz in Geneva was instrumental in procuring information and contacts necessary for rescue work. While mainstream Jewish organizations in the United States were reluctant to press the American government to change its immigration quotas or to make rescue a high priority during World War II, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, headed by Peter Bergson (Hillel *Kook) and the Orthodox Va’ad ha-Hatzalah, two bodies created during World War II for the express purpose of saving Jews in Europe, actively campaigned for increased rescue efforts by the United States, pressure which played a role in the establishment of the *War Refugee Board. The JDC also transferred funds to underground Jewish organizations in Europe with the approval of the United States. Yielding to pressure, mainly the initiative of three non-Jewish officials in the Department of the Treasury working through Secretary of the Treasury Henry *Morgenthau, President Roosevelt appointed the *War Refugee Board (WRB) in January 1944 which financed relatively small-scale rescue schemes and the sending of food parcels and funds for underground rescue operations. Early in 1944 Ira A. Hirschmann, the WRB delegate in Turkey, and the International Red Cross in Bucharest aided in bringing back 48,000 Jews from Transnistria to Romania. In Istanbul a center for rescue was developed in 1943–44 dealing largely with immigration to Palestine. Jewish Agency emissaries and others smuggled out over 3,000 people via Istanbul before the liberation of Romania in August. In May 1944 Joel *Brand was
sent from Hungary to negotiate with the Allies on a German offer to trade Jews for trucks and other wares. Official negotiations were vetoed by the Soviets, and publicity, especially in England, doomed the mission, but talks began in Switzerland between Saly Mayer, the JDC representative, and an SS delegation under Kurt Becher with *Himmler’s knowledge. As a result of the controversial “Kasztner transport” talks, 1,684 persons were brought out of *Theresienstadt by the pro-German Swiss statesman, Jean-Marie Musy, who was sent to the Nazis by the representative of the Vāād ha-Hatzalah in Switzerland, Isaac Sternbuch. In June 1944, the WRB helped obtain the intervention of Sweden, Switzerland, the Holy See, and the International Red Cross, which, along with a strong American warning, persuaded the Hungarian government to stop the deportations of Hungarian Jews in July. However, the demands transmitted by Roswell McClelland, the WRB representative in Switzerland, and the Jewish Agency to bomb the *Auschwitz murder installations and the railroads leading to it were refused, though in fact factories adjacent to the camp were bombed in September. In the autumn and winter of 1944 representatives of neutral governments in Budapest, among them Raoul *Wallenberg of Sweden and Charles *Lutz of Switzerland, cooperated with Zionist youth groups in preserving the lives of many thousands of Jews who were equipped with genuine or forged “protection” papers.

The Jewish Agency called for sending Jewish Palestinian parachutists to Europe, but its request was rejected, except for 32 men and women who were sent in 1943–44 to the Balkans, Hungary, and Slovakia. The parachutists’ missions failed on the whole because they were too few in number and came too late; seven of them were killed by the Nazis. Between 20,000 and 30,000 Jews escaped from France to Spain and Portugal between 1940 and the summer of 1942; from 1942 on over 11,000 more escaped until the summer of 1944. About 11,000 entered Switzerland in 1942–44. The Jewish underground in France, supported by the JDC and other bodies, facilitated these rescue operations. In October 1943, the Danish underground shipped over 7,200 Danish Jews to safety in Sweden. Several hundred Norwegian Jews were also smuggled into Sweden. In late 1944 and early 1945 Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish efforts, coupled with the intervention of Himmler’s Finnish masseur Felix Kersten, led to the evacuation first of Scandinavian Jews from Nazi camps and then of thousands of women from *Ravensbrueck camp, including 1,500 Jewish women.

