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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

MS-763: Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman Collection, 1930-2004.

Series H: United Jewish Appeal, 1945-1995.

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"Why Build this Wall?" Dedication of the Baltimore Holocaust
Memorial. 1980-1981.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the
American Jewish Archives website.

Speech given by RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN

WHY BUILD THIS WALL?

WE HAVE COME TO THIS PLACE, FILLED WITH THE DARKNESS OF DESTRUCTION, SEEKING TO FIND THE LIGHT OF COURAGE. WE HAVE COME BECAUSE OF THE COMMANDMENT OF ACCOMPANYING THE DEAD. WE ACCOMPANY THESE DEAD TO THEIR GRAVE BECAUSE THEY WENT TO IT ALONE, AND WE MUST FOREVER, FOR ALL TIME, FOLLOW THEM. THOSE WHO ARE MEMORIALIZED HERE WERE

(We) Jews burned in the heat of a thousand ovens - and the world was cold. THEY gagged in the gas of a thousand chambers - and the world was silent. A million bullets thudded into inert flesh until it was no novelty - and a thousand bulldozers heaved the frozen, starved and mangled bodies into gaping holes in the exhausted earth. ^{THE} Soil could not shriek in protest. It could only accept and swallow the awful refuse. The smoke dissolved in the sky. The ashes were scattered on the winds. The bones disappeared - and when the whole hideous mess was over - mankind was indicted forever. The mark of Cain was burned

into the brow, not only of jack-booted Nazis who were the active criminals, but of every single human being on earth who had failed to protest.

Nothing like this has ever happened before in the entire recorded history of the human race. The human animal is a fighting animal - worse than absolutely any other - and the rivers of blood spilt during millenia in wars over land or gold or religion or trade, spilt through torture and inquisition and gladiatorial combat, spilt through hatred and greed and fear and pride, have been far greater than all the rivers of water on all the continents. But, never in all the fantastic episodes which have marked man's incredible eagerness to harm his brother, has there been one to match the murder of the Jews in the mid-20th century.

Deliberate, calculating, announced long in advance, described in detail, broadcast widely for all to know, and performed in an age when the technical means of communication were such that today's news reached the farthest point on earth by tomorrow, this mass murder was possible not because the victim was willing, but because his neighbor was. The criminal shot in the dead of night - there was no policeman to prevent him - and the neighbors closed their doors and windows in order not to become involved. The victims died - 6 million of them - at the hands of two kinds of murderers, active and passive.

There are some who say that the victims themselves must share in the guilt of the crime, for they did not fight back.

Especially the young, those born since the holocaust, and the free, those living in Israel and America, have made some savage and biting comments. Asking the question - why did the victims allow themselves to be led like sheep to the ovens? - they imply that there was cowardice or paralysis or some innate weakness. They suggest there was an alternative or a way of escape which the weak-livered Jews of Central Europe were not strong enough or clever enough to employ.

The victims need no defense on this point. It is well known that they fought back in many ghettos - that they joined partisan and resistance groups - that they utilized all sorts of ingenious methods to avoid the enemy. And furthermore, it is historically clear

that the long preparatory years of Nazi propaganda, the ceaseless transports from one area to another, the masquerading of death camps as work camps, the morale-cracking effect of hunger, the separation of families, the herding into ghettos and a hundred other devices all designed to confuse, harass and weaken - resulted in the unarmed civilian Jews being an unequal match for the greedy sadism of the Gestapo and the SS.

This PLACE is erected to the memory of those victims. What purpose does it serve? Why build it?

First of all, to cause us to remember the crime. Human memory seeks to erase that which is painful. There cannot be an Eichmann trial to remind every new generation. So there must be

symbols, employing poetry, imagery and illusion, to remind us of the harsh reality. This wall is such a symbol. We place it here, right in front of our noses, so that we shall see it as often as possible. It is not put off in some remote park or plaza which might be visited, at best, infrequently. It stands in this sanctuary where multitudes will be confronted by it constantly. We must never allow ourselves to forget the pain and horror it signifies.

Secondly, to cause us to understand the meaning of our existence. We were not accidental victims - but deliberately chosen for the slaughter. Our collective, existential presence in the world is an obstacle to the force of barbarism. So long as we exist, with our moral code and our set of values and our capacity to

give birth to additional religions and our beliefs in justice and righteousness, we are a bone in the throat of all those who seek to organize the world differently. The world could not be dominated by Hitlerian philosophy so long as we existed in it. He understood this and kept on trying to destroy us up to his dying day. If he understood it, we certainly should. The wall will remind us of the ideals which must survive if civilization is to endure.

