

A Fragile Home in the Waiting Room:
The Ambivalent Postwar Relationship between
Americans and Jewish Displaced Persons in U.S.-
Occupied Bavaria

by

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Class of 2014

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in History

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the many people who have helped and supported me throughout the thesis-writing journey. The Wesleyan History department has been incredibly supportive during every step of the process, beginning with its generous White Fellowship grant that allowed me to conduct archival research in Washington D.C. over the summer.

Within the department, there are several faculty members who I owe a great deal of gratitude. First and foremost, thank you to my wonderful thesis advisor, Professor Grimmer-Solem, who inspired me to write about the drama that unfolded in the displaced persons camps and encouraged me to stay true to the human side of the story. Thank you for your patience as I slowly began the writing process, and for your faith that this was an important history worth telling.

To Professor Schatz, thank you for sending me information about lectures and conferences related to displaced persons and directing me to the YIVO Institute, academic journals, and other resources. I benefitted greatly from your expertise in American Jewish history. To Professor Tucker, thank you for helping me devise my research proposal and giving me the theoretical tools, like micro-history, meta history, and social history, to approach my thesis topic from a broader historiographical perspective. Thank you to Professor Smolkin-Rothrock, who first inspired me to become a history major during my freshman year when I took her fantastic course on Soviet Russia. Chatting with you over lunch about my thesis and your current research helped me feel connected to a community of historians.

My amazing housemates—Becca, Katherine, Lydia, and Sarah—deserve special thanks. They have spent almost a year indulging me in conversations about Jewish displaced persons, baking delicious nutella bundt cakes, and creating a happy and comfortable environment to live and work.

Finally, thank you to my loving and relatively functional family. Mom, Dad, and Robin: thank you for listening to me talk about my thesis and research over countless phone calls, calming any anxieties that came up along the way, and for simply being there.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DP	Displaced Person
JDC	American Joint Distribution Committee
MP	Military Police
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
ORT	Organization for Rehabilitation
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
YIVO	YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Introduction

Entering the Waiting Room: *A Multi-Perspectival Analysis of the Jewish DP Camps*

“The remnant of Jewry is gathered here. This is its waiting room. It is a shabby room, so we hope the day will come when the Jews will be taken to a place they can call their own.”¹

Zalman Grinberg, Chairman of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews for the U.S. Zone of Occupation in Germany, Munich, October 1945.

“DP life was simultaneously a final efflorescence of a destroyed East European Jewish culture, a preparation for an imagined future in *Eretz Israel* (land of Israel), and a ‘waiting room’ in which new lives were indeed—against all odds—begun.”²

Historian Atina Grossmann, 2009.

On a Friday night in late September 1945, at the start of the Jewish religious holiday of Sukkot, a curious incident occurred at the railroad station outside of the all-Jewish Feldafing displaced persons (DP) camp in the American zone of Germany.³ As the Jewish DPs and German civilians disembarked the train, they were confronted by German police and U.S. military police officers. The officers asked the departing passengers if they were Jewish, and sorted out the Jewish DPs from the Germans so that they could be checked for valid traveling permits.⁴ This sorting

¹ Grinberg quoted in Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post- World War II Germany*, trans. John A. Broadwin (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 4.

² Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 10.

³ Sukkot is a seven-day holiday that commemorates the forty years of wandering in the desert and living in temporary shelters. The word “sukkot” refers to the temporary dwellings that Jews are commanded to construct and live in or dine in during the holiday.

⁴ There is some controversy surrounding the exact wording of the orders. According to Pfc. Harry Sokol’s testimony on October 6, 1945, they asked the departing passengers if they were German and thus separated the Jewish DPs, who replied in the negative. However, Jewish DP Reabek Malka’s testimony describes that the officers bluntly shouted, “All Jews to one side!” See Testimony of Harry Sokol, October 6, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Investigation- Alleged Mistreatment of Displaced Persons at Feldafing, Germany, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at College

ostensibly occurred because displaced persons, unlike the rest of the civilian population, were required to have both identification cards *and* traveling permits.⁵

What transpired next is so disturbing and unimaginable that it would soon come to the attention of General Eisenhower himself. According to testimonies from Jewish DPs, after they were separated from the rest of the passengers they were brutally apprehended for not possessing the required traveling permits; the American military police and the German police forced the DPs to squat and violently shoved Jews on to a truck. Some were struck, kicked, or pushed with guns.⁶ German civilians allegedly even joined in, shoving the DPs and shouting anti-Semitic epithets. The military police then took the Jewish DPs to jail, and they were fined by a German court for not having valid traveling permits. After an enraged Jewish GI found out about the incident and wrote to General Eisenhower, the military government launched an investigation to determine what had happened and whether any of the military policemen involved should be punished. The lead investigator concluded that no abuse had occurred and all complaints were based on hearsay.⁷ To this day, the extent of the abuse remains frustratingly ambiguous. The fact that this incident occurred at all has been almost wiped from historical memory, its record preserved only in a dusty box at the National Archives in College Park.

The Feldafing railroad incident, though certainly not an everyday occurrence, is a fitting introduction to the bizarre, confusing, and volatile world of the Jewish DP

Park (hereafter cited as Feldafing Investigation Papers); Testimony of Reabek Malka, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁵ Testimony of Ervine Tichareau, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁶ See Testimony of Leba Lieb, Isaac Klutch, Monich Zeidenfeld, Chaim Greenberg, Abraham Landesmann, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁷ These allegations and the administrative response will be discussed at length in Chapter One.

camps in the US zone of Germany. Ironically, Germany, the country that had so recently been declared *judenrein* (cleansed of Jews), became a safe haven for European Jews in the immediate postwar period. Thousands of Eastern European Jews, including those who had never directly experienced Nazi occupation, fled ongoing persecution by fleeing to the displaced persons camps in the U.S. zone of Germany, the only zone of occupation that had displaced persons camps specifically for Jews.⁸

In the camps, the Eastern European Jews encountered a diverse group of Jews from across Europe who had spent their wartime years in concentration camps, partisan groups, or in hiding, as well as a cadre of American military government officials, United Nations personnel, and relief workers. Consequently, the DP camp was a site of first encounters: between displaced European Jews and “free” American Jews, between Jews from all over Europe with radically different pre-war and wartime experiences, and between the Jewish DPs and the non-Jewish Americans administrators, relief workers, and military officials. These encounters and the ensuing relationships forged in the DP camps shaped the DPs’ perceptions of the United States and American Jewish life. For Americans, their time working in the DP camps and interacting with the Jewish DPs shaped their perceptions of the survivors of Nazi genocide and mobilized the American Jewish community to support the displaced Jews.

The population of each camp was constantly in flux, as European Jews poured in, others emigrated out, and American workers rotated in and out of the camps,

⁸ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 1.

staying only for brief periods of time.⁹ As a result, the camps were highly unstable places, making it difficult for the Jewish DPs to feel completely secure in their new homes. While the Allied governments worked on the massive bureaucratic task of repatriating and relocating the millions of displaced persons left languishing in Germany after the war ended, the Jewish DPs were stuck waiting indefinitely in displaced persons camps, uncertain of what was to come next but forced to build new, albeit temporary, lives for themselves. The instability and transience of the camps have made it difficult for historians to understand the nature of these “waiting rooms” for displaced persons: were they traumatic spaces of abuse and prolonged suffering or safe spaces of rebirth and community renewal?

The answer to this question is not neutral; it is closely tied to political and ideological goals and subject to the distortion of official history. The binary that posits the DP camps as either spaces of suffering or recovery cannot even begin to capture the richness of the Jewish DP experience; the camps were both and more than either one. Yet the memory of the Jewish displaced persons (DP) camps in the U.S.-occupied zone of Germany has long been appropriated for different purposes: as a legitimizing national narrative for the state of Israel, as a history of U.S. benevolence and friendship, as a heroic story of the vitality and strength of the Jewish people, and as a disheartening story of the continuing hardships and sufferings faced by Holocaust survivors in postwar Germany. The complexity of the lived experiences of the Jewish DPs and the culture they created in the camps have been excised from these histories that were written to serve a certain purpose, as each approach operates under different

⁹ Population figures throughout the thesis should be treated with great caution. No reliable agencies for accurate statistical information existed until the end of 1946. At the individual camps, the number of Jewish DP residents was often inflated as many Jews were registered at more than one camp.

assumptions about the Jewish DPs and the nature of the American involvement in the DP camps.

The first historical narratives of the DP camps emerged soon after the establishment of the state of Israel.¹⁰ The DP camp experience became formative in the national narrative of Israel's founding. In these accounts, often written by Israelis or American Zionists, Jewish DPs are generally portrayed as highly politicized, brave pioneers who fought against all odds for the state of Israel, escaping illegally from the DP camps to go to Palestine as part of the legendary "B'richa" movement.¹¹ While these works treated the postwar experiences of the DPs as distinct from the study of the Holocaust, their accounts were distorted through a teleological lens that viewed Israel as the inevitable result of the DP camps. This view dominates Israeli popular memory, as demonstrated by the commemoration of Jewish DP history in Israeli museums. For example, the 1985 exhibition in the Tel Aviv Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, "Return to Life: The Holocaust Survivors: From Liberation to Rehabilitation," portrayed the Jewish DPs more as symbols of the renewal of the Jewish people than as actual people with diverse needs and interests.¹² This portrayal of the DPs emphasized their heroic and political qualities, while downplaying their day-to-day struggles and ignoring the histories of the many Jewish DPs who were not politically active or who did not subscribe to Zionism.

¹⁰ Leo W. Schwarz, *The Redeemers: A Saga of the Years 1945-1952* (New York: Farrar Straus and Young, 1953); Efrayim Dekel, *Bricha: Flight to the Homeland* (New York: Herzl Press, 1973); Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and rescue: Brichah*, 1st ed., Contemporary Jewish civilization series. (New York: Random House, 1970).

¹¹ Bauer, *Flight and rescue*; Dekel, *Bricha*.

¹² *Return to Life: the Holocaust Survivors: from Liberation to Rehabilitation* (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefuso, the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1985).

Since Zionist accounts were focused on the establishment of Israel, the role of Americans was evaluated on the basis of whether or not they hindered or facilitated the Zionist agenda of the Jewish DPs. While these works tended to valorize the efforts of the American liberators of the concentration camps and the American relief workers, the later incompetence and indifference of the U.S. Army in the DP camps was an integral part of the narrative in justifying why emigration to Palestine was necessary.¹³

Another strand of historiography emerged as Americans who had worked with the Jewish DPs wrote memoirs about their experiences.¹⁴ These early histories tended to subsume individuals to portray a rather homogenous picture of both the Jewish DPs and the kind-hearted Americans who worked with them. These histories sought to emphasize the strength and dynamism of the Jewish people, while casting a largely favorable light on the Americans involved in the camps and the US Army. Like the Zionist branch of historiography, their accounts tended to depict a romantic view of Jewish survivors of Nazi terror who, with the indispensable assistance of Americans, overcame tragedy and forged a new life for their people. Since these histories were written by participants in the events, the authors had a stake in how their story would be told and how the legacy of American participation in the DP camps would be remembered, which may have led them to distort the positive impact that Americans had in the camps.

¹³ Dekel, *Bricha*, 24, 26, 78-80.

¹⁴ Judah Nadich, *Eisenhower and the Jews* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1953); Philip S. Bernstein, foreword to *Bricha: Flight to the Homeland*, by Efrayim Dekel. (New York: Herzl Press, 1973); Abraham Hyman, *The Undefeated* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House Ltd., 1993).

