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The New York *Black Book* of 1946: A United Jewish Response to Nazi Crimes

While Day 92 of the International Military Tribunal against leading Nazi criminals was being held by the Allies in the Nuremberg Palace of Justice, some 10 to 15,000 people gathered in New York's Madison Square Garden to "demand justice for six million Jewish dead."¹ This rally, which assembled numerous politicians, intellectuals, artists, and leading representatives of Jewish organizations in the United States, as well as a broad press contingent, was dedicated to the publication of a unique volume: a *Black Book* on Nazi atrocities.² The edition contained over 500 pages of "documented indictment by World Jewry of the Nazis for their monstrous crimes against the Jewish people,"³ and was the result of an unlikely cooperation between four organizations spanning continents: the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the Jewish National Council in Palestine Va'ad Leumi (Va'ad Leumi), the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), and the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, Inc. (Writers Committee). In 1944, they had formed an edito-

1 "Demand Justice for Six Million Dead," Invitation Letter to the Mass Rally at Madison Square Garden on March 27, 1946, signed by Shlomo Almazov (Executive Director of the Black Book Committee) and Joseph Brainin (Writers Committee), undated, Cornell University Library, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, International Workers Order, Records #5276 (IWO Records), Box 42, Folder 2.

2 *The Black Book: The Nazi Crimes against the Jewish People*, ed. Jewish Black Book Committee (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946). For the rally, see a contemporary report: "Einstein Says Nations of the World could have halted Massacre of the Jews; Pleads for Palestine," May 28, 1946, <https://www.jta.org/1946/03/28/archive/einstein-says-nations-of-world-could-have-halted-massacre-of-jews-pleads-for-palestine>, accessed May 29, 2024; and a brief historical account: Arno Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book: The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews*, trans. Mary Beth Friedrich and Todd Bluedeau (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), 163f.; B. Z. Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union: An Analysis and a Solution* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1961), 66.

3 "Demand Justice for Six Million Dead."

Note: I warmly thank Arthur Kiron and Bruce Nielsen from the Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, who made it possible for me to access the full estate of B. Z. Goldberg, which is part of the library's special collections, and supported me in finding relevant material. Furthermore, my best thanks go to Dana Herman (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati), Juliane Weiss, and Jakob Stürmann (Dubnow Institute, Leipzig) for providing me with invaluable archival and reference material at a time when it was hard to reach due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

rial board that oversaw the preparation of the volume in New York. Madison Square Garden, which had already hosted major rallies against Nazi Germany in the 1930s, was predestined for an event celebrating one of the first comprehensive collections of eyewitness accounts, German documents, and press reports on the Holocaust.

The event was not only meant to generate wide public attention for the book. Its aim was to underscore a sense of unity among the Jews of the world in response to Nazi crimes. Ben Zion Goldberg, one of the most prominent Yiddish-language journalists and publicists in New York at the time, and the driving force behind the *Black Book* project, articulated this goal unequivocally: “Hitler made a total war upon the Jews, every Jew in the world. Therefore, every Jew in the world [. . .] must participate in this [Black] book, which should be issued to the world in the name of all the Jews in the world.”⁴ This idea of unity found expression in a diverse group of editors and was also guiding the decision to organize the meeting in New York, which sought to host a wide range of Jewish and non-Jewish representatives dedicated to the cause. The WJC, as co-host, was represented by the Polish-born Reform Rabbi, Maurice Perlzweig, and the honorary president of the American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. The mayor of New York, William O. Dwyer, spoke as well as several others representing various political factions from communist, staunchly pro-Soviet to liberal, even conservative ones. In addition, over forty cantors from the Yishuv and the US sang mourning prayers for the murdered. A speech by Albert Einstein, in his capacity as founding and honorary member of the Black Book Committee, was to mark the highlight of the ceremony.⁵ Most of Einstein’s lines read at the event stemmed from a preface written for the *Black Book* some months before the meeting, which had been excluded from the published version after its vehement rejection by the Soviet partners. Einstein’s plea for a restriction of state sovereignty and a withdrawal from an international politics of non-interference as well as his support for the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine seemed not to harmonize

4 B. Z. Goldberg, “Address on behalf of the Committee for Jewish Writers and Artists to the members of the Detroit Committee for the Jewish Black Book,” undated [end of 1945, beginning of 1946], Detroit Synagogue, Library of the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, Manuscript Collection (Katz Center Library), Ben Zion Goldberg Papers (Goldberg Papers), ARC MS1, Box 64.

5 Press reports referred to Einstein’s speech, not all of them mentioning the fact that he was not present himself: “Einstein Calls Fate of the Jews Warning to All: Tells ‘Black Book’ Rally in the Garden that Humanity Can’t Live without Law,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 28, 1946, 8; “Shield Minorities, Dr. Einstein Pleads,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1946, 26; “N.Y. Garden Buildup for Black Book,” *Variety* 162, no. 4, April 3, 1946, https://archive.org/stream/variety162-1946-04/variety162-1946-04_djvu.txt, accessed May 30, 2024.

with the official line of the Communist Party in the USSR.⁶ The fact that the organizers of the rally decided to make Einstein's demands heard showed that they were not ready to accept all Soviet requirements unquestioningly, as they were often accused of doing by anti-Soviet voices in the American-Jewish community.⁷

As this disagreement already indicates, the creation of the American version of the *Black Book* was by no means a harmonious endeavor – to the contrary. Cooperation between these very different organizations – as much as it was acclaimed as the “first permanent bridge thrown across the gulf which separates Soviet from other Jewries nearly twenty-five years”⁸ – proved an immense challenge that was in danger of failing several times. The efforts made against all political, but also logistical and practical, odds were driven by the strong will of the protagonists from all sides to stand united in the face of the catastrophe that was the Holocaust. Just as the “Big Three” – Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union – were allied to fight Nazi Germany and build an almost implausible and highly fragile coalition, likewise the Jews, usually politically divided, overcame all differences and strove for concerted action in reaction to the Nazis' ultimate genocide. Yet the editors of the *Black Book* were walking on thin ice when trying to reach a consensus and were highly affected by the growing ideological tensions surrounding them. This made their project a remarkable example of transnational political activity in the period of transition from a “hot” to a “cold war”: from a conscious, but always suspicious American-Soviet partnership in the phase of Allied coalition, to distrust, hysteria, and open resentment that characterized this relationship soon after. Still, the American version of the *Black Book*

6 The German original of Einstein's text is published in: Wassili Grossman and Ilja Ehrenburg, *Das Schwarzbuch. Der Genozid und den sowjetischen Juden*, ed. Arno Lustiger (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 1013–1014. The English version, *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry*, trans. and ed. by David Patterson (New York: Routledge, 2002), does not contain Einstein's text. Arno Lustiger published an English translation in his study *Stalin and the Jews*, 167–169. For the disagreement about the preface, see Simon Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 103; Ilja Altman, “Das Schicksal des ‘Schwarzbuchs,’” in *Das Schwarzbuch*, ed. Grossman and Ehrenburg, 1063–1084, here 1074f.

7 In particular, the Jewish Labor Bund and many social democratic Jews criticized the alliance built here by the Writers Committee for its uncritical embrace of the USSR. See Daniel Soyer, “Executed Bundists, Soviet Delegates and the Wartime Jewish Popular Front in New York,” *American Communist History* 15 (2016), no. 3: 293–332.

8 Telegram, “Jewish World News: Publication Black Book,” March 28, 1946, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM), WJC Collection, H-series, subseries 1, H335, File 12: USSR: Jewish Antifascist Committee, 1942–1949, 1972.

shows how cooperation continued below the radar on an individual level – despite the ideological battlefield it found itself in.

