

Trudy Gold - Poland and the Jews

- Good afternoon, everyone. Today I begin to talk about Poland and the Jews. And it's obviously an incredibly controversial issue, and it's still a controversial issue to this day. And I found, over the years of teaching, that many of my students have had far more hostility towards Poland than they have towards the Germans. And I remember when we used to run tours. I used to teach in Poland, just after communism collapsed, and under the auspices of the ITF, now IRA. We used to run seminars in Poland and Lithuania, and it was a fascinating experience teaching Polish teachers about the Shoah, an area that they didn't know. So I'm probably going to have to do at least two sessions on this because... I think it's very important that we address this properly. I used to hear from my friends who were Polish, nothing is as it seems over there. And I think that's true. And I'm actually going to start this presentation from a poem by Antoni Slonimski. It's called "Elegy for the Jewish Villages."

Visual slides are displayed throughout the presentation.

And he himself was complicated. He was the grandson of Hayyim Slonimski, who was the founder of the first "Hebrew Weekly" in Poland with an emphasis on sciences. His dates were 1895 to 1976. His father converted, married a Catholic woman, and he studied at the Academy of Fine Art. And in 1990, he founded the Skamander Group of Jewish Poets with Julian Tuwim, also a very important poet. And it was Julian Tuwim who said, "If it was so good, why was it so bad?" I spent a lot of time when I ran the LJCC with Felek Scharf. I've mentioned him to you many times. His great-grandfather was the rabbi of Oswiecim, Auschwitz. His mother had come from Vienna, was modern, and he was really stuck between two cultures. He knew an awful lot about Poland. He knew a lot about Polish literature. And in the end, when he was quite ill, he would take me walking on Hampstead Heath quoting Polish poetry to me. And I said, I don't understand it. He said, but you've got to hear the rhythm. So, and he was really caught between two cultures. And it was he who said to me, you've got to try and understand, we walked the same earth, we looked at the same sky. How much do our worlds connect?

And I think the reason we have to give so much attention to Poland is that Poland was the city in Europe with the largest Jewish community in the world. On the eve of war, there were three and a quarter million Jews living in Poland. And it was the heartland of the Jewish world. And at that time, in 1939, you had every aspect of the Jewish world. You had the assimilationist, not that large in Poland, you had the Zionist of every shade. Felek in his early days was a Revisionist. You had the Revisionist, you had the Left Wingers, you had the Bundists, you had the Communists, you had those who wanted an accommodation with Poland, you had those who loved Piłsudski. And the other point that I find absolutely fascinating, coming from London, how many Jewish newspapers do we have? There were 40 Jewish newspapers, Hebrew papers, Yiddish papers. There was a brilliant Yiddish theatre in Poland. Today it still exists where you have non-Jewish actors performing in Yiddish for other Poles.

There was Jewish cinema. It was the greatest in the world. And many of them later on, of

course, made it to America. But it was the heartland of Yiddish cinema, Yiddish Theatre. There was incredibly sophisticated poetry. There were great Jewish artists. It was the heartland of European Jewry. And I think it deserves a lot of attention to see if we can come to terms. I'm not asking for reconciliation. I would never dream of using that word. But if we can come to terms with Poland, because... And let me start by reading from Antoni Slominski, and I'm going to read it very slowly. Felek's phrase, Felek's wrote that, if you can see the bullet points that, bless Judi, she put up for me, "Poland, what do I have to do with you?" Was actually a title of a book that Felek Scharf wrote. And it's half in Polish and it's half in English. And to me that sums up so much about Polish Jewry. So this is Antoni Slominski "Elegy for the Jewish villages", Gone are the little towns where the shoemaker was a poet, the watchmaker a philosopher, the barber a troubadour.

Faced now of the little towns where the wind joined biblical songs with Polish tunes and Slavik rue Where all Jews in orchids in the shade of cherry trees lamented for the holy wars of Jerusalem. Gone now are these little towns through the poetic mists, the moons, the winds, the ponds, the stars above them have recorded in the blood of centuries, the tragic tales, the history of the two saddest nations on earth. The Jews and the Poles. Remember that last phrase, "the history of the two saddest nations on earth". When the Poles see Auschwitz, they see it as their national tragedy. When we see Auschwitz, it's a symbol of the destruction of the Jewish people and perhaps it's also a destruction of the world. So let me give you an example of some of the problems that are happening now. Going a little bit back into history, I dunno how many of you remember the period of the controversy over the crosses of Auschwitz.

Catholics died in Auschwitz, including a nun called Edith Stein. Edith Stein died and was therefore a Catholic martyr. However, the reason she was murdered by Hitler was both her parents were Jewish. What happened with the crosses at Auschwitz, in the perimeter the convent had established crosses. And radical Jewish group said, this is a Shanda, you are defaming a Jewish place. So... It's such a complicated story. Felek was one of the founders of the Jewish Cultural Centre in Kraków. And I went with him to the opening. It was very bizarre. It was at the Jagiellonian University. His old Alma Marta. The problem was he'd been unable to do his PhD there because of the quota. That's what saved his life. There must have been about a dozen Jews in a huge audience and listening to Cantorial music, that's Poland.