Over time, there was a backlash to the glorification of American participation in the DP camps. In the late 1990s, historical accounts emphasizing the negative aspects of American involvement in the DP camps came to dominate historical scholarship.¹⁵ By 2007, historian Atina Grossmann concluded that the field was marked by accounts of the negative aspects of American policies, including outright anti-Semitism or tolerance for German anti-Semitism toward the DPs.¹⁶ Simultaneously, there was a surge of interest in the United States about the DP camps and the Holocaust in general. According to historian Peter Novick, the Holocaust became a prominent feature of American culture and a cornerstone of American Jewish identity fifty years after the events themselves took place. Utilizing sociologist Maurice Halbwach's concept of "collective memory," he explored the possibility that "present concerns determine what of the past we remember and how we remember it" rather than "the past working its will on the present."¹⁷

In line with this concept of the present dictating how we remember the past, a new wave of historiography—largely driven by those who were born in DP camps—has responded to the renewed interest in DP camp life. As the generation of Holocaust survivors passes away, many children of Holocaust survivors have become deeply interested in rediscovering the DP camps, many of whom want to understand their vague childhood recollections and reconstruct the world that their parents briefly inhabited.¹⁸ As a result of the efforts of this "second generation," there have been a

¹⁵ See Robert L. Hilliard, *Surviving the Americans: The Continued Struggle of the Jews after Liberation* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997); Joseph W. Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

¹⁶ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 6.

¹⁷ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 3.

¹⁸ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*.

growing number of publications and conferences pertaining to the DP camps, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum conference in 2000.¹⁹ Despite this ongoing scholarship, the story of the displaced persons has not been fully integrated with the Holocaust narrative that ends with liberation in May 1945. As recently as 2001, historians Angelika Königseder and Julian Wetzel asserted, “The story of the Jewish DPs is still largely unknown.”²⁰

To recover the experiences of the Jewish DPs, historians in the past two decades have begun to focus on the social history of the DP camps using records like letters, memoirs, and oral histories. In this tradition, Margarete L. Myers’ article, “Jewish Displaced Persons: Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany,” argued for the need to study the everyday life in the DP camps in its own right, apart from the Holocaust or Israel.²¹ Using interviews with former DPs, she detailed the psychological and social experiences of the DPs, including their constant search for family members, their high marriage and birth rate, the absence of elders in the camps, their distrust of Allied policy, and the burdensome restrictions on their movement. Unlike in past narratives, she did not search for political trends or make broad generalization about the characteristics of the DPs and the Americans in the camps. Rather, her questions revolved around recovering individual experiences in all their complexity.

In the past decade, Atina Grossmann has emerged as one of the most prominent historians of the Jewish DP experience. Similar to Myers, Grossmann’s

¹⁹ Menachem Z. Rosensaft, ed., *Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons, 1945-1951: Conference Proceedings* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000).

²⁰ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 7.

²¹ Margarete L. Myers, "Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 42, no. 1 (1997).

main contribution to the field is her focus on the social history of DPs rather than the political history. In her path-breaking book, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, Grossmann diverged from past historiography that instrumentalized Jewish DP history for external political or ideological purposes. Instead, her book used personal narratives, oral histories, written reports, letters, memoirs, diaries, and press accounts to create a different history of everyday life in the Jewish DP camps. These records produced by Jewish DPs are integral because they provide a different perspective on the DP camps than what historians could ascertain from looking exclusively at the records kept by those who managed and administered the DPs; the Jewish DP records highlighted the rich cultural and social life of the camps that was largely downplayed by the American records. Given the disparity between the two kinds of records, Grossmann identified the need for historians to closely analyze the interactions between Jews, Allied occupiers, Germans, and international aid workers to understand the role that different actors played in the camps.

Accordingly, this thesis approaches the question of how historians should characterize the transient space of the displaced persons camps through a new lens: by evaluating the complex and poorly understood relationships and interactions between Jewish DPs and the Americans working in the displaced persons camps. The thesis will contribute to the burgeoning scholarship that has attempted to recover the lived experiences of the Jewish DPs by focusing on the three largest Jewish displaced persons camps in U.S.-Occupied Bavaria—Föhrenwald, Feldafing, and Landsberg—in the fall of 1945. By concentrating on a narrow geographic space and time period,

the complicated interactions that occurred in the camps can be rigorously investigated and unpacked.

This thesis contributes to the field of “refuge history” by focusing on the perspectives of individual participants. In his essay, “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” John Brewer describes “refuge history” as a close-up way of studying history that emphasizes an incorporation of “many points of view rather than the use of a single dominant perspective” and focuses on “a singular place rather than space, the careful delineation of particularities and details a degree of enclosure.”²² Using this approach, the thesis aims to put various viewpoints in dialogue with one another to endow the historical participants with an agency that has often been ignored.²³

Through the synthesis of various micro and macro-level perspectives, this thesis reinterprets the interactions between Jewish DPs and Americans to yield fresh historical insights about the DP camp experience in all of its complexity and ambiguity. To accomplish this, the methodology of Myers and Grossmann will be applied to use the relatively underutilized records produced by DPs, such as oral histories and memoirs, in addition to records created by the U.S. Military Government, soldiers, and relief workers. In doing so, it may be possible to reconcile conflicting sources to form a more inclusive history of everyday life in the Jewish DP camps.

Each type of primary source poses a unique set of methodological challenges. The archival sources include written records, photographs, and video recordings from

²² John Brewer, “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” *Cultural and Social History* 7.1 (2010): 88.

²³ Ibid.

the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at College Park, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. While these records were critical in gauging the perspectives of the military government, DP camp administrators, the Advisers on Jewish Affairs, and the military chaplains, the primary sources that are preserved by the archives are by definition the product of a process of selection and judgment that undoubtedly shaped the research findings.

Moreover, the author's inability to speak multiple languages restricts the written material to English-language sources. Unfortunately, the richest source material to uncover the everyday lives in the DP camps—camp newspapers, camp court records, theatrical performances, and diaries and letters written by the DPs—are written primarily in Yiddish, German, Polish, and Hebrew and are rarely translated into English. Consequently, the thesis may disproportionately reflect the experiences of DPs who later immigrated to the United States and learned English or who spoke English in the camps. This is problematic because these DPs' perceptions of Americans in the DP camps might have been biased by their later experiences in the United States or by their unusual ability to communicate with Americans in the camps. However, the recollections from Jewish DPs who immigrated to the United States are also a uniquely valuable source because they provide a different narrative than the mainstream Zionist narrative, in which the Jewish DPs invariably immigrate to Palestine. While their memories of the Americans may be rose-colored, they also constitute legitimate lived experiences that have not been easily integrated into the dominant DP narrative.

Another issue that arises when using oral histories and memoirs is that most of these records have been compiled decades after the events themselves took place. Thus, these oral histories are highly vulnerable to the distortive effects of memory. The oral history collection from the USC Shoah Foundation, for example, is comprised of over 51,000 videotaped interviews recorded in the late 1990s and early 2000s—over fifty years after the interviewees had left the DP camps.²⁴ This temporal distance between the DPs' actual experiences and their later recollections may have altered their viewpoint in profound ways. For example, it is easy to see how the memories of the day-to-day hygienic issues in the camp would have faded over time while the memories of the lifelong friendships formed would grow stronger, bolstered each time the former DPs interacted with their friends from the camps.

However, one of the collections of oral histories has the potential to counter this problem. David B. Boder, an American psychologist, embarked on a research project in 1946 in which he traveled across Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy, interviewing displaced persons in their native languages. He recorded the interviews on a wire recorder and translated and published the interviews in a multi-volume collection.²⁵ From these interviews, which constitute some of the earliest audio recordings of Holocaust survivors, it is possible to hear the voices of Jewish DPs while they were living in the DP camps.

In the analysis of Boder's interviews and the USC Shoah Collection of oral histories, the techniques discussed in Joan Sangster's "Telling our Stories: Feminist

²⁴ "Visual History Archive," *USC Shoah Foundation*, accessed April 2, 2014. <http://sfi.usc.edu/explore>.

²⁵ David P. Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People: Recorded Verbatim in Displaced Persons Camps with a Psychological and Anthropological Analysis* (Los Angeles, 1950).

Debates and the Uses of Oral History” will be employed.²⁶ First, oral histories will be approached through the lens of subaltern history, as a way to hear voices that have been silenced by traditional sources and master narratives. Since the perspectives of most DPs have been overshadowed by the “official” reports of administrators along with the records of a select group of DPs who have gone on to write lengthy memoirs of their experiences, oral histories provide a rare opportunity to recover the lived experiences of DPs who otherwise might be left out of history.

However, it is important to be acutely aware of the subjectivity of the interviewer. As Sangster cautions, since the researcher participates in a dialogue with the historical subject, they have the opportunity to steer the conversation in certain ways that may alter the intended meaning of the interviewee.²⁷ In the oral histories from the USC Shoah Collection, the interviewer will occasionally change the subject of the interview or cut the interviewee off, which may compromise the authenticity of the oral history as an uncensored primary source. This issue is especially apparent in Boder’s interviews, since he inserts his own psychological and anthropological analysis into his English transcription.

In addition to the oral histories, much of the micro-historical analysis will come from three published primary sources: Simon Schochet’s memoir *Feldafing*,²⁸ Jacob Biber’s memoir *Risen from the Ashes: A Story of the Displaced Persons in the Aftermath of World War II*,²⁹ and Major Irving Heymont’s *Among the Survivors of the*

²⁶ Joan Sangster, “Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

²⁷ Joan Sangster, “Telling our Stories,” 92.

²⁸ Simon Schochet, *Feldafing* (Vancouver, British Columbia: November House, 1983).

²⁹ Jacob Biber, *Risen from the Ashes: A Story of the Displaced Persons in the Aftermath of World War II* (Asheville, NC: Star Publishers, 2005).

*Holocaust: The Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont.*³⁰ Schochet and Biber were Jewish DPs in Feldafing and Föhrenwald, respectively, and Major Heymont was a secular Jewish 27 year-old Army infantry officer placed in charge of the Landsberg DP camp during the fall of 1945. Each source provides a fascinating window into one's individual experience, the problems they faced, and their perceptions of the people they encountered in the fall of 1945.

The thesis will be divided into three chapters: the first will serve as an introduction to the ambiguous and fraught world of the displaced persons camps by contextualizing the violent incident that occurred outside of Feldafing. This incident is of particular interest because it highlights the potential for abuse and continued trauma as well as the close relationship between the Jewish DPs and certain Jewish GIs and the responsiveness of top U.S. Army officials. The second chapter will posit the Jewish DP as a subject of inquiry to address the critical question of who the Jewish DPs were, both demographically and psychologically, and how contemporary American observers perceived the differences among them. To do so, the chapter will closely analyze why different sub-groups of Americans and the Jewish DPs failed to understand each other, and how misunderstandings between the two groups fostered stereotypes and erroneous psychoanalyses. The third and final chapter will use the tools of cultural anthropology to understand the dissonance between the liminality of the Jewish DP camp for the DPs themselves and the structured status-system of the DP camps for the Americans who worked in them, which could both heighten and alleviate the DPs' sense of isolation from the rest of the world. The tension between

³⁰ Irving Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust- 1945. The Landsberg DP Camp Letters of Major Irving Heymont, United States Army* (Cincinnati, Ohio: The American Jewish Archives, 1982).

the transience of liminality and the DPs' longing for permanency will illuminate why the DPs' "home in the waiting room" was necessarily a fragile one.