Third, to cause us to know that our fate is largely in our own hands. Almost no one - with some remarkable exceptions - lifted a finger to help us. We can protect ourselves mainly by ourselves. This is the metaphysical interpretation of the creation of the State of Israel within three short years

after the destruction of European JEWry. It is almost as though history were saying that a sovereign independent Jewish political and military power was necessary in order to ensure that never again would any portion of world Jewry be defenseless. Should some future attack ever again be launched - and should the rest of the world again stand idly by - a free and independent Jewish commonwealth would rise as a powerful ally to aid the stricken. The wall reminds us that we must do all possible to keep our destiny in our own hands.

Fourth, to cause us to think always of those who stood silently by, and not to BEAR ANGER in our hearts against them, but to realize how weak and fragile most men are. ^{ANGER IS A WASTED EMOTION.} The Christian world did not act with Christian love or charity.

The Christian veneer proved to be awfully thin. There are some who say that the Christian religion displayed a terrible bankruptcy and impotence in the years of fearful testing. It was found wanting. But what is the sense of our going forward into the centuries ahead merely hating? Rather must we understand that people are morally weak and thus it is all the more imperative for us to maintain our strength and faith in Judaism's eternal role of civilizing mankind.

Fifth, to cause us to know that there is still a great mystery about God-but that, like Job, we must not be discouraged in the search to understand His relationship to man. Many people will look at this wall and it will turn them into atheists for they will not understand why He was silent at Auschwitz-

and all the other places named here. Others will recall that the religious faith of the victims themselves was not disturbed for they went to the flames singing Ani Ma'amin - I believe with perfect faith. The fact is that God is most often hidden from man - and never more so than during this frightful time of murder. Does He exist? Yes? No? Where was He? Was he powerless? The wall will not provide answers - but at least it will remind us to keep asking the questions. Without that, all is certain to be lost.

So, these are some of the purposes to be served by the building of this wall - to remember the crime; to understand our role as the victim; to develop our independent strength; to be UNDERSTANDING

of human weakness; to keep searching for a God to make human life more meaningful.

May the men who built this wall accept our gratitude for their wisdom in doing so; may those of us in this generation who actually experienced the searing agony seek most forcefully to record it and interpret it so that its meaning shall never be lost; and may the anonymous millions of the past memorialized here, inspire the unborn millions of the future to live as Jews should, so that the whole human race can progress to the messianic time when such insane explosions as this will appear to be part of the frenzied infancy of man still not yet in control of himself.

When the time finally comes that all men will be truly ashamed of what happened in this century - then we will be able to take down this wall for it will have served its purpose.



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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

January 30, 1981

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman
President
The American Friends of the
Jerusalem Academy
75 East 55th Street, Suite 501

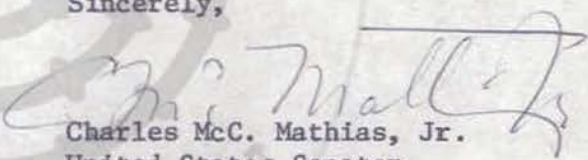
Dear Rabbi Friedman:

I was very pleased to insert your speech regarding the
Holocaust Memorial in Baltimore in the Congressional Record.

I am enclosing a copy for your information.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,


Charles McC. Mathias, Jr.
United States Senator

CM:cyh



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 97th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 127

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 1981

No. 9

BALTIMORE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

● Mr. MATHIAS. Mr. President, on November 2, 1980, the people of Baltimore dedicated the city's holocaust memorial. This memorial, built on an acre of land donated by the Baltimore City Council with funds raised by the Baltimore Jewish Council, was designed by architects Donald Kann and Arthur Valk. Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, President of the American Friends of the Jerusalem Academy, was the keynote speaker at the dedication ceremony.

Two giant concrete monoliths, representing the brutal force inflicted by the Nazis, lead to the stone memorial which is inscribed as follows:

This memorial represents one city's effort to remember the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust, to remember a dark period in the history of mankind when the world stood silent as innocent men, women and children were murdered because of their religion.

I hope that the message of this memorial—that we must not forget the horror of the holocaust lest history repeat itself—will be heard throughout the world.

I ask that Rabbi Friedman's moving evocation of the holocaust be placed in the Record.

The material follows:

WHY BUILD THIS WALL?

We have come to this place, filled with the darkness of destruction, seeking to find the light of courage. We have come because of the commandment of accompanying the dead. We accompany these dead to their grave because they went to it alone. And we must forever, for all time, follow them.