And all the little stalls in the market in Kraków, they had garden gnomes, I suppose that's how you'd put it, dressed up as Hasids. It is bizarre. And then if you talk to sensitive Poles, they talk about what happened when they lost their Jews. There are Polish students at the Jagiellonian University and University of Warsaw studying Hebrew literature, studying Cantorial music, studying the world that they think they lost as well. And yet today you have a very nationalist government who is very zealous of the reputation of Poland. And is it a crime now to actually say that any Pole was complicit in the Holocaust when you have great scholars like Jan Gross who electrified the Polish world, horrified the Polish world, electrified the Jewish world with his book on Jedwabne, which was actually a massacre perpetrated by Jews. And it seems there were many mass-- Perpetrated on Jews by the Poles.

And it seems there were many such massacres. On the other hand, there are more Poles commemorated in the avenue of the righteous in Yad Vashem than any other nation. But on the other hand, there were more Poles. So what I'm trying to do to start with is to give you, if you like, a notion of an incredibly complex story. I want to say from the beginning, I tried very hard to be as objective as possible. But one of the problems with every one of us, when I say objective as possible, I will read as many books as I possibly can on any subject. I will listen to people. And I've been incredibly fortunate because over the years, many Poles, Lithuanians, Latvian actually came to class with their stories. And I had some wonderful friends who told me so much. And I know there are people online who know an awful lot about Poland.

And yet I have to see it through my own prism, who I am. So even that is a difficult story. So what I'm going to try and do is to explain why Poland was so central and how it was that this terrible hostility developed. Bearing in mind, and this is my last thought, when the Nazis conquered Poland and we're going to be dealing with this next week, never forget that the Nazi occupation of Poland was the harshest anywhere. All Poles had to do, was to count up to 500 and to be able to write their names. I've seen Polish textbooks for Polish schools under the Nazis. If children looked Aryan, they were ripped away from their parents. The Polish intelligence here was murdered. They see it as their tragedy. That's why I think Sloni's note is so interesting, "the two saddest nations on earth". And so let's go back and remember Poland was the heartland. It was also the refuge for Jews. So I know some of you will know this history quite well and others of you, it's new to you. So what I'm going to do is give you an overview and later on, when our website is developed. And please don't contact Judi on this yet.

There there will be previous lectures that I gave between six and nine months ago in much more detail about Poland. So what I'm doing today is to give you an overview so you understand, those of you who don't come from Eastern Europe, you understand just how important Eastern European Jewry was. And something else, I have a hunch that the majority of you listening today, your roots come from Poland. Whether you say you came from Ukraine, Lithuania, or Poland or Russia, you are Eastern European Jewry. And at one stage it was part of the kingdom of Poland. And that's what I'm going to explain. So we know, I love me mediaeval history because it's really detective stories and building up a picture. And Poland actually means Polani, dwells in the plains. And the context, Poland was very much the bridge between the European West and the Arabian and Byzantine East and also the Asian continent. And we also know that Khazaria in the Crimea was at the centre of trade.

Khazari is fascinating because sometime in the late eighth century, they converted, either the rulers converted to Judaism or the whole kingdom converted to Judaism. Arthur Koestler wrote a brilliant book called "The Thirteenth Tribe". It's worth a read, but don't take it as historical fact. It's just very interesting. Now, we also know that there was a whole group of Jewish merchants called the Radhanites. They knew Arabic, Persian, Greek, Frankish, the Slav languages. And we know what they traded in. And this is before Poland is developed as a kingdom. They traded in forest, in the products of the forest. Now what are they? The hides the horses, the animal

skins. Think about it, swords, luxury goods from the east, silk and furs. And we know that the trade root came through Kraków. So we know that the earliest record we have of Jewish merchants is 1028. Where you have these Radhanite merchants who run the fertile crescent. They go from the east, they would finish up in Kaifeng in China and Kraków was one of their stops. And we also have an account of a Jewish community in Kiev in 1113. And we know that Jews are heavily involved in all this trading.

They also traded in slaves. It's important to remember that tragically, people were commodities. Now the history of the recorded state, it really begins around 992 when Boris Slav is cut of the Piast Dynasty, is crowned the first king of Poland. Now, what happens is Poland develops as a very large kingdom and in 1241 the Mongols sweep in from the east and they decimate the area. So consequently there's huge depopulation and it's at this stage in 1264, the Jews are given a charter of protection and privileges. They already realise Poland's going to develop as an interesting state with more nobles per capita than any other state in Europe. And they realise, they already know what the Jews are doing in western and central Europe. Pushed out of most trades and professions by the Christians, Poland has become Christianized. These people nevertheless can be very useful. We are underpopulated. They're bringing in peasants from the German lands, from Prussia. Prussia, the land known as Prussia at this stage it's Proske and it's later going to become a state of the Teutonic Knights.

Later on when you think about Hitler and Poland, it's going to be very important to think in these ridiculous terms, I'm afraid. So what happens is you have the sweeping in of Polish peasant-- Of German peasantry, but also Jews. They're very, very useful and they move into every branch of the economy. And what do they become? The merchants and the money lenders. There are various charters of ratification. The greatest of all is in 1334 with Kazimierz the Great. He completely enlarges Jewish privileges. And what happens is that the Jews are more or less allowed a kingdom within a kingdom. Po-lin: Here shall we rest. What happens is, in return for really oiling the wheels of the economy, for setting up the inns, running the infrastructure of trade, 'cause you have a peasantry and a nobility. The kings allow them privileges. Look, there's going to be hiccups. Let me just read what Bishop Olesnick said about Kazimierz. Do not imagine that he matches touching the Christian religion, you are at liberty to pass any law you please. No one is great or strong enough to put down all opposition.