Throughout the thesis, the voices of the Jewish DPs and Americans will be juxtaposed and put in dialogue with one another to complicate the binary of the DP camp as either a space of suffering or joy. This complexity will be revealed not just through the inclusion of multiple individual perspectives, but within the experience of a single individual; the same person could portray their camp as both kinds of spaces depending on when they were writing and which aspect of the camp were are discussing.

The aim is to treat the DP camp experience on its own terms, as a unique community with distinctive signifiers and social norms that structured the DPs' interactions with one another and with the Americans who they encountered. The realm of the Jewish DP camps had a reality onto itself, not just as a temporary waiting room but also as a formative life experience that had lasting effects on the world-views and social networks of those it touched, including the Americans who were only stationed in the camps for a few months. The DP identity does not fit neatly into the narrative of being simply a Holocaust survivor, and American, or an Israeli. Nevertheless, the DP identity was a lasting one, adding a new layer to the multi-faceted Jewish identity retained long after leaving the DP camps.

Chapter 1

Troubles Ahead for the Jewish DPs: *The Feldafing Railroad Incident and the Mystery of Eisenhower's Swift Reaction*

“They said they were going to take us to a place where we were going to be able to live like human beings, so they took us to Feldafing.”³¹

Interview with Dora Abend, Former Resident at Feldafing DP Camp, 1996.

“Conditions among DPs are a disgrace regardless of what is said to the contrary. Our conduct towards them as compared to that of the Germans is a slap in the face to justice and often makes me ashamed to be a part of such a lousy set up. Why don't Americans wake up and start treating our Allies like humans instead of licking German boots[?] It's high time we really did something for DPs—give them their freedom!”³²

Captain A.F. Thompson in *Stars and Stripes*, 1945.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II, the Jewish survivors of Nazi genocide or involuntary migration from Eastern Europe were transformed into “displaced persons.” “DP” was the Allied abbreviation given to all individuals who had fled or were driven from their countries of origin due to World War II and its aftermath.³³ Jewish DPs found a temporary safe haven in the United Nations assembly centers, or “DP camps,” which were set up under the Allied military authorities. In the U.S. zone, the Army had overall control of the DP camps while the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was entrusted with administering the camps’ day-to-day operations.³⁴

³¹ Dora Abend, interview by Shelly Roberts, 20 May 1996, interview 14339, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³² A. F. Thompson, “DPs are Human,” *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 28 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

³³ A note on terminology: “DP” was a non-specific and common postwar term to refer to any individual displaced from his or her native countries, including Holocaust survivors as well as former POWs and forced laborers who did not want to return to the East.

³⁴ Anna Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception: American Occupation Policy in Postwar Germany and the Formation of Jewish Refugee Spaces,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 456-57.

Several months after the war ended, the condition of the Jewish DPs in the U.S. zone of Germany came to the forefront of public knowledge in the U.S. with the widely publicized “Harrison Report.” Due to an influx of angry letters by American Jewish GIs detailing the neglect and mistreatment of Jewish displaced persons, President Truman commissioned Earl Harrison, the Dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, to investigate the conditions for the Jewish DPs in Germany.³⁵ The report, which was printed in full length in *The New York Times*, concluded that the conditions for Jewish DPs were deplorable.³⁶ Famously, Harrison stated, “We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them.”³⁷ Harrison accused the US Army of not only failing to act efficiently and competently, but behaving so cruelly it was as if they had merely substituted for SS guards.

Most importantly for the future of the DP camps, he denounced the current American policy of segregating DPs by nationality and urgently recommended that separate camps be set up for Jews.³⁸ When the DPs were grouped by nationality, the displaced Jews were often forced to live with people who had collaborated with the Nazis or who held strongly anti-Semitic views.³⁹ Since this type of living situation

³⁵ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 6; There is controversy surrounding whether or not Harrison was commissioned by the president. According to an interview with Rabbi Abraham Klausner, who guided Harrison on his investigation of the displaced persons camps, Truman had refused to send Harrison but he was sent by the State Department. See Abraham J. Klausner, interview by Toni Binstock, 1 September 1998, interview 45818, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁶ “Text of Report to the President on Conditions Among Refugees in Western Europe,” *New York Times*, September 30, 1945.

³⁷ Earl Grant Harrison, *The Plight of the Displaced Jews in Europe: A Report to President Truman* (New York: Reprinted by United Jewish Appeal for Refugees, Overseas Needs and Palestine on behalf of Joint Distribution Committee, United Palestine Appeal, National Refugee Service, 1945).

³⁸ Quoted in Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 32.

³⁹ Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper, 2009), 266; Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 17.

exacerbated the Jewish DPs' distress and anxiety, Harrison recommended that the United States create exclusively Jewish DP camps.

While the Harrison Report was partly unfair to the impressive relief efforts that had been made by the U.S. military,⁴⁰ it had the intended effect: it was immediately a “political bombshell.”⁴¹ The Harrison Report commanded public attention toward the roughly 50,000 Jewish survivors who remained in Germany—a number that would continue to swell throughout the course of 1945 and 1946.⁴² As a result, the U.S. Military Government followed through with Harrison's recommendations and decided to create exclusively Jewish displaced persons camps in Germany (Fig. 1). In addition to Feldaafing, which was already exclusively Jewish, Landsberg and Föhrenwald, among several other camps across Germany, were soon made exclusively Jewish.⁴³ Thereafter, Jews would be treated as a special category; they did not have to undergo an eligibility review to receive the benefits of a DP status, they received 500 more calories a day than the other DPs, and were allowed to return to the American zone after they had been repatriated to receive the DP status a second time—a benefit that no other kind of displaced person in Germany shared.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The military successfully repatriated 4.2 million DPs by the end of July 1945 and had repatriated almost 6 million by September 1945. See Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 15.

⁴¹ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 138.

⁴² Overall, a quarter of a million Jews would temporarily find refuge in the American and British zones of occupation. See Bessel, *Germany 1945*.

⁴³ By October 3, 1945, all three camps had become exclusively Jewish. Landsberg was converted into a Jewish camp in September and Föhrenwald in October.

⁴⁴ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 22.

MAJOR CAMPS FOR JEWISH DISPLACED PERSONS, 1945-1946



Figure 1: Map of Jewish DP Camps in occupied Germany and Austria. From United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C. *The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students*, <http://www.ushmm.org> (accessed April 4, 2014).

Within the U.S. zone of Germany, Bavaria quickly became the focal point of postwar Jewish life because it contained most of the Jewish DP population.⁴⁵ The three largest Jewish DP camps in Bavaria were Föhrenwald, Feldafing, and Landsberg. During the fall of 1945, each camp, built on former German military barracks, housed about 4,000 to 5,000 Jewish DPs, who were already beginning to establish a rich cultural life.⁴⁶ While each camp had its own camp committee, newspaper, police, and recreational activities, the geographic proximity of the camps and the considerable inter-camp movement between them makes it difficult to speak of them as completely separate entities. For example, many of the Föhrenwald DPs

⁴⁵ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 15; Koppel S. Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's," *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (1947); Bessel, *Germany 1945*.

⁴⁶ Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's."; Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 16.

had been transferred from Feldafling and Landsberg in late 1945.⁴⁷ Though the camp population was in near constant flux, the early residents of the camps were mainly concentration camp survivors and most were from Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and other Baltic countries.

In the camps, the Jewish DPs had frequent interactions with Americans working in the camps, including GIs, military government officials, UNRRA workers, and relief workers. Though the U.S. Army officially operated the camps, by late 1945 the camps were administered almost entirely by UNRRA and voluntary relief organizations like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). Nevertheless, the Jewish DPs frequently interacted with American military government officials and the military police. The fraught and unstable relationship between the Jewish DPs and the military government, as epitomized by the Feldafling railroad incident, will be the subject of this chapter.

Feldafling Railroad Incident in Postwar Bavaria:

A Situation Ripe for Abuse

The incident at the Feldafling railroad station described in the Introduction, in which Jewish DPs were allegedly physically beaten, forced to squat at the side of the road for up to an hour, shoved into trucks, brought to jail, and fined for not having the requisite travel documents, is a useful jumping-off point into the bizarre world of the displaced persons camps. The severity of the incident and the military government's prompt reaction pose two questions that this chapter will explore in depth. First, what

⁴⁷ "Foehrenwald," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007059>.

conditions in postwar Germany allowed for such abusive treatment of the Jewish DPs to take place? And how did this incident receive so much attention amidst the chaos of postwar Bavaria?

In the fall of 1945, Bavaria was an incredibly chaotic place to live and work. In general, confusion and miscommunication characterized the interactions between the military police with local authorities and the UNRRA in the months following the end of the war. According to historian Leonard Dinnerstein, it often took a long time for information to trickle down to lower levels due to “confused policies, inadequate supervisors, uncoordinated programs, [and] generally poor administration.”⁴⁸ In a Memorandum written only one day before the Feldafing incident, Eisenhower himself acknowledged the “many administrative difficulties” and “the confusing nature of some of the problems presented in the various sub-districts” when carrying out policies affecting the Jewish displaced persons.⁴⁹ In the absence of an organized system of rules and regulations, the military police at Feldafing may have behaved in a careless, haphazard way toward the Jewish DPs because they believed they could get away with it.

In addition to the lack of clear oversight or directives, the GIs stationed in Germany during the fall of 1945 were largely inexperienced recruits who lacked an awareness and sensitivity to the traumatic past of the Jewish DPs. Due to the desire of American soldiers to return home after the war had ended in May 1945, there was a

⁴⁸ Leonard Dinnerstein, "The United States and the Displaced Persons " in *She'erit Hapletah, 1944-1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle* ed. Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1985), 349.

⁴⁹ Eisenhower quoted in Judah Nadich, *Eisenhower and the Jews*, 131.

severe manpower shortage and “a continual shift in personnel.”⁵⁰ The soldiers stationed around the displaced persons camps had just been sent over from the U.S. as part of a wave of new military personnel who came in to replace the frontline troops.⁵¹ Without having witnessed combat or the horrors of the concentration camps, the newly conscripted GIs were far less angered by the German wartime persecution and genocide of the Jews and other minority groups since they had not “seen those camps in the raw.”⁵² Perhaps dramatically, Dinnerstein concurred that the newcomers “barely knew that Hitler existed; they certainly did not know about the concentration camps.”⁵³

This wave of new conscript troops entered the DP camps and found themselves thrust with the responsibility of administering a very difficult population: the Jewish DPs were far more dependent on aid than other displaced persons due to the acute trauma they had suffered during the war, and their seemingly uncivilized behavior made them very difficult to relate to.⁵⁴ The Jewish DPs were acutely aware in the change of attitudes of these newer outfits. At Feldafing, for instance, Simon Schochet felt a “sudden change we see and feel in our daily dealings with the [U.S.] forces,” which he found “discouraging and disappointing.”⁵⁵ The horrors that the DPs had experienced were unfathomable to the young GIs, who “found it difficult to understand and like people who pushed, screamed, clawed for food, smelled bad, who couldn’t or didn’t want to obey orders, who sat with dull faces and vacant staring

⁵⁰ Dinnerstein, “The United States and the Displaced Persons,” 401.

⁵¹ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 25.

⁵² Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 87.

⁵³ Dinnerstein, “The United States and the Displaced Persons,” 401.

⁵⁴ The long-term psychological effects of living in a Nazi concentration or death camp will be explained in later chapters.

