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Holocaust: What we can do about it now

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HOLOCAUST Remembrance Week (April 29-May 5), when we mourn the destruction of 6 million Jews, is an appropriate time to reflect on the consequences of virulent anti-Semitism. During World War II, the refusal of the U.S. and other Allied governments to respond to the plight of European Jewry signaled to Hitler that he could carry out mass extermination policies with impunity. Now, 30 years later, anti-Semitism flourishes worldwide, people assert that the Holocaust is a fabrication, and public figures in the U.S. suggest that Hitler was great. Today, more cognizant of U.S. wartime indifference to Jewish survival, we must ensure that this country actively opposes anti-Semitism anywhere in the world — so that no one can ever again believe that heinous acts against Jews can be carried out again.

During World War II, in which 176,000 Americans gave their lives to stop Hitler, the U.S. was basically indifferent to the fate of European Jewry. Jews could have fled from Hitler in large numbers but no country wanted them.

The U.S., by insisting on tight immigration restrictions, allowed only a tiny handful to enter this country, and Britain would not allow them to leave Europe and enter Palestine. Toward the end of the war, the U.S. refused to bomb the railroad lines to Auschwitz.

After the war, the U.S. publicly prosecuted war criminals at Nuremberg, but at the same time, secretly collaborated with and protected Nazi war criminals. U.S. officials em-

ployed ex-Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie (known as the "butcher of Lyon" for the atrocities he committed), shielded him from war crimes trials in France and helped him flee to safety in South America. And Barbie wasn't the only one helped abroad.

In addition, the U.S. brought Nazi war criminals to this country. Gustav Hilger, who as Hitler's deputy foreign minister, worked with the mobile killing units that murdered 1.5 million Jews in Eastern Europe, came here, thanks to the CIA, in 1945.

According to a former Justice Dept. lawyer, the State Dept. brought in a large number of key officials of the Nazi puppet government in White Russia, where more than a quarter of a million Jews during World War II were murdered. Several of these official collaborators were reportedly personally involved in the killing of thousands of Jews.

The U.S. also employed many Nazi war criminals who came to America. According to the General Accounting Office, Congress' watchdog agency, the State Dept., Defense Dept., CIA and the FBI knowingly employed more than 20 alleged Nazi war criminals living in the U.S.

In addition, hundreds, possibly thousands, of other Nazi war criminals and their families came on their own to the U.S. after the war and found sanctuary here for 30 years. Suspected Nazi war criminals living in the U.S. included guards at Auschwitz, Dachau and Treblinka and virtually every other concentration camp; the commandant

of a Latvian concentration camp; an aide to Adolf Eichmann; the Nazi minister of Croatia who signed the orders sending thousands of Jews to death camps; the instigator of a murderous pogrom against the Jews in Bucharest in 1941 and members of special units in Eastern Europe who worked under the Nazis in slaughtering Jews.

Amazingly, for 30 years U.S. officials who learned of the criminal backgrounds of these suspected Nazi war criminals did nothing. Our country became a haven for many of Hitler's henchmen.

As a member of Congress, I uncovered this in 1974 and called for vigorous and corrective governmental action. After years of intense pressure, the government finally agreed to make a systematic effort to bring Nazi war criminals to justice. At my insistence the Immigration Service set up a special unit to conduct these proceedings and in 1979, this unit was transferred to the Justice Dept.'s Criminal Division, upgraded in status and given more resources.

Congress passed legislation I proposed to authorize explicitly the deportation of Nazi war criminals and to plug up loopholes in our immigration laws.

The unspoken message of the 30 years of U.S. inaction and silence was that the U.S. condoned the horrors perpetrated on the 6 million Jews. By finally agreeing to deport Nazi war criminals, the U.S. at last acknowledged that the murder of Jews cannot go unanswered, and that those responsible for the destruction of the 6 million cannot go unpunished.

There is still more to be done. Only one man — Hans Lipschis, a concentration camp guard at Auschwitz — has actually been deported since 1974. Extensive, unnecessary delays are partly responsible; if a Nazi war criminal is a U.S. citizen, the government must first go to one court to remove the person's citizenship and then to another court to get the person deported. In all, seven separate legal steps are required to deport a Nazi war criminal who is a citizen. Legislation should be enacted to speed up the process by combining deportation and denaturalization proceedings and by accelerating cases that involve deportation alone.

The U.S. should also pressure other countries to take action to bring to justice Nazi war criminals living within their borders. Over 1000 Nazi war criminals allegedly live in Canada. Canada should be urged to take systematic action, as we have against the Nazi murderers living here.

Other countries, particularly in South America, harbor war criminals. For example, Walter Rauff, a former SS colonel wanted for the mass gassing of 97,000 East European Jews, lives in Chile. Joseph Mengele, Auschwitz' murderous "doctor," reportedly lives in Paraguay. The U.S. government should urge these countries to deport these murderers so that they can be tried and punished for their crimes.

Finally, a thorough examination of the secret and disgraceful role of the U.S. government in aiding, protecting and collaborating with Nazi war criminals after World War II is needed.

This investigation should be conducted by a special commission, authorized by Congress, independent of the executive branch and with full subpoena powers. It should seek to determine how and why war criminals were protected abroad, got here, and were permitted to remain virtually undisturbed until 1974.

By taking these steps, the U.S. can begin to undo the shameful deeds of the past. If Americans don't stand for justice, who will?