I therefore beseech and implore your majesty to revoke the aforementioned privileges and liberties, prove you are a Catholic sovereign and remove all occasion for disgracing your name and worse offences that follow. This is the Catholic church fighting back. Basically these Jews are dangerous, but basically Kazimierz realised just how much he needed the Jews. So basically he ignores the charter, he extends privileges. And in 1335, Kraków was his capital, he establishes a separate town called Kazimierz, and that is going to become the Jewish area of settlement. He also issues privileges to the Jews of Trakai, which is a wonderful place to visit if ever we are at liberty to do so. So under Kazimierz, Polin, this is fascinating, this is a Hasidic phrase, "here shall we rest". Because really from this period, right up until 1648, not 1690. In 1648, the period of the catastrophe, for nearly 300 years you had an extraordinary period.

Yes, there were hiccups, there were expulsions, sometimes the German merchants, and you see the emergence of a small Polish merchant class, there's animosity that leads to expulsion. But compared with the rest of Europe, think what's happening. Expulsions from England in 1290, expulsions from France, the year of the Black Death, 1348. It meant that more and more Ashkenazi Jews, Ashkenazi is the word German, flee into Poland and they set up for themselves the Qahals, the council of the four lands. They basically administer their own world. So say for example, and you have the development of the shtetlekh. The shtetlekh are villages and towns on the estates of the nobility. Every community had it's shtetln who would deal with the... Would actually deal with the lord. He would deal with the estates. 'Cause what were the Polish aristocracy doing? What aristocrats always do, hunting, shooting, fishing, and going to war and being at the court, you needed an estate manager. And because it was liberal, Jews could live a Jewish life. The Rabbonim had huge power.

And really this is where Jewish self-help develops. Because if you think about the council of the four lands, which is based largely on the kingdom of Poland, which is enlarged because the queen, the 12 year old queen of Poland marries the pagan king of Lithuania to really hold back the Teutonic Knights. 12 year old girl is sacrificed and that amalgamates Poland and Lithuania. And so the Jews living in this area are living in this vast kingdom, which is later enlarged when they are next Ukraine. Ukraine means "borderlands". And of course it was Jews who go into the Ukraine to parcel up the land for the nobility. So, I want you to imagine a shtetl, you would have the rabbis really in control. The greatest thing that your son can be is a Talmudic scholar. It wasn't completely rosy if you think about it, the poor were the poor, the rich were the rich. But Jews entered into much more trades and professions than they could in the rest of Europe. And basically they were the middle men with the peasantry.

So market day would be on a Sunday, not on a Saturday. They were completely Shabbat observant and they really lived their own lives. And the most important man in the town would be the man who dealt with the local lord, but on a par with the Rabbi. And basically the greatest prize in marriage for your daughter, if you are wealthy, is the rabbi or a Yeshiva student. So yes, there was corruption and yes... And there was troubles from of all sorts. It's wonderful to read the stories of this time. But basically compared with the rest of Europe for the Jewish situation, Poland does become Po-lin: "Here shall we live". Now it all comes to a terrible end in 1648. Why? Because in 1648 it's the end of the 30 years war in Europe. Now, I've said this to you many times, Zionist historians always say the Jewish world acts, all that the Jews can do is react. And certainly what happens is, at the end of the 30 years war, the Ukrainian Cossack leader attempts to break away from the Polish rule. And they go on-- Khmelnytsky is his name, he's the hero of the Ukraine to this day. He goes on the rampage against Polish clergy because they are Orthodox Christians. They go on the rampage against any Polish aristocrat they can get their hands on, and of course the Jews. They hated Jews.

And it is in the most appalling period. And it leads to carnage beyond imagination. There are many descriptions of the catastrophe. And I remember I had a student, his family originally

came from Ukraine and his grandmother would tell them stories that have been handed down to the appalling period of the Khmelnytsky massacres. So you had 350 years, the union of Lublin, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Warsaw had become the capital and then 1648. And it took the Polish crown eight years to rectify the situation. But it was never the same again. Poland was weak. But from a Jewish point of view, and these are subjects I have covered... And we have recordings, but please don't go to the Judi for them yet. This is when the website is in action. Where, and of course out of it, out of the lack of study came the great Baal Shem Tov and the opposition of . So within the Jewish world itself, you're going to have huge divisions, the growth of Hasidism, so much so that by the time you get to 1850, 50% of the Jews of Eastern Europe are going to be Hasidic and 50% are going to be what we call Misnagdim, opposers to Hasidism.

Can we see a map? If you don't mind, Judi. Here you see the kingdom of Poland at its height and this is the union of Poland and Lithuania. Now those of you who come from that part of the world, I'm sure that takes in most of your ancestry. And if this group is anything to go by, usually when I used to teach in a class, I'd say over three quarters of the people there would trace their dissent from that particular area of the world. It's huge. By the way, Poland's economy was built on salt, the great salt mines. So basically that was the kingdom of Poland. And then it never really recovered. Now look where Poland is geographically, because what do you now see? You see the rise of other great empires. You know, this notion of empires coming and empires going, it's not very fashionable at the moment because the majority of historians are micro. Batwainby and I suppose Ferguson has also attempted to actually look at empires falling and empires rising. But because what you see here is Russia and you can't quite see it on the map, but Prussia and those other countries of course by this time the Habsburg Empire. And they've all got very, very jealous eyes on Poland. Poland is weakened. Those of you have been to Poland. I was so surprised when I went to Poland because I expected it to be a grey, terrible land, but it was green and it was lush.