Those who are memorialized here were (we) Jews burned in the heat of a thousand ovens—and the world was cold. They gagged in the gas of a thousand chambers—and the world was silent. A million bullets thudded into inert flesh until it was no novelty—and a thousand bulldozers heaved the frozen, starved and mangled bodies into gaping holes in the exhausted earth. The soil could not shriek in protest. It could only accept and swallow the awful refuse. The smoke dissolved in the sky. The ashes were scattered on the winds. The bones disappeared—and when the whole hideous mess was over—mankind was indicted forever. The mark of Cain was burned into the brow, not only of jack-booted Nazis who were the active criminals, but of every single human being on earth who had failed to protest.

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Senate

BALTIMORE JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

September 15, 1980

Rabbi Herbert Friedman
500 East 77th Street, Apt. 2519
New York, New York 10021

Dear Rabbi Friedman:

I was delighted to hear from Marty Waxman of the Associated Jewish Charities that you have agreed to be our featured speaker at the dedication of the Baltimore Holocaust Memorial on Sunday, November 2, 1980, at 2:00 P.M.

After four years of planning, which saw us through an architectural competition, fund raising, and major efforts to develop an inscription sensitive to the particularists and universalists in the community, the construction is almost complete. The dedication is an event long and eagerly awaited and will include among the invited dignitaries all of the area's leaders in government, business, academia and religion.

The program itself will not be a long one. We expect some remarks from the Mayor of Baltimore, some very brief remarks from officials of the Community College of Baltimore on whose campus the Memorial sits, and appropriate melodies by a cantor, in addition to an invocation and benediction. We would like your comments to be about 25 minutes in length and deal primarily with the importance of remembrance.

As you may be able to tell from the not-too-terrific artist's rendering enclosed, the essence of the architecture is that there are two huge cantilevered monoliths which form an entrance to an open-air sanctuary. On the back wall of the

Rabbi Seymour L. Essrog
President

William Engelman
Vice-President

Chiae Herzig
Vice-President

Marilyn Glaser
Secretary

Herbert Goldman
Treasurer

Stanley Sollins
Executive Director

Ruth B. Hurwitz
Associate Director

319 W. Monument St.
Baltimore, Md. 21201
(301) 752-2630

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MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Congress
American Mizrahi Women
Baltimore Hebrew Congregation
Baltimore Zionist Federation
Beth El Congregation
Beth Israel Congregation

Beth Jacob Congregation
Beth Tfiloh Congregation
B'nai B'rith
B'nai B'rith Women
Board of Rabbis
Chizuk Amuno Congregation
Councils of Conservative, Orthodox
and Reform Congregations

Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations
Hadassah
Har Sinai Congregation
Independent Order of Brith Shalom
Jewish Labor Committee
Jewish War Veterans
Jewish War Veterans, Ladies Auxillary
Montefiore-Woodmoor Hebrew Congregation

National Council of Jewish Women
Ner Tamid Congregation
Pioneer Women
Rabbinical Council of America
Temple Emanuel
Temple Oheb Shalom
Women's American O.R.T.
Zionist Organization of America

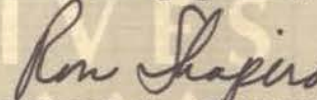


September 15, 1980
Page Two

sanctuary will be found the inscription which is also enclosed with this letter. The dedication ceremonies will take place in the plaza in front of the monoliths.

I am personally looking forward to meeting you and particularly on an occasion as significant as this. If there is any further information you would like, or that I think might be helpful to you, let us keep in touch.

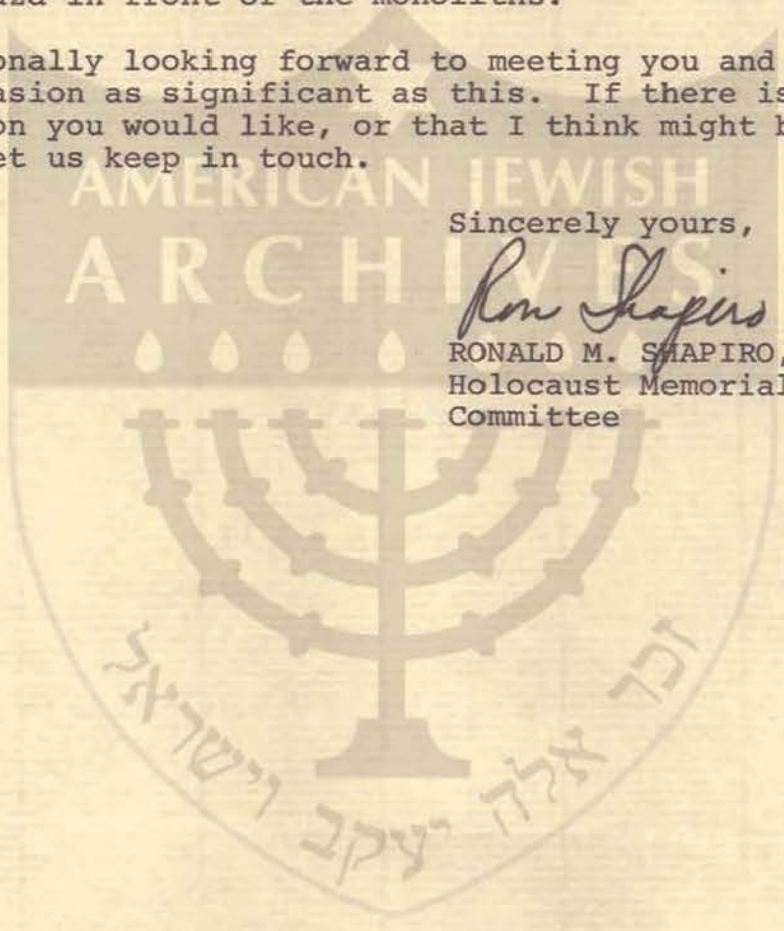
Sincerely yours,



RONALD M. SHAPIRO, Chairman
Holocaust Memorial Dedication
Committee

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Enclosure



We consecrate this Memorial to the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis in Europe, 1933-1945, in the most tragic of times known as the Holocaust. Six million victims, including more than one million children, were martyred solely because they were Jews.

We remember and shall not forget the genocide which the mind cannot imagine: the degradation, the starvation, the torture, the rape, the experimentation on humans, the gassings, the burnings, the mass executions.

We remember and shall not forget the concentration camps—monuments to man's capacity for evil—where Jews suffered and died. על קדוש השם

We remember and shall not forget the heroic resistance of Jews in the cities, the ghettos, the forests and in the very death camps themselves.

We remember and shall not forget the righteous of all faiths חסידים אומות העולם who risked their lives to save Jews.

We remember and shall not forget the world's silence and indifference which led not only to the Holocaust but to the deaths of millions of other people.

The People of Baltimore
November, 1980
Tishri, 5741

BALTIMORE JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

November 5, 1980

Rabbi Seymour L. Essrog
President
William Engelman
Vice-President
Chiae Herzig
Vice-President
Marilyn Glaser
Secretary
Herbert Goldman
Treasurer

Rabbi Herbert Friedman
500 East 77th Street, Apt. 2519
New York, New York 10021

Stanley Sollins
Executive Director
Ruth B. Hurwitz
Associate Director

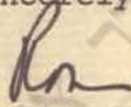
Dear Rabbi Friedman:

There is no way to adequately express our thanks for your eloquence at the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial on Sunday. No one we could have invited could have added more dignity, more insight, more truth, or more meaning to our Dedication, and we are very grateful.

I hope that you have forwarded to Ruth Hurwitz a copy of your text so that we may distribute it to the many who have asked for it.

Continued good health and good luck with the blessed work that you do.

Sincerely yours,


RONALD M. SHAPIRO, Chairman
Holocaust Memorial Dedication
Committee

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Beth Tilloh Congregation
B'nai B'rith
B'nai B'rith Women
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Jewish War Veterans
Jewish War Veterans, Ladies Auxiliary
Montefiore-Woodmoor Hebrew Congregation

National Council of Jewish Women
Ner Tamid Congregation
Pioneer Women
Rabbinical Council of America
Temple Emanuel
Temple Oheb Shalom
Women's American O.R.T.
Zionist Organization of America



PAUL S. SARBANES
MARYLAND

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

November 25, 1980

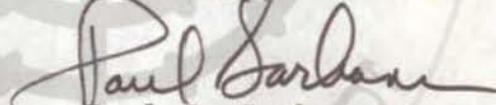
Herbert A. Friedman
President
The American Friends of the Jerusalem
Academy
75 East 55th Street
Suite 501
New York, New York 10022

Dear Mr. Friedman:

Thank you very much for forwarding a copy of the very moving speech which you delivered at the recent dedication of the Holocaust Memorial in Baltimore. It was a great privilege for me to be present on that occasion, and I appreciate your willingness to make the text of your remarks available to me.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

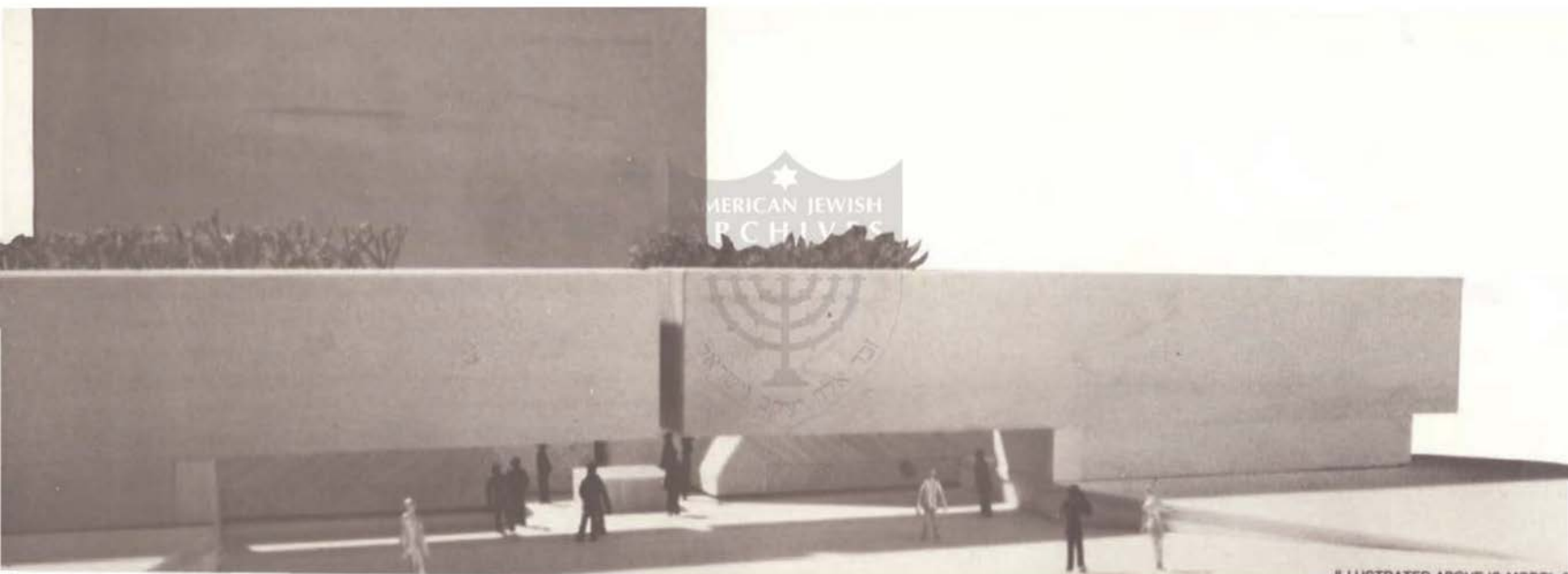


Paul S. Sarbanes
United States Senator

PSS/jdb

The logo of the American Jewish Archives is centered in the background. It features a shield with a Star of David at the top, the text "AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES" in the middle, and a menorah at the bottom. Hebrew text is visible at the very bottom of the shield.

We shall not forget.



A memorial to the 6,000,000 Jews who perished in the Holocaust

The Holocaust — the persecution and mass murder of European Jews under Adolf Hitler's German dictatorship (1933-45) — remains an event unique in history. While the Second World War raged across Europe, huge numbers of men, women and children were methodically segregated, degraded, starved, tortured, forced into slavery labor, subjected to cruel experiments, and eventually gassed and cremated in enormous death factories built expressly for that purpose. Carefully researched evidence documents the fact that over six million Jews were slaughtered by the Nazis who branded them as an inferior, subhuman race and slated them for total extinction.

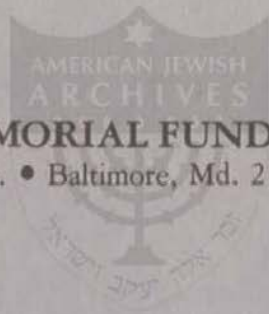
A reminder of those darkest hours and a tribute to our everlasting faith in the goodness of man — this is the

meaning of the powerful Memorial which will stand near the Inner Harbor on the campus of the Community College of Baltimore.

On a one-acre site provided by the City of Baltimore, the Memorial will be an impressive architectural interpretation of that man-made nightmare of history which destroyed a third of the Jewish people.

All of us have the obligation to remember the six million and the universal lesson to be learned from this tragedy . . . each of us has the opportunity to participate in the creation of this most unique and meaningful Memorial. We can help bring it to fruition by making a tax deductible contribution to the Holocaust Memorial Fund of Baltimore.





HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL FUND OF BALTIMORE

319 West Monument St. • Baltimore, Md. 21201 • (301) 752-2630