On the whole, rescue operations achieved little until 1944, because the Allies were indifferent to the problem. It was then thought that only a German defeat would rescue the oppressed and that any diversion of energies from the war effort for rescue activities might diminish the successful conclusion of the war. That decision, made early in the war, was never reexamined despite mounting information that victory might come too late for rescue. There was also a self-imposed silence as the Allies were reluctant to do anything that would even indirectly give credence to the Nazi propaganda, which claimed that World War II was a Jewish war and that the United States was fighting on behalf of the Jews who had dragged the U.S. into the war for their own manipulative reasons.

[In the U.S.S.R.] The absolute number of Jewish survivors in the Soviet Union was greater than that in any other European country. For several years after the war rumors spread, largely by Communist propaganda sources, claiming that the Soviet government had made a special effort to rescue Jews from the Nazis or to evacuate them from the advancing German armies. These claims have been shown to be unfounded. Those Jews who escaped Nazi extermination on Soviet soil (including, until June 1941, Soviet-occupied territories in eastern Poland, the Baltic states, north Bukovina, and Bessarabia), did so either by fleeing eastward from the advancing Germans, often encountering Soviet guards who drove them back, or, after June 1941, by being evacuated into the Soviet interior as Soviet administrative personnel or as skilled workers. The Soviet authorities never accorded special help to Jews in order that they might escape Nazi persecutions.

On Sept. 17, 1939, when the Red Army entered eastern Poland, there were in that region hundreds of thousands of Jews who had fled from the German occupation in western Poland, and tens of thousands more were streaming in. The Soviets maintained an open border until the end of October, when the two-way traffic of Jews and non-Jews between the two occupied sectors came to a halt. When this movement ended, and only Nazi-persecuted Jews continued to pour into the Soviet side, the Soviets closed their border and forced the new refugees to return to the German sector, many of whom perished between the lines. The Jewish refugees from western Poland numbered about 300,000–400,000. They were ordered to choose between accepting Soviet citizenship or returning to their previous homes in the western sector, though the Soviets knew (but the refugees did not) that the Germans categorically refused to accept them. The refugees were not offered the alternative of a temporary asylum in Soviet territory. Since the Soviet authorities extended practically no assistance to the homeless refugees, most, particularly those who left close relatives behind, felt compelled to register for return to their previous places of residence in German-occupied territory. For this “demonstration of disloyalty” the Soviets punished the refugees by deporting them to the Soviet interior. Most of the refugees were arrested in June 1940; families were sent to small, isolated villages in the far north of the Soviet Union, and single people were sent to prisons and concentration camps. An event which typifies the Soviet policy of ignoring the Nazi attitude toward the Jews occurred on Dec. 31, 1939, at Brest Litovsk. In this city the Soviets handed over to the Gestapo several hundred
Communist activists from Germany and Austria, both Jews and non-Jews, who had found refuge in the U.S.S.R. before World War II.

On the eve of the German-Soviet war (June 1941), thousands of Jews, together with non-Jewish “bourgeois” and “unreliable” elements from eastern Poland and the annexed Baltic states and Romanian provinces, were deported to and imprisoned in the Soviet far north and far east. As a result many of the deportees escaped the later Nazi occupation of their places of origin (1941–45).