This project of early Holocaust documentation and the Jewish call for justice that took such a promising start at Madison Square Garden was soon forgotten. As a product of the short-lived East-West alliance, the *Black Book*'s momentum was over before it ever saw the light of day.⁹ Even though, for example, Eleanor Roosevelt had praised the undertaking, it can be assumed that the many official recipients of the book neglected it, because it paid too much respect to the Soviet Union.¹⁰ This suspicion was combined with a quite thorough critique of many reviewers, who pointed to its historical errors and inaccuracies, as well as flaws in structure and narrative. Therefore, the volume never made it into the ranks of standard collections documenting the Nazi crimes against European Jews.¹¹ But its later omission from historical research was – so I assume – mostly fueled by the tragic and today much more widely remembered story of the fate of its Russian counterpart, and worse, that of its Soviet editors. In autumn 1947, the publication of a Russian *Black Book*, which had been prepared in parallel with the American edition, was forcefully stopped in its tracks by Soviet censors. Most of the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow were pushed into a secret trial in May 1952. Accused of treason and Jewish nationalism, all but one of the defendants were sentenced to death and executed on August 12, 1952 – later remembered as the “night of the murdered poets.” Their cooperation with Jews in the West had become part of their doom.¹² The Russian version was finally printed in Israel in 1980, in Kiev in 1991, in Vilnius in 1993, and from then on in

9 There was extensive press coverage in 1946, see for example Luitpold Wallach, “The Black Book: The Nazi Crime against the Jewish People,” *Jewish Education* 18, no. 3 (1947): 55; Abraham G. Duker, “Before Nuremberg, Book of the Week: The Black Book,” unidentifiable and undated press clipping, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Jewish Writers Committee; Frederic Ewen, “Review: The Black Book: The Nazi Crime against the Jewish People,” *Science and Society* 11, no. 4 (1947): 391–394. Ewen was a member of the editorial team of the *New Currents* journal, edited by the Writers Committee, so he presented an inside view.

10 “Black Book of Nazi Crimes Due Soon,” quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, *Daily Worker*, January 22, 1945, 10.

11 The New York edition of the *Black Book* is mentioned in many studies on the JAC, but is hardly noticed in Holocaust historiography. Introductory information is provided by Harvey Asher, “The Black Book and the Holocaust,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 3 (1999): 401–416; and Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 157–168.

12 See Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, eds., *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*; Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*; Gennady Estraiikh, “The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2018): 139–148.

several editions and languages.¹³ Researchers dealing with the history of the *Black Book* since the 1990s almost exclusively paid attention to the Russian version, considering the American publication a less important offshoot.

Challenging this reading and breaking through the many ideological layers obscuring this volume from the inside and outside, I want to reconstruct its story anew. First, I place it within the long Jewish tradition of dealing with atrocities by creating documentary books that assembled evidence and testimony. Second, I draw attention to the unique collaboration at stake here, based on an internationalist vision of the postwar period and a shared dedication to the fight for retribution and the memory of the murdered European Jews. This dedication was eventually shattered by its own ideals and by the moment in time in which it was situated. My concern is to understand a project whose product may have contained flaws, but whose constellation of participants and aims provide us with new insights into the scope and nature of transnational Jewish agency in the aftermath of World War II.

Times of War, Times of Unity

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and with the growing awareness of the brutal crimes German units committed against Jewish civilians, more and more American Jews had turned their attention towards Eastern Europe and strove to support the Soviet combatants fighting against Germany. This responsiveness had grown tremendously in August 1941 after a radiobroadcast from Jews in the Soviet Union, who would shortly after establish the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC), was transmitted to the US and called for a united Jewish front against Hitler.¹⁴ Bodies such as the Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scien-

¹³ Mordechai Altshuler and Sima Ycikas state that the Russian version appeared in Jerusalem in 1980 under the title “Chernaia Kniga”; the first English edition in 1981, edited by John Glad and James S. Levine (published by the Holocaust Library in New York); in Yiddish in 1984; and Hebrew in 1991, see Mordechai Altshuler and Sima Ycikas, “Were There Two Black Books about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union?” in *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* 17, (1992): 37–55, here fn. 1 and 2. A first complete version was published in Russian in 1993 (Vilnius) and German in 1995; an extended version (with material from the JAC Archive found in the State Archive of the Russian Federation) was published in Russian in 1993: *Njeiswjestnaja Tschornaja Knige* [The unknown Black Book], ed. Yitzhak Arad et al., (Jerusalem/Moscow: Yad Vashem/Text, 1993). This was translated into English in 2008: *The Unknown Black Book: The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories*, ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Ilya Altman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Ilya Altman, “The History and Fate of *The Black Book* and *The Unknown Black Book*,” in *The Unknown Black Book*, xix–xxxix, here xxi.

tists, Inc., as well as the Jewish Council for Russian War Relief, were created in response as decidedly non-partisan activist groups. For some time, they were able to mobilize Jews from a broad political spectrum, building what Daniel Soyer aptly described as a “Wartime Jewish Popular Front in New York,” standing in solidarity with threatened Soviet civilians and Red Army soldiers.¹⁵ The density of renowned public intellectuals who took up the cause was helpful to its publicity: next to Albert Einstein and B. Z. Goldberg, among them were such writers as Shalom Asch, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Waldo Frank.

The JAC in Moscow was formed as one of five officially established anti-fascist associations and pursued a twofold objective: mainly a propaganda organ of the Soviet Union abroad to raise funds for the military, though it soon developed into a semi-official representative of Soviet Jewry. It was headed by an illustrious group of scholars, writers, poets, publicists, artists, and journalists, some of them fighting in the ranks of the Red Army.¹⁶ The American Writers Committee followed this model, forming an intellectual defense and public relations group.¹⁷ By the beginning of 1942, telegrams were sent from the US to the Soviet Union asking for collaboration. Apparently, it was Albert Einstein who came up with the plan to invite members of the JAC to the United States and to launch a *Black Book* together with them.¹⁸ The Soviet administration responded favorably and chose Itzik Fefer, a famous author of Yiddish poetry in the Soviet Union, and Solomon Mikhoels, a well-known actor and head of the Moscow Jewish Theater (both in leading positions of the JAC) to travel to the US. Their mission was to enhance visibility, establish contacts, and organize support from American Jewry for the Russian war effort.¹⁹ The Writers Committee, and here especially B. Z. Goldberg, who as a Russian-born Jew

15 Soyer, “Executed Bundists.” See also Frank Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten. Juden im Sowjetstaat 1941–1951* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008), here 65–68; Estraiikh, “The Life, Death, and Afterlife,” 141. For the Jewish Council for Russian War Relief in the US, see “Some Questions on Aid to Russia, Interview with James N. Rosenberg,” *New Currents* 1, no. 3 (June 1943), 20–21, 30; Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 73.

16 Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten*, 55–58, and 63; Estraiikh, “The Life, Death, and Afterlife”; Lutz Fiedler, “Drei Geschichten einer Desillusionierung. Wassili Grossman, Ilja Ehrenburg und das Jüdische Antifaschistische Komitee,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2016): 511–531.

17 B. Z. Goldberg described this partnership poignantly in *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 46.

18 One of the first telegrams sent from New York to Moscow proposed an exclusive work on a “Black Book reporting Nazi atrocities on Jews [in] occupied Russia.” Chaim Zhitlovsky [head of the Writers Committee] to JAC, February 14, 1943, YVA, GARF Collection, P-8114.1, folder 847; Estraiikh, “The Life, Death and Afterlife,” 141f.; Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten*, 70; Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 96.

19 Soyer and Estraiikh convincingly argue that this trip was also supported by the Soviet administration to distract the American public from the death (through enforced suicide and execution)

with astute knowledge of the Soviet Union and son-in-law of the celebrated Russian-Yiddish poet Sholem Aleichem, was predestined as the host. They organized Fefer and Mikhoel's American part of their tour starting in June 1943, which brought the two Soviet emissaries across the US, then to Canada, Mexico, and Great Britain.²⁰ One of the highlights of their journey was a mass meeting organized by the Writers Committee at the Polo Grounds in New York on July 8, 1943, with over 45,000 attendees and a group of eminent speakers from among politicians, artists, and journalists.²¹ Off stage, representatives of the WJC and the Writers Committee met with Mikhoels and Fefer, and – among other things – started to make plans for their *Black Book*.

