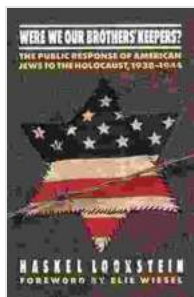


The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust 1938-1944: Unraveling a Complex History



Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?: The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938–1944

by Haskel Lookstein

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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The Holocaust stands as one of the darkest chapters in human history, a systematic genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany that claimed the lives of millions of Jews. As the horrors unfolded in Europe, the American Jewish community grappled with a complex range of emotions and responses. This article explores the public response of American Jews to the Holocaust during the critical years of 1938-1944, shedding light on their evolving understanding, advocacy efforts, and the challenges they faced.

Early Awareness and Responses: 1938-1941

News of anti-Jewish persecution in Germany began reaching the United States as early as the mid-1930s. However, American Jews were initially

divided in their response, with some dismissing the reports as exaggerated or believing that the situation would improve over time. The Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938, which saw widespread violence against Jews in Germany and Austria, marked a turning point. The brutality and scale of the attacks shocked American Jews and galvanized them into action.

In the aftermath of Kristallnacht, Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress) intensified their efforts to alert the American public to the plight of European Jews. They organized protests, rallies, and campaigns to raise awareness and pressure the United States government to take action.



The Dilemma of Rescue: 1942-1944

As the war progressed and reports of mass deportations and executions of Jews reached the United States, the urgency of rescue efforts grew.

American Jews faced a moral dilemma: they wanted to help their persecuted brethren, but they were also aware of the challenges and risks involved. The Roosevelt administration adopted a restrictive immigration policy, making it difficult for Jews to flee Europe. Moreover, the United States government was reluctant to intervene directly in the war.

Despite these obstacles, American Jewish organizations continued to advocate for rescue and relief measures. They lobbied Congress, organized public events, and raised funds to provide assistance to Jews still living in Europe. In addition, some individuals engaged in clandestine rescue operations, such as the Bergson Group, which helped thousands of Jews escape from Nazi-occupied territories.

Challenges and Tensions

The public response of American Jews to the Holocaust was not without its challenges and tensions. Some members of the American public were sympathetic to the plight of Jews, while others remained indifferent or even hostile. Anti-Semitism persisted in the United States, and some politicians and media outlets fueled these sentiments. This made it difficult for American Jewish organizations to mobilize support for their advocacy efforts.

Within the American Jewish community, there were also divisions over how to respond. Some believed that a focus on rescue should take precedence, while others argued that raising awareness and pressuring the government to take action was more important. These debates reflected the complexities of the situation and the difficult choices that American Jews faced.

The public response of American Jews to the Holocaust was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. They grappled with the horrors unfolding in Europe, the challenges of rescue, and the complexities of American society. Despite the obstacles they faced, American Jewish organizations and individuals played a significant role in raising awareness, advocating for rescue measures, and providing assistance to those in need. Their efforts, although imperfect, stand as a testament to their compassion, resilience, and unwavering commitment to justice.

The legacy of the Holocaust continues to resonate today, reminding us of the dangers of hatred, intolerance, and the importance of standing against oppression. The public response of American Jews during this dark period in history offers valuable lessons for understanding the challenges of responding to human rights crises and the imperative for solidarity and action in the face of adversity.

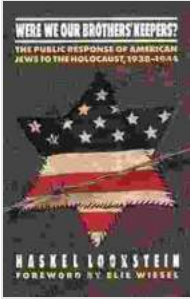
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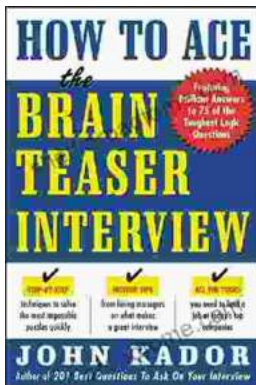
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