After the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, the Soviet government, under an agreement with the Polish government-in-exile, ordered (on Aug. 12, 1941) the release of Polish citizens from camps and places of exile. Of those released, the Jews were generally barred from joining the newly formed Polish army, which later left the U.S.S.R. Many Jews thereby suffered from lack of food and housing, in spite of the welfare services extended by the Polish embassy and its representatives in the Soviet provinces. When Stalin announced the “scorched earth” policy and the evacuation of administrative personnel, vital industries, and their equipment and workers, Jews were more interested in speedy evacuation than non-Jews. Jews did exploit the few possibilities available for evacuation; the authorities, however, did not grant any priority to Jews. Soviet Jews, i.e., residents and citizens of the U.S.S.R. in its pre-September 1939 boundaries, could, on their own initiative, try to escape eastward. However, along the pre-1939 border in Belarus and the Baltic states patrols were set up to prevent refugees who were not officially evacuated from escaping into the Soviet interior. This blockade affected mainly Jews, because very few non-Jews in these areas were eager to flee from the advancing Germans. The number of Jews moving eastward, either on their own initiative or within the framework of the evacuation of administrative personnel and vital industries, increased as the German advance slowed down. It is estimated that of the Jewish residents of the German-occupied areas of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) about 50% managed to flee from the Germans. Among the Soviet anti-German underground in the cities and the partisans in the forests there were serious cases of discrimination and enmity toward Jews, sometimes resulting in executions on the basis of unfounded accusations. Some Jewish partisans, nevertheless, succeeded in establishing “family camps” for noncombatant Jews – the elderly, women, and children – who were smuggled out of the ghettos, particularly in Minsk and other places in Belarus. There were exceptions to the rule of enmity and indifference shown toward the Jews in several German-occupied cities, e.g., Minsk, where Belarusian women organized the hiding of several scores of Jewish children, and Vilna, where individual Jews, particularly children, were saved by clergymen, intellectuals, and domestics working in Jewish homes. Some Soviet partisan commandants helped Jews escape; and in some cases partisan units, particularly those with a considerable number of Jewish fighters, attacked German-occupied townlets in order to rescue their Jewish inhabitants. In the western Ukraine (former East Galicia), there was an outstanding example of organized hiding of some 150 Jewish children, initiated by Andreas Szyptycki, the Ukrainian head of the Uniate Church in German-occupied Lvov. Szyptycki openly preached and protested against the extermination of the Jews and, after being approached by two rabbis, instructed the Uniate monks and nuns to hide Jewish children in their monasteries.

Jews who fled from the German-occupied territories annexed to the Soviet Union in 1939–40 were accorded by the Soviets the same harsh treatment given to western Ukrainians and other residents of those areas who had collaborated with the Nazis. Many of these Jews were sent to the “labor army,” which was in fact a system of slave labor camps whose inmates included criminals. Jewish refugees from the Baltic areas and other countries were conscripted into the Lithuanian and Latvian divisions, the Czechoslovak brigade, and the Polish army established in the U.S.S.R. in 1943 after Moscow severed relations with the Polish government-in-exile in London. In many of these military units, Jews constituted the majority of the soldiers and suffered a high proportion of casualties. Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria were treated as “enemy citizens” and sent to forced labor camps. Because they had served on work teams of the pro-German Hungarian army, although forcibly conscripted, Hungarian Jews captured in 1943 on Soviet territory were treated as “enemy prisoners” together with the routed Hungarian units. The Soviets accorded the Jews the same treatment as the Hungarian soldiers even though the Jews were not considered military personnel, wore civilian clothes, the yellow armband, and had been maltreated by their Nazi and Hungarian commandants.

The unreliability of Soviet censuses in regard to the number of Jews in the U.S.S.R. makes it difficult to calculate the number of Jews who managed to escape Nazi extermination on Soviet soil. Figures of the number of Jews saved, published in the West from Soviet sources (e.g., 1,500,000 mentioned by Itzik *Fefer in the New York Yiddish Morgen-Frayhayt, Oct. 21, 1946), were probably greatly exaggerated. In spite of the official Soviet attitude, a considerable number of Jews nevertheless survived the Holocaust because they found themselves on Soviet soil and somehow succeeded in evading the Germans (see *Russia, the Soviet Union during World War II).

[Yoel Litvak]

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HOLOCAUST, THE, NBC television film The Holocaust, by Gerald Green, first shown in United States in April 1978. It became a focal point for discussion and aroused considerable controversy. Appearing just one year after the mini-series Roots, it marked the expansion of Holocaust consciousness into diverse segments of the population. Unexpectedly, the viewing audience was vast. So enraptured was the audience in New York City that when commercials came on the water pressure in the city dropped. Among those critical of the film was Elie Wiesel, who referred to it, inter alia, as “untrue, cheap, offensive, soap opera and trivializing.” On the other hand, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, one of the most distinguished scholars of the Holocaust in America, called it “a breakthrough.” He wrote:

Ten of millions will see with their own eyes and experience in their own homes a shadow of the incredible and unprecedented total assault on Jews and humanity. It is a challenge to our consciences and to our teaching and learning ability that we study along with it, in order to deepen our understanding of the incomprehensible.