The effort was driven by the desire to build a united Jewish front and to “investigate the Nazi crimes against the Jewish population.”²² At first, the parties agreed that the book should focus on German crimes committed on Soviet territory. To speak in *one* Jewish voice to the world, they decided to find a partner from the Yishuv in Palestine. The president of the WJC, Nahum Goldmann, zealously supported the cooperation with the JAC to foster WJC's weak relations with Soviet Jewry and reached out to the Jewish National Council (Va'ad Leumi) to join, quickly receiving a positive reply.²³ An editorial team was set up in New York and started to work in spring 1944 after a dispute over the final composition of the editorial group had been resolved, which centered around the role of the Writers Committee. With its character as an individual lobby group, it seemed not to belong to the ranks of the representative bodies.²⁴ After fierce negotiations, the members agreed

of two Polish-Jewish Bundists, Viktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, accused by the NKVD of espionage for the Nazis in 1942.

20 Soyer, “Executed Bundists,” 314–326; Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in War-time Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941–1948* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1982), 115–125; B. Z. Goldberg, “Uniting Ten Million Jews: The Recent Soviet-Jewish Delegation to America. Its Friends and Enemies,” *New Currents* 2, no.1 (1944): 10–11. For a comprehensive study of the tour of the Soviet delegates see Jakob Stürmann, *Mission “Eynikayt” Die Welttournee des Jüdischen Antifaschistischen Komitees 1943* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2024).

21 Soyer, “Executed Bundists,” 318–322. Statements of participants are collected in: YVA, GARF Collection, p-8114.1, folder 829.

22 Telegram from Nahum Goldmann and Arie Tartakover to Va'ad Leumi, Palestine, November 9, 1943, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

23 See several telegrams from November 1943 and January 1944 for invitation and confirmation of the participation in: AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. For the WJC's problems in reaching out to Soviet Jewry during the war, see Zohar Segev, *The World Jewish Congress during the Holocaust: Between Activism and Restraint* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 143.

24 Nahum Goldmann to B. Z. Goldberg, January 16, 1944, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, ARC MS1, Box 1 (unsorted material).

to have the Writers Committee represent the JAC in New York.²⁵ The discussion gives a foretaste of the potential for conflict in the group. Eventually, a Black Book Executive Committee was formed acting on behalf of the four partners. Two refugee scholars, Polish-Jewish historian Raphael Mahler and WJC's legal expert Henri Sinder from France, were chosen to supervise the editing in New York, while B. Z. Goldberg and Maurice Perlzweig were to care for the communication between all partners, for the public promotion and fundraising of the project.

Conceptualizing a Black Book

In the context of the JAC in Moscow, initiatives to document the German atrocities had already been discussed since its establishment. Red Army soldiers, Jewish escapees, and war reporters “flooded the JAF [JAC] with materials relating to the fate of the Jews under Nazi occupation.”²⁶ Eyewitness accounts had been pouring into its office or had been addressed to the famous Soviet-Jewish writer and journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, who headed the literary commission of the JAC. Another important body of material was collected by the Soviet State Commission for Investigating Nazi Crimes, founded in November 1942 under the chairmanship of Nikolay M. Shvernik. It maintained several local branches and eventually gathered some 250,000 reports on Nazi crimes committed against civilians on Soviet territory. This material was meant for the envisioned postwar tribunal of the Nazi perpetrators, which the Soviets called for early on.²⁷ The JAC exchanged documents with the State Commission, the latter using parts of it as evidence in the Nuremberg trials. Some of the official material of the State Commission eventually made it into the *Black Book*.

For all four parties involved, the idea of the publication of an accusatory document collection, a *Black Book*, served similar purposes in the process of dealing with the unprecedented dimensions of mass murder. “Color books” that assemble

25 The agreement was conveyed by Nahum Goldmann to Solomon Mikhoels, March 27, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. Telegrams indicating the dissonant opinions about the group's composition are also collected in the folder.

26 Redlich, *War, Holocaust and Stalinism*, 95.

27 The full name was: The Extraordinary State Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating Crimes Perpetrated by the German-Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices and the Damage They Caused to Citizens, Collective Farms, Public Organizations, State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR (ChGK). It was established on November 2, 1942, and dissolved by the end of 1945. On the role and importance of the Soviets for the postwar Nazi prosecution, see: Francine Hirsch, “The Road to Nuremberg,” in *Soviet Judgement at Nuremberg: A New History of the International Military Tribunal after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17–131.

and present proof of crimes targeted at a specific group or in a specific political-ideological setting were by then an established instrument of defense, used by Jewish as well as non-Jewish actors and interest groups.²⁸ Especially in the course of the long history of violence against Jews in Europe, documentary volumes were repeatedly produced to record atrocities.²⁹ These volumes had manifold aims, but most urgent was certainly the goal to gain a voice and to inform the public.³⁰ Therefore it is not surprising that B. Z. Goldberg and his compatriots chose this form of presentation for their cause. Besides the participation in the Allied armies or partisan groups, publicizing the crimes offered one of the only available ways of confronting the genocidal German war. The editors were aware of the shortcomings of this approach, as becomes apparent in a personal letter of Solomon Mikhoels to B. Z. Goldberg from November 1944, where he reflected on the boundaries and limitations of the process:

Everything here would be good if not the horrifying news and images of the liberated cities and shtetls, if not for the image of the ghastly holocaust [sic] that the German, may his

²⁸ Alexandra Garbarini, “Document Volumes and the Status of Victim Testimony in the Era of the First World War and Its Aftermath,” *Etudes arméniennes contemporaines* 5 (2015), 113–138, here 134. See also the exploration of a similar, though different sort of “color book” presenting offenses to international criminal law around the First World War: Christopher Gevers, “The Africa Blue Books’ at Versailles: The First World War, Narrative, and Unthinkable Histories of International Criminal Law,” in *New Histories of International Criminal Law: Retrials*, ed. Immi Tallgren and Thomas Skouteris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 145–166.

²⁹ See for context: David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), and more specifically: Laura Jockusch, “Chroniclers of Catastrophe: History Writing as a Jewish Response to Persecution Before and After the Holocaust,” in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergences, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 135–166. Direct forerunners of the postwar *Black Book* were the volumes organized by the Comité des Délégations Juives and its head, Leo Motzkin, in Paris: *Das Schwarzbuch. Tatsachen und Dokumente. Die Lage der Juden in Deutschland 1933* (Paris: Comité, 1934) and Jacob Apenszlak, *The Black Book of Polish Jewry: An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry under the Nazi Occupation* (New York: Roy, 1943), as well as the volume *El Libro Negro del Terror Nazi en Europa* (Mexico City: El libro libre, 1943). An important reference might have been the “Brown Book” published by German authors in French exile (many of them Jewish) in response to the burning of the Reichstag in 1933: *Livre Brun sur l’incendie du Reichstag et le terreur hitlérienne*, ed. by Willi Münzenberg et al., (Paris: Edition Carrefour, 1933).

³⁰ See, for example, Polly Zavadikev, “Reconstructing a Lost Archive: Simon Dubnow and ‘The Black Book’ of Imperial Russian Jewry. Materials for a History of the War, 1914–1915,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 12 (2013): 419–442, here 427.

name be erased, brought upon our people. Words, descriptions, stories, and eyewitness testimony pale against that which was lost and against what happened in reality.³¹

Still, in acknowledgement of this incommensurability between representation and the event itself, the overall value of such a document volume was emphatically proclaimed from all sides involved. Mikhoels called the envisioned book “a powerful political weapon in the hands of the Jewish people demanding just punishment for the perpetrators” and was seconded by the Black Book Committee in New York, which stated that the collection will bring “the thundering voice of five million murdered Jews to the peace table.”³² In contrast to the widespread production of commemorative books by Jewish survivors after the war, the so-called *Yisker-Bikher*, which were conceived as a form of gravestone and memorial for the dead of specific areas and communities,³³ the *Black Book* was directed at the outside world, not necessarily a Jewish audience: passing a verdict on the German perpetrators stands at its center. The book’s production was an important means to overcome the feeling of passivity and create a sense of meaningful action despite the doom emanating from the killing sites in Europe.

