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## Operation Texas: Lyndon B. Johnson, The Jewish Question and the Nazi Holocaust

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## OPERATION TEXAS: LYNDON B. JOHNSON, THE JEWISH QUESTION AND THE NAZI HOLOCAUST

*By James Smallwood*

Charles Marsh, a powerful Austin, Texas, newspaper tycoon, and Alice Glass, his future wife, attended the Salzburg, Austria, Music Festival of 1937. They then took a side-trip to Germany. While in the country of Kant, Beethoven, and Goethe, they found time to attend a meeting of the Nazi Party and to hear a speech by Adolph Hitler, who would soon be responsible for the deaths of millions of people. Marsh and Glass immediately understood what a menace that Hitler was to peace, to Western Civilization, and to the sanctity of human life.<sup>1</sup>

Their young congressman, Lyndon B. Johnson, had arrived at a similar view in 1934, the year he became engaged to Claudia Alta “Lady Bird” Taylor. On their first encounter, they discussed European affairs, the Nazi rise in Germany, and the potentially disastrous fate of the Jews. Both were concerned. One day later, Lyndon gave Lady Bird a gift, a book which he inscribed “To Bird – in the hope within these pages she may...find reiterated some of the principles in which she believes and which she has been taught to revere and respect.” The book was *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization*, edited by Pierre Van Paassen and James Waterman Wise. Published just one year after Hitler assumed power, it predicted the coming Nazi terror and the not-too-distant Holocaust in which millions of Jews, Slavs, numerous gypsies, and other “undesirables” would be murdered.

The prescient work also predicted Hitler’s seizure of Austria, and attacks on Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union – in proper order. In March 1934, co-editor van Paassen made a speech that he titled “Every German Jew Doomed to Death, Slavery, or Exile.” Again, van Paassen predicted the Holocaust, only to be laughed at and ridiculed.

Johnson did not laugh; rather his wide reading of European affairs led him to some conclusions. LBJ could not stop the coming Holocaust, but he recognized the Nazi menace to Western Civilization and he knew that millions of lives were at stake. He determined at that point to do what he could to help the world cope with such insane aggression and murder.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding his concern for European Jews, Johnson had to vote his convictions only five days after taking office in 1937. The Omnibus Immigration Bill came before the House on May 18. The heart of the bill could be posed in a question. “Should the United States deport or naturalize aliens, mostly Jews, from Poland and Lithuania who had entered the country illegally on false visas?” Aligning with most Republicans and the “Dixiecrats” of the South, LBJ voted with the majority – naturalize the Jews and save them from Hitler’s executioners.<sup>3</sup>

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In March 1938, after Hitler seized Austria, thousands of Jews from Germany and Austria sought safe haven, many of them hoping to come to the United States. Would America accept them? This time the answer was "no." A significant number of Americans, including many national politicians, were anti-Semitic and had no desire to increase the Jewish population of the country. Some people feared that more Jewish immigrants would lengthen unemployment rolls, become public charges, and bleed away precious resources during the Great Depression. The American government turned a "deaf ear" to the Jews.<sup>4</sup> But some people did not close their hearts to Jewish suffering and Lyndon Johnson was among their number. Although LBJ represented approximately 400,000 people in his district, only about 400 were Jews. Although they were but a tiny fraction of his Hill Country, the congressmen had developed pro-Semitism early in his lifetime.<sup>5</sup>

LBJ's interest in the national and international Jewish community can be traced, in part, to his early religious upbringing, which included exposure to Christadelphian doctrines. In the 1860s or 1870s, a Christadelphian preacher remembered only as Oatman visited the home of LBJ's paternal grandfather, Sam Ealy Johnson, who lived in central Texas town of Johnson City. The two men engaged in an informal debate about religion, a debate that Sam Johnson relished. The elder Johnson knew his Bible, but he could not answer several of the Biblical questions posed by Oatman. Impressed, Johnson arranged a public debate between Oatman and Johnson City's Baptist preacher. With several of his relatives in tow, Johnson attended the debate, which Oatman won, to hear the locals tell.<sup>6</sup>

Won over by Oatman, Johnson and some of his relatives became Christadelphians, whose doctrines had originated in the 1820s when physician-preacher John Thomas left the Christian Church and founded his own Brethren of Christ. Thomas taught the literal exegesis (meaning) of the Bible, with Jews and Israel having a special place, for they were the "People of the Book." In Christadelphian eschatology, Christ's second coming would be signaled by a return of the Jews to Palestine and the recreation of the Jewish state of Israel. Christian millennialists, Christadelphians believed that the Jews must return to Israel and that they had a duty to help them fulfill the Bible's prophecy. Sam Johnson taught young Lyndon these doctrines.<sup>7</sup> As one author put it, the youngster "was raised in a pro-Jewish household. . . he was fed pro-Zionist propaganda along with his Pabulum and milk."<sup>8</sup> Although the mature LBJ did not become a Christadelphian, he remained a member of the Christian Church, he internalized his grandfather's charge to "take care of the Jews, 'God's Chosen People.' Consider them your friends and help them in every way you can."<sup>9</sup>