In retrospect, both Wiesel and Greenberg were correct. The mini-series, which has not stood the test of time as a work of art, did have major impact, expanding interest in the Holocaust, moving it beyond the boundaries of an area of concern to Jews alone, triggering interest in Holocaust survivors and in the telling of their stories, sparking the creation of Holocaust memorials and museums and making the Holocaust a focal point of discussion. It also increased interest in the Holocaust on college campuses and in the teaching of and research on the Holocaust.

The decision to show the film in Germany (January 1979) met with violent opposition, and extreme neo-Nazi groups threatened to attack the television stations from which it was telecast, and there were bomb blasts at two regional transmitters during its showing. It nevertheless had a profound effect. It was estimated that no less than 60% of the population viewed it and that it had an effect on the vote in the Bundestag regarding the cancellation of the statute of limitations for those charged with Nazi atrocities. A cruel joke told in Germany at the time is indicative of its effect: “It had more impact than the original.” In 1981 the Germans decided to rescreen The Holocaust the following year.

The film has been shown in numerous countries throughout the world, including Israel, England, France, Belgium, Denmark, Brazil, Austria, Australia, and Japan.

Most importantly, it demonstrated that there was a vast, international audience for portrayals of the Holocaust in the popular media. This enabled other television shows and movie broadcasts to be shown. It is no exaggeration to say that the mini-series of the Holocaust, problematic as it may have been, was a turning point in Holocaust consciousness in the last quarter of the 20th century. Much of what has been achieved can be attributed directly or indirectly to the doors opened by this successful television series.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL. In one sense, Holocaust denial began during World War II, as the Nazis tried to carry out their mass murder of Jews in secret and in many cases returned to the sites of destruction to destroy the evidence, plow the camps under or dig up and burn the bodies of those shot by Einsatzgruppen. But active denial of the Nazi genocide began shortly after the war, promoted by some former Nazis in South America and elsewhere.

In most societies Holocaust denial is a fringe phenomenon, and is less about historical events and more about classical antisemitic conspiracy theories. If the Holocaust did not occur, but people all over the world believe it did, how could this be? Most deniers allege that Jews made up this story to exact reparations or to justify the creation of Israel, and have fooled the world through alleged control of governments and the media.

While distinguished professors of history worldwide have disagreements about aspects of the Holocaust (exactly when it occurred, but people all over the world believe it did, how could this be? Most deniers allege that Jews made up this story to exact reparations or to justify the creation of Israel, and have fooled the world through alleged control of governments and the media.

Yet denial persists not because it has a historical purpose, but because it has a political one.

Some of the earlier deniers included a French concentration camp survivor named Paul Rassinier and American isolationist Harry Elmer Barnes. It was not until the 1970s that denial was noticed beyond the world of white supremacy. Arthur Butz, a professor of electrical engineering at Northwestern University, wrote a 1976 book called The Hoax of the Twentieth Century. And in 1979 Willis Carto, a long-time active antisemite, created the Institute for Historical Review, designed to give the impression that denial of the Holocaust was simply another credible historical theory. The IHR held its first conference in 1979, which was attended by white supremacists from around the world. Usurping the historical term “revisionism,” they claimed they were Holocaust “revisionists,” not deniers. While revisionism is an accepted historical approach which seeks new ways to understand historical events, Holocaust deniers, on the other hand, ignore or twist evidence in order to pervert history.

Key deniers over the last decades of the 20th century included the Frenchman Robert Faurisson and a German national then living in Canada named Ernst Zundel, co-author of The Hitler We Loved and Why. And while white supremacists, hoping to rehabilitate Nazism and fascism by removing...