It's absolutely beautiful. It reminded me of travelling in Ireland. It was that lush and that green and it's fertile, particularly Ukraine, later on, Ukraine becomes known as the bread basket of Europe. So basically they all want those lands. And that's exactly what happens because the weakened Poland never really recovers. This is the Zionist view remember, the outside world acts, all the Jews that can do is react. Can we see the next map, if you don't mind, Judi. And this is exactly what happens because that is The Pale. Can we pinch it out a bit? Yes. Good. That is one of Martin Gilbert's maps. What happens is, beginning in 1772 and culminating in 1815, Poland is wiped off the map, the bulk of the Jewish world. Poland does no longer exists of a sovereign state. It is not going to reemerge until 1919. So what do you see? The bulk of the Jewish world is now going to be subjects of the czars. About 70,000 are going to be in Germany. You see Germany and about another 100,000 into the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. So the bulk of Jews now are going to live under Russian rule. And we've spent a lot of time looking at Russia. Suffice to say that what happens is, the Jews are confined to a huge area of land called The Pale of settlement, Pale meaning for stock aiding. And that is where they are going to live their lives. They make up about 12% of the population of that area.

And it's divided up into administrative districts. I do have much more detailed maps, but they don't work very well on the screens. Have a look at the maps because what is fascinating, those of you who know where your families come from, it's very interesting to find the maps to actually work out. And when I-- I've travelled a lot in Eastern Europe, as I said, because I've done a lot of teaching there. And the further east you go, the more primitive it is. And I sometimes wonder how on earth we managed to survive in those kind of circumstances. But survive they did. And there was a huge population explosion. In the 19th century there were about, under Russian rule, there were about one and a quarter million Jews. By the end of the century there were 5 million. And that doesn't take into account some people spent a lot of time studying, is of course 40% of the Jews from that area left. And that's I would suggest, is where many of your families got out. And where would they have gone? Well, we all know, the largest number to America, then to Britain, to South Africa, to Canada, to Argentina because of the good offices of Baron De Hirsch and the beginnings of Palestine, the Zionist immigration to Palestine.

And this is the area the Jews are confined to, give or take, under Alexander II, there was a brief honeymoon, but we've covered all of this. So this is really a revision because what I want us to understand, and I've spent so much time thinking about these areas, what is it about Poland? Because remember, 350 years we lived there in relative harmony, it's always relative because if you look at the Jewish condition in the Christian world, it's a dark dire story. But we survived. We survived as a landless people. Ironically, assimilation only really happens when there's a world that we want. And now of course, you had a very brief period under Alexander II where it seemed Russia would open up. But in 1881 it closes up again, pogrom economic hardship. And it meant that a disproportionate number of Jews, 40%, made the decision to get out. And it's such an incredible decision to make, isn't it? To actually make that decision. And of course, by this period, the 1880s onwards, all the political parties were defined, the various Zionist parties, the Bund international socialism. But please don't forget, over 50% of the Jews of Eastern Europe were Hasidic. And the majority of them never left. The largest number of deaths in Eastern Europe were of course the Hasidic community.

Lubavitch got out because the Rebbe had a dream in the twenties. The Ger in the main escape. Apart from that, well I don't think there was one other dynasty that escaped. There were individuals of course, and many of them reformed again in England, in America, in Israel eventually, there was a real problem with Hasidism and Zionism. Anyway... The first world war, well, we've spent a lot of time looking at the first World War. the Russian Revolution, the Association of the Jews with communism. And it's after the first World War, nationalism comes to the fore and the Treaty of Versailles, very much the brainchild of two men, Grabski and Piłsudski, Poland reemerges as an independent state. Can we see the next map please, Judi? I cannot thank Judi enough for all she does for me because I am technologically impossible and this is what makes it easy for me. So thank you. This is the state of Poland and you see from Austria, from Russia, from Lithuania, you see what happens? There is war. At the end of the first World War, whilst the allies are working at the Treaty of Versailles, dividing up the world, there are terrible pogroms all over Eastern Europe. Pogroms, pogroms, even the red army.

The red army created by Trotsky. They were murdering the Jews. The worst atrocities were in the Ukraine. But during the Polish Soviet war, it was a huge test of Polish-Jewish relations. Did Jews have Bolshevik sympathies? It should be said that thousands of more acculturated Jews actually fought for Polish independence. Thousands of them were actually in military units on the front line. There were some Jewish parties like the Bund, that opposed the war, which they saw as imperialistic. But the problem was there were over 500 murders. And as a response to Poles themselves, you've got to remember nationalism, they've reconstituted as a state after over a hundred years. Excessive nationalism, are the Jews really Poles? Now, when it settles down and Piłsudski's army defeats the Russians, defeats Trotsky's army. They seed land. And of course the land they took from Germany and the Danzig corridor is going to be an incredible thorn in Hitler's flesh. And you see that area they take from Germany.