When Sam E. Johnson was in the twilight of his years, still passing life's lessons on to his grandson, events in Georgia made a permanent impression on both grandfather and grandson. In 1913, a twenty-nine year old Jewish businessman, Leo Frank, who managed a pencil factory in Atlanta, was accused of the mutilation of Mary Phagan, a thirteen-year-old girl whose body was found

in Frank's factory. Although he was likely innocent, police arrested Frank who, as events proved, had little chance of justice. Frank was a Northerner, he represented industrialization, and he was a Jew. As his case developed, Sam Ealy, Sam Ealy, Jr., and young Lyndon Johnson followed the four-week trial. The nation as a whole was also experiencing a wave of ugly anti-Semitism in the same year as the Frank trial. Jewish immigration was at an all-time high and a number of demonstrations and magazine articles fueled anti-Jewish sentiment. Congress even passed an immigration bill complete with a literacy test, although President William Taft vetoed the measure.<sup>10</sup>

Bigots aimed death threats at Frank's attorney, the trial judge, and the jury – if they did not find Frank guilty and sentence him to death. After only four hours of deliberation, the jury found Frank guilty and the judge did sentence him to die. The evidence in the case was so flimsy that many humanitarians protested. During two years of appeals, Albert D. Lasker, a wealthy American Jew and later a friend of LBJ and Lady Bird, led a campaign for clemency. Touched by public protests, petitions, and appeals from other governors, Georgia chief executive John M. Slaton commuted Frank's sentence to life in prison. Enraged, a group calling itself the Knights of Mary Phagan entered Georgia's Milledgeville Prison where Frank was incarcerated, seized him, drove across the state to Mary's hometown, and hanged him in Marietta, Georgia.<sup>11</sup>

With Sam Johnson Sr. reporting the events surrounding the Frank case to the Johnson family, Lyndon learned the facts of the case and all the race hatred involved in the trial and the lynching. He never forgot what harm that racism could do and he remained friendly to Jews throughout his life, in addition to developing concern for blacks, Catholics, and other minority groups. In his political career, LBJ could always count on solid support from the Jewish community in Texas and, later, on the national community as well. Historian Robert Dalleck pointed out that although Johnson occasionally engaged in "rhetorical anti-Semitism," he still had sympathy for the downtrodden. "There was something about him," Dalleck contended, "that made him sympathize with the underdog. It may have been his harsh boyhood in the Texas hill country...or there was his sense of emptiness, a hole in his psych that made him identify with the persecuted."<sup>12</sup>

Young Lyndon's grandfather and father also educated him about Tom Watson, a one-time Georgia Populist firebrand with egalitarian views who metamorphosed into a racist and bigot. Watson used his monthly, *Watson's Magazine* and his weekly paper, *The Jeffersonian*, to arouse Georgians against Leo Frank, calling him a "jewpervert," among other derogatory names.<sup>13</sup>

Events away from his Texas home were not all that made an impression on the young Lyndon Johnson. The same year the Georgia mob lynched Leo Frank, LBJ's father had several confrontations with the Texas Ku Klux Klan, a group he condemned on the floor of the Texas legislature. LBJ proudly watched from the gallery as his father called the group "KuKluxsonsof bitchcs." Later, the Klan made him a target of their terrorist campaign.<sup>14</sup> LBJ's

younger brother Sam Houston Johnson remembered one threatening phone call to the Johnson home. After listening to a death threat, Sam Johnson, Jr., boomed, "Now, listen here, you Ku Klux Klan son-of-a-bitch, if you and your goddamned gang think you're man enough to shoot me, you come on ahead. My brothers and I will be waiting for you out on the front porch."<sup>15</sup>

LBJ learned something that night. He learned of fear and terrorism born of racial and ethnic hatred as he and his brother hid in an earthen cellar near their home while his father, uncles, and older cousins – all with loaded shotguns – waited for the Klansmen. The Johnson men stationed themselves at intervals along a front porch and waited until dawn. Apparently losing their nerve, the terrorists never came. Sam Houston Johnson said later, "The Kukuluxsonofabitches never showed up. But after that my daddy carried a gun wherever he went, even as he sat in the House of Representatives in Austin."<sup>16</sup>

Learning practical lessons from incidents such as Klan threats, and saturated with the news his grandfather and father related – sometimes-current events, sometimes history – young LBJ internalized the lessons. He never gave himself over to irrational racial hatred. As a mature man, he did the opposite; he helped minority groups, advancing their causes whenever he could. According to Horace Busby, a long-time Johnson aide and speechwriter, the mature LBJ often mentioned the Leo Frank case and similar persecutions of others. Johnson said that those kinds of incidents were the sources for his opposition to anti-Semitism and to all other forms of racism. Johnson felt that such events – which led to the Holocaust – were responsible for his internationalism and his opposition to isolationism. He seemed to believe, but left unspoken, that America had a duty to act in the international arena whenever any group carried out genocidal war against another group. Later, another long-time aide, George Reedy, added that LBJ "had less bigotry in him than anybody else I have ever met...he was not a racist."<sup>17</sup>

Given Johnson's early religious teachings, when Charles Marsh and Alice Glass contacted him about a matter involving Jews, the young congressman was willing to listen. Marsh already had helped Johnson with good publicity during his victorious congressional campaign in 1937. The young man was willing, even anxious, to please a benefactor. Marsh and Glass explained how they had begun to provide financial resources to Jewish refugees attempting to escape Germany. They had befriended the brilliant twenty-five-year old Jewish musician Erich Leinsdorf, from Austria, who they had met at the Salzburg Festival. In 1938 Leinsdorf came to the United States on a temporary visa to perform with the New York Metropolitan Opera.