In the course of 1944, the appointed researchers working in New York began their painstaking search for material. They used all available collections of Jewish institutions, relied on the WJC’s channels into Europe, got hold of German official documentation (decrees and law enforcement) and combed the Jewish and non-Jewish press for news and coverage of Nazi atrocities. The same happened in Moscow, with a focus on first-hand testimonies from survivors and eyewitnesses. Ilya Ehrenburg at first planned two collections: one documentary-archival, the

31 Cited in Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom*, 22. For the situation of Soviet Jews during World War II, see: Zvi Gitelman, “The Holocaust,” in *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 115–143, and “The Black Years and the Gray, 1948–1967,” 144–173; Michael David-Fox et al., eds., *The Holocaust in the East: Local Perpetrators and Soviet Responses* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014); Harriet Murav and Gennady Estraikh, eds., *Soviet Jews in World War II: Fighting, Witnessing, Remembering* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014).

32 Book Launch Brochure with statements of Mikhoels and others, p. 4, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6; Fundraising Brochure “Let the World Know . . . that the World May Judge,” Section “What is the purpose of the Black Book?” [unpaginated], USHMM library holdings.

33 For the *Yisker-Bikher*, see Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), Eliyana R. Adler, “Mapping a Lost World, Postwar Jews and (Re)creating the Past in Memorial Books,” in *Reconstructing the Old Country*, ed. Eliyana R. Adler and Sheila E. Jelen (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 68–86; Gali Drucker Bar-Am, “Record and Lament: Yizker Bikher as History and Literature Conflated,” in *Yad Vashem Studies* 51, no. 2 (2023): 101–128.

other with “real life reports [showing] the full extent of the tragedy” written by acclaimed Jewish authors and war correspondents.³⁴ In April 1944, Ehrenburg published the first portion of reports in Yiddish in a small volume under the somewhat quirky title, *Murderers of People: Material about the Murders by the German Occupiers in the Temporarily Occupied Soviet Territories*, with the publishing house Der Emes (the Truth).³⁵ In Ehrenburg’s introduction, the nature of the contributions and the volume’s intention are made explicit: “I have collected here documents telling of the annihilation of defenseless Jews by the Nazi invaders. Here is no literature. These are genuine, candid stories, letters to relatives, diaries [. . .] Let all know that defenseless Jews died manfully with words of contempt and revenge. [. . .] Let this book burn like fire. Let it call for retribution.”³⁶ The conjunction between commemorative and legal spheres, which is highlighted here, forms a central criterion of the genre. A “Black Book” combined a general call for justice with the documentation of individual experience of victims. In the case of the New York volume, the commemorative dimension remained in the background, while the legal was privileged.

Striving for a Common Language

The editors in New York were eager to receive all kinds of documents from the collected lot in Moscow and constantly pressed their JAC partners to send materials.³⁷ Their transfer was delicate on several levels. It can be assumed that both American and Soviet authorities monitored all events; the suspicion of espionage or dissemination of secret information was ever present. The Sovinformburo (Soviet Information Bureau, a news agency collecting and spreading information in and outside the USSR, especially about the war, in operation from 1941 to 1961), which supervised JAC’s activities, had to approve all the allotted material to be sent to the US. Transferring huge amounts of documents was logistically difficult during wartime and shortly after, therefore the assistance of the consulate was

³⁴ Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 159. According to Lustiger, the JAC archive contained material from over 4,000 authors, reporters, and witnesses, Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 157. For the two different versions planned in Moscow, see Altschuler and Ycikas, “Were There Two Black Books”; Asher, “The Black Book and the Holocaust.”

³⁵ Altschuler and Ycikas, “Were There Two Black Books,” 40; Harvey Asher, “The Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and Auschwitz,” in *The Holocaust in the East*, 29–50, here 46f.

³⁶ Quoted in: Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 66.

³⁷ For example, Joseph Brainin to Salomon Mikhoels, September 14, 1944, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), GARF Collection, f. 8114, d. 801, 42–47.

needed. Moreover, there was disagreement among JAC members, especially articulated by Ilya Ehrenburg, regarding the decision about what kind of material should be used outside the Soviet Union. When in September 1944 the Black Book Committee still had not received the material, WJC president Nahum Goldmann agreed to visit and urge Soviet ambassador to the United States, Andrei Andrejewitsch Gromyko, to help.³⁸ One month later, the WJC finally got the news that the documents were dispatched by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in Moscow and should be arriving in New York within a week.³⁹

The American *Black Book* had become an official act prepared in full knowledge and support of the Soviet administration. About 520 pages were sent to the United States, among them "affidavits, statements of Nazi prisoners, eyewitness accounts of the manner in which Jews were killed in the Soviet Union."⁴⁰ Shortly after, Goldberg got notice that an entire manuscript with reports and testimonies compiled by Ilya Ehrenburg had arrived in the US for English translation and publication as an additional volume. An unnamed American publisher had rejected the manuscript because of its "archival form," and the recipient, the translator Helen Black, handed the material over to the Black Book Committee. Among this collection were reports of acclaimed Jewish authors such as Abraham Sutzkever and Vasilii Grossman. Ehrenburg was apparently furious to hear that the material reached the Committee and that he thereby lost control over the way it was presented; Goldberg simply assumed that Fefer and Mikhoels would agree to have portions of it published and went ahead with the planning without further approval.⁴¹

Meanwhile, a profound disagreement had emerged among the editorial staff in New York regarding the adequate structure and character of the *Black Book*. Mahler and Sinder had resigned from their posts, because they were unable to establish a common line. B. Z. Goldberg began to assume more responsibility. The paper trail of the WJC shows that among its leadership there were great doubts

38 Minutes of Office Committee Meeting, September 12, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

39 Léon Kubowitzki informed the Office Committee of the WJC accordingly on October 26, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

40 "A Statement Concerning the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, Inc.," undated [probably early 1945], AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. For the transfer, see: Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 100f.

41 The story is told in a letter from B. Z. Goldberg and Joseph Brainin to Itzik Fefer and Solomon Mikhoels, March 27, 1945, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Letters to Fefer. After the affair, Ehrenburg left the Literary Commission of the JAC, while Vasilii Grossman took over responsibility. See Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, 100; Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 216.

regarding the volume and its expected pro-Soviet political bias. In particular, WJC's think tank, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, and here most explicitly its director Jacob Robinson, repeatedly expressed skepticism about the value and scientific credibility of the planned volume.⁴² But the WJC could not withdraw from the project, because its leadership was determined to maintain contact with the JAC in Moscow, hoping it would open a communication channel into the Soviet Union.⁴³ The WJC was dependent on the information coming from JAC members or their networks. Several lists with names of victims and survivors, as well as reports on the scale of destruction reached the US, which certainly served the WJC in better understanding what was going on. Moreover, the disturbing articles from Vasili Grossman and other war correspondents, which found their way to the West were important keys for the accumulation of knowledge among a (Yiddish-speaking) American audience.⁴⁴ In a memo of July 1944 written by Perlzweig to WJC's Office Committee, we find intriguing testimony on how the reports dispatched from Moscow impacted American contemporaries. He quoted here from an article of David Shub that was prepared for the American socialist journal *New Leader* based on the reports of Grossman. The latter had traveled to Ukraine and Belarus and recorded that the Jewish communities had "been completely wiped out and no longer exist." Perlzweig's memo expresses the horror and incomprehensibility of the information Grossman conveyed, and showed the way in which such information led to a transition in the perception and drew the WJC members closer to what was going on. In his letter, he concluded:

That Jewish life has disappeared from these broad lands and historic places after so many centuries is a hard fact which we have not yet grasped in all its implications. There was a general feeling that most of the Jews had escaped in time, but it appears that not more than a third were able to get out, and they are now scattered over the rest of the vast area of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

⁴² For instance, Perlzweig raised objections in a memo to the Office Committee, October 4, 1944, and in a "strictly confidential" report from February 23, 1945, both in: AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. Robinson's critique is mentioned several times, especially in a WJC Office Committee Meeting, October 13, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

⁴³ Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, 125.