⁵⁵ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 82.

eyes.”⁵⁶ Having not witnessed the concentration camps, many were bewildered by the seemingly strange and lethargic behavior of the DPs.

The military police’s inexperience dealing with Jewish DPs and their ignorance of all that the DPs had been through might partially explain the insensitivity and harshness which some of them treated the Feldafing DPs at the railroad station. Indeed, Lieutenant Clarke, one of the military policemen involved in the Feldafing incident, recognized that the manpower shortage had rendered it extremely difficult to manage a large group without resorting to “firm action” and regretted that the military police lacked experience dealing with the Jewish DPs, which contributed to the abuse at the railroad station.⁵⁷

Ignorance of the Jewish survivors’ wartime experiences was not the only problem; perhaps more importantly, most Americans had little chance of successfully communicating with the DPs to ever relate to them. Few spoke any of the DP languages like Yiddish or Polish, which made it almost impossible for them to communicate with one another and for DPs to learn of the constantly changing rules. This lack of understanding between Jewish DPs and Americans may at least partially explain why the military police felt compelled to resort to violence. Feldafing DP Monich Zeidenfeld recalled that a military policeman “said something to me in American which I couldn’t understand, but the next thing he kicked me so hard that his helmet rolled off his head.”⁵⁸ Zeidenfeld’s account of physical force preceded by

⁵⁶ Anton Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors* (London: Grafton, 1989), 41. Quoted in Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 23.

⁵⁷ Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Lee Clarke, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁵⁸ Testimony of Monich Zeidenfeld, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

some sort of verbal instruction suggests that the policeman had tried to give Zeidenfeld orders and, when ignored, resorted to violence. From the military police perspective, military policeman Karl C. Vogh explained why he had to resort to physically pushing the DPs: “It was just that they were a little slow in understanding what we meant.”⁵⁹ He justified the pushing of the Jewish DPs onto the truck as an essential measure “to make the people understand and it is necessary because they don’t understand, and they try to get away.”⁶⁰ However, even if the military police did attempt to communicate with the DPs in English, their attempts seem marked by impatience and frustration, and the physical violence they directed toward the DPs seems unjustifiable regardless of the circumstances.

Thus, compounding the problem of inexperienced troops and a shortage of personnel, the Army in general was not well trained to perform rehabilitative tasks and ensure peace. To deal effectively with a population with needs as severe as the Jewish DPs, the American occupiers needed to be patient and empathetic, qualities that were antithetical to the military response of physical force and emotional detachment.⁶¹ This mismatch between Army training and civilian postwar responsibilities was even widely acknowledged by contemporary observers within the Army. The concern among military personnel that the US Army should not control the occupation of Germany was particularly evident in the B-bag, or complaints column, of the southern Germany edition of *Stars and Stripes*. In November, one captain wrote in the B-Bag column that sending the Army to achieve peace objectives

⁵⁹ Testimony of Corporal Karl C. Vogh, October 8, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 23.

was a “tragic misfit” because the soldiers had simply not been trained for peacetime.⁶² Just 11 days later, another letter appeared in the B-bag column in which an American sergeant decried the “total lack of long-range policy” and confusion due to the lack of training: “GIs and officers, trained to fight and plan battles, are not capable of performing duties involving international politics.”⁶³ It is no coincidence that two letters expressing similar anxieties about the soldiers lacking appropriate training appeared in the B-bag column within the same short time frame. Rather, the preponderance of these themes in the B-bag column is indicative of how closely the concerns resonated with the *Stars and Stripes* readership: military personnel in southern Germany.

Due to the lack of a long-term strategy for rehabilitation and a lack of coordination between the various branches of the military government, policies toward the DPs were always in flux. As a result of the perpetually evolving regulations, Jewish DPs were constantly being arrested and mistreated for minor infractions that they did not realize were illegal. Almost identical to the Feldafing incident, a DP at Föhrenwald, Jacob Biber, recalled being arrested by MPs for allegedly smuggling at the railroad station:

We were about a hundred Jewish men and women at the railroad station. Suddenly, we were surrounded by a group of MPs. They searched our briefcases and found some cans of food we had put aside for our journey home. An officer then announced, “You are under arrest!” The many Germans who were sitting in the station on built-in benches were having fun. Pointing at us, they said to each other, “*Juden Schmugglers*” (Jew smugglers)... Finally, at two in the

⁶² Kristofer Hagen, “Would put ‘Brains’ into MG,” *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 16, 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

⁶³ S. K. Geer, “Occupation Armies Called Failure,” *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 27, 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

morning, they let us free after the UNRRA and Joint [JDC] officers in Nuremburg discovered what had happened and intervened.⁶⁴

During these frequent instances of arrest, it was common for American workers to intervene to bail out the DPs from jail. One of these men, Rabbi Abraham Klausner, a Jewish army chaplain who worked in DP camps throughout Bavaria, was relentlessly visiting jails to bail out the DPs. He perceived the situation as a bureaucratic nightmare in which “[p]eople were constantly being arrested because...you had to have an identity card, there were curfews, if you didn’t have an identity card you were arrested but they wouldn’t give you an identity card.”⁶⁵ In short, the Jewish DPs were in a Kafkaesque “lose-lose” situation; they were punished severely for rules that they were often not informed about and could not possibly follow.

This type of mass confusion lay behind the violence at Feldafing; Jewish DPs, camp administrators, and even U.S. Army officials expressed confusion about what was required of displaced persons in terms of necessary documentation. In their testimonies, many Jewish DPs expressed uncertainty over what constituted as a valid travel permit. During the testimony of Feldafing DP Raebek Malka, she explained, “I had other passes to be out of the camp. I didn’t know that I needed one... I just had a pass to travel from the camp.”⁶⁶ While many of the DPs admitted to not having “any special pass to travel,”⁶⁷ others genuinely believed that they had “a valid permit

⁶⁴ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 16.

⁶⁵ Abraham J. Klausner, interview by Toni Binstock, 1 September 1998, interview 45818, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

⁶⁶ Testimony of Raebek Malka, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁶⁷ Testimony of Schmel Zelnik, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

signed by the Military Government of his respective town.”⁶⁸ Another DP testified that though he had a permit, the military police told him that his pass “wasn’t any good” and thus made him squat down.⁶⁹ From these testimonies, it seems likely that there was legitimate confusion among Jewish DPs about what kind of permit they needed in order to travel by train.

The German Jewish chief of police of Feldafing—Ervine R. Tichareau, himself classified as a displaced person, testified that most of the DPs did not understand the traveling regulations and that guards in other parts of Germany had treated them inconsistently. Many were able to travel throughout the Third Army area, and were astonished when the Feldafing military police treated them so much more harshly than those in Munich.⁷⁰ While he acknowledged that “there was a posting in every barracks” regarding traveling regulations and punishments, he was not sure how many of the DPs could read the regulations.⁷¹

The military police themselves seemed unsure of the constantly changing regulations. At his testimony, Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Lee Clarke replied with uncertainty to a direct question about what railroad pass regulations were required of displaced persons: “We are right in the middle of a change at the present time. I don’t know what rule we are going to have two days from today.”⁷² He also recognized that “some of the military policemen are ignorant of the regulations because there are so many. I would say that the tendency has been more towards leniency than towards

⁶⁸ Testimony of Harry Sokol, October 6, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁶⁹ Testimony of Abraham Landesmann, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁷⁰ Testimony of Ervine Tichereau, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Lee Clarke, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

harshness.”⁷³ From these testimonies, it appears that the military police behaved inconsistently toward the Jewish DPs and communicated poorly with them.

Because the rules and regulations were constantly changing and it was almost impossible to communicate these changes, it was extraordinarily difficult for the Americans to effectively administer the Jewish DPs. These difficulties, while not necessarily brought about by the Jewish DPs’ behavior, may have indirectly fostered anti-Jewish sentiments within the U.S. Army. As the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported in December of 1945, “the growing complications in connection with displaced persons are creating annoyance among officers, which in turn leads to anti-Jewish feelings.”⁷⁴ These anti-Jewish attitudes shaped the way Jewish DPs were portrayed and perceived by Americans. Although it was technically only a matter of months between American soldiers witnessing the liberation of concentration camps and the Feldaefing incident, the perception among GIs of the Jewish displaced persons had already been completely transformed from broken victims of Nazi terror to unruly subjects whose movement had to be restricted.⁷⁵

This attitude is evident in the testimonies of the military police, who tried to make their rough treatment of the DPs appear the natural result of the DPs’ own rowdiness. For instance, Private Donovan suggested that it was necessary to push and shove the DPs because of their rambunctious and disorderly behavior. He testified, “They will form a wedge and will try to get in [through the door of the station] all at

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Conditions in Landsberg Camp for Displaced Jews Criticized by Allied Correspondents,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency: The Global Jewish News Source*, December 11, 1945, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/1945/12/11/archive/conditions-in-landsberg-camp-for-displaced-jews-criticized-by-allied-correspondents>.

⁷⁵ See *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 71.

one time, and we have to push them and keep them away.”⁷⁶ While Donovan’s testimony emphasized the difficulty of crowd control, a problem certainly not unique to the Jewish DPs, Lieutenant Clarke’s testimony took this description to a new extreme by pointing to the Jewish DPs’ moral depravity. According to Clarke, the restriction on travel had to be vigorously enforced to prevent the DPs from overcrowding the trains and robbing defenseless German civilians:

Before we stopped in and started to regulate, the displaced persons crowded everyone else off the train. Many of them are merely joy riding... these displaced persons were carrying black market goods on the railroad... There were quite a few complaints from civilians about the displaced persons going through the baggage of the people on the train and robbing them.⁷⁷

In short, the DPs were portrayed as a dangerous and subversive group of people who allegedly took advantage of the free railway system to transport illegal goods and rob German civilians. Aside from Lieutenant Clarke’s perception that the Jewish DPs had to be regulated so that they would not resort to criminal activity, his belief that the Jewish DPs were “merely joy riding” indicates just how disconnected he was from the realities of everyday life for the Jewish DPs. During the fall of 1945, many DPs were desperately trying to search for lost relatives and friends they had been separated from during the war. As Jacob Oleiski, a member of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Germany, recalled in a 1946 speech, the sole mission of most Jewish DPs in the first few months after liberation was to find the relatives they had been separated from during the war: “When a Jew would recover to health, there stood before him only one query: Go and search, where are members of your family.

⁷⁶ Testimony of Private Gordon J. Donovan, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁷⁷ Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Lee Clarke, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

And that is why in Germany during the first months after liberations, one saw Jews gathered in droves at all railroad stations.”⁷⁸ Many of the Jewish DPs had lost much of their families during the war, and re-connecting with any surviving relatives constituted a pressing imperative for the Jewish DPs. This search required DPs to travel beyond their immediate geographic area to DP camps throughout Germany and beyond. A JDC director recalled that during the first year after liberation, there was an “almost mad hunt for family and friends... The slightest clue would send them on a trek of hundreds of miles over many a border without concern for personal safety.”⁷⁹ The frantic search for loved ones, not a conspiratorial plan to transport black market goods and rob civilians, drove the Jewish DPs to crowd onto the German trains in the fall of 1945.

Nevertheless, this negative characterization of the Jewish DPs was not unique to the military policemen who testified. The perception of DPs as a lawless, criminal group who attacked German civilians was widespread throughout Bavaria.⁸⁰ German civilians believed that the DPs were responsible for the majority of crime in the postwar period, and Americans working in Germany also believed that there was a strong association between DPs and criminality.⁸¹ The southern Germany edition of the *Stars and Stripes* reported in November, that “[c]omplaints against lawless acts by displaced persons have been frequent.” As a result, the US Army began placing armed guards and re-instating a pass system in many displaced persons camps

⁷⁸ Jacob Oleiski, "Speech of Mr. Jacob Oleiski: Paper presented at the World Conference of the ORT" (1946) in Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1388.