Of course, later on when we look more at the Nazis, Hitler is looking for Lieber's realm. And that's one of the reasons and William's going to be talking about it next week when he rolls into Poland. Now the second Polish republic, which you see there had 30 million inhabitants. Two thirds were Poles. Within Poland's borders there were 5 million Ukrainians, 3 million Jews, 2 million Germans, one and a half million and there were a few others of mixed heritage, some from Czech, et cetera. And what happened was you had an incredibly nationalist government. Now, Warsaw for example, the capital, was 30% Jewish. The Jews were the middle classes of Warsaw. But what happens is thousands of peasants move into the towns. They're looking for jobs. The Jews are the doctors, the Jews are the lawyers, the Jews are involved in industry, they're involved in trade. This is a Polish senator in the Polish parliament. If the aboriginal nation reaches its economic maturity, the immigrant nation must step aside and the prime minister Grabski, he decides to displace the Jews from the economy.

Jewish dominated industries were nationalised, thousands of employees were dismissed. What were the Jewish industries? Tobacco, liquor, salts. Also that Jews were not allowed to be part of any government industry, they were very strong in the garment industry, that was all nationalised. They weren't allowed any civil service contracts and government contracts. By 1926, over 2000, let's take the shoemakers an example. In 1919, there were 2,800 Jewish shoemaking establishments. By 1926, over 2060 had closed. Piłsudski takes over from Grabski and he's much more of a fair man. He's an extraordinary individual. But then of course the Wall Street crash. The Wall Street crash, a third of Polish breadwinners were unemployed and the Great Depression. Now it was very difficult for Jews to get out of Poland. Why? I want you to remember what's going on in the rest of the world. The world is beginning to close up. You also had a lot of hostility towards the Jews coming from the Catholic church.

And he also had it coming from Pan-Slavism. Remember all the minorities, how do we pull Poland together? Now... This is a quote from Vladimir Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky, and remember a lot of the Zionist leaders to the right and the left were in Poland in the twenties and thirties trying to persuade Jews to leave. And it wasn't just about leaving though, because gradually Palestine was beginning to close its doors, America's beginning to close its doors. So this is Jabotinsky.

The Jewish nation entire and complete is heading for an encounter with an unprecedented worldwide catastrophe. There are countries where antisemitism and expulsion of Jews has become an official part of the state order. There are countries where it's done unofficially, sometimes to the accompaniment of street violence, sometimes even in a polite way. There are countries where these things concretely affect existence. But where amongst the masses in society, the same public moods that led to these very consequences are clearly and rapidly developing. What is he saying? It's getting very, very bad. Ironically, towards-- And Pilsudski dies in 1935. Up until that time, there were pogroms, but they were not state pogroms. It was kind of under control. In Gradski's day, in the early twenties, there had been benches developed in the universities where Jews could only sit on certain benches.

There was a lot of antisemitism in the universities. You're going to have the same thing in Hungary, the same thing in Romania. Ironically, it's after Pilsudski's death that you have the very Right Wing colonels in control. Jabotinsky is discussing with them Jewish immigration and they want it. They want the Jews out of Germany. This is the Supreme Council of the National Unity Camp. In the present circumstances, the Jews are a factor weakening the republic, the normal state forces and impeding the social evolution underway in Poland. A solution to the Jewish question can be achieved above all by the greatest possible reduction of the numbers of Jews within the Polish states. They even talked about sending the Jews to Madagascar. And they're trying to put pressure on the British to increase immigration into Palestine. Now Catholic antisemitism was absolutely extraordinary. This is in the Polish Bishop Crip of Kelchi. This is a weekly-- in , a weekly magazine. Hitler is Poland's enemy. But in the struggle against the moral corrosion caused by the Jews, we have to admit that he is right. So the picture I'm giving you is of increased antisemitism and yet a vibrant Jewish life did go on, of every different persuasion. I'm going to read now though from Jabotinsky's speech in Warsaw on the Ninth Ab 1938.

It is for three years that I've been calling on you Jews of Warsaw, the glory of world Jew, with an appeal. I have been ceaselessly warning you that catastrophe is coming closer. My hair has turned white and I have aged in these years because my heart is bleeding for you dear brothers and sisters do not see the volcano that will soon begin to spit out the fire of destruction. I see a terrifying sight. The time is short in which you can still be saved. I know. You do not see because you are bothered and rushing about with everyday worries. Listen to my remarks at the 12th hour, for God's sake, may each save his life while there is still time and the time is short. And I want to say one more thing to you on this day of the Ninth of Ab, those who will succeed in escaping from this catastrophe will merit a moment of great Jewish joy. The rebirth and rise of the Jewish state. I do not know whether I will earn that. My son, yes, I believe in this just as I am sure that tomorrow the sun will shine once again. I believe in this with total faith.