⁴⁴ Vasili Grossman, "Ukraine on Yidn" [Ukraine without Jews], *Eynikayt*, November 25 and December 2, 1943. The text was meant to be published in Russian, but the army newspaper, *Krasnaja Swesda*, rejected it. A full English translation only appeared in 2011, prepared by Polly Zavadvivker in *Jewish Quarterly* 58 (2011), 12–18. For Grossman's impact on American perceptions, see: Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 29–63.

⁴⁵ Memo of Maurice Perlzweig to WJC Office Committee, July 20, 1944, USHMM, WJC Papers, H-Series, 335, Folder 12. David Shub's article was published on July 15, 1944, in *The New Leader*.

The accounts from JAC members were eye-opening. American Jews received pieces of information, which made them slowly aware of the fact that millions of their brethren were being killed and that the majority surviving would be those who had escaped or were deported to the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ This fact surely added to the willingness to support the Soviets in their tremendous war effort.

Still, this alliance asked a lot of all partners involved. In their communication, we see many misunderstandings and ideological rifts. The JAC, hardly surprising, followed the Communist Party rules in rhetoric and activities quite strictly and tried hard to reconcile between Soviet and specific Jewish interests. The WJC, on the other hand, acknowledged the incredible price the Red Army and Soviet civilians needed to pay in the war, but more or less paid lip service when sending enthusiastic congratulatory addresses on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, saluting the comrades, and rejoicing in Soviet propaganda fanfare about the war and the Soviet's people's unity.⁴⁷ A sincere communication between the two groups at the time was hardly possible: all telegrams were subject to strict censorship; discussions about collaboration with the Germans in the overrun Eastern European territories or antisemitism in the Soviet Union itself were prohibited by the administration; and even though the articulation of a particular Jewish identity may have been fostered for strategic reasons during the war, it remained a delicate issue.⁴⁸ The Writers Committee had to function as a bridge between these rather polarized positions of the WJC and JAC, threatening more than once to go off the rails. In a letter to the JAC, Goldberg and his colleague, the journalist and writer Joseph Brainin, complained:

It required almost superhuman patience to be constantly on guard not to allow ourselves to be provoked into breaking with the World Jewish Congress. The enemies of the Soviet

⁴⁶ Jewish survival in the Soviet Union has only recently attracted interest, see for example: Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, "Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 3 (2010): 373–399, Markus Nesselrodt, *Dem Holocaust entkommen. Polnische Juden in der Sowjetunion, 1939–1946* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Atina Grossmann, eds., *Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Eliyana R. Adler, *Survival on the Margins: Polish Jewish Refugees in the Wartime Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020); Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt, eds., *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939–1959): History and Memory of Deportation, Exile, and Survival* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021).

⁴⁷ See telegrams and internal debates in the related folders of WJC at the USHMM and AJA cited above and Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, 125–133.

⁴⁸ For Jewish nationalism and collective identity in the Soviet Union during the war and the postwar period, see among others Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten*; Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*.

Union in the WJC did everything they could to sabotage the work on the Black Book and to cause a break between us [. . .]

But they also admitted in the same letter that “it was the hope of the World Jewish Congress that the Black Book is only the first step in a series of united efforts between the Jews of the World and the Soviet Union.”⁴⁹ Goldberg constantly had to act as a bridge between the different partners. The Writers Committee members themselves entertained a warm relationship with their Soviet comrades and felt much more attached to the Soviet Union. Therefore, they were willing to ignore the totalitarian nature of Stalin’s policies and the rising antisemitism for quite some time. It is not easy to position the Committee and especially B. Z. Goldberg politically, as the label “communist” might blur a more complex situation here. Goldberg never called himself a communist and his writings in the 1940s mostly show a personal attachment to Soviet Jews, a strong urge to support them and Jewish (mostly Yiddish) culture and life in the Soviet Union, a deep understanding (and gratitude) of the role of the Red Army in liberating Europe from Nazism, and a political leaning towards a romanticized idea of the Soviet experiment of equality. Therefore, he (and his compatriots from the Committee) seem to have been willing to defend the Soviet Union against growing American hostility – also coming up in the ranks of the WJC – for quite some time into the postwar period.

Drafting a Manuscript

The differences in political outlook and strategy between the Writers Committee and the WJC made it very difficult to come up with a conception of the *Black Book* which suited all. A “Draft Outline” that was circulating among the editors in the second half of 1944 only minimally resembles the version realized later.⁵⁰ At that point, the editors had opted for a broad geographical scope: the book was to cover all Nazi-occupied regions of Europe, not only the Soviet Union. The outline also foresaw “subsequent volumes” that would present documents and reports on a whole range of topics, such as the prewar situation of the Jews in countries later annexed by the Germans, the economic and cultural destruction of European Jews and their assets as a prelude to annihilation, and a volume entitled

⁴⁹ B. Z. Goldberg/J. Brainin to Fefer/Mikhoels, March 27, 1945, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Letters to Fefer.

⁵⁰ “Draft Outline,” undated [c. Oct. 1944], AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

“Jewish Heroism” that was to focus on Jewish resistance.⁵¹ What exactly led to the rejection of the planned structure of the volume cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the available files. It can be assumed that the focus on Nazi crimes set against a more general condemnation of fascism in Europe that the editors initially had in mind was one of the demands of the WJC. We also see different traditions colliding when it comes to the question of the style and presentation of the book.

B. Z. Goldberg, in what could perhaps be called a more American approach, hoped to attract attention for the volume by integrating famous personalities as authors. Further, he hoped to make the book more accessible by providing comments and explanations contextualizing the reproduced sources, rather than presenting the bare reports and accounts as such. WJC members – and here we can safely assume a shared opinion with the Soviet partners – pushed for the opposite: a strictly documentary volume, presenting original material and witness voices that could stand and speak for themselves. This concept clearly referred to an Eastern European Jewish historiographical tradition and documentary projects realized by the WJC predecessor, the Comité des Delegations Juives, informed by the historian Simon Dubnow and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in Vilna and Warsaw. They had established a sociological approach towards the collection and use of source materials and witness voices in order to reconstruct (traumatic) historical events.⁵² Next to these content-related quarrels, the project constantly also suffered from a lack of personnel and funding.⁵³

A new structure of the volume evolved after the Soviet material had arrived in New York. B. Z. Goldberg cautiously complained to the JAC that the necessary data about authors, eyewitnesses, interviewers, and collectors of the material was missing. And he wondered in a telegram of December 1944 whether the Russian version of the *Black Book* prepared by the JAC differed from the one planned collaboratively. He urged the partners to indicate in the press that these were not competing endeavors, but that the Russian version should be regarded “as gen-

51 WJC members, especially Jacob Robinson, objected to the plan for several volumes, see Minutes of Office Committee Meeting, August 21 and August 28, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

52 For this tradition and postwar Jewish initiatives referring to it, see for example: Laura Jockusch, “Become Historians Yourself! Record, Take It Down, and Collect!” *Jewish Historiography in Times of Persecution*, *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies* 2 (2005), 77–95; Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History: Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

53 Most of the support came from a vast number of “Black Book Committees” in several American, Canadian, and English cities that collected money: B. Z. Goldberg to Maurice Perlzweig, August 4, 1944, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6; see also Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 162.

eral archives,” while the American should be read as the bill of “indictment of [the] Nazis [. . .] and be issued in several languages.”⁵⁴ This underscores the mentioned differentiation between a more Eastern European and American approach. Goldberg’s vision gained ground: the American *Black Book* drew away from the original plan of a purely documentary nature. In February 1945, Goldberg presented to Perlzweig a new design of the volume with a reduced and more focused scope: “It is understood that the book is not to be an archive, but a political document to influence public opinion. As such it should not contain more than about 5–600 pages, should be written in a popular style, and appear very soon, if possible before summer.”⁵⁵ Now he foresaw the following parts: an introduction by Albert Einstein, a chapter on the history of the Jews in Europe and their longstanding contributions to its fabric and culture, a chapter on the catastrophe of the Nazi onslaught against the Jews, and a set of charges against the Nazi perpetrators that were in turn to form separate chapters. The project was to be rounded off with the reactions of the outside world to what was happening in Europe and with legal demands from “united Jewry.”

