

Project 26: The Rhetoric of Complicity

An Explication of 26 Front-Page Features about the Holocaust in *The New York Times*

By Emily Park

## **Introduction**

After studying filmic exposés of complicity in Italy and France during the Holocaust, I became curious about the rhetoric of complicity in American news. I wanted to know how a free and democratic society could ignore the violence of the Holocaust with such seeming innocence and for so many years. Inspired by Laurel Leff's *Buried by the Times* and Daniel Schwarz's *Endtimes?*, this paper offers a microcosmic analysis of the language that promoted American complicity.

This project first sprang to mind as I read Laurel Leff's article, "How the NYT Missed the Story of the Holocaust While It Was Happening". Leff presents a compelling case for Times' complicity, writing that "The story of the Holocaust—meaning articles that focused on the discrimination, deportation, and destruction of the Jews—made the Times front page just 26 times" ("*How the NYT Missed...*"). Whereas Leff focused on the "why's" of complicity (including the political tensions between America and France and the identity politics of a Jewish-owned newspaper), I chose to focus on the "how's." By analyzing the rhetoric and structure of how each story presented the Holocaust, I developed the idea of complicit rhetoric as it appeared in these 26 front-page features.

## **Historical Context**

In the vast sea of news about World War II, there is no better material to investigate than the Holocaust headlines of most influential paper in America. As Leff writes in *Buried by the Times*, "No American newspaper was better positioned to highlight the Holocaust than the Times, and no American newspaper so influenced public discourse by its failure to do so" (Leff 9).

Between 1939 and 1945, only 26 out of 24,000 front-page stories in the *New York Times* covered the Jewish plight in the Holocaust. The *Times* was reluctant to cover it for two major reasons. Firstly, the Jewish owner Arthur Sulzberger did not want "to be seen as a Jewish newspaper that was specially pleading for Jews" (*Endtimes?* 390). Secondly, the outlet worried that people might doubt the stories of Nazi atrocities despite having access to legitimate information. Details about the atrocities were difficult but not impossible to obtain; as Leff puts it, "The New York Times did not downplay the Holocaust because it lacked the information to play it up...enough information reached Allied and exile governments..." (Leff 3).

The *New York Times* made a formal apology about its Holocaust coverage in September 1996: “*The Times* has long been criticized for grossly underplaying the Holocaust while it was taking place. Clippings from the paper show that the criticism is valid” (Shapiro 57). But the damage was done. By “grossly underplaying” the Holocaust, this influential paper deprived American citizens of the full truth. Concerns about identity politics and the paper’s public image eclipsed good journalism.

By contrast, some countries made Jewish persecution a central feature of their news. British newspapers decried it from the early 1930s, when a lawyer “by the name of Schrumm...had been arrested at Kiel, taken to Stormtroop headquarters and shot. His death made headlines in every British newspaper the following day, and was denounced as ‘lynching’” (Gilbert 34). Not only was the death reported; it was “denounced”. Moreover, Britain’s political action mirrored its papers’ active denunciation. After Kristallnacht, Britain provided a safe haven for Jewish children: “no regular entry visas were required...[these children had] the automatic approval of the British authorities in Germany” (ibid). Both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations in Britain supported this “Kindertransport”.

Why does news matter? It predicts political action and becomes a barometer of national morality. Britain’s papers denounced the lynching of Jews from the early 1930s; America’s papers largely avoided the issue until the early 1940s. Britain provided a refuge to Jewish children after a horrific Nazi pogrom in 1938; America, on the other hand, refused to accept any refugees beyond those allowed by the quotas set in 1939 (see the 1941 headline “U.S. Refuses French Plea to Take Refugees”). Indeed, the NYT’s first front-page Holocaust feature of 1939 is “Nazi Tortures Detailed by Britain”. Here and elsewhere we see the *Times* divest itself of responsibility for primary reportage despite having access to legitimate information. Thus the desire to discuss political issues is closely tied to a drive/tendency to solve them.

### **Method**

I began by contacting Laurel Leff to confirm the 26 features, which she included among a list of 42 articles in her book (Appendix C, *Buried by the Times*). After collecting the features from ProQuest, I organized them by date and headline while taking notes on my first impressions. I wanted to simulate the experience of a casual first-time reader in order to see the impact of headlines beyond my critical/scholarly lens.

Then I read the articles and noted patterns with a more analytical focus on diction, tone, article length, euphemism, authorial intention, and inclusion or omission of perspectives. News is supposed to be objective, but journalists and papers have incredible power to skew their articles by strategic selection of interviewees. An article's message also depends on the order of information and placement of text on the physical page. For instance, a 1943 feature about the opening of Palestine shows both of these biases. Half of the second page is devoted to the opinion of Joseph M. Proskauer, a non-Zionist leader who disapproved of a Jewish commonwealth, and the other half is devoted to a list of pledges to Jews of which he disapproved. By including only an opposing opinion, and directly juxtaposing this opinion with fact, this article had the potential to sway readers who read a denunciation of a decision before reading the text of the decision itself. I also considered the lede of each piece, as well as whether the article followed the inverted pyramid model (which organized most news pieces from most important to least important information).