And don't forget that Wieszmann had come from Eastern Europe. Please don't forget that Bangorian came from Eastern Europe. They were working hard to try and move what Jabotinsky called the frozen stampede. Let me read now from Simon Dubnow. Simon Dubnow was an extraordinary Eastern European. He was a Jewish historian. He was born in 1860. He had a fascinating life. He was murdered in 1941. He was shot in Riga by the evil ones. And this

is what he said. And I want you to listen because sometimes we have to find hope out of horror. Every generation in Israel carries within itself the remnants of worlds created and destroyed during the course of the previous history of the Jewish people. A generation in turn builds and destroys worlds in its form and image. But in the long run continues to weave the thread that binds all the link of the nation into the chain of generations. He's talking about the chain of Jewish generations. Thus, each generation in Israel is more the product of history than its creator. We the people of Israel living today continue the long thread that stretches from the days of Hamarabi and Abraham to the modern period. We see further than others for during the course of thousands of years the nations of the world have borrowed from our spiritual storehouse and added to their own without depleting the source.

The Jewish people goes its own way, attracting and repelling, beating out for itself a unique path amongst the nations of the world. Okay, so this is a society on the brink. The reason I've given you an overview, as I mentioned before, I have covered all these subjects and you will be able to get the, I'm reiterating, you will be able to get the particular lectures after the website's created. But what I want to do now, I'm going to show you a film. Now the quality is not good. But the point is, back in 1939, a Polish Jew had gone to America, went back to Poland to show films for the folks who had left. And he filmed five, he actually filmed six Polish cities. One has been lost. And in another week, I'm going to show you Vilna. Now it's in Yiddish, please don't turn it up or try and improve-- We cannot improve the quality of this film. It was actually found in a left luggage in New York. It was sent, I think in the seventies, it was sent to Yad Vusehm-- Not to Yad Vushem. It was sent to back up.

So they cleaned it up and this is as good as we are going to get. But I thought, because those of you who know Yiddish, there's English subtitles, I wanted you to see it because it gives you a smell of a world that was lost. And this is actually taken in the spring and summer of 1939. So Judi, should we go for it? Please don't complain about the quality. I made a decision that it was so important that you see this film, and I think it's worth putting up with a little bit of rough edge technology. So can we go for it, please, Judi, if you don't mind No. We try. It worked yesterday. Thanks, Judi. Thank you.

Video clip plays.

Okay. I think there's a lot of questions. Let's see. I know the quality of the film is bad, but having said that, I just find it so unbelievably poignant. A lot of people being nice.

Q&A and Comments:

Okay, this is from Frida, who knows so much about Poland. Tuwim was one of the most important Polish poets in the history of Polish literature. Slomisnki was also a poet, not great. And then she's given me it in Polish. Thank you.

Though Tuwim wrote in America, "We polish Jews." That is a great piece of literature. Thank

you.

And somebody liked the film. I think it's just very powerful.

Anna, please comment on efforts and actions by Polish government and other Eastern European governments to rewrite, revise Holocaust history in their countries.

That is a very, very important question you've asked me. And I'm not going to sidestep it, but I'm going to talk about it next week because that deserves a huge answer. And it's very, very complex. Just suffice to say that between 19-- Look, no-- I'm not going to answer it now. It's much too complicated, but very important. But I do want to give it proper weight.

Q: And this is Anna who says, my roots originate in Valginia. And this, is my father came from Poland as a teenager. Yes, spoken Yiddish. Where did the slaves emanate? And you're asking about the Radhanites.

A: Oh, wherever they could capture them. You know. I'm afraid all sorts of-- Just think about it. The root of the slaves, people were a commodity. Whatever country they passed through. My roots are in Poland. My family lived in Płock. Yes. Which is a 100 K's from Warsaw. They immigrated sometime between 1891 and 1892. Yes. This is very important. If you understand what happened in Eastern Europe and the waves of economic deprivation, you can usually work out where they left from and why they left.

This is from Thea, my parents were saved by a Polish farmer's wife. But every piece of I own, was bought on my mother's side in Warsaw from open farmer's markets, side by side with vegetables. They were stolen from abandoned Jewish homes. When the Germans marched in, they didn't know who was Jewish. It was our Christian neighbours who pointed us. Yes, that is certainly true. But there are also Poles who saved.

This is from Frida. How wonderful you understand Poland. I always said it's the country for full of But there is also no other country in Europe, they will find so many people knowing our history, loving us, fighting antisemitism, and fighting for historic truth. There are Poles who misses in their history know our culture. They study Hebrew too and Sasnal and Bałka, two great contemporary artists, speak as they say, they witness what happened in the Holocaust in Poland with the Jewish people. Thank you for that, Frida. I really appreciate everything you have to say. You know so much about it.

And can I also mention at this stage another irony? POLIN the museum, the Jewish museum in Warsaw, is probably the best Jewish museum I've ever been to.

Can I talk about Slonim? And came to-- Ah. You want more details? My Zeida, was a Bunsdist. Yeah, Barry, I will do my best. Julian, would I say Germans and Nazis are one of the same?

Q: You mentioned that the Nazis occupying Poland and not the Germans.

A: It's complicated. Not every German was a Nazi and not every Nazi was a German. A third of the SS were Austrian.

Q: So what was the total population in 1939?

A: 30 million.

Michael. No, not the Rodinsky mo-- Rodinsky is something different.

Ruth, I'm talking about the Radhanites. They were a group of merchants.

And this is from Audrey, the 1948 massacre in Nemyriv my ancestor was head of the Yeshiva there. Yes. That was the most terrible story. Look, antisemitism, Robert Wistrich calls it the longest hatred. It is a terrible disease and tragically I think it's very much the province of the world of monotheism. But I've discussed this at times and I think we'll be doing quite a lot of evening lectures on it.

And this is from Monty. Any people interested in the culture of the Shtetl should read "Life is with the people" by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog. Thank you for that.

This is from Leila Levine. My grandfather was a cousin of Lubavitcher Rebbe When he married my grandmother, who was a Misnagdim, they had to move from Vilna because of the hostility, they went to.

Yeah, yeah. You know, they used to tell on each other. You know, in Russia, under the Russians, the Hasids would tell the authorities that the Misnagdim were avoiding taxis and vice versa. In fact, the Chabad, Zaman of Liadi, who was Chabad rabbi, he was actually imprisoned by the Russians.

"Atlas of the Holocaust" is a wonderful resource from Anna. Yes, it certainly is. We have a great deal to thank Sir Martin Gilbert for. His maps are wonderful. Now.

Q: Are there maps of where the Jewish people came from before they settled in The Pale of Settlement?

A: Yes. I would recommend you get Martin Gilbert's "Atlas of the Jewish people."

Right? We've had an incredibly strange history, Lucy. We are really the wandering Jews and it's very, I mean, I don't know where my family originally came from. I really don't. I mean, we are very hybrid and partly...

My mother thinks we came from the great Sephardian because that's her side. But you know, there's a lot to be said. I don't know. Let me just go on. I lost my place.

The unsung hero who saved the Jews and forced the Polish government to treat them more fairly was Herbert Hoover before he became US president. Lots to say on that.

Rosenberg, I think Jabotinsky spoke of the frozen stampede very much so. I often heard it from my revisionist mother in Port Elizabeth. You know, going on about the revisionist and the left. What I want to say, because we've got to diffuse before we actually get to what happened in Palestine. I think they are all trying to save the Jews. I think that's the point. But they had different ways of doing it. This is the great example of Jewish powerlessness. Look, Jabotinsky is trying to negotiate with the Poles, the Hungarians, the Romanians, to get Jews out. He's begging everyone. when he's begging in London. They're all begging. Ben-Gurion comes to London, help the Jews. And remember the words of Golden Mayer and Evian. The day will come when no one will pity the Jews again. And I think if you want to understand modern Israel for good or bad, I'm not making any political decision here. I think you need to understand that. That in the end, this is the greatest example of powerlessness in modern history.

Q: How many Polish Jews got out of Poland before it was invaded?

A: Look, don't use the word Poland, Linda, because between 1881 and 1914, it's The Pale of Settlement. And 40% got out. Two and a half million. Out of Poland itself, between 1919 and 1923, you had the third LEL and about a hundred thousand got to Palestine. Some were getting out, but the bulk didn't. And it's partly to do-- Look, the Hasids wouldn't leave. Think how the Hasids viewed the outside world. Yes, it's evil, but what you expect, we just go further and further in. But of the Misnagdim, you've got your life there. You've got your roots. Look, I come from London where there's about 250,000 Jews and we have four or five miserable newspapers. Poland was, even though it was tough, they had each other. It's a such a dif-- And nobody could have predicted the Holocaust.

Okay. I can quote to you from Jabotinsky now, I can quote to you from Wiezmann now, but would you have really believed it? Never forget the words of Nahum Goldmann. He said you'd need a soul of a poet to imagine the inferno. So don't forget that. Let me just go back to the question. I'm sorry, my questions are at the top. Let me go further on.

The frequently rearranging of political borders caused a great deal of inter-ethnic conflict. Yes, of course it did. It was a major factor in the rise of antisemitism. Look, antisemitism is-- Look, when do we become racist? Maybe we all suffer from racism of one kind or another. We all stereotype, don't we? We all prejudge. When things are tough, it gets a lot worse.

Yes. Jabotinsky certainly was considered a prophet by his followers.

Yes. Oh, this is from Edith. Thank you for the film on Warsaw. It was great to see the city my

parents were in in the summer of '39. Yes. Even though it's such... You know, the film is fracturing. I just think it's so important.

Q: Yes. Carol's mentioning "A Vanished World" by Roman Vishniac, which is wonderful. When was the film made?

A: It was made in the spring and summer of 1939. What happened was a Polish Jew went back to make a film for the folk, he was living in America, to make it for the Jewish community who originally came from Eastern Europe. And this is Marcia. Polish Yiddish is different from Litvak Yiddish. Nevertheless, a wonderful film. Yeah.

Yes. Yes. I will be showing you-- And oh, Sandra's saying fab film. I'm going to bring up the Mafioso of the Jewish mother.

Sandra Mai is a very close friend of mine. It was her son, Sandra got her son to digitalize some of my film collection. So I will be showing you, now that we know they work, I want to show you the film of Vilna taken in 1939 later on in the course. Because to me this is very important. Yes, there is Białystok in 1939. The five, there's Białystok, Łódź, Warsaw. I'll try and work out when we can see it.

I went to Białystok just after communism collapsed. And I was with a group, we were going to the Białystok Memorial, the Zamenhof Memorial. And this old man came up to us. And it's funny because our group was a very modern group, but all the men were wearing yarmulkes, that's what seems to happen in Eastern Europe. And this chap came up and started speaking Yiddish and luckily my partner who was leading the group, he has Yiddish as his first language. He was a sort of-- His parents were both survivors and he was brought up in the Yeshiva and Yiddish. And so he started speaking and it turned out this guy was one of the five Jews left in Białystok who'd been saved by his non-Jewish girlfriend who later married. He invited all 30 of us back to his flat. There were pictures of the Pope everywhere. It turns out he was a. He pronounced the priestly blessing on us. It was insane. But I found that whenever I went to Poland, and I dunno if is listening, because he used to run our tours, we always said, just take away all your preconceptions. It's complicated.

This is from Diane. My grandmother was from Mince and told me the Poles were more antisemitic than the Germans. My grandparents went to South Africa. Yeah. Yes. It's an amazing window to a world.

When was the film shot? I've already mentioned it, Gloria. 1939. That's why I find it so important. The spring and summer of 1939, he was touring the cities. There were six, one of them got lost. But we have five of the Polish cities. There are bits of footage around. I've got an extraordinary film collection. I'm very fortunate. I've been collecting for 40 years. First of all, DVD, it was videos, now DVDs. But thanks to Sandra's son, we are digitalizing. And Judi, bless her.

Q: How many of the Jewish population were ultra Orthodox?

A: Linda, how do you define ultra orthodox? Reform didn't make it in Poland. You were either a Misnagdim or you were a Hasid. Yes, in Warsaw there was a culturation and there would've been people who weren't. But in Warsaw, in Kraków. Kraków was a more modern city. It had a temple, 'cause it had once been part of the Habsburg Empire, but it wasn't reform, it was modern Orthodox. So depends how you define Orthodox.

The sound quality is great. Yes. Yes. I find it more poignant to watch films like this, than I do watching films about the Shoah. And yeah, the reason I had to apologise for the film is that we quite often get comments that it's not glossy enough and it's not technical enough. But I'm a historian and I know I am...

You are an incredible audience. You all care. And I really think sometimes let... Frankly, I think it's more important that we can get what we can out of these films because it's so important. Yes.

This is Lillian. on YouTube. A 33 minutes in Poland.

This is from Tony. First time I've really heard Yiddish. Yeah. There aren't that many people who speak it anymore. There used to be a Yiddish centre in Oxford, but in the end, the people behind it decided, 40% of the students who came were were Japanese. And that's when they decided it was over. Look, we sent an awful lot of Yiddish books back to Vilnius, actually. There's a huge library at the Vilnius University. And of course in New York you have wonderful, wonderful Evo, which saved so many of the books. Let's see.

Yes, no, the five cities are five different cities. Vilna, Łódź, Białystok, can't remember the other one at the moment. And the films, Ian, they're exactly the same. They're travel logs. They take you round the city and they take you round the Jewish life. Look, Kraków is the other one. Kraków was 25% Jewish. You got to remember the Jews were so integral. Look, Warsaw was a third Jewish. Can you just imagine that? London a third Jew-- Well, New York was at one time, wasn't it?

Oh, this is from Pearl. I don't have any Yiddish. My parents, remember my mother was part Sephardi. My parents didn't have Yiddish. They had a few words. A lot of my friends whose families did have Yiddish, they used it amongst themselves when they didn't want the children to know.

Is it possible to have the curator of the Poland Warsaw Ghetto Museum? It's the POLIN Museum. Well actually, the man who was responsible for most of the history is actually a man called Anthony Polansky. He's a professor. He would be interesting. I don't know how we will far with Poland at the moment because it's so difficult for Poles, with this whole issue of the Shoah, which I'm going to be talking about.

Frida, how can you get the film? I'll have to think about that. I think...

And this is from, I can't see the first name, Miller. I have a business associate who lives in Warsaw. He's a nationalist and claims Poles did no harms to the Jews. What is the history? Well, we are coming onto it. This is your preparation.

Yes, yes. Caroline is saying, when I look at the children, I can't cope thinking someone could have been a member of my family, my grandfather. Yes. It's when you see the children, nine out of 10 Jewish children died in the Shoah. And that is beyond imagination. You know, George Steiner, the philosopher, he said Jewish parents hold their children so close because all the times when they couldn't. And it's...

How long, how many generations would it take? Not just of the Jewish world, but of the non-Jewish world. I'm going to finish on a quote of Howard Jacobson. See what you can make of this. Howard said they can't forgive us, the Holocaust. Anyway, I think I better stop there. And you know why I'm stopping there because we have an incredible event tonight.

And Terry Kergan, who is a South African, she's telling, it's called "Family Secrets Photography, A Storytelling". And it's going to be the story of her Polish family. So that's at seven o'clock. So I want to give you time to have something to eat.

So thank you all. I'm glad that you got something out of the film I'm not asking you to enjoy it, I just think it's important. Because it takes us back to that period of history. And as I said to you before, to me it's more resonant to watch that than to watch films of The Liberation because I want to try and touch the world that was lost. Because make no bones about it, it is lost. We'll never get it back. And what I want to do is also talk to you about what's going on amongst the Jews of Poland, because there are so many stories. But I'll do that next week. So be safe everybody. And Judi, again, thank you for everything.

- [Judi] Always a pleasure, Trudy.

- You say that now, not when I'm... You know, I cannot press a button. I press a button, everything goes wrong. So Judi, lots of love and I'll speak to you tomorrow.

- [Judi] Thank you everybody. Bye-bye.

- [Trudy] Bye. Bye everyone.