The WJC, especially Jacob Robinson, strongly disapproved of the idea and called for a reduced narration and an emphasis on documents, which should be selected by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, not the Writers Committee, which he denounced as amateurish.⁵⁶ But he could not prevail. Goldberg and Brainin seem to have made the most of the editorial decisions and the book’s outlook in the end resembled their vision much more than the WJC’s. Contrary to expectations, it took another year until the book could finally be published. One of the main reasons for the delay was the hesitant attitude of the JAC. The emphasis on a particular Jewish fate under German rule was increasingly questioned by Soviet authorities, who constantly blurred the contours of the specific Jewish experience in a concept of general Soviet victimhood. After the war’s end, this tendency grew ever stronger and led to uncertainties among JAC members about the right focus and perspective of the project, which in turn caused a strong reluctance to release the book for publication.

54 B. Z. Goldberg to JAC, December 11, 1944, YVA, GARF Collection, f. 8114, d. 799, 24–27. English, Yiddish, Spanish, and Hebrew versions were planned: B. Z. Goldberg to Itzik Fefer and Solomon Mikhoels, February 16, 1945, YVA, GARF Collection, P-8114, F. 839.

55 B. Z. Goldberg to Maurice Perlzweig, February 12, 1945, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

56 The whole quarrel is summarized by Maurice Perlzweig in his confidential report to the Office Committee, February 23, 1945, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6 (fn 45).

The Jewish Voice in the Punishment of Nazis

Shortly after the war's end in Europe, Maurice Perlzweig announced to the WJC's Office Committee that the volume was "nearing completion." He reported that the Writers Committee had assigned authors to put the documents together and provide context in a narrative form, that the material sent from the Soviet Union had been revised, that documents from the American Jewish Committee and the US administration had been added, and that the introduction and conclusion of the book had been drafted.⁵⁷ Perlzweig did not name them in his report, but the authors signing as responsible for putting the last version together were four women: Frances McClernan, Anne L. Bloch, Gitel (Gertrude) Poznanski, and Patricia Lowe-Fox. All of them are hardly known today, the archives consulted do not reveal any information about them. It seems most likely that they were connected with the Writers Committee or personal acquaintances of B. Z. Goldberg. Poznanski (from 1947 Poznanski-Steed) later became an anthropologist at Columbia University; all others worked as translators, journalists, editors, or writers. The group was supervised by Ursula Wasserstein, called by Goldberg the "assistant editor" of the volume, herself a journalist, later accredited to the UN.⁵⁸ How the decision was made to work with them or in what way they influenced the content of the final product could not be established on the basis of the available sources. What becomes abundantly clear, however, is that the public presentation and representation of the project was reserved for men, while the actual work of text production was done by women who remain largely invisible.⁵⁹

Another interesting side note of Perlzweig's memorandum referred to an intervention by the Canadian Jewish Congress. Its head, Saul Hayes, had expressed doubts about the necessity of the book after the facts about the crimes had already become public with the liberation. This prompted Perlzweig to underline unequivocally the aim of the book again:

I have pointed out that our purpose was not really to publicize the facts of the situation but to secure public support for the adoption of the principles embodied in the Declaration on the Punishment of War Criminals adopted at our Atlantic City Conference. It would be disas-

57 Memo Maurice Perlzweig to Office Committee, June 15, 1945, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

58 B. Z. Goldberg telegram to the Writers Committee, March 27, 1946, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 10 (unsorted material).

59 For the broader context, see: Immi Tallgren, "Absent or Invisible? 'Women' Intellectuals and Professionals," in: *The Dawn of a Discipline: International Criminal Justice and Its Early Exponents*, ed. Frédéric Mégret and Immi Tallgren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 381–413.

trous if criminals are punished, as has already occasionally happened, but no reference is made in the indictments to the crimes against the Jewish people. I made it clear to Mr. Hayes that our principal purpose is to see that the conspiracy is publicly established and appropriately condemned and punished.⁶⁰

Here, the partners seem to have found common ground. It had become clear that the purpose of the book was to integrate the Jewish voice into the ongoing debate on the possibilities of legal persecution of Nazi crimes. This was mirrored in the final structure of the volume as well as in all statements accompanying its publication, externally and internally. The WJC had publicly proclaimed its intention to take part in the prosecution of the German war criminals; delegates were sent to the London based War Crimes Commission of the Allies and worked closely with the American prosecution team preparing a postwar military tribunal, and presented the Jewish demands there.⁶¹ Maurice Perlzweig had been involved in these initiatives by coordinating them from New York. At the same time, members of the JAC were supporting Soviet preparations for this tribunal against the leading Nazis. Soviet-Jewish lawyer Aron Trainin, a member of the JAC, played a significant role in setting up the charges; the Committee was busy preparing documents and testimonies for the Soviet State Commission; and was also asked to help choose Jewish witnesses for the Soviet prosecution team in Nuremberg.⁶²

To substantiate the wish to participate in the conversation about the indictment of the perpetrators, B. Z. Goldberg pressed for a publication date of the *Black Book* in connection with the Nuremberg trials. And he got a recognized legal scholar from the University of California, Max Radin, to write the opening

60 Memo of Maurice Perlzweig to Office Committee, June 15, 1945 (fn 61). For the War Emergency Conference held in Atlantic City in November 1944, Jewish delegates from 40 countries had engaged in systematic postwar planning regarding relief work for survivors, refugees and displaced persons, the possibilities of rebuilding communities in Europe, prospects for Jewish statehood in Palestine, and questions of retributive and restorative justice. See “Summary of Proceedings ‘War Emergency Conference. World Jewish Congress,’ November 26–30, 1944, Atlantic City,” issued by the American Jewish Congress.

61 See Marc Lewis, *The Birth of New Justice: The Internationalization of Crime and Punishment, 1919–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 165–167; Laura Jockusch, “Justice at Nuremberg? Jewish Responses to Nazi War-Crime Trials in Allied-Occupied Germany,” *Jewish Social Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): 107–147; Kerstin von Lingen, “Crimes against Humanity”. *Eine Ideengeschichte der Zivilisierung von Kriegsgewalt 1864–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2018), 211–236.

62 Hirsch, “The Road to Nuremberg,” 17–131, fn. 28; Michelle Penn, “Genocide is Fascism in Action: Aron Trainin and Soviet Portrayals of Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 1 (2020): 1–18.

chapter entitled “Indictment,” which set the general tone and idea of the book.⁶³ Radin’s introduction focused on the guilt and prosecution of the Germans. It is noteworthy that they were explicitly accused here as a collective group – “Germans as a whole” – and not as single individuals as in the Nuremberg Tribunal.⁶⁴ The charge is presented in a confident voice, articulated in the name of the entire Jewish people, and in representation of the murdered: “As the formal accusers of the German people before the bar of the civilized world, it may properly be demanded of the Jews that they prepare such a bill of indictment.”⁶⁵ The main charge was that the Germans “willfully and without provocation [. . .] attempted the murder of a whole people and in pursuance of this design did actually murder millions of individuals.”⁶⁶ Radin argued that during the Nazi period there was a systematic conspiracy at work, a “completely thought-out plan” to “abolish” the Jewish people.⁶⁷ This charge resonated with the main argument put forward by Jacob Robinson, the WJC, and others in preparations for the Nuremberg trial and with Raphael Lemkin’s concept of genocide, which he tried to introduce into international law as a new criminal offense.⁶⁸ The introduction closes with a plea for justice and a full conviction of the crimes, so as to “prevent the recurrence of fascism anywhere.”⁶⁹

One fact that may have reinforced the impression of a specific political outlook of the volume was the continuous use of the term “fascism” to describe the Nazi political system throughout its chapters. By placing Itzik Fefer’s statement, “The globe is too small to hold both mankind and fascism,” as the motto for the

⁶³ The first published volume does not indicate individual authors of each chapter, subsequent volumes do. See for the decision: Maurice Perlzweig to Nahum Goldmann and David Remez (Va’ad Leumi), March 11, 1946, AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6. Max Radin closely followed the Nuremberg Trials: Max Radin, “Justice in Nuremberg,” *Foreign Affairs* 24, no. 3 (1946): 369–384. For an introduction, see: Eugene R. Sheppard, “The Day of Reckoning: Max Radin and the Rule of Law in International War Crimes,” in *Swimming against the Current: Reimagining Jewish Tradition in the Twenty-First Century. Essays in Honor of Chaim Seidler-Feller*, ed. Shaul Seidler-Feller and David N. Myers (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 243–253.