⁷⁹ Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's," 110.

⁸⁰ Dr. Leo Srole, the UNRRA camp welfare officer at Landsberg, said that U.S. Army officers had distanced themselves from the displaced Jews “by denying their needs, discrediting their motives, and attacking their character.” See Leo Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait," *Commentary* 3, no. 1 (January 1947), 13.

⁸¹ Holian, "The Ambivalent Exception," 459.

throughout the region “to stop an epidemic of looting, rape, and murder by DPs.”⁸²

While the article applied to all displaced persons and not Jewish DPs in particular, the perception of DPs as a disruptive group who posed a threat to German civilians is relevant in illuminating the American military police’s severe response to any perceived disorder or crime committed by DPs.

The *Stars and Stripes* characterization was not completely unfounded. There certainly was crime among the DP population, just as there is among any population.

At Feldafing, Simon Schochet later wrote that there were “quite a few” thieves who used the camps as a home base from which to rob German citizens and American military personnel.⁸³ In fact, just two weeks after the Feldafing incident, another

incident occurred at Landsberg between the DPs and German civilians. However, at Landsberg the role of “victim” and “perpetrator” were reversed; the Jewish DPs allegedly terrorized the German residents living in Landsberg. Under orders from high commanders, the German civilians of Landsberg were evicted from their homes to create more room for the Jewish DPs (Fig. 2). The process soon turned into a riot as the Jewish DPs left the camp to watch the evictions take place, and began looting and pillaging the houses. Even the Jewish camp police, who were called in to try to control the riot, joined the looting.⁸⁴ To finally end the riot and protect the German civilians from harm, the Jewish DPs were forced back into the camp.

⁸² “Armed Guards Approved for Camps of DPs,” *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 28, 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

⁸³ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 68.

⁸⁴ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 36.



Figure 2: German Women Forced to Evacuate Homes to Make Room for Jewish Displaced Persons (1945). From United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C. Photo Archives, <http://www.ushmm.org> (accessed January 15, 2014).

Incidents like the one at Landsberg were easily blown out of proportion to reinforce existing prejudices against the Jewish DPs and anti-Semitic stereotypes, which were in turn used to justify their harsh treatment. According to historian Leonard Dinnerstein, anti-Semitism in the United States reached a peak between 1944 and 1946, and contributed to the attitudes of American officials in Germany.⁸⁵ While anti-Semitism was pervasive across the U.S. zone of Germany, it was particularly widespread among officers in Bavaria.⁸⁶ Consequently, contemporary records and historical scholarship on life for Jewish DPs in Bavaria indicate that the Third Army

⁸⁵ Leonard Dinnerstein, "American Policy" (paper presented at the Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945-1951, Washington D.C., January 14-17, 2000), 105.

⁸⁶ Dekel, *Bricha*. 24.

did treat the DPs more brutally than in other areas in the American zone of Germany.⁸⁷

During the early fall of 1945, Bavaria was under the command of General George Patton, who was infamous for his anti-Semitic views. Unfortunately, the majority of the Jewish DPs in the American zone resided in the region of Germany, Upper Bavaria, that fell under Patton's command.⁸⁸ Patton's antipathy toward the Jewish DPs is well documented. Fearing that the Jewish DPs would spread outside of the camps "like locusts," Patton ordered that each DP camp be surrounded with barbed wire and armed guards and that DPs could not leave the camps without having a substantial reason to do so—and then only with a pass.⁸⁹ In the same month as the Feldafing incident, Patton wrote about the Feldafing DPs in his diary as "the greatest stinking bunch of humanity I have every seen... My personal opinion is that no people could have sunk to the level of degradation that these have reached in the short space of four years."⁹⁰ Just a day before the Feldafing incident, during Patton's visit to Feldafing with General Eisenhower, he referred to the Jews as a "sub-human species without any of the cultural or social refinements of our time" and as "lower than animals."⁹¹ Patton's writings on the Jewish DPs convey his indisputably prejudiced animosity, an attitude that he had no qualms about acting on.

However, the harsh treatment of the Jews in Bavaria cannot be blamed on Patton alone; while Patton was oddly candid about expressing his anti-Semitic views, such attitudes coincided with other American military officials and was not confined

⁸⁷ Dinnerstein, "American Policy."

⁸⁸ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 269.

⁸⁹ Patton quoted in *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Patton quoted in *ibid.*

⁹¹ Patton quoted in Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 27.

to the military government leadership.⁹² The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported in December 1945 that a group of American and Allied correspondents had found “definite evidence of anti-Semitism among some of the officers and men” stationed around Landsberg.⁹³ Similarly, Major Irving Heymont was dismayed to find that American officers around Landsberg subscribed to anti-Semitic beliefs. He overheard one mumble that the Jews were “animals” and that it was unfair that they were getting better treatment than the Germans without working. This officer was verbally reprimanded for his comments—the General “told him to shut up”—which indicates that vocalizing such views was looked down upon.⁹⁴ However, the fact that this man had the audacity to express his anti-Semitic views front of his superiors hints at the prevalence of anti-Semitism among the U.S. Army. Thus, while this particular conflict was brought to Eisenhower’s attention, the scope of the military police and German police’s misconduct likely extended far beyond the September 21 railroad incident.

Though the Feldafig incident was an unusually extreme episode of mistreatment, it was also not completely an anomaly. Some Jewish DPs even claimed in their testimonies that the German police and the military police at the railroad station *regularly* treated them as harshly as they had the night of September 21st. Hirsch Tischter, a Feldafig DP who was not even present during the incident, testified that he was regularly struck at the railroad station, typically by a German

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Conditions in Landsberg Camp for Displaced Jews Criticized by Allied Correspondents," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency: The Global Jewish News Source*, December 11, 1945, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/1945/12/11/archive/conditions-in-landsberg-camp-for-displaced-jews-criticized-by-allied-correspondents>.

⁹⁴ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 13.

policeman.⁹⁵ Because Tischter had to go to a doctor in Munich every other day, he came in regular contact with the German police and the American military police, who would allegedly always grab him by the collar and push him the ground.⁹⁶ His testimony implies that the Feldafing incident was somewhat representative of the kind of abuse the Jewish DPs regularly faced when they encountered the German police.

Given the scope of the abuse, it is surprising that American authorities did not intervene or even that they allowed the German police to be stationed at Feldafing at all. One explanation is that, given their lack of experience, the Americans had come to identify with the German police and became desensitized to violence against the Jewish DPs. The intense negativity that many GIs felt toward Jewish DPs coupled with their identification with the German civilians, who seemed more “normal” and in many ways resembled themselves, created a perverse turn of events: the American soldiers bonded with the Germans and distanced themselves from the Jewish DPs.

Despite the explicit nonfraternization order and the anti-German propaganda that GIs were exposed to before their tours of duty, both army observers and disheartened Jewish DPs observed the growing closeness of Americans and Germans at the expense of the Jewish DPs.⁹⁷ In particular, many Jewish GIs were distressed by the differential treatment the American troops displayed toward civilians versus DPs. An American Jewish officer wrote to his wife in December 1945 that “the American soldiers prefer the company of German men and women, clean, healthy, well dressed,

⁹⁵ Testimony of Hirsch Tischter, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁹⁶ Hans Jaeger, the accused German policeman, testified that he had pushed Tischter but “not that he would fall down.” See Testimony of Hans Jaeger, October 8, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

⁹⁷ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 25.

to that of the DP, dirty, destitute, in frayed garments, and torn shoes.”⁹⁸ He described the attitude Americans displayed toward Germans as bordering on “obsequious” while remaining “impatient, severe, incomprehensive, intolerant and often hostile” toward the Jewish DPs.⁹⁹ Since it was so much easier to relate to the neighboring healthy and young German civilians, soldiers quickly began to treat the German youth as friends or younger siblings. The southern Germany edition of the *Stars and Stripes* reported that American troops, on their own initiative and “without prompting from higher headquarters,” were teaching games and sports to German children by November of 1945.¹⁰⁰ This organic connection to the German civilians occurred throughout Bavaria, much to the disapproval of the Jewish DPs, who felt the Americans did not comprehend the gravity of the Germans’ crimes.

The largely positive and close relationship between the Americans and neighboring Germans, in contrast to the distant relationship between the Americans and the Jewish DPs, sheds light on why the American and German police stationed at Feldafing would have worked together to abuse and mock the Jewish DPs on the night of September 21st. Feldafing DP Isaac Klutch, for instance, described the inescapable abuse he suffered from *both* the German and American Police officers:

I was accosted by the German police. He told me to run fast, and I questioned their authority to have me run fast. The German police struck me over the head until I came to the other side where the Military Police were stationed and the Military Police said “You are a Jew, get into the truck”, and he kicked

⁹⁸ Quoted in Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 140.

⁹⁹ Ibid. This portrayal of the Jewish DPs is confirmed by other contemporary accounts. Even the American Jewish journalist I.F. Stone, known for his left-wing views, described the Jewish DPs as an “unattractive lot” in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 269.

¹⁰⁰ “German Kids Learn New Game,” *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 15, 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

me in the back so hard that I couldn't mount the truck and the other Jewish people had to help me on.¹⁰¹

Based on Klutch's testimony, it seems that he had mistakenly believed he would find a reprieve from the abuse of the German police by running to the American military police side of the station, only to experience equally brutal treatment. This potent memory of the American military police and German police ganging up on defenseless Jewish DPs is corroborated by other DP testimonies. Leba Leib, for example, described how the American and German officers laughed together as they were abusing the DPs: "I saw the Military Police strike a woman across the face and after that the German police laughed... The German police struck me across the face and the Military Police laughed."¹⁰²

The kind of abuse the DPs described seems wildly inappropriate for the alleged offense of traveling without possessing a permit. Revealingly, some DP testimonies suggest they were mistreated without any authority ever asking them about whether or not they possessed a pass or after the Jewish DPs had showed them their pass. For example, DP Chiam Greenberg recalled that after he showed the military police his passes, he was told: "Jew, get on the truck," struck by the German Police, forced to squat, sent to jail, and then fined twenty marks.¹⁰³

Thus, it seems that the DPs were not solely reprimanded for their lack of a travel pass; they may also have been a convenient outlet for the military police to release their general anger at staying in Germany after the war over, having to deal

¹⁰¹ Testimony of Isaac Klutch, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹⁰² Testimony of Leba Leib, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹⁰³ Testimony of Chiam Greenberg, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

with a difficult population facing acute trauma, and motivated to some degree by underlying anti-Semitism.

Feldafing Incident Prompts Investigation

In the chaos of postwar Germany, it is remarkable that the incident received any attention at all. In the fall of 1945, there were countless issues that required immediate attention, such as a massive crime wave, an acute housing shortage, and the massive destruction of infrastructure.¹⁰⁴ Roughly 8 million displaced persons were left toiling in Germany after the war ended, all of whom had pressing needs to be attended to.¹⁰⁵ While the great majority of DPs had been repatriated by the end of September 1945, about 1.2 million DPs remained.¹⁰⁶ The Feldafing railroad episode was certainly a case of mistreatment, but it was also of a relatively minor nature, as it did not result in any deaths or casualties.

The incident would most likely have never been addressed had it not been for the tireless advocacy of Pfc. Harry Sokol, the Jewish GI who brought the incident to Eisenhower's attention. Fortunately for the Feldafing camp residents, Sokol had recently taken a keen interest in the Jewish DP problem.¹⁰⁷ Several weeks earlier, he had begun visiting Feldafing twice a week to speak with the residents and transport mail between the DPs and their friends and relatives in the United States.¹⁰⁸ After hearing reports from the Feldafing DPs about the incident, he was so shocked and

¹⁰⁴ Bessel, *Germany 1945*.

¹⁰⁵ Lisa Haushofer, "The 'Contaminating Agent': UNRRA, Displaced Persons, and Venereal Disease in Germany, 1945–1947," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 6 (2010).

¹⁰⁶ Holian, "The Ambivalent Exception," 457.

¹⁰⁷ Testimony of Harry Sokol, October 6, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹⁰⁸ This was necessary in the fall of 1945 because Feldafing and the other DP camps lacked a postal system.

infuriated that he wrote an enraged letter to the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper, which he also forwarded to General Eisenhower.

Using inflammatory language, he wrote that the abuse of the Jewish DPs “should be of interest to all Americans who came here with the mistaken idea that all men were created equal and that regardless of your religion you would be treated as a man, to walk in dignity and with hope, for the future.”¹⁰⁹ Pledging to bear out the facts in the case of an investigation, Sokol described his version of the events that transpired:

When the train from Munich pulled into Feldafing...the civilians as they left the train were questioned in the following matter—are you German? If the answer was yes, they were politely told to step aside. If the answer was no, they were greeted with blows from the butts of the carbines, and the fists of the military who questioned them. Their treatment was accorded both men and women, abely [sic] assisted by some German civilians who as they happily assisted in the work they love, said, “Now we will kill the rest of you damn Jews.” Then as a climax, the criminals were then made to squat down, and when their muscles would no longer support them and they fell, were again struck by the butts of the carbines.¹¹⁰

He noted that the charges of having an invalid traveling pass were also ludicrous, since many of the DPs did in fact have a pass from their respective local authorities. He dramatically concluded, “Who were the men that did the beating? Black-shirt SS troops? No, they were men that wear the same uniform I wear and that call themselves ‘American Soldiers’—Fighter for the IDEALS of Democracy.”¹¹¹ His disgust and anger at the treatment of the Feldafing DPs is palpable, as is his heartfelt concern for the DPs. As a Jewish GI, he understandably felt a greater connection to

¹⁰⁹ Harry Sokol to *Stars and Stripes*, September 24, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

the Jewish DPs than the non-Jewish soldiers and military police. However, the intensity of his concern was likely atypical, even for a Jewish GI.

It is difficult to speculate about whether Sokol was representative of the larger group of Jewish GIs. On the whole, Jewish GIs expressed varied reactions to the Jewish DPs, ranging from those who hid their Jewish identity to those who warmly embraced the first liberated Jews they encountered.¹¹² This emotional range of responses to the Jewish DPs can be accounted for by the incredible diversity of American Jewry in the 1940s, who shared few common beliefs that bound them together and were more socially diverse than in later decades.¹¹³ Over a half million Jews served in the armed forces during the war, each with their own set of beliefs and attitudes toward European Jews.¹¹⁴

While it is unclear exactly how representative Sokol was of the broader population of Jewish GIs, evidence indicates that, as a group, Jewish GIs did feel a stronger connection to the Jewish DPs than did other officers and played a large role in bettering the conditions of Jewish DP camps. According to Israeli historian Efrayim Dekel, “by far the overwhelming majority of the Jewish soldiers in the American occupation forces” helped the Jewish DPs and even supported their efforts to travel illegally to Palestine.¹¹⁵ Since Jewish GIs were usually the first “free” Jews that the Jewish DPs encountered and more likely to understand Yiddish or Hebrew, they played an especially important role in connecting with the displaced Jews and

¹¹² For an example of an Army Major who concealed his Jewish identity, see Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*. For an example of a Major who embraced the liberated camp inmates, see Aaron Cohn, interview by Adrian Hirsch, 24 April 2001, interview 51569, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

¹¹³ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 31.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁵ Dekel, *Bricha*, 87.

boosting morale.¹¹⁶ While Jewish GIs did not have the organizational strength to execute a collectively coordinated effort to help the Jewish DPs, they were enormously helpful on an individual level.¹¹⁷

Anecdotal evidence from oral histories suggest that American Jews working in Germany occasionally went out of their way to work with the Jewish DPs. Bernard Bermack, a Jewish GI stationed in Landsberg, volunteered to work at the Landsberg DP camp after seeing a bulletin board posting about it. Like Sokol, he forged close bonds with the DPs, sending and delivering their letters to the U.S. and even driving them to neighboring camps to help them search for relatives. The relationships he forged with the Jewish DPs were so strong that the time of his release from duty, he felt “sorry to leave” behind all of the friends he had made at Landsberg.¹¹⁸

Although many American Jews did not feel a particular cultural connection to the Eastern European Jews who populated the camps, they did realize that they would have suffered the same fate had their ancestors remained in Europe. This kind of “survivor guilt” was widespread among American Jews, who were keenly aware that they would have shared the fate of the European Jews had it not been for “the accident of geography.”¹¹⁹ The theme of luck surfaces in firsthand accounts with American Jewish GIs, including Bermack’s oral history interview and Major Irving Heymont’s memoir of his experience at Landsberg. While Heymont decided not to disclose his Jewish identity to the DPs, he privately acknowledged his relative luck: “had my father not fled Russia, my family might have been inhabitants of the

¹¹⁶ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 138.

¹¹⁸ Bernard Bermack, interview by Yana Katzap, 30 March 1998, interview 39975, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

¹¹⁹ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 75.

camp.”¹²⁰ As Aaron Cohn, a Jewish GI stationed in the town of Feldafing similarly expressed, “Just think, if my grandfather...had not decided to come to the U.S.A, that could be me!”¹²¹ While not all Jewish GIs acted on this connection to the extent that Sokol did or even admitted that they were Jewish, the active role of Jewish GIs stands in sharp contrast to the pervasive anti-Semitism among other GIs and military police.

While Jewish GIs like Sokol undoubtedly played a significant role in improving conditions of the DP camps and boosting the morale of the Jewish DPs, their involvement was not enough to bring about lasting change; they needed the support of higher authorities. Once Sokol brought the incident to Eisenhower’s attention, it was remarkable that Eisenhower personally responded to Sokol’s letter and immediately ordered an investigation, which required the presence of additional on-site personnel. Most likely, the public climate of concern for the Jewish GIs led Eisenhower to swiftly react to allegations of abuse at Feldafing.

In the aftermath of the Harrison Report, President Truman and General Eisenhower were under intense pressure to improve conditions for the Jewish DPs. In addition to Truman’s moral outrage at the poor treatment of the Jewish DPs, the Harrison Report also posed a political threat to Truman insomuch as it threatened to draw Jewish Americans away from the Democratic Party.¹²² Consequently, the Harrison Report triggered presidential action that directly influenced Eisenhower. In a September 1945 letter from President Truman to Eisenhower, Truman instructed:

We have a particular responsibility toward these victims of persecution and tyranny (Jews) who are in our zone. We must make clear to the German

¹²⁰ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 109.

¹²¹ Aaron Cohn, interview by Adrian Hirsch, 24 April 2001, interview 51569, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

¹²² Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception,” 460.

people that we thoroughly abhor the Nazi policies of hatred and persecution. We have no better opportunity to demonstrate this than in the manner in which we ourselves actually treat the survivors remaining in Germany.¹²³

In a sense, Truman was preaching to the choir. Eisenhower had been deeply moved after liberating a concentration camp and was purportedly highly sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish DPs. As Judah Nadich, the first Advisor on Jewish Affairs to Eisenhower wrote, Eisenhower's treatment of the Jews was consistently "marked by understanding and sympathy."¹²⁴ Even when Eisenhower pledged to return troops home as speedily as possible after the war, he stressed that the United States had an obligation to help the displaced persons of Europe. He was quoted in a *Stars and Stripes* article: "The sad fact is that our job will be a continuous one until they [the DPs] have been given the opportunity to develop for themselves a self-respecting standard of living."¹²⁵ Eisenhower was clearly devoted to the condition of DPs in general and committed to ensuring their safety.

With this positive predisposition toward the DPs, Eisenhower was now forced to react to the changing political climate. In September 1945, the same month as the Feldafing incident, Eisenhower was observed to be "personally invested" in improving the condition of Jewish DPs, and was exerting pressure on high army officials to improve conditions for the Jews.¹²⁶ Thus, for both external political reasons and guided by his own moral imperatives, Eisenhower grew increasingly involved in the Jewish DP camps. In September and October of 1945, Eisenhower

¹²³ Truman to Eisenhower, "Displaced Persons in Germany," *U.S. Department of State Bulletin* 13 (30 September 1945): 455–63.

¹²⁴ Nadich, *Eisenhower and the Jews*, 11.

¹²⁵ Eisenhower quoted in "Ike Pledges Speed in Returning Men," *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 15, 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

¹²⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 6.

toured the DP camps and wrote a series of memorandums to his subordinate officers in which he incorporated Harrison's recommendations.

At Feldafing, the first all-Jewish camp that had been hailed as a model in the Harrison Report, Eisenhower was particularly active. In fact, less than a week before the railroad incident occurred, Eisenhower had personally toured and inspected Feldafing (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Generals Eisenhower and Patton Tour Feldafing (September 17, 1945). From United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C. Photo Archives, <http://www.ushmm.org> (accessed January 15, 2014).

Eisenhower had asked to be taken to a place where he would be able to sense the emotions of the Jewish DPs, and was thus taken to Feldafing on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, the day of atonement that is viewed as the holiest day in the Jewish year.¹²⁷ He spent nearly a full day at Feldafing, speaking not only with the

¹²⁷ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 163.

camp administrators but with the residents themselves, hearing about their problems firsthand, and playing with the kindergarten children.¹²⁸ The presence of the Commanding General at Feldafing was extraordinarily relieving to the isolated DPs, who feared that the rest of the world had forgotten about them. As Judah Nadich, an American who worked at the camp, argued, “The visit of General Eisenhower proved to be the single greatest factor to date in boosting the morale of the displaced persons. They knew now that they were not forgotten people.”¹²⁹

Eisenhower’s actions after leaving Feldafing showed that he had not only remembered the DPs, but was so affected by his visit that he felt compelled to change their situation. Several days after his visit, Eisenhower sent a memorandum to his subordinate commanders in which he specifically complained about the restrictions of the movement of the Jewish DPs. In a Memorandum dated September 20, just a day before the railroad incident and just over a week before he received Sokol’s letter, Eisenhower instructed his subordinate commanders to remove the American troops stationed around the camps as guards and abolish the system in which DPs were not permitted to freely enter and exit the camps. Instead, he instructed:

Necessary guarding should be done by displaced persons themselves, on the volunteer system and *without arms* (emphasis added)...Everything should be done to encourage displaced persons to understand that they have been freed from tyranny and that the supervision exercised over them is merely that necessary for their own protection and well-being and to facilitate essential maintenance.¹³⁰

Eisenhower’s memorandum highlighted the very behaviors, like using arms and force to make the DPs feel that they still had not been “freed from tyranny,” that would

¹²⁸ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 66.

¹²⁹ Nadich, *Eisenhower and the Jews*, 130.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

create violent conflict at the railroad station merely one day later. Unfortunately, many of the officers were not on the same page as Eisenhower and were slow to carry out his orders. Nadich asserted, “Had this document been carried out in its entirety by all levels of command in the field, the situation would have been changed radically for the better... In too many cases American officers were more sympathetic to the Germans than with the Jews and they searched for loopholes.”¹³¹ Accordingly, the conditions at Feldafing and elsewhere were extremely slow to change. By December, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on the horrible conditions at Landsberg and concluded, “the problem of displaced Jews will not be solved unless the directives of Gen. Eisenhower concerning displaced persons are carried out.”¹³² Since many of Eisenhower’s orders were barely carried out by December, certainly no appreciable change occurred between Eisenhower’s visit on September 15 and the Feldafing incident on September 21.

One can only imagine Eisenhower’s shock when he read Sokol’s letter that the Jewish DPs were not only still being “guarded,” but actively harassed and abused by American troops and the German police. Moreover, when Eisenhower received Sokol’s letter, his visit to the camp and his experiences speaking to the Feldafing DPs and playing with the children would have still been fresh on his mind. The personal bond that Eisenhower felt to the Feldafing DPs in particular might explain Eisenhower’s immediate and strong reaction to Sokol’s letter. Framed in the context of Eisenhower’s recent visit to Feldafing and his September 20 memorandum, his

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "Conditions in Landsberg Camp for Displaced Jews Criticized by Allied Correspondents," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency: The Global Jewish News Source*, December 11, 1945, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/1945/12/11/archive/conditions-in-landsberg-camp-for-displaced-jews-criticized-by-allied-correspondents>.

letter to Sokol that the railroad incident sounded “so shocking and so contrary to every order that I have issued on this subject” is far easier to understand.¹³³

Results of the Investigation

Despite Eisenhower’s personal involvement and the deployment of additional personnel to investigate the incident, the investigation concluded that all of the allegations were based on hearsay. Brigadier General Oliver Haines, who led the investigation, was far more swayed by the military police testimony than the DP testimony. Five days after the investigation, Haines concluded in a Memorandum to Brigadier General P.W. Thompson, Chief of Information & Education Section,

I investigated the alleged incident and found the statements to be entirely false, and based on hearsay only... I am giving you this information with the suggestion that you pass this on to the Editor of *Stars & Stripes* for the purposes of the insuring that the letter written to the ‘B-Bag’¹³⁴ - is not published.¹³⁵

Thompson responded, reassuring Haines that he agreed with his decision and even including comments from the editor-in-chief of *Stars and Stripes*: “Stars and Stripes had no intention of publishing the attached crackpot letter in the first place. It follows that we will keep an eye on communications from Sokol to make sure that nothing

¹³³ Eisenhower to Sokol, October 3, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹³⁴ “The B-Bag” was the title of the complaints column in *Stars and Stripes*. At the time, the “B-Bag,” or the “barracks bag,” was a large clothing bag. The bag gave rise to the popular expression: “blow it out your b-bag,” synonymous with “letting off steam,” for anyone who was unhappy with their situation. For a more detailed explanation, see Alfred E. Cornebise, *The Shanghai Stars and Stripes: Witness to the Transition to Peace, 1945-1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010), 171.

¹³⁵ Oliver Haines to P.W. Thompson, October 13, 1945, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

gets in.”¹³⁶ Thus, despite the mounting evidence that the Feldafing DPs had been seriously mistreated by the American military police, Sokol’s allegations were received as ludicrous and the case was officially dismissed.

However, the case did not quite end there. For reasons that remain unclear, Haines seemed to change his mind over the next couple of weeks as he developed his report to Eisenhower; he officially switched course from insisting that the statements were “entirely false” to at least partially true. Perhaps he was trying to maintain the positive publicity of the army in his first memorandum to General Thompson, or perhaps new developments occurred in the following two weeks that changed Haines’ mind. It is also possible that Haines altered his report to align with the beliefs of the intended audience, and he may have intuited that Eisenhower would have been skeptical of a complete rejection of Sokol’s claims. Regardless, in Haines’ final report to the Commanding General on November 1, he recognized that the military police had shoved the DPs and that at least one American officer, Pfc. Ansilio, had kicked a Jewish DP.

Even these concessions to Eisenhower were extremely limited. He was quick to excuse the actions of the military police who admitted to shoving DPs, as “experience handling a large crowd held in custody by a small number of MP’s indicates that some physical restraint is necessary, especially where language precluded giving instructions by voice.”¹³⁷ Haines thus used the military police’s

¹³⁶ P.W. Thompson to Oliver Haines, October 22, 1945, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹³⁷ Report of Investigation Made By Brigadier General Oliver L. Haines to the Commanding General. November 1, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

inability to speak any of the DP languages as a justification for their rough physical treatment.

Even Ansilio, the sole military policeman called out for his particularly abusive behavior and who Haines conceded was “lacking in balanced judgment,” was excused. Haines wrote that Ansilio “has evidently been considerably affected by association with the unfortunate Jewish DPs” and that during the investigation, Ansilio “stated he was entirely in the wrong and misled by his zeal to assist in bettering the lot of the Jewish DPs.”¹³⁸ For this reason, he recommended that no further action should be taken against him. By highlighting Ansilio’s sympathy with the Jewish DPs and later feelings of remorse about kicking them, Haines preemptively dispelled any argument that Ansilio or other military police officers harbored anti-Jewish prejudices.

Though the verdict was perhaps overly forgiving of the American military police, Haines did make recommendations that reflected his growing sensitivity to the Jewish DPs’ situation. First, there had been virtually unanimous sentiment among both Jewish DPs and American MPs that it was unwise to have German police stationed at Feldafing. As Bella Abramovitz, a Feldafing DP, recalled in an oral history interview, “I was shocked...they shouldn’t have the right so soon after the liberation to wear guns. Even if they were allowed to have a militia, without guns.”¹³⁹ Like Abramovitz, Feldafing DPs were horrified by the presence of armed German policemen at the Feldafing railway station. On this issue, the interests of the US Army and the Jewish DPs converged. The military policemen who testified to Haines, while

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Bella Abramovitz, interview by Ann Zoltak, 25 June 1997, interview 30165, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

faithfully denying the culpability of the Americans, seemed almost uniformly convinced that it was unnecessary to have German police at the Feldafing railroad station.¹⁴⁰ As Haines noted, the military police testimonies indicated that “the displaced persons do not pay much attention to the German police, and resent their efforts to control them.”¹⁴¹ Some American MPs acknowledged that there had been previous problems between the Jewish DPs and the German police, and claimed that their presence was merely “ornamental.”¹⁴² Even Private Donovan, who claimed that the German police had never mistreated the DPs and took them into custody only when the DPs tried to jump the fence, conceded that he saw no reason for the German police to be dealing with the Jewish DPs.¹⁴³ Similarly, Lieutenant Clarke pessimistically speculated that the tension between the German police and Jewish DPs would remain long after the military police left: “they never will make friends between the Germans and the Jews.”¹⁴⁴ As a result, Haines recommended removing German police from the Feldafing railroad station and to stop requiring rail travel permits of the DPs, which restricted their movement disproportionately relative to German citizens.

Notably, neither of his recommendations implicated nor reflected poorly on the American military police. However, the acknowledgement that a problem existed and that Jewish DPs were being mistreated by the German Police was an important

¹⁴⁰ See Testimony of Private Gordon J. Donovan and Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Lee Clarke, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹⁴¹ Report of Investigation Made By Brigadier General Oliver L. Haines to the Commanding General. November 1, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹⁴² Testimony of Corporal Karl C. Vogh, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

¹⁴³ Testimony of Private Gordon J. Donovan, 7 October 1945.

¹⁴⁴ Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Lee Clarke, October 7, 1945, box 4680, file no. 102, Feldafing Investigation Papers.

step toward creating a more comfortable environment for the Feldaafing DPs.¹⁴⁵ It is also important to recognize that General Haines was in a difficult position: he had the dual goals of protecting the Jewish DPs and maintaining peace and good relations with the German population. His recommendation to remove the German police from the railroad station might reflect his desire to protect the DPs from the Germans without directly accusing the German police or engaging them in a confrontation.

Though the military government's response was not as pivotal in transforming the Jewish DP camps as Sokol had hoped, broader changes during the same time period drastically altered the social dynamics of the DP camps; the Jewish DPs increasingly interacted with other subgroups of Americans beyond the military government officials, including JDC and UNRRA workers. To understand the nature of these interactions, it is valuable to examine the ways that the different subgroups of Americans perceived the DPs, the differences between them, and the characteristics and psychological profiles that were ascribed to them. From both a demographic and subjective standpoint, the following chapter will treat the Jewish DP as a subject of inquiry to answer a seemingly basic but complicated question: who were the Jewish DPs?

¹⁴⁵ Based on the records available at the National Archives, it is unclear when Haines' recommendations were implemented.

Chapter 2

The Jewish DP as a Subject of Inquiry: *Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Psychoanalyses*

“The DPs and the survivors generally are, to my mind at least, the quintessential Jews of this century, living symbols of the unshakable will of Jews to survive as individuals and communities.”¹⁴⁶

Historian Yehuda Bauer, *Life Reborn* conference, 2000.

“You would think that we would be happy that we survived the war, you know, always rosy and all that, but we were kind of sad though. I don’t know, I never thought that life will ever become normal again and, well, the experiences were so horrible.”¹⁴⁷

Interview with Sarah Brett, Former Resident at Feldafing DP Camp, 1997.

The Harrison Report and the subsequent incidents of mistreatment that continued to transpire during the fall of 1945 revealed that the U.S. Army was woefully unprepared to handle the Jewish DPs. Understaffed and inexperienced, the military authorities treated the Jewish DPs harshly and inconsistently, with little concern for their mental well-being.¹⁴⁸ This created a dangerous disconnect; the Jewish DPs were stuck in a situation where they were treated by military authorities as nuisances at the same time that they felt an acute need to feel human dignity, warmth, and security—especially from the group of people they regarded highly as their liberators.¹⁴⁹

In the meantime, the American Jewish community was growing increasingly worried about the conditions for displaced Jews in Germany. Across the country,

¹⁴⁶ Yehuda Bauer, “The DP Legacy,” (paper presented at the Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945-1951, Washington D.C., January 14-17, 2000), 35.

¹⁴⁷ Sarah Brett, interview by Molly Horowitz, 25 June 1997, interview 30355, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

¹⁴⁸ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 18.

¹⁴⁹ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 16.

Jewish organizations urged its constituents to take action and featured the Jewish DPs prominently in their newsletters. For instance, the front page of the National Jewish Welfare Board weekly newsletter in October 1945 was dedicated to mobilizing support for the Jewish DPs. The two front-page articles, entitled “Abominable Conditions of ‘Liberated’ Jews Revealed” and “Plain Speaking on A Crucial Issue,” urged its readers to respond to the Harrison Report and advocate on behalf of the displaced Jews: “It is time to do some basic thinking and some plain speaking about the homeless, stateless Jews of Europe.”¹⁵⁰ American Jews responded in kind, organizing protests and rallies as well as urging policymakers to take action to help the Jewish DPs.

In part to satiate the demands of the increasingly outspoken American Jewish community and in part out of a genuine concern for the Jewish DPs, the U.S. Army and military government made several changes during the fall of 1945 that had the net result of maximizing interactions between displaced Jews and Jewish Americans. First, Eisenhower relieved General Patton of command of the Third Army in October.¹⁵¹ He was replaced by General Truscott, who treated the Germans with greater skepticism and was “concerned about the growing tendency to become too chummy with the Germans and to forget what Germany has done.”¹⁵² He was also far more adamant about limiting the traumatizing interactions between displaced Jews

¹⁵⁰ “Abominable Conditions of ‘Liberated’ Jews Revealed,” *National Jewish Welfare Board Weekly Newsletter*, October 8 1945; “Plain Speaking on a Crucial Issue,” *National Jewish Welfare Board Weekly Newsletter*, October 8 1945.

¹⁵¹ Patton was not only replaced because of his treatment of the Jewish DPs, but because of his unpredictable and hot-headed behavior more generally. As Eisenhower allegedly told Truscott, he wanted someone “not as inclined to intemperate outbursts.” See H. Paul Jeffers, *Command of Honor: General Lucian Truscott's Path to Victory in World War II* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2008), 264.

¹⁵² Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 69.

and Germans, and attending to the DPs' general insecurities toward dealing with non-Jews.

Second, power was rapidly transferred from Army officers to UNRRA staff, which brought talented Jewish Americans into the DP camps.¹⁵³ Only about a month after the Feldaing railroad incident, the Third Army relinquished control of all but six displaced persons camps.¹⁵⁴ By November 15, UNRRA became officially responsible for administering the DP assembly centers.¹⁵⁵ However, in every area besides administration, UNRRA would continue to be subordinate to the military, which was responsible for matters related to the provision of food, medical supplies, and clothing.¹⁵⁶

Unlike the Army, UNRRA was explicitly concerned with rehabilitation and addressed the psychological needs of the displaced persons. In an August 1945 Report entitled "Psychological Problems of Displaced Persons," the UNRRA officials expressed great sympathy for the way that Jewish DPs' wartime experiences affected their current behavior.¹⁵⁷ However, just as official Army policy was disconnected from reality, not all UNRRA officials expressed this degree of understanding in their daily interactions with the DPs. At Föhrenwald, for instance, historians Angelika Königseder and Julian Wetzel describe that "disputes arose continually" throughout the fall of 1945. Relationships between the DPs and the UNRRA workers depended

¹⁵³ Among these talented Jewish leaders was Henry Cohen, who came in January 1946 to serve as the UNRRA camp director for Föhrenwald. See Henry Cohen, "The Anguish of the Holocaust Survivors: Talk at Conservative Synagogue of Fifth Avenue on Yom Yom HaShoah" (speech, New York, April 13, 1996), Return to Witness, <http://www.remember.org/witness/cohen.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 97.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵⁷ Report by the UNRRA Subcommittee on Welfare for Europe, "Psychological Problems of Displaced Persons," 1945, Record Group 294, YIVO Institute Archives, DP Collection: DP Camps in Germany, 1945-1952, microfilm.

almost entirely on the individual. For instance, Föhrenwald DP Jacob Biber wrote glowingly of “Miss Katel,” the American UNRRA worker who “gave all of her love to the survivor children and was a great spiritual influence on all of us.”¹⁵⁸ In contrast, he felt alienated by the UNRRA director in charge of Föhrenwald, Jean Henshaw.¹⁵⁹ He recalled that she “habitually looked down on us with a sarcastic smile on her face, as if we were some kind of vermin or pests” and put her legs on top of her desk during meetings with the camp committee, which he found disrespectful.¹⁶⁰ Even worse, other UNRRA officials “treated us like escaped criminals who had disobeyed Hitler’s will to be exterminated,” and were completely ignorant to their needs for human connection and social warmth.¹⁶¹

The psychological disconnect between the UNRRA workers and the DPs manifested in a variety of minor incidents, one of which occurred when UNRRA officials reduced the rations given to the Föhrenwald DPs to give more to the Germans without prior warning. In response, the Föhrenwald workers violently protested: “We starved for six years—let them feel what it’s like to go hungry.” When one UNRRA worker responded that they should be grateful for having received clothes, a DP shouted back, “We’ve simply gotten back a few of the things the Germans stole from us.”¹⁶² Tense moments like these revealed how far some of the UNRRA officials were from understanding and respecting the sensitivities of the DPs, despite their official recognition of the DPs’ complex psychological needs.

¹⁵⁸ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 16.

¹⁵⁹ In his memoir, Biber actually referred to her as “Miss Blanchette.” However, other records refer to the first UNRRA Director as “Jean Henshaw.” See Königseder and Wetzol, *Waiting for Hope*, 97.

¹⁶⁰ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 15.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁶² Königseder and Wetzol, *Waiting for Hope*, 29.

In addition to the lack of understanding on the part of individual UNRRA workers, the rapid transfer of responsibility to UNRRA brought problems of its own. Jacob L. Trobe, director for Germany of the JDC reported in a *New York Times* article that “the UNRRA’s activities had suffered from a sudden transfer of authority after a period in which it had not had a chance to shoulder the responsibility.”¹⁶³ The role of UNRRA in relation to the Army and other authorities remained unclear throughout the fall of 1945, leading the *Stars and Stripes* to report in late November 1945: “UNRRA in Germany is a ‘mess.’”¹⁶⁴ The disorganization of the UNRRA and its chronic inefficiency was apparent to many Jewish DPs, which may have contributed to their disappointment with the UNRRA workers.¹⁶⁵ While there was steady improvement in the quality of UNRRA staff, replacing the US Army with UNRRA teams was not the panacea it was hoped to be.

The third major change that occurred during the fall of 1945 was the stronger establishment of Jewish organizations like the JDC in the Jewish DP camps.¹⁶⁶ In contrast to UNRRA, the JDC workers gave the Jewish DPs the opportunity to work with “free” American Jews who treated them with greater understanding. Isaac Norich, a camp survivor and Feldafing DP explained, “I worked very well with the UNRRA officers, but when JDC came into the camp it was something new. They

¹⁶³ Trobe quoted in Drew Middleton, “More Help Urged for Jews in Reich: American Unit Chief Declares Restoration of Family Life is Being Neglected,” *New York Times*, October 28 1945.

¹⁶⁴ “UNRRA Offers 1,000 GI Jobs,” *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 23 1945 microfilm, New York Public Library.

¹⁶⁵ Ze’ev W. Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 109.

¹⁶⁶ The JDC was the most important voluntary relief organization for the Jewish DPs, as it was the largest and contributed the most support. See Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 55.

brought what we call a *Yiddische Neshume* [Jewish soul].”¹⁶⁷ Many Jewish DPs deeply believed that Jewish Americans, both in the Army and in relief organizations, could offer something that non-Jewish Americans could not: a “warm Jewish heart.”¹⁶⁸

Much to the disappointment of the Jewish DPs, American Jewish relief organizations were slow to establish a presence in the camps. This delay provoked great anguish among the Jewish DPs, who found it difficult to understand why they had such little contact with American Jews. As Dr. Zalman Grinberg, a Jewish DP and future chairman of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the U.S. Zone, criticized in an appeal to the World Jewish Congress at the end of May, “four weeks have passed since our liberation and not a single representative of world Jewry...has come to talk with us about the gravest ordeal ever endured by any people...[t]hese are the sad and incomprehensible facts.”¹⁶⁹ American Jews and other “representatives of world Jewry” had tried to establish contact with the Jewish DPs, but there were severe military restrictions on outside organizations coming into the camps in the first few months after liberation. With regards to the JDC, the Third Army and Seventh Armies in Bavaria were reluctant to allow the organization to enter the camps or grant them control, as they feared that “nongovernmental civilian relief workers would be an unwelcome intrusion on their authority.”¹⁷⁰ Despite the Army’s reservations, the situation had grown so dire by the fall that it became necessary to allow the JDC

¹⁶⁷ Isaac Norich, “Life in the DP Camps: The Special Role of the JDC,” (paper presented at the Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945-1951, Washington D.C., January 14-17, 2000), 46.

¹⁶⁸ Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1382.

¹⁶⁹ Grinberg quoted in Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 58.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

workers into the camps.¹⁷¹ Once in the camps, the JDC provided vital programming, ranging from distributing food and clothing to the DPs, organizing emigration, performing social work, operating a tracing bureau for DPs to reconnect with friends and relatives, providing health care, and supporting cultural and educational programs.¹⁷² The expansion of the JDC efforts into the camps ushered in a new era; now, civilian American Jews and European displaced Jews finally had ample opportunities to interact with one another.

However, similar to the problems the Army faced, the early JDC workers lacked the resources, personnel, and training to deal with the severity of problems the Jewish DPs faced. The first JDC employees were trained as ordinary social workers, and were not equipped to deal with the problems of postwar Germany and respond to the acute needs of a traumatized population.¹⁷³ Their problems rehabilitating the Jewish DPs was aggravated by the severe overpopulation of the Jewish DP camps, which accelerated during the fall of 1945 as Jews flowed continuously into the U.S. zone.

It was no coincidence that the Army, JDC, and UNRRA workers all found themselves bewildered by the Jewish DPs; they had little in common with these largely Eastern European Jews who had vastly different life experiences. Thus, before delving into the perceptions that the JDC and UNRRA workers had of the Jewish

¹⁷¹ The JDC had officially begun its work over the summer, when two JDC representatives established a medical program at Feldafing and JDC worker Eli Rock established the central headquarters of the JDC in Munich. However, it was not until the fall that the JDC established an everyday presence within the DP camps. See Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 57.

¹⁷² Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 62.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 61.

DPs, it is important to first outline the demography of the Jewish DPs and assess the difficulties of analyzing perceptions of them as a singular homogenous group.

Demography of Jewish DPs in Fall of 1945

The Jewish DPs constituted an incredibly diverse group, which was continuously changing. Bernard Bermack, a Jewish GI who worked at Landsberg DP camp from June 1945 to January 1946, recalled that the camp “was like a revolving door, they were coming in, going out, and others were coming in.”¹⁷⁴ This “revolving door” phenomenon considerably complicates the task of analyzing American perceptions of the Jewish DPs, as Americans working at Föhrenwald, Feldafing, and Landsberg were not necessarily in contact with the same group of individuals.

While the camp population was in near constant flux, certain generalities about the DPs over time can be deduced. Broadly speaking, there were three different groups of Jewish DPs present in the camps during the fall of 1945. The first group, present from the establishment of the camps, was the camp survivors. The survivors “consisted almost entirely of men and women between the ages of 18-45,” with virtually no children or elderly people.¹⁷⁵ Most of the former camp inmates were from Eastern Europe, because almost all Jewish camp survivors from Western Europe had been repatriated to their countries of origin in the first few months after liberation.¹⁷⁶

During the summer and fall of 1945, a second group of partisans came to join the DP camps. They had escaped from the ghettos and death camp transports to join

¹⁷⁴ Bernard Bermack, interview by Yana Katzap, 30 March 1998, interview 39975, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

¹⁷⁵ Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's,” 104.

¹⁷⁶ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 67.

partisan units on the Eastern front and in the Balkans. According to JDC official

Koppel S. Pinson, “[p]sychologically as well as physically, these partisans represented a healthier element” and “presented somewhat better integrated personalities.”¹⁷⁷ Many of them were able to bring children with them and had often been able to keep their families in tact. Due to their militaristic experiences during the war, they were observed to be independent, self-sufficient, committed to the interest of the group over the individual, and resistant to outside authority.¹⁷⁸ Simultaneously, they were joined by people who had been in hiding during the war, termed *Unterseeboot* (submarine). Their entry into the camp also brought in children, which led to some of the first reunited families of survivors (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: A Reