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STAT

America's shame

It is said that we study the past in order to understand the present. This truism of the classroom is ~~now~~ being illustrated on the front page of daily *Newspapers*, where coverage of the Klaus Barbie case has molted into a rare retrospective investigation of yesterday's scandals, yesterday's shame.

The news that Barbie, "the butcher of Lyons," was protected and employed by America in the postwar years has encouraged Americans to look back at our country's unprincipled cooptation of Hitler's henchmen. Like our reluctance to accept Jewish refugees here during the Hitler years, our postwar coddling of Nazi survivors evokes terrible questions about what we thought we were fighting for, or against, in the period from 1941 to 1945.

Apologists for the conscious, coordinated American policy of shielding captured fascists and using them as Cold War soldiers against Stalinist Russia will say, in their more forthright moods, that we shouldn't attempt to judge official actions outside their historical context. The times were different, they suggest, and no Monday morning quarterback can understand the all-consuming sense of urgency that blighted the inception of the Cold War epoch. It is an argument which, for all its historicity, still resembles the logic of the more apologetic Germans who carried out Hitler's policies: Nazi officials also believed their anti-bolshevik crusade entitled them to fight their enemies by any means necessary. And their other great enemy, besides the bolsheviks, happened to be the Jewish people.

Now come revelations from the archives of the State Department showing that America systematically protected Nazis known to be

guilty of the most heinous crimes against humanity. Barbie was no exception; he was the rule. Men who wiped out whole villages in eastern Europe were embraced by American "intelligence." (Nowhere is the perversion of that word more transparent than in this sordid episode.) Fascist officials who sent tens of thousands of Jews to the ovens of Dachau and Auschwitz were allowed to escape punishment so that they could write "reports" for the Americans about the common enemy to the East.

Thanks to the perverting power of Cold War ideology, untold numbers of unregenerate Nazi criminals were first sheltered from extradition and then absorbed into western intelligence agencies or provided safe passage out of Europe. Many of those who emigrated to South America became "advisers" and spiritual guides to congenial neo-fascist regimes on this continent. To our great shame, American policy-makers have consistently aligned this country with those same regimes. In Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and elsewhere we chose, again and again, to be the political bedfellows of the Nazi refugees who had been our postwar proteges.

Americans reacted with understandable outrage recently when bystanders in a New Bedford bar acted as callous spectators to the crime of rape. We are now learning that American officials acted as accessories after the fact in aiding Nazis who took part in the slaughter of millions of innocent people. No moral outrage is commensurate with that crime. All we can do is to insist on knowing the full truth about the past, so that we can say to our present leaders: Never again!