⁶⁴ *Black Book*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Black Book*, 3.

⁶⁶ *Black Book*, 5.

⁶⁷ *Black Book*, 6.

⁶⁸ Robinson is remembered as having said to Justice Jackson: “The Jewish causalities are not a pure incident of the war or its preparatory stage, but the result of a well-conceived, deliberately plotted and meticulously carried out conspiracy.” See Lingen, *Crimes against Humanity*, 299. For Lemkin in Nuremberg, see for example Hilary Earl, “Prosecuting Genocide before the Genocide Convention: Raphael Lemkin and the Nuremberg Trials, 1945–1949,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 15 (2013): 317–337.

⁶⁹ *Black Book*, 10.

entire book, the term and with it a whole set of social semantics that distorts the specifics of Nazi policy and ideology was emphasized.⁷⁰ Whether an agreement between WJC, Va'ad Leumi, and the Writers Committee to use the term "fascism" was reached or B. Z. Goldberg and the authors used it without consensus is hard to tell. Undoubtedly, it must have been a huge concession for the members of the Institute of Jewish Affairs, who were among the first in the US to develop a distinct understanding of the different and new forms of totalitarian dictatorship and genocidal politics of the Nazi regime.⁷¹ The placement of the term was an accommodation to an international, but also Soviet antifascist doctrine and struggle, which had grown strong during the war and included many fractions beyond communist or socialist ones.⁷² In its initial phase, the JAC had seen this project in line with the Soviet administration (represented in the Sovinformbureau), which had supported the idea of using a *Black Book* in the ideological battle against "fascism." But it would be wrong to read this decision only as a strategic one in order to allow for Soviet appreciation. Rather, it was meant to remind readers of a vanishing broader international alliance in a mutual global fight. But it was exactly this that opened the door to problems of reception. The book's ambiguity and indecisiveness regarding its political outlook led to much of the criticism in the West and eventually to dramatic consequences for the Soviet constituents.

The opening indictment of Radin is followed by four chapters, which were to provide the evidence and explanation of the main charges: 1) the German conspiracy against the Jews on the level of ideology and politics, 2) laws and decrees used in order to degrade and exclude, later expel and murder the Jews; 3) strategies of decimation such as slave labor and starvation; and finally 4) the processes and methods of annihilation. All but the last chapter adhere to the form Goldberg had suggested: they are geographically ordered by the countries under Nazi rule and introduce reprints of original material with contextual and explanatory texts. In each chapter, this pattern of composition was broken in the section on the Soviet Union and Poland where eyewitness accounts and other materials were presented without a metacommentary. Among these, we find several testimonies of Soviet prisoners of war, Red Army soldiers, and those collected by the Soviet State

⁷⁰ *Black Book*: slogan on the first page; Fefer's statement was already published by the Writers Committee in his text: "We have gained Courage," *New Currents* 2, no. 5, 7 (1944).

⁷¹ See Elisabeth Gallas, "Frühe Holocaustforschung in Amerika. Dokumentation, Zeugenschaft und Begriffsbildung," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2016): 535–569.

⁷² For an instructive discussion about the impact of Allied "antifascism" on Soviet policies towards the Jews during the war, see Michael Seidman, "Antifascisms United: 1941–1944," in *Transatlantic Antifascisms: From the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 160–181.

Commission – describing roundups, camp structures, killing methods, and killing centers.⁷³ Integrated into this section, we find some of today’s most famous reports, which stem from Ilya Ehrenburg’s collection mentioned above: Vasilii Grossman on Treblinka, Ehrenburg himself on Sobibor, and Abraham Sutzkever on Vilna, the Ghetto, the resistance, and German SS personnel – experiences Sutzkever would also report about as one of the only three Jewish witnesses at the Nuremberg trials.⁷⁴ It is evident that the editors sensed that these were the most powerful testimonies, because they chose Grossman’s and some of Sutzkever’s accounts to be published in a pre-circulated brochure entitled “Memo from the Dead.”⁷⁵ In this brochure, the reports were still accompanied by some lines of introduction by Albert Einstein, which were not to appear in the final book.

Even though we see serious editorial problems in the presentation of these materials in the *Black Book* (it is often not clear who is speaking; sources are printed with too little information on their place and date of origin or their authors), the reports presented provided an early and exceptional perspective on the details of the Holocaust, long before they became established knowledge in the West. They offer the first descriptions of the “Holocaust by bullets” or the Operation Reinhard (*Aktion Reinhard*) killing centers. The facts may have been presented in questionable format, but they nonetheless brought details of the events to the fore that were buried afterwards and needed a long time to be integrated into historical knowledge. The same goes for the Polish and Soviet survivors’ voices assembled here; many of them would be out of reach during the entire Cold War period.

The last chapter of the book built around documents is called “Resistance.” Like the preceding ones, it is arranged chronologically and according to geographical areas. But the chapter’s character differs from the others, as the presentation of armed and spiritual resistance against the Nazis obviously did not fit in as a charge against Germany. It followed other considerations. Especially the part on Poland and the Soviet Union, which again used the JAC’s and Ehrenburg’s material, including many outstanding first-hand accounts, among them another re-

73 *Black Book*, 304–413.

74 *Black Book*, 320–324; 398–413, 373–377; Abraham Sutzkever, *From the Vilna Ghetto to Nuremberg: Memoir and Testimony*, ed. and trans. Justin D. Cammy (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021).

75 “Memo from the Dead. Excerpts from the Jewish Black Book to be published soon by the World Jewish Congress, Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, USSR, Va’ad Leumi, Palestine, American Committee on Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists,” undated [probably beg. 1946], AJA, WJC Papers, G-Series, Box 3, Folder 6.

port by Abraham Sutzkever on Jewish resistance fighters in the Vilna Ghetto.⁷⁶ It seems likely that the editors followed an impulse to refute the accusation of passivity on the part of the victims, which was frequently heard at that time, in and outside the Soviet Union. Plus, they did not want to end their volume with the documentation of mass murder, but with the depiction of the numerous, however often hopeless, moments of agency. Just as is known from the early Zionist reading of events, here too, the depiction of World War II and the mass extermination was based on tropes of opposition and defense – a mode that allowed for the filling of the void created by the ultimate irrationality of the Holocaust and made narrations and representations possible.⁷⁷ The chapter particularly emphasizes the cooperation between Soviet partisans and Jewish resistance groups, in other words, the united struggle that became the central element in the creation of the collective memory on the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union.⁷⁸

Before the *Black Book* ends with a rather extensive appendix of Nazi German decrees, jurisdiction, and press documents, B. Z. Goldberg added a three-and-a-half-page section called “Justice,” in which he articulated what he considered the main Jewish demands for the criminal persecution and a peaceful future. Here, he called for a

speedy trial for every German, or other national, who has had a hand in the colossal murder of the Jews in Europe, a murder that could not have been perpetrated without the active aid of thousands of willing accessories. [. . .] Speaking on behalf of murdered Jews, we demand that their murderers be tried [. . .] No matter how many other counts there may be against him [the Nazi], the count of his murder of Jews must be conspicuous among them.⁷⁹

Moving beyond the confines of the Nuremberg trials, Goldberg demanded more than the trying of a selected group of major war criminals. What is noteworthy here is his direct reference to collaboration – a topic highly contested in the Soviet Union, at least when it came to the countries of the later Warsaw pact. Goldberg did not shy away from addressing such issues. And he combined his demands for

⁷⁶ *Black Book*, 444–447. Ilya Ehrenburg was the first to make Sutzkever’s partisan activity prominent in the Soviet Union in an article about him in *Pravda* on April 29, 1944, entitled “Triumph of a Man.”

⁷⁷ For the resistance narrative dominant in Israel after the war, see as an example: Israel Gutman, *The Holocaust and Resistance: An Outline of Jewish History in Nazi Occupied Europe, 1933–1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1972). For a discussion: Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁷⁸ For an overview of the debate, see Robert Rozett, “Jewish Resistance,” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 341–361.

⁷⁹ *Black Book*, 466–467.

comprehensive trials with a specific one regarding the Jewish survivors of the catastrophe:

[W]e must make the demand that full justice be done to them. It is not enough that their former legal rights be formally restored. [. . .] Equality of economic opportunity is no less essential than equality under the law. [. . .] The Jew [. . .] must be given the possibility of returning to his native city. [. . .] He should find his home, a home indeed, with a full sense of belonging—socially, economically and politically. His house, his place of business, his job, or his property must be restored to him.⁸⁰

This call for the restoration of rights and property was most certainly informed by the influx of news coming from Eastern Europe at the time that Jews could or would not return to their former homes due to the waves of antisemitic resentment that awaited them in their native cities and towns. Ever larger numbers of Jewish displaced persons emerged after the end of the war, stateless people with uncertain futures. Goldberg did not articulate a call for the opening of Palestine, but presented different visions of a Jewish future after the Holocaust, asking for a more universal and abstract “solution to the so-called Jewish problem, which is also that of the non-Jew.”⁸¹ Most importantly, he called for an international outlawing of antisemitism altogether, a project that was of central concern for the collaborators of the *Black Book*, with several letters mentioning the idea of fostering an international convention to make antisemitism a criminal offense.⁸² This rather general ending provoked criticism, especially in combination with the fact that Einstein’s introduction, which was to emphasize the need for Jewish statehood in Palestine, was not published. Still, also here, a closer reading of Goldberg’s closing passages reveals an important understanding of the Jewish needs at the time: the protection by the law, after an experience of total loss of any legal status; the restitution of property, which so many survivors regarded as essential for a new beginning after the Holocaust; and, last but not least, the recognition of the fundamental right to belong to a polity.

⁸⁰ *Black Book*, 467.

⁸¹ *Black Book*, 467.

⁸² See, for example, Goldberg, Brainin, and Saltzman to Fefer and Mikhoels, March 27, 1945: “Other possible joint acts which will help the unity effort might be a general movement sponsored by our four organizations for an international law against anti-Semitism.” Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: Letters to Fefer.

The Fate of Books, the Fate of Humans

The members of the JAC took a long time to accept the presented version of the *Black Book* and to approve it for publication. The growing unease of the situation becomes apparent in the communication between all partners in the course of 1945. The Soviet administration had fostered Jewish transatlantic networks and an evolution of a distinct Soviet-Jewish consciousness only for a short period of time. After the war's end, it gave way to a growing rejection of any Jewish particularity in the self-understanding of Soviet citizens. Mikhoels, Fefer, and their fellows in Moscow were torn between their loyalties to the regime and their desire for cooperation and partnership with their American friends.⁸³ From January to May 1946, B. Z. Goldberg made a trip to the Soviet Union, and he was one of the first and very few who was allowed in. In his censored letters and telegrams of the time, he praised the friendly atmosphere and his close relations with JAC members.⁸⁴ Despite signs indicating political change, new plans were made for collaborative projects. Goldberg and the JAC members resumed the idea of another publication on "Jewish Heroes in the Struggle against Fascism"; they thought about a literary journal in Yiddish that would be published simultaneously in Moscow, New York, and Tel Aviv "as an indication of Jewish national unity,"⁸⁵ and Goldberg tried to invite Mikhoels and Fefer again to the US to do a theater production with them. But nothing came of these plans.

In hindsight, he discussed this journey differently when writing his 1961 (autobiographical) study on Jewish life in the Soviet Union: "The situation of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union [in 1946] was much darker, and the rays of hope fewer. I found emaciated, ragged, crumbled Jewry, almost no longer a people, just stray individuals, harried and gloomy, haunted by shadows of death and hate and abuse."⁸⁶ And he remarked on a turn in perspective that he apparently had witnessed during his stay: "On the basis of Soviet sources alone, one might think that the Nazis were only a little bit harder on Jews, that the Jews were merely another people exposed to the Nazi scourge. The facts of course were to the contrary."⁸⁷ The American *Black Book* had presented the Jewish fate as unique, something that was problematic in the eyes of the Soviet regime, which

⁸³ See Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 44–64.

⁸⁴ See itinerary, letters, and telegrams of Goldberg's travel in: Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 70.

⁸⁵ Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 64.

⁸⁶ Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 49. For Goldberg's trip to the Soviet Union, see also: Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom*, 27.

⁸⁷ Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 54.

insisted on a narrative of shared victimhood of all Soviet people. This marked the beginning of the end of the unity conjured up between the partners.

When the publication was finally approved in 1946 and preparations for the book launch were made in Madison Square Garden, the JAC members were already subject to growing internal pressure. It became obvious that the planned Russian publication—neither in the format Ehrenburg had aimed for, nor in the “archive format” of the JAC or a combination of both—could not be realized in the Soviet Union. Against this background, it is not surprising that its members no longer had the capacity to deal with the volume in New York. Worse yet, the cooperation in the Black Book project became a serious threat for the JAC poets and writers. Growing anti-Soviet sentiment in the US also made it increasingly difficult for the Writers Committee to pursue its goals and to keep close ties with the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ The WJC made a final attempt to invite the members of JAC to join the important plenary session of the Congress planned in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1948. But their attendance was cancelled by USSR representatives. This time, Nahum Goldmann’s intervention on behalf of the JAC with ambassador Gromyko proved useless. Responding to Goldmann’s invitation, Gromyko replied that it was unnecessary for the JAC to participate in the WJC’s meeting, because problems of discrimination were nonexistent in the Soviet Union.⁸⁹

Solomon Mikhoels was murdered in a staged car accident in January 1948. One of the last public signs of the close ties between the Writers Committee and the JAC was the memorial meeting held for Mikhoels in February of the same year in New York, which was attended by 2,000 people.⁹⁰ By 1948, the *Black Book* in the US already seemed like a matter of the past. Not least, the harsh criticism of the Institute of Jewish Affairs as well as the Va’ad Leumi that followed its publication had discredited any further work on subsequent projects. But on the side of the JAC in Moscow, the book had a fateful presence. After Mikhoels’ death, most of the rest of those involved were convicted and tried, among them Solomon Lozovsky, leader of the Sovinformbureau. The transfer of documents to the US, collaboration and treason, and a too particular Jewish view represented in the volume were among the central charges against the defendants.⁹¹

⁸⁸ A very telling account on the situation in the US is given in a letter by B. Z. Goldberg to Solomon Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer on October 25, 1946, Katz Center Library, Goldberg Papers, Box 69, Folder: JAC. Attempts of the Committee to maintain contact and continue with collaboration are explained in Goldberg, *The Jewish Problem in the Soviet Union*, 93–114.

⁸⁹ Andrej Gromyko to Nahum Goldmann, December 16, 1947, USHMM, WJC Papers, H-Series, Box 335, Folder 12.

⁹⁰ Joseph Brainin to JAC, February 20, 1948, YVA, GARF Collection, P-8114.1, d.830.

⁹¹ See Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom*.

A project meant to unite the Jewish world in its fight against the Nazis became a lethal weapon against those involved. Paradoxically, while the book was branded as pro-Soviet to Western audiences and therefore marked as non-historical and unreliable, its adversaries claimed the opposite in the USSR. The book was trapped in its time. But it stands as a sad memorial to the committed initiative of its editors, who, against all odds, tried to maintain close ties in an ever ideologically polarized world that would draw them apart. Begun at a time when the four Allied powers still sought to find a common ground in their attempts to prosecute German perpetrators, an allied Jewish voice was to call for justice, to at least be present in the courtroom of history.