Initially I focused on (a) ways that the NYT minimized the significance of violence against the Jews, and (b) how the articles evolved over time. This slowly expanded into a longer list of trends and observations. For completeness, I have included a list of analytical summaries in the findings section and a more cohesive synthesis in the conclusion. The findings section is written in the present tense, as it refers directly to the texts. The conclusion is written in the past tense, as it refers to the historical trends.

### **Findings – Analytical Synopses of The 26 Features**

In this section I parsed the elements of complicit rhetoric in order to demonstrate how the articles minimized the Jewish plight. Articles appear in chronological order.

#### **October 30 1939 – “Nazi Tortures Detailed by Britain”**

The first headline in the *New York Times* during this time period makes it crystal clear that another country supplied the information. The emphasis on secondhand sourcegathering takes some of the punch out of the stunning first two words “Nazi Tortures”. This removed reportage inverts the inverted pyramid, treats the event as an innocuous historical fact, and allows the NYT to divest itself of responsibility. The lede continues this trend of evasion, as it

minimizes its subject's import by emphasizing the source, claiming it was written "On the basis of pre-war reports of British diplomats" who "accused the Nazis of inventing tortures almost beyond imagination" (p 1). The British claimed that they did not write the paper for publication because they did not want further conflict with the Germans; however, the government was "forced to disclose the facts" so the public would know about "treatment...reminiscent not of Macedonia but of the darkest ages in the history of man" (p 1).

The article goes on to give examples such as the mob attack on the Vienna Cathedral, concentration camps, forms of torture, and types of physical labor forced upon prisoners. It says "The recital of Nazi sins and crimes was even more shocking" and then refers to "an account of the fate of a Jew who fought for Germany..." (p 5). Words like "recital" and "account" keep violence in the periphery. It is not the violent act itself, but the "story", that might shock readers. From the very first Holocaust feature of this period, the NYT seems afraid to confirm the truth and wholly denounce the Nazis.

### **August 1 1940 – "France to Seize Fortunes of Rothschild, Louis-Dreyfus and Other Noted Exiles"**

Both the headline and the lede of this article provide a fairly direct statement of the truth. The strong action verb "seize" and the sensational phrase "noted exiles" give the headline a dramatic flair, but the lede quickly secures a legitimate description of place and persons. However, while it describes the how, when and where, it neglects to mention the essential why: both Rothschild and Louis-Dreyfus were wealthy Jews who fled France at the time of its fall to the antisemitic Nazi regime. The article instead references the "Pétain regime's recent decree punishing those who fled abroad at the time of France's collapse" (p 1). This is a true statement. But the omission of the essential detail of Jewish persecution makes the men sound like traitors or deserters rather than potential victims.

The remainder of the article is divided into four sections: "Refugee Travel Resumed", "British Relations Strained", "Pétain May See Hitler", and "Youth "Phalanx" Planned". The blurb about Hitler and Pétain is smashed in the middle of the article. Though it shows strong

evidence of complicity, especially as it notes Hitler's acknowledgement of Pétain as the "Supreme Leader of the French State", it receives little structural emphasis (p 9 quotes in the article). Pétain's goal at this point was to return the French Government to Versailles or Paris, but exactly how he would accomplish this was unspecified—which implies by omission that he negotiated with Hitler. Also, the article describes Hitler's "willingness" to both acknowledge Pétain's legitimacy and to speak with him and Pétain's corresponding "eagerness" to speak with Hitler (p 9). Furthermore, the scare quotes around "Phalanx" make the Vichy government's new youth organizations seem unreal and downplay that they were "Modeled along the lines of the youth movements in totalitarian countries" (p 9). The subtitles and sections about youth military organizations and Hitler have a very even, straightforward tone and by their placement get no more emphasis than the others, despite their implication of the Vichy government's totalitarian tendencies.

#### **November 26 1940 – "Refugee Ship Off Palestine Is Sunk by Blast, Casualties Feared Among 1,771 Homeless"**

This article's brief narrative lede describes the sinking of the steamship Patria. It specifies that the "refugees" were Jewish, an essential detail neglected by the headline. When describing the refugees awaiting transfer to another British colony, it suggests but does not confirm casualties: "It is feared there were some fatalities" (p 1). By this point The Americans are obviously aware that persecuted minorities are struggling to find refuge. But by de-emphasizing the Jewish identity of the victims and neglecting to confirm any casualties, this article fails to convey the depth of their plight. It entirely neglects what made these people "refugees". Like the Rothschild/Louis-Dreyfus piece, this one emphasizes and even dramatizes the mechanics (the "how") while ignoring the reason for their need to escape (the essential "why"--persecution) and thus is complicit by omission.

#### **January 9 1941 – "U.S. Refuses French Plea to Take Refugees"**

Unlike previous features, this one explicitly states in the first sentence that the refugees are fleeing "governments under German dominion" (p 1). It goes on to glorify the American government's heroic solution: the U.S. State Department suggested that the French give exit

permits to those in unoccupied France who held American visas (about 3500 people). However, Germany prevented the Vichy government from issuing these permits. Like the “youth phalanx” feature, this one does not place any emphasis on cooperation between Germany and Vichy. This would obviously place the NYT in an awkward position and would compromise America’s relationship with France. However, by refusing to note the danger and damage of possible collaboration, America too was complicit.

The remainder of the article takes the form of a dialogue between French Ambassadors and the U.S. State Department. It sounds like the U.S. used its pre-existing laws as excuse for inaction. Many of the State Department summaries resemble dumbed-down legal jargon: “The laws of the United States do not permit further liberalization...even though this country is prepared to make every effort to contribute to relief of the pressure of overconcentration of refugees in France and other countries” (p 11). This sounds like what George Orwell might term ‘plusbad doublespeak’; even two years into World War II America concealed its complicity by saying it could and could not help the Jews.

### **May 11 1941 – “Nazis Held Ready to Crush Serb Guerrillas and Jews”**

This headline clearly and correctly identifies Nazi brutality and is a pretty emphatic title compared to the previous ones. It refers directly to German violence with strong verbs and explicitly mentions the Jews in the largest headline. However, the conjunction of “Serb Guerillas and Jews” does not distinguish the agent militant forces from the persecuted minority. At a quick glance, readers would be unable to differentiate them unless they knew the deeper context.

The language deteriorates in strength throughout the article, which refers to the Germans as “characteristically thorough.” In reference to extermination this is very weak wording. This article actually admits that the departure of American troops “the last restraining factor will be removed and ‘we can proceed with the treatment these Serbians deserve’” (p 1), but it quickly brushes aside the fact of American abandonment. Later, a German source is quoted as saying “this...is just the beginning” right before a paragraph on diminished wheat reserves and breadlines in Northern Serbia (p 1). This chilling threat loses a significant amount of power when placed unassumingly before a tangential detail.

Overall, though, this article is the most descriptive and accurate so far, as it includes “Jew” in the title and states the fact of systematic execution at concentration camps on the first page. Marks an uptick in specificity and urgency.

### **August 22 1941 – “Zone in Paris Is Encircled For a Round-Up by Police”**

Only the headline was available.

### **December 14 1941 – “100 Hostages Shot by Nazis in France”**

The largest headline uses the word “Hostages” rather than “Jews”; only in the drop head does it introduce the word: “Billion-Franc Fine Levied on Jews” (p 1). The hostages were accused of attacking German soldiers and plotting to “ruin France...Vichy officially announced the new executions and the beginning of large-scale deportations to Eastern Europe for hard labor” (p 1). Here, a casual reader might find it difficult to distinguish the good guys from the bad ones. Rather than emphasizing or investigating the Germans’ specious claim, the article suggests by its wording that the Jews might have actually taken part in the plot. Furthermore, the author buries the name of “General Otto von Stuelpnagel” (a German commander in occupied France tried for murder and theft by the Allies after WWII) in the middle of a lengthy sentence before bracketing a statement about “new executions” and “large-scale deportations”, thus minimizing a critical piece of information. Also, at least one-third of the article is devoted to Otto’s speech. This perspectival emphasis combined with the emphasis on German complaints about Jews taking over France makes the Jews seem like they are perpetrators, not victims, of violence and hatred.

### **June 14 1942 – “258 Jews Reported Slain in Berlin for Bomb Plot at Anti-Red Exhibit”**

This headline gives no indication of the Jews’ innocence and in fact implies their guilt. A more accurate title would have included the word ‘massacre’ or ‘holocaust’; however, both the headline and the lede imply the possibility of the Jews’ guilt in “an alleged Jewish plot to blow up the anti-Bolshevist ‘Soviet Paradise’ exhibition at the Lustgarten” (p 1). To its credit, this

story takes a briefly skeptical tone: “If there were any bombs, they evidently were discovered before they had time to explode, because as far as can be learned, the Gestapo has not claimed any damage or injuries to persons” (p 9). This implies that the Gestapo overreacted. The following statement gives fascinating insight into Nazi news: apparently, the SS wanted to publish news of the execution in newspapers, but the Ministry of Propaganda prevented it. Here is yet another article that minimizes the senseless killing of Jews.

### **July 22 1942 – “Nazi Punishment Seen by Roosevelt”**

At first glance, this headline makes the president seem like a hero. But a close reader should pause at the word “seen”, which seems far too passive for an action against the Nazis. Is the president a passive bystander who “sees” and approves a punishment? Or does he “see” that the punishment is enacted, thereby taking an active role? The lede glimmers with American heroism and emphasizes, unsurprisingly, a more active role in retribution: “The American people will hold the Nazis to ‘strict accountability’ for their crimes of oppression” (p 1). The remainder of the story includes highlights from a meeting with the American Jewish Congress and Jewish Labor Committee. On the next page, it juxtaposes Roosevelt’s speech to the Congress/Committee with a message from Churchill, who praised Jewish support/contributions to the UN cause. Roosevelt seems overly optimistic: “The Nazis will not succeed in exterminating their victims any more than they will succeed in enslaving mankind” (p 4). He firmly negates the possibility of Nazi success despite ample evidence from the British press about extermination (see the first front-pager from 1939).

### **August 6 1942 – “Pope Is Said to Plead for Jews Listed for Removal from France”**

This is the first mention of the Pope in a Holocaust headline from this period. Document only includes the headline.

### **August 22 1942 – “President Warns Atrocities of Axis Will be Avenged”**

The headline implies (by making “Axis” the actor and omitting the recipient of its action) that the atrocities were committed against Allied powers. It contains no mention of the Jews or any other victims. It also makes the president seem like a hero, yet the word “warns” has become

a weaker-sounding term that addresses an issue that will not wane. Though he makes a “formal statement”, and promises that “this government [will] take steps to warn Germany especially of the consequences of the continued reprisals against innocent persons”, he does not specify the “steps”, the “consequences”, or the identities of the “innocent persons” (p 1). Though the story mentions extermination, it fails to acknowledge its already-significant progress: “the barbaric and unrelenting character of the occupational regime will become more marked and may even lead to the extermination of certain populations” (p 1). Furthermore, the word “barbaric” distances the reader and the writer from the brutal reality of the Holocaust. By making the event of killing seem anachronistic. More soft language appears on the second page: “The President...hoped that the barbaric acts against the civilian populations would decrease but that, on the contrary, they seemed to be increasing.” Is this not worthy of stronger denunciation? Is this of no more import than a weather report or a cereal ad?

Finally, The President said that “retribution would be exacted ‘in the courts of law’ after victory, but a reporter pointed out that the “slow processes of law” would come too late to help occupied countries. An example of how news people challenged soft diplomatic promises. The article also paraphrased the President's statement that “The sober judgment of the civilized world favored the orderly processes of law” and he was completely confident that the UN would win the war (p 1). After calling Nazi violence “deeds of desperate men who know in their hearts they cannot win”, he euphemistically subsumes their actions under the title “Frightfulness” (p 4).

### **September 16 1942 – “Hull Warns Vichy on Labor Draft; Condemns Deportations of Jews”**

The article summarizes the message from Secretary of State Cordell Hull to the Vichy French government that conscription of French labor for German war factories would be considered aid to enemies. He “permitted reporters to quote him directly”, which begs the question: what kinds of essential political conversations did not make it into the news? The article presents Hull in a derogatory manner, calling his remarks “sharp” and criticizing his prediction of a “diplomatic crisis with Vichy” (p 1). By criticizing his statement against Vichy, this story displays insidious complicity. Unlike other politicians, Hull is apparently unafraid to denounce the Nazis with strong language: he calls them “revolting” and “fiendish...they defy

adequate description” (p 1). Those who rail against the Nazis do not euphemize; they use the most forceful language at their disposal and then point out that even *that* is not enough.

### **September 18 1942 – “ Laval Interns a Catholic Leader in Wake of Church Plea for Jews”**

From late 1942 onward, the articles became increasingly specific. This one uses “Jew” in the headline and covers anti-Jewish laws in Vichy France. But it fails to emphasize French complicity and re-frames the story as an issue of state versus religion: Vichy Chief of Government Pierre Laval “struck back” at the Church’s opposition to Jewish persecution in France (p 1). The story also devotes a lot of space to Laval’s statement to a group of German correspondents: “No man and nothing can sway me from my determination to rid France of foreign Jews and send them back where they originated. I’ll take no lessons in humanitarianism from any country” (p 1).

### **September 20 1942 – “Pope has a Long Talk with Taylor; Move to Aid Jews in France Seen”**

When the Pope received Myron C. Taylor (Roosevelt’s personal representative) at the Vatican, the meeting received little press in France. No statements were given after the fact about the subject of the meeting, but journalists in Rome thought that the Church was planning to help the Jews. This story emphasizes their assumption, providing another example of false reassurance. This story harps on the “presumption in neutral journalistic circles” that the Church is going to help the “oppressed religious minority” in occupied countries (not “Jews”). But if we consider the headline: “...Seen” ... what aid was “seen”? All this article can say is that (a) two very influential people met and (b) Roman journalists have vague theories about their topic of discussion. Because of its optimistic tone, the article encourages readers to simply skim it and assume that everything is going to be alright; the President and the Pope are taking care of it.

### **December 18 1942 – “11 Allies Condemn Nazi War on Jews”**

This is the first headline that explicitly confirms and condemns Jewish extermination. The subheading states that the “United Nations Issue Joint Declaration of Protest on ‘Cold-Blooded Extermination’” (p 1). In the smallest subheading--in text even tinier than the

article itself-- is the statement "Special to The New York Times" (p 1). From its headline to its body, this article uses much stronger language than the previous ones. It quotes the joint declaration of the Allies calling out the "bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination" of Jews and "the barbarous Hitlerite tyranny" (p 1). Finally, explicit information about transport to concentration camps and "Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe" (p. 10). There are far fewer euphemisms. However, when the President was again quoted, he tended to emphasize juridical retribution after the war (not action right then). Allied victory is the first priority in all of his statements.

### **March 2 1943 – "Save Doomed Jews, Huge Rally Pleads"**

Here the NYT recognizes the American peoples' response gruesome reality of the Holocaust in a headline. The word "doomed" makes clear that the Jews are victims (like the one at the end of 1942). Previous titles used euphemisms like "removal" and "deportation" and "draft" and even the phrase "war on Jews" (which connotes a metaphor; we usually use that phrase to describe warring ideas, not literal deaths). This headline emphasizes American heroism (common among the articles during the later period of the war) and Jewish suffering (uncommon in the NYT due to Sulzberger's reluctance to act as but impossible to ignore after this time).

For the first time, "Immediate action by the UN" will be taken "to save as many as possible of the five million Jews threatened with extermination by Adolf Hitler...was demanded at a mass demonstration of Christians and Jews in Madison Square Garden" (p 1). The way it's organized, with a section heading for each helpful party, makes it seem like everyone in America is doing their utmost to help the Jews.

### **April 20 1943 – "Refugee Aid Linked to Victory in War"**

This headline seems hopeful, but the subheading admits that "Substantial Relief is Not Possible Now" (p 1). A better title might be "America Makes Allied Victory a Priority; Jews Must Wait to be Saved". The article goes on to address the limitations of "Anglo-American talks on the international refugee problem" (p 1). It devotes much of its text to quotations from the American and British delegates in conference on their pessimistic outlook on the possibility of aid to "refugees." Much like Roosevelt, the delegates believed that victory must come before aid, but the title emphasizes "victory" while hiding their reluctance. Thus another possible title would

be “American and British Delegates Reluctant to Stop Nazi Atrocities”, but that would make them look terrible. The president, Richard K. Law, head of the British delegation, thought that “victory was the only real solution” and said “we are unable to give them immediate succor”, and American Delegate Harold W. Dodds agreed: “The problem is too great for a solution by the two governments here represented. The cooperation of others must be solicited” (p 11). The inclusion of these perspectives encourages readers to believe that victory is a necessary prerequisite to helping the Jews, and that Allied success is the top priority, and that it is not only difficult but impossible to provide aid.

#### **April 22 1943 – “Secret Polish Radio Asks Aid, Cut Off”**

This article demonstrates the consequences of the Allies’ reluctance and provides a chilling counterpoint to the headline from April 20. It describes a radio broadcast from a Polish radio station that said, “The last 35,000 Jews in the ghetto at Warsaw have been condemned to execution...the people are murdered. Women and children defend themselves with their naked arms. Save us...” (p 1). This striking plea, remarkable both for its revealing the shockingly large ghetto population and its barefaced phrasing (“naked arms...”), met some controversy. The United Press dispatch from Stockholm quoted the broadcast as saying “the last thirty-five Jews in Warsaw”, whereas the London listeners who reported they heard “the last 35,000 Jews in Warsaw’s ghetto”). This is why it’s so difficult to study radio broadcasts compared to newspapers (unless you have a recording of the original audio). The article’s emphasis on the controversy, and its lack of clarity on the true number of Jews in the ghetto, only serves to downplay the tragedy. The broadcast “as heard here [in America]” matched the Londoners’ interpretation, but again, the emphasis is on a numerical dispute and not on the horrific news of any number of deaths.

#### **August 31 1943 – “Rescue at Once of Europe’s Jews Demanded at Conference Here”**

The headlines become increasingly urgent from this date. The lede of this story carries on the forceful energy of the headline: “Demands for immediate steps to rescue as many Jews as possible from the Nazi-controlled countries of Europe...were voiced repeatedly yesterday” (p 1). It also paints America as a powerful hero that “demands” the “rescue” of Jewish people. It

further specifies that it will save “Europe’s Jews” as if to differentiate them from American Jews. This specification places the primary responsibility on the European Jews’ native country and thereby increases the impression of America’s generosity. Unlike previous articles, this one asserts that “This time solemn declarations are not enough” (p 1). It also refers to the Jews as “a people which has suffered as perhaps no other in lives and material resources”, a distinction that the NYT failed to make for four whole years. In keeping with a common trend, the rescue of Jews from Nazis is always coupled with advocacy for establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine.

### **September 2, 1943 – “Opening of Palestine as Homeland Demanded by Jewish Conference”**

The next front-pager likewise opens with a “demand”. It appears that America, specifically Jewish America, has decided to take action. The first half of the article summarizes the proceedings of the conference in a fairly dry and objective way. Then comes a balanced description of a resolution calling for the reconstitution of Palestine as the Jewish commonwealth (summarized in the 2nd half of the article) which Zionists loved and non-Zionists disliked.

The article develops an imbalance in its second half, which includes statements from Joseph M. Proskauer (a non-Zionist leader at the conference). He disapproved of “vesting in Jewish authority the full power to regulate and direct immigration into Palestine” (p 4). He also cites “UN embarrassment” as the first reason against creating a Jewish commonwealth. His statement comes before a section on “Pledges to Jews Cited” in the resolution. These two components appear on adjacent columns, which encourages direct comparison. By directly juxtaposing this negative opinion with fact, this article had the potential to sway readers who read a denunciation of a decision before reading the text of the decision itself.

### **October 17, 1943 – “Pope Said to Help in Ransoming Jews”**

Though the title seems ambiguous, the lede specifies that the pope helped to pay the ransom demanded by Germans “for the release of 100 Jewish hostages” (p 1). This tiny three-sentence article minimizes the Jewish plight and instead emphasizes the Pope as a heroic figure. It fails to include details about the plight of the Jewish hostages or even the atrocious

behavior of the Germans, who even “after receiving the gold, refused to release the hostages” (p1).

### **January 30, 1944 – “Roosevelt Board is Negotiating To Save Refugees From Nazis”**

This headline confirms direct action by the American government against the Nazis. Again, the president seems like a hero. But this time, he is actually taking action to save the Jews instead of waiting for juridical ‘retribution’ after an Allied victory. The not only minimizes the Jewish plight in favor of American heroism; it uses the word “refugees” rather than “Jews” (later specifying their ethnicity in the first sentence and calling them “victims of Nazi aggression”). While the NYT’s language against the Nazis grows stronger, it still displays extreme reluctance to present this as a Jewish issue. In keeping with the emphasis on American heroism, the article devotes an entire section to describe the sought-after cooperation for “programs and measures for relief, rescue, maintenance, and transportation of persecuted victims to be carried out” and the goal to “effect immediately the rescue and relief of Jews in Europe and of other victims of Nazi terror” (p 15).

### **March 25 1944 – “Roosevelt Warns Germans On Jews”**

Emphasis continues to be placed on American heroism. The word “warns” appears for the third time in a Holocaust headline, which seems like a step backward from the strong language in the previous headlines. However it goes on to specify that the president said “All Guilty Must Pay for Atrocities and Asks People to Assist Refugees” (p 1). His appeal to peoples of “all subjugated Europe” makes Europe sound weak and America sound strong if only by contrast. And it would be “a major tragedy if they should perish on the very eve of triumph over the barbarism which their persecution symbolizes” (p 1). Again, emphasis is placed on American heroism and the free world’s “triumph” over barbarism rather than simply saving fellow human beings because it is the right thing to do. Then it includes a brief bracketed statement by Hull which de-emphasizes his strong language and adamant approval of Hungarian uprising against German invaders. Lastly, the article emphasizes the President’s continued investment in postwar retribution: includes this quote from Roosevelt: “keep close watch, and to record the evidence that will one day be used to convict the guilty” (p 4). Tragically, the “systematic torture and murder of civilians and Nazis” remains to be solved after an Allied victory (p 4).

### **August 30, 1944 – “Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare at Camps”**

Shockingly, this is the first headline that mentions killing at the concentration camps. The others did not refer to them as “camps” or mention mass-murder (save for a sensational June 13 headline about a “Murder Orgy by Nazis”). W.H. Lawrence, a NYT journalist, went “all through the camp, inspecting” every instrument and site of torture (p 1). His thorough examination and accurate reportage become the central focus of the article, which goes on to emphasize his “discoveries” in bolded subheadings about “mass graves”, “responsible Germans,” the extent of the camp (670 acres), and the crematories. This article does not spare readers any grief and acknowledges, like Hull and Arendt and a few other bravely articulate voices, that “it is impossible in the space here available to relate details of all the evidence of crimes we saw and heard” (p 9). It also includes interviews from camp prisoners.<sup>1</sup>

In an attempt to describe the sheer number of executions, the article uses the phrase “peak death production day” – adopting weirdly economic diction that conforms to the frequent caricature of Nazis as machines and makes them seem dangerously unreal. This was apparently November 3, 1943, the day on which the Germans executed between 18,000 and 20,000 prisoners. No headlines about the Holocaust were featured in the NYT in November 1943.

### **October 20, 1944 – “Dewey Backs State Department in Warning Nazis Over Murders”**

This article addresses a statement by the Governor of Pittsburgh approving the State Department’s warning to Germany “against acts of terrorism and extermination of victims of Nazi aggression” (p 1). Here Dewey acknowledges the fact of “murder” and “extermination”, but the word “warning” seems far too soft. Again, politicians talk of “justice” in the “civilized world that awaits” the Nazis. Have they not yet noticed that the Nazis do not abide by the rules of their “civilized world”? Hull recognized this in no uncertain terms. By contrast, Dewey’s statement makes it seem like the *possibility* of Nazi’s extermination of Jews is *likely*, as if it hasn’t been happening for years already. The warning itself appears on page 13.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the principal interviewees’ names was Staub, which means “dust” in German. This is a chilling coincidence as he witnessed hundreds of people literally burned to ash and dust in the crematories.

### November 13, 1944 – “Foe Put Nurseries Inside Death Camp...”

The word “foe” seems startlingly inadequate as they precede the first mention of child-murder in a headline of a front-page feature on the Holocaust. This story also marks the first time a NYT headline explicitly referred to a Nazi/concentration camp as a “Death Camp”. In keeping with the stories during and after 1943, the articles get increasingly specific and graphic, although the lede and the following sentences use scare quotes. Gives the piece a self-obviating ironic tone that slightly distances the reader from the brutal reality.

Again, the Nazi crimes defy description: “Many stories are to be heard about the brutalities committed by the hated WW...Some seem incredible” (p 3). Scare quotes continue on page three as in the descriptions of the crematoriums and the “Fantasy for Young” (rooms in a camp for internees who were not charged with serious offenses but were suspected anti-Nazis).

**The camp was steadily enlarged and “improved,” one “improvement” being the construction of a modern crematory which has two big ovens that still reek with the smell of death. Apparently two ovens were not adequate; just outside there is a mobile crematory, a big, black boiler-like affair resembling a steam roller.**

Then the article takes a literary turn. Fanciful figurative language appears in the next few paragraphs, which describe “two big ovens that still reek with the smell of death” (p 3). The selection of “Gold Fillings Removed” and the use of the word “Fantasy” in the subheadings give the article a far more dramatic and dire flavor than previous ones. Every time this extreme language appears, it’s followed by an admission that no language can accurately capture the horrors of the camps (see 2 previous articles). This story also states with complete confidence that these stories are “part of the official record” whereas previously the stories waffled with phrases like “heard it from a neutral party”.

## November 26 1944 – “U.S. Board Bares Atrocity Details Told by Witnesses at Polish Camps”

This article offers a report by the War Refugee Board on the first report of a U.S. Government Agency with eyewitness proof of mass murder by the Germans. Unlike previous stories, this one includes a number of statistics and details about the methods of execution.

Poland (transported by truck)	300,000
Poland (transported by train)	600,000
Holland	100,000
Greece	45,000
France	150,000
Belgium	50,000
Germany	60,000
Yugoslavia, Italy and Norway	50,000
Lithuania	50,000
Bohemia, Moravia & Austria	30,000
Slovakia	30,000
Camps for foreign Jews in Poland	300,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,765,000</b>

### 2,000 Bodies a Day

In the report the Jewish youths described the gassing and burning technique as follows:

“At present there are four crematoria in operation at Birkenau, two large ones, I and II, and two smaller ones, III and IV. Those of Type I and II consist of three parts, i.e., (a) the furnace room, (b) the large hall, and (c) the gas chamber. A huge chimney rises from the furnace room, around which are

(p 24)

It also emphasizes the fact that Nazi atrocities are impossible to believe or describe and continuously insists on the strength of evidence about Nazi mass murders (just like the “Nurseries Inside Death Camp” story). Finally, after years of complicity and evasion, “[The War Refugee Board] is making the reports public in the firm conviction that they should be read and understood by all Americans” (p 24). Here is a rare and powerful article that combines many rhetorical and reporting techniques in order to illustrate the Nazi atrocities.

## April 18 1945 – “Nazi Death Factory Shocks Germans on a Forced Tour”

This comparatively lengthy story communicates the shock and horror of German citizens of Weimar who saw the Buchenwald camp for the first time.

## *Germans on a Forced Tour*

By GENE CURRIVAN

By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

BUCHENWALD, Germany, April 16 (Delayed)—German civilians—1,200 of them—were brought from the neighboring city of Weimar today to see for themselves the horror, brutality and human indecency perpetrated against their “neighbors” at the infamous Buchenwald concentration camp. They saw sights that brought tears to their eyes, and scores of them, including German nurses, just fainted away.

They saw more than 20,000 non-descript prisoners, many of them barely living, who were all that remained of the normal complement of 80,000. The Germans were able to evacuate the others before we overran the place on April 10.

There were 32,705 that the “vis-

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Its figurative subheadings (such as “Cruelty Raised to an Art”) display increasing confidence in their own accuracy and informative capacity. The sentences are tighter, the descriptions more specific, the catalogues more extensive. Scare quotes, headings like “Well-Appointed Crematory”, and the phrase “the most modern ovens science can provide” create a quasi-sarcastic tone that suggests the writer’s complete knowledge of the subject. These additions also suggest moral superiority, which appears in even greater relief against the backdrop of oft-cited shame of the German citizenry.

### Cruelty Raised to an Art

It had its gallows, torture rooms, dissection rooms, modern crematoria, laboratories where fiendish experiments were made on living human beings and its sections where people were systematically starved to death.

This correspondent made a tour of the camp today and saw everything herein described. The statistics and an account of the events that happened before our troops liberated the camp were obtained from a special committee of prisoners, some of whom had been in the camp since its inception and others who had been German prisoners for twelve years. Their information was documented and in most cases confirmed by the records.

This story has already been told in part, but not until today has the full import of the atrocities been completely felt.

One of the first things that the German civilian visitors saw as

away. It was too much for them.

### German 'Science' Exhibited

These persons, who had been fed on Nazi propaganda since 1933, were beginning to see the light. They were seeing with their own eyes what no quantity of American propaganda could convince them of. Here was what their own Government had perpetrated.

But they hadn't seen anything yet. In a barracks building in front of them was a scientific laboratory where captured scientists worked with material supplied by their overlords. There were shelves of bottles filled with various organs of the human body. In one was half a human head. It had been cut longitudinally to show all its component parts. This head once belonged to a prisoner, as did all the other human parts so displayed. In another room were a dozen death masks, skulls and shrunken human heads. A Czechoslovak scientist and surgeon who worked in the laboratory told us the history of each part, each head, each mask—because he had known the human beings to which they belonged. Some had been his own countrymen.

The German visitors saw this, too.

And then they were taken to

### Children Poisoned, Too

This sight was too much for many German housewives, especially a little farther on, where only the children were kept. One 3-year-old boy, who had had only the first few injections, seemed quite chipper. He was Andor Gutman, a Hungarian Jew of Budapest. He had been in the camp three years. When asked where his parents were, he replied, without any emotion: "My father was killed and my mother was burned to death."

As one watched the Germans filing out of this building there was hardly a dry eye, although some tried to maintain their composure. There was real horror ahead, but some of them just couldn't go on.

From there they were taken to

The final paragraph uses flowery visual imagery to describe the contrast between a "distorted" scene and a "magnificent" sunset. It also refers to the Germans as a "chastened people" who have learned their lesson from this singular visit to a camp. Thus continues the American fixation on postwar justice.

## May 1 1945 – "Dachau Captured by Americans Who Kill Guards, Liberate 32,000"

America is finally presented as the hero who not only "warned" or "saw" punishments for the Nazis, but who actually "captured" a concentration camp and was able to "liberate" thousands of prisoners. This story includes some images of the "rubble of Berlin" and emphasize the destruction of the "shattered capital":

## THE RUBBLE OF BERLIN FURNISHES BACKGROUND FOR A RUSSIAN PHOTOGRAPHER



Soviet infantrymen moving up to occupy a sector of the shattered capital

It also calls Dachau “Germany’s most dreaded extermination camp” (using the phrase that was avoided in front-pagers until 1943). Strong verbs like “withering”, “dashing”, “catching”, “raged” create a colorful contrast between the crumbling city and the heroic American forces. This section glorifies the Americans and does not spare the gruesome details of how emaciated and miserable the prisoners were (p 1, 5). The remainder of the story emphasizes extreme heroism on America’s part with no mention of how late it came.

### ***Dachau Captured by Americans Who Kill Guards, Liberate 32,000***

By The Associated Press.

DACHAU, Germany, April 30—Dachau, Germany's most dreaded extermination camp, has been captured and its surviving 32,000 tortured inmates have been freed by outraged American troops who killed or captured its brutal garrison in a furious battle.

Dashing to the camp atop tanks, bulldozers, self-propelled guns—anything with wheels—the Forty-second and Forty-fifth Divisions hit the notorious prison northwest of Munich soon after the lunch hour yesterday. Dozens of German guards fell under withering blasts of rifle and carbine fire as the soldiers, catching glimpses of the horrors within the camp, raged through its barracks for a quick clean-up.

The troops were joined by trusty prisoners working outside the

barbed-wire enclosures. Prisoners and Russians, grabbing weapons dropped by slain guards, acted swiftly on their own to exact full revenge from their tormentors.

The sorting of the liberated prisoners was still under way today but the Americans learned from camp officials that some of the more important captives had been transferred recently to a new hideout, probably in the Tyrol. These were said to have included Premier Stalin's son, Jacob, who was captured in 1941; the former Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, and his wife; Prince Frederick Leopold of Prussia, Prince Xavier de Bourbon de Parme and the Rev. Martin Niemoeller, the German Lutheran, who was arrested when he defied German attempts to control his preaching.

[Prisoners at another camp

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escape.

Bavarian peasants—who traveled this road daily—ignored both the bodies and the horrors inside the camp to turn the American seizure of their city into an orgy of looting. Even German children rode by the bodies without a glance, carrying stolen clothing.

In the wake of the storming Americans the bodies of the trimly-clad German guards lay scattered like tennis balls, bowled over as they sought to flee. The highest officers surrendered, waving a white flag, but a Red Cross representative said that the real executives of the camp had escaped the night before.

The camp held 32,000 emaciated, unshaven men and 350 women, jammed in the wooden barracks. Prisoners said that 7,000 others had been marched away on foot during the past few days. The survivors went wild with joy as the Americans broke open their pens, smothering their liberators with embraces.

Bodies were found in many places. Here also were the gas chambers—camouflaged as “showers” into which prisoners were herded under the pretext of bathing—and the cremation ovens. Huge stacks of clothing bore mute testimony to the fate of their owners.

French general was slain last

### **Synthesis & Conclusion**

The NYT grossly underplayed the Nazis' violence against Jews with rhetorical tactics of euphemism, understatement, omission, figurative language, placement of text, and perspectival exclusion. If one were to try and determine the timeline of Jewish persecution from these articles alone, one might assume that conditions only became unbearable beginning in 1943, whereas in fact Jewish persecution was rampant from the early 1930s (as evidenced by the British reports mentioned in the Introduction).

During 1941 and 1942, the *Times* minimized the plight of Jews as victims and even made them seem like perpetrators. Most of the stories only reported official statements by the British, French, or American political organizations and emphasized their secondhand reportage.

In 1943 and 1944, the stories' emphases shifted toward American heroism and postwar juridical retribution. The *Times* portrayed Roosevelt as a moral force who "warned" the Germans about the consequences that will follow an Allied victory. However, neither the paper nor the president did much to bring the Jewish plight to the forefront of America's consciousness or political agenda until August 1943, when the rescue of Jews was demanded by a NYT headline for the very first time.

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