Leinsdorf accepted many invitations to visit Marsh and Glass at the tycoon's countryside farm in Virginia. The Austrian was still in the United States when German Nazi forces rolled over his country, and he had no desire to return home where, most likely, he would be persecuted and possibly murdered. Although he applied for an extension of his visa, eight days before it was to expire, he still had not heard from the immigration service. When Leinsdorf told Marsh and Alice Glass about his problem, they contacted LBJ to ask him for help.<sup>18</sup>

On a Sunday morning, Marsh drove Leinsdorf to Washington's Mayflower Hotel where the newspaperman kept a suite. Johnson met them, heard Leinsdorf's predicament, and the next day began solving the problem. Operation Texas was in motion. Johnson learned that the immigration service had rejected Leinsdorf's application because he had asked for a two-year extension, something not possible under existing American law. But, immigration personnel had not notified Leinsdorf of their decision. Johnson used that oversight as ammunition for strongly pressuring the service to extend the visa, and officials granted Leinsdorf a six-month extension. Next, Operation Texas began in earnest. LBJ first worked on having Leinsdorf's classification changed to permanent resident, a possibility only if the musician went abroad and returned as a regular immigrant from a country whose quota of Austrians had not been reached. After contacting the United States Consul in Havana, Cuba, to make sure the office's quota of Austrians still had slots open, Johnson put together the necessary documents and arranged for Leinsdorf to travel to Cuba and the conductor returned to the U.S. as a permanent resident.<sup>19</sup>

Leinsdorf eventually became director of the Boston Symphony Society, but he never forgot Johnson. He contributed to all of LBJ's political campaigns, and at a party in Georgetown in 1960, Leinsdorf told the story of his rescue as plotted by LBJ, a rescue that involved the stopover in Havana that Johnson arranged. Because the rescue included illegal acts, secrecy had to be maintained. After his remarks, LBJ asked, "Now Erich, this is a lovely story and I certainly would like to hear it again, but let me ask you something; what kind of town shall we now put in that story to replace Havana?"<sup>20</sup>

Leinsdorf's rescue was just the beginning of Operation Texas. Even as Johnson was plotting to save Leinsdorf, Jim Novy – a wealthy leader of Austin's Jewish community and a Johnson friend – planned a trip to Palestine to celebrate his son David's *Bar Mitzvah* and his own twenty-fifth anniversary in America. The two also planned to visit Poland and Germany and spend time with relatives that Jim had not seen since he left Europe.

With his brother Louis, Jim Novy had migrated to the United States in 1913 from a small town in what was then western Russia (now eastern Poland). The two escaped on the eve of World War I and both settled in Austin. Louis Novy became a successful scrap metal dealer. As Novy and his son prepared for their trip, the first German-Czechoslovakia crisis occurred and Nazi anti-Semitism was on the march. LBJ learned of the trip and urged Novy to "get as many Jewish people as possible out of both countries" while predicting that "very difficult" times were about to strike European Jews.<sup>21</sup>

Leaving for Europe in July 1938, Novy became a partner in Operation Texas. He had Congressman Johnson's letter of introduction to diplomats in the United States Embassy in Warsaw. Novy also had a large stack of immigration papers signed and counter-signed, to use at the appropriate time. The papers had no names; Novy was to supply the names after he located and identified Jews who wanted out. Johnson's maneuver was the key to success. Ordinarily America's overseas embassies arranged and approved visas, but

LBJ had the Department of State in Washington approve them beforehand. Johnson and his staff wrote the appropriate letters, checking and rechecking to ensure that the materials would pass the scrutiny of all immigration officials.

The Novy's hid the papers among their personal possessions. At one point, they rode in a railroad car that had a microphone hanging from the ceiling, probably placed there by the Gestapo. Father and son made innocent small talk but mostly remained silent. When they reached their destination, Germans in Poland called them "dirty Jews," among other things. Once in Warsaw, they went to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and were shocked to learn that the group was spending money on new furniture while more unfortunate Jews were lacking food. Novy became upset and criticized the committee for not doing more. At the American embassy, Novy learned that Johnson had called and asked for the consul's cooperation in processing the pre-approved visas.

Forty-two Jews from Poland and Germany, including four of Novy's relatives, received the documents, fled Europe, and lived while millions more were about to die. The Novys did more than pass out documents. Jim agreed to pay the expenses of Jews who could not afford the trip, and he promised to provide for them until they found jobs and homes. Novy and his son learned of a new threat when they reached Paris, where they stopped before continuing to Palestine. The second German-Czech crisis was in the wind and war might break out at any time. Rumors were rampant that the Germans might even have attacked Alsace-Lorraine, a border province long disputed between France and Germany and the Novy's faced the possibility of becoming trapped in Europe. Believing such a threat possible, LBJ frantically contacted authorities in Europe until he found the Novys in Paris. In the middle of the night, a man from the United States embassy banged on their hotel door and roused them from their beds. Afraid, they refused to respond until the visitor slipped his credentials under the door. Once inside, the representative relayed Johnson's message demanding that they immediately return to the United States. They booked passage on the next ship bound for America. They never made it to Palestine, but they could celebrate, for, with LBJ's help, they had saved the lives of forty-two human beings.<sup>23</sup>

After Jim Novy returned home, he received a letter from Berlin's Ernst Israel Rychtwalski addressed to the "Jewish Relief Association, Austin, U.S.A." No such organization existed, but a post office worker sent it to Novy, who did not know Rychtwalski but who listened to the man's appeal. He was writing on behalf of Adel and Fanny Gontshar, a Jewish mother and daughter who lived in Berlin.<sup>23</sup> Rychtwalski asked Novy to help them get out of Germany before the Nazis crushed them. Novy's concern for Jews such as the Gontshars meshed with LBJ's continuing concern. Working together, they arranged for the Gontshars to make a sudden dash out of Germany, destination, Texas.<sup>24</sup>

By 1939, Johnson had become more and more distressed about the precarious position of European Jews. Although it was not common knowledge

that the Nazis intended to exterminate millions of Jews, Johnson believed that it was only a matter of time before the Holocaust would begin. He knew of the international rejection of Jewish refugee ships, including rejection by the United States, and he knew of England's policy of thwarting Jewish migration to Palestine.<sup>25</sup> Unwilling to stand by while Nazis murdered the "People of the Book," Johnson met with Jewish leaders and said simply, "we must do something to get Jews out of Europe."<sup>26</sup>

So LBJ expanded Operation Texas. Using methods, sometimes legal and sometimes illegal, and using cash supplied by wealthy benefactors such as Jim Novy, Johnson smuggled hundreds of Jews into Texas, using Galveston as the entry port. Money bought false passports and visas in Cuba, Mexico, and other Latin American countries. As Johnson smuggled Jews into Texas, he gave them new names and hid them in the Texas National Youth Administration (NYA), a New Deal agency he had once headed in Texas. Johnson's task was made easier because his longtime friend, Jesse Kellum, directed the NYA in Texas. Although most of the Texas NYA records were later lost or destroyed, Morris Shapiro, Jim Novy's son-in-law, and other sources, verified that many Jews were routed through the state's NYA. Although it was illegal to harbor and train non-citizens in the NYA programs, the refugees were housed at various sites scattered around the state. Novy reimbursed the NYA for all expenses, including room-and-board for the trainees. He also covered the cost of classes for those who did not speak English and for vocational training so refugees could "blend" into American society.

Johnson channeled many men into NYA welding schools since welders were in high demand during the war preparedness campaign of 1940-1941 and then in the war itself. He also took advantage of his close relationship with President Franklin Roosevelt. Although Johnson became the first congressman to enlist in the service after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt called him home and put him in charge of the Navy's shipbuilding personnel. In that capacity, Johnson made sure that "his" refugees were hired. Other Jews that he aided worked in a strange assortment of jobs, including liquor stores, carnivals, and janitors in schools. Jim Novy's son David estimated that Johnson and his father saved as many as four or five hundred Jews, possibly more.<sup>27</sup>

The rescue efforts were offset by failures. With his wife Lili, the physician Otto Lippmann escaped after the Nazis revoked his license to practice medicine and he became a target of the Gestapo. Lippmann's mother, who lived in a Jewish ladies home remained in Germany and he appealed to LBJ to help him get her out of Germany. Johnson worked for eighteen months to get her out, but was ultimately unsuccessful. "We tried everything," Lippmann later recounted. Arrested before she could escape, Mrs. Lippmann was sent to a small death camp in Poland and executed. LBJ also failed to save Herman Winter. Approached by Rabbi Abram Vossen Goodman on Winter's behalf, Johnson tried to extricate him, but the Nazis arrested Winter before he could escape. Like Lippmann's mother, Winter also died in a concentration camp. Despite such setbacks, Operation Texas was for the most part successful.<sup>28</sup>



Operation Texas also included aid to Jews already in Palestine who were "underground fighters." In March 1942, Novy hosted a World War II bond drive party for thirty or so influential Texans and invited Johnson to make remarks. After they raised their quota for the bond drive, Johnson rose, gave his listeners some "straight talk" about the European and Middle Eastern situations, and then raised yet more cash – the new money ear-marked for the Palestine Jewish "underground."<sup>29</sup> While in the midst of Operation Texas, Johnson gave voice to why anti-Semitism was wrong, especially in America. In his remarks, Johnson said, "without tolerance and mutual understanding, without a sincere sense of the rights of our neighbors to differ in their views from us, this nation is endangered. We spring from too many races and nationalities and religions here to find unity in any intolerant theory of race and creed."<sup>30</sup>

Operation Texas continued after the United States entered World War II. Novy reported that in 1942 Johnson sent him on a secret mission to Europe. The Jewish businessman said that the job was so dangerous that he did not tell his family, not even his wife and children what he was doing. Novy knew that he might be caught, identified, and shot by German authorities. Soon after his return, Novy, a civilian, received a Purple Heart, something almost unheard of because such an award normally goes to only members of the military wounded during combat. Years later, in 1958, Novy told a reporter of his mission, but refused to answer specific questions, saying that "only when Senator Johnson says so will I tell the story."<sup>31</sup>

With the conclusion of World War II, LBJ had the sad opportunity to see what he fought against when he took on the Nazis in Operation Texas. With other congressional leaders, Johnson flew to Europe to inspect conditions and visit the horrific death camps. On 4 June 1945, his party visited the concentration camp at Dachau.<sup>32</sup> After passing through the camp's black iron gate with a banner stating *Arbeit Macht Frei* (work brings freedom), the Americans were stunned. They saw death up-close and even smelled the stench of it. Some people in the diplomatic party wept. One of the congressmen, Louisiana's F. Edward Herbert, summed up the feelings of all the observers with, "God, how can men do to other men what these beasts have done...[the Nazis have] destroyed the last vestige of decency in the human being...[young boys are] emaciated, puny, weak, devastated, some beyond hope of redemption...death is their only salvation[,] and they are still dying at the rate of 40 a day."<sup>33</sup>

LBJ agreed with Herbert's views even though he may have remained in Paris. Johnson heard reports from observers, Herbert included, that detailed the murders and torture in the concentration camps. Such cruel scenes were reinforced by the committee's visit to Italy. As Donald Cook remembered, in a comment that also related to the Vietnam War, "The worst [of the poverty] was down at Palermo...where there were tremendous lines of people who would form with their pots and pans and dishes to get a ration of soup from the [American] Navy, which was turning out this stuff [soup] out of the

garbage from the vessels." It was a saddening episode," Cook continued, "but it kept them alive... [Congressmen Johnson] was appalled... the realities of war made a very, very, deep impression on him, and I think that a recollection of those realities undoubtedly played a part in his initial opposition to going into Vietnam. That's one of the reasons why I'm sure that a tremendous selling job was done on him [to escalate the Vietnam War]"<sup>34</sup> Lady Bird Johnson later recalled that when her husband returned home he was still shaken, stunned, terrorized, and "bursting with overpowering revulsion and incredulous horror at what he had seen."<sup>35</sup> Linda Johnson Robb, the Johnson's oldest daughter, added, "He came home after that trip, and he wouldn't talk about it. He was just miserable. It was as if he were (sic) struck by some terrible illness... Depressed and wordless, he took to his bed."<sup>36</sup>

The horrors of Dachau and other killing fields may help explain Johnson's foreign policy as president. He was a man torn by inner-conflict. Although he questioned the Vietnam War at first, to LBJ, Dachau meant "never again." Never again should unarmed people be murdered by madmen. From the 1940s to the 1960s, Johnson saw the United States as defender of the free world, the defender that could not let Dachau happen again whether by fascists or communists, by the political right or the political left. Such views explain why Johnson bowed to his advisors and reversed his early view on Vietnam, ultimately insisting on "saving" South Vietnam. After much "soul-searching," he cast the Vietnamese struggle as one that could produce another Dachau. He feared that millions of unarmed civilians would be butchered by a powerful, hate-filled foe. Perhaps he wanted another Operation Texas, a chance to save lives by opposing what he saw as the aggression of North Vietnam.

Operation Texas was a secret affair. Some LBJ aides, friends, and associates even denied that it existed. There is no mountain of evidence that divulges all of the specifics of the scheme, but evidence does substantiate that it existed. First, that LBJ was addicted to the telephone is legendary. He seldom wrote things down. Sometimes he made as many as 100 calls a day. Second, certain aspects of the scheme were illegal. Thus, there would not be a "paper trail" that would implicate people in such a plot. A one-time NYA administrator and Johnson friend, Elizabeth Goldschmidt, denied any knowledge of Operation Texas, but she was not stationed in Texas between 1938 and 1943. However, she did offer with a sly grin, "Of course, in those days we all took a loose view of what we could and couldn't do."<sup>37</sup> Jack Baumel, an engineer who worked for the Texas Railroad Commission and who was also one of Johnson's friends, recalled that LBJ once said, "We had to do something to the Jews out of Europe." Baumel added, "There's no question that LBJ was instrumental in helping literally hundred of Jews get into the U.S., especially through Galveston."<sup>38</sup> Jim Novy's son Dave confirmed that the operation existed, as did Novy's son-in-law, Mike Shapiro. Professor David Bell and Barby Weincr, co-chairmen of the Criteria Committee for the selection of the Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum's annual Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award, believe that LBJ saved at least two score of Jews in 1938 and,

subsequently, likely saved “several hundred [more] through other lesser-known and even riskier means.”<sup>39</sup>

The best witness is Jim Novy. The Jewish leader finally made the story public during the 30 December 1963 dedication of Austin’s newest synagogue, Agudas Achim. Invited to the ceremonies by Novy, LBJ and Lady Bird were in attendance, with the president scheduled to make remarks. Knowing that the new president was well beyond prosecution for his acts of long ago, Novy told the story to 400 synagogue members and their guests, along with Austin’s civic leaders and local newspaper, radio, and television reporters. He did not discuss his secret 1942 mission to Europe, the details of which the public and later historians will never know. Novy’s presentation, humorous at times, drew much laughter from the crowd, beginning with his order to President Johnson, then the most powerful man in the world. “If I get mixed up, you help me out!”<sup>40</sup> Even Lady Bird had to cover her mouth and try to stifle her laughter, while the president only smiled and nodded that he would do what Novy demanded.

After Novy finished his story, he introduced LBJ by looking over to him and – trying to hold back tears – said with a breaking voice, “We can’t ever thank him enough for all those Jews he got out of Germany during the days of Hitler.” Then pointing to the first row where four small boys were sitting, Novy added, “There’s the ...current generation, and they’ll be watching [out] for you and helping you [while you are president].”<sup>41</sup>

LBJ gave a speech that lasted approximately twelve minutes. He began by saying how glad he was that his first unofficial speech as president was one presented in a “house of worship in my hometown.” Continuing, for the first time publicly, he “owned up” to Operation Texas to celebrate human life, to acknowledge Jewish support, and to determine that long before his presidency he had become involved with the Jewish community in a positive way. Humanism shined through in the remarks of both Novy and Johnson.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the ceremonies, the crowd mobbed Novy and both the Johnsons. Lady Bird remembered that “person after person plucked at my sleeve and said, ‘I wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for him. He helped me get out.’”<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the testimonials provided the ultimate “truth-test” that Operation Texas was a success. Wrote a reporter for the *Houston Chronicle*, “Johnson was a man who took considerable risk with his political career to uphold the message [racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance] for the future. Thus, many Jews have Johnson to thank for their lives because of his display of moral courage.”<sup>44</sup>

Lyndon Johnson is often criticized by many laymen and professional historians. He has been stereotyped as a crude Texan who had few serious beliefs, an opportunist only out for personal political gain.<sup>45</sup> Operation Texas belied that image. The rescue efforts saved hundreds of Jews from the Holocaust. Johnson cared for the “People of the Book,” as he obviously revered human life and detested suffering caused by naked aggression and racial and ethnic animosity. While he agonized over the loss of life during the Vietnam War (a war he repeatedly tried to end with secret negotiations), he remained consis-

tent in his attempts to help others. Because of his domestic policies, he became known as the “Education President” and the “Civil Rights President.” He fought a “War on Poverty” that reduced the United States poverty rate to eleven percent in just five short years. In his humanism, Johnson tried to help Jews, Blacks, Latinos, or other minorities. He made it to the top, and he took as many people with that he could.

#### Afterward:

In 1951, Israel needed money and material to help Jewish refugees coming in the new country. LBJ successfully lobbied the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for \$150 million to help with the problem.<sup>46</sup>

In July 1956, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on the LBJ Ranch to protest his willingness to help minorities.<sup>47</sup> A message with the cross proclaimed, “Our favorite son must serve Texas and America, not B’nai B’rith.”<sup>48</sup>

In his speech about the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Johnson said, “Our Constitution, the foundation of our republic, forbids [discrimination]. The principles of our freedom forbids it. Morality forbids it. And the law I sign tonight forbids it.”<sup>49</sup>

In October 1965, Johnson signed a new immigration bill that voided the old racist act of 1924.<sup>50</sup>

In 1994, the Holocaust Education Center and Memorial Museum established the Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award. The award could be given to someone who committed a single act of moral courage or to someone whose entire career displayed that virtue. LBJ, said the committee, acted by “stretching his authority to its utmost and risking the personal dreams his actions might shatter [if he failed].”<sup>51</sup>

One observer wrote, “John F. Kennedy once said that ‘each time a man stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others or speaks out against injustice, he sends out a ripple of hope...these ripples [become] a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression’...Lyndon Johnson chose not to make a ripple. He made a [tidal] wave.”

#### NOTES

Abbreviations:

LBJ Lyndon Baines Johnson

LBJL Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas

OH Oral History Collection

<sup>1</sup>Frank Oltorf, OH, Erich Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.; Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York, 1983), p. 481.

<sup>2</sup>Pierre van Paassen and James Waterman Wise, eds. *NAZISM: An Assault on Civilization* (New York: 1934). The LBJ Library (LBJL) has the original inscribed volume that LBJ gave Lady Bird; for more on van Paassen’s anti-Nazi efforts, see H. David Kirk, “Pierre van Paassen: Righteous Journalist,” *Midstream* (May 1991), pp. 42–43, and van Paassen, “Every German Jew Doomed to Death, Slavery, or Exile,” *Toronto Star* [Canada], March 26, 1934; Tom Tugend, “LBJ

as a Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post* [international edition', September 28, 1991; *Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997: "Was President Lyndon B. Johnson a Righteous Gentile?," *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter* (Winter 1992, p. 5. van Paassen's journalism career took him to Berlin in the late 1920s. In 1928 he had his first interview with Hitler in addition to talking to many of Hitler's Nazi followers in the city's beer halls. After condemning the Nazis, he was beaten by Hitler's hoodlums, arrested, and accused of spreading "atrocious propaganda." After they came to power, the Nazis expelled van Paassen from Germany and banned his paper, the *Toronto Star*. In addition to Nazism, van Paassen wrote several books, including *Days of Our Years* (1939), in which he traced developments that destroyed peace in Europe, and *The Time is Now* (1941), where he told the democracies what had to be done to defeat the Axis powers. After the war van Paassen became a revisionist Zionist and followed founder Zev Jabotinsky. For yet more on van Paassen's career, see Kirk, "Righteous Journalist," pp. 42-43.

"Complete Voting Record of LBJ." LBJL; Louis S. Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ's Foreign Affairs Background," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1989), p. 197.

"For the Roosevelt Administration's Jewish Policy, see Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, 1970); Robert Dalleck, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: 1991), p. 169; Other books pertinent to the topic include David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: 1984); Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: 1981); Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust*, (Champaign, 1984); Also informative is the film, "Holocaust Education," in the LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum of Houston, Houston, Texas [hereinafter abbreviated Holocaust film].

Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.

"Jessie Johnson Hatcher, OH, LBJL.; Joseph H. Banta, "President Lyndon B. Johnson," *The Christadelphian* (January 1964)), pp. 26-27; Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Nashville: 1890), pp. 72-73; Rebekah Baines Johnson, *A Family Album* (New York, 1965), pp. 70-71, 90.; H.P. Mansfield, *Israel's Revival: Sure Sign of Christ's Coming* (Pasadena: 1981), pp. 1-7; Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York: 1984).; Caro, *Path to Power*, p. 27.

Banta, "LBJ," *The Christadelphian*, pp. 26-27.; Mead, *Handbook of Denominations*, pp. 72-73.; Hatcher, OH, LBJL.; Mansfield, *Israel's Revival*, pp. 1-7.; Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*.; R.B. Johnson, *Family Album*, pp. 70-71.; Holocaust Film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Tugend, "LBJ," Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.; "Johnson a Righteous Gentile?" *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5; Claudia Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Houston Chronicle: Texas Magazine* [hereinafter cited *Texas*], September 27, 1998, p. 10.; *Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997.

Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 10.

"R.B. Johnson, *Family Album*, pp. 18-19.; Johnson a Righteous Gentile?" *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5.

"*Austin Daily Statesman*, May 26, October 11, 16, 22, 23, 29, November 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 1913; Banta, "LBJ," *The Christadelphian*, p. 26.; Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: 1968), pp. 2, 4-5, 64-73.; Robert Devine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952* (New York: 1972), pp. 4-5.; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 10.

"*Austin Daily Statesman*, November 1, 1913.; August 17, 18, 22, 1915.; *New York Times*, May 15, 25, 29, 1915.; Dinnerstein, *Leo Frank*, pp. 55-119.; John Gunther, *Taken at the Flood: The Story of Albert D. Lasker*, (New York: 1960), p. 88.; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 10.

Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.

<sup>13</sup>Dinnerstein, *Leo Frank*, pp. 95-98.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 12-12.; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>14</sup>Feldman "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 10.; Holocaust film, C. Anderson to L. Robb, January 18, 1994, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Johnson Righteous Gentile?," *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.

<sup>15</sup>Sam Houston Johnson, *My Brother Lyndon* (New York: 1970) pp. 30-31.; *Fredericksburg Standard*, March 23, April 6, 1918.; *State Observer*, June 10, 1940.; Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Johnson's Boy*, (New York: 1968), p. 20.; Ronnie Dugger, *The Drive for Power, From the Frontier to Master of the Senate* (New York: 1982), p. 91.; Robert L. Phinney, OH, LBJL.; Wright Patman, "Patman Cites Klan Fight by President's Father." *Washington Post*, April 1, 1964.

<sup>16</sup>S. Johnson, *My Brother Lyndon*, pp. 30-31.; Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: 1980), p. 20.

<sup>17</sup>George Recdy, OH, Horace Busby, OH, LBJL, Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston; "Johnson a Righteous Gentile?," *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>Erich Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL; Erich Leinsdorf, *Cadenza: A Musical Career* (Boston, 1976), pp. 56, 75-79; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; *Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 30-34.

<sup>19</sup>Erich Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.; Leinsdorf, *Cadenza*, pp. 75-79.; Caro, *Path to Power*, pp. 481-482.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; *Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 30-34.

<sup>20</sup>Erich Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.

<sup>21</sup>Jim Novy, "Introduction of the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, Dedication Dinner Agudas Achim Synagogue," Austin, Texas, December 30, 1963, Jim Novy Papers, LBJL (hereinafter abbreviated "Dedication Dinner"); President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Dedication Congregation Agudas Achim, Austin, Texas, December 30, 1963," Tape Recording, LBJL (hereinafter abbreviated "LBJ Recording"); Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 36.; Dalleck, *Lone Star Rising*, pp. 169-170.; Charles Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 8.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.; "Johnson a Righteous Gentile?," *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 8.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.

<sup>23</sup>Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 8.; Dalleck, *Lone Star Rising*, p. 169.; Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.

<sup>24</sup>Novy, "Dedication Dinner;," "LBJ Recording;," Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 44-46.; Dalleck, *Lone Star Rising*, p. 170.; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, pp. 8-9.; Johnson a Righteous Gentile?," *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.; *Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997.; *Jewish Herald Voice*, August 10, 1994.; Julie Lambert, "Holocaust Museum Presents the Third Annual Lyndon Baines Johnson Moral Courage Award" [new release], November 17, 1997, Archives, Holocaust Museum, Houston.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 31.

<sup>25</sup>See Edward Bernard Glick, *The Triangular Connection: America, Israel, and American Jews* (London: 1982); Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*; Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy*, (New York: 1968); and Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 48-49.

<sup>26</sup>LBJ quoted in Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 49.

<sup>27</sup>Novy, "Dedication Dinner," and "LBJ Recording," Leinsdorf, OH, LBJL.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 49-50.; *The Jewish Examiner*, November 14, 1941.; Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; "LBJ a Righteous Gentile?," *Texas Jewish Historical Society Newsletter*, p. 5.; Tugend, "LBJ Philo-Semite," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 1991.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, pp. 9-10.; *Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997.; *Jewish Herald-Voice*, August 10, 1994. Carol Weisenberger, whose book on the Texas NYA was well received, told Claudia Anderson, archivist at the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, that most local records of the Texas NYA had been destroyed, thus making it impossible to verify the number of Jews routed through the program. See Claudia Anderson, "Memo of Conversation with Carol Weisenberger," Xerox copy, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston. Rescuers of the Jews may have saved at least 500,000 lives, if not more. See "Christine Gorman. A Conspiracy of Goodness," *Time* (March 16, 1992), p. 65.

<sup>28</sup>"Oral Reference Request." Rabbi Abram V. Goodman, March 31, 1997, staff memo, LBJ Papers, Archives, LBJL.; holocaust Film, LBJ papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 7.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>29</sup>*Austin American Statesman*, March 21, 23, 25, 30, 1941.; "Newspaper clipping," n.d.. Novy Papers, LBJL.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 63.

<sup>30</sup>*Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997.

<sup>31</sup>*Jerusalem Post* [Israel], September 23, 1958.; Austin Jewish Community Council, "Resolution Condemning England's ban on Jewish Immigration to Palestine," Novy Papers, LBJL.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 62.

<sup>32</sup>F. Edward Herbert, OH, Donald C. Cook, OH, Sterling Cole, OH, LBJL.; Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," pp. 64-67.

<sup>33</sup>F. Edward Herbert, *I Went, I Saw, I Heard: being the European Diary of F. Edw. Herbert. Member of Congress from Louisiana* (New Orleans: privately printed, n.d.). June 4, 1945, entry.

<sup>34</sup>Cook, OH, Herbert OH, Cole, OH, C. Anderson, response to oral reference request by David Bell, April 29, 1994, C. Anderson to Lynda [Johnson] Robb, January 18, 1994, LBJ Papers, LBJL. A copy of Anderson's response to Bell and her letter to Robb is in the LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup>Lady Bird Johnson, quoted in Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ," p. 67.; Cook, OH, LBJL.; C. Anderson to L. Robb, January 18, 1994, LBJ Papers, LBJL, copy in LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>36</sup>Linda Johnson Robb, quoted in Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 12.; Cook OH, LBJL.

<sup>37</sup>Elizabeth Goldschmidt, OH, LBJL.; Goldschmidt is also quoted in Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup>Jack Baumel, quoted in Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup>*Jewish Herald-Voice*, August 10, 1994.

<sup>40</sup>Novy, "Dedication Dinner," Novy Papers, "LBJ Recording," LBJL.

<sup>41</sup>Novy, "Dedication Dinner," Novy Papers, "LBJ Recording," LBJL.; Lady Bird Johnson, *White House Diary*, (New York: 1970), p. 28.; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup>See *Austin American Statesman*, December 31, 1963.; *New York Times*, December 31, 1962.; *Houston Post*, December 31, 1963.; Lady Bird Johnson, *White House Diary*, p. 28.

<sup>43</sup>Lady Bird Johnson, *White House Diary*, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup>*Houston Chronicle*, December 24, 1997; Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas*, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup>See, for example, Caro, *Path to Power*, and Dugger, *The Politician*.

<sup>46</sup>Holocaust film. LBJ Papers, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>47</sup>Anderson to L. Robb, January 18, 1994, LBJ Papers, LBJL, copy in LBJ Papers, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>48</sup>Anderson to L. Robb, January 18, 1994, LBJ Papers, LBJL, copy in LBJ Papers, Holocaust film Archives. Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>49</sup>Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>50</sup>Holocaust film, LBJ Papers, Archives, Holocaust Center and Memorial Museum, Houston.

<sup>51</sup>*Jewish Herald-Voice*, August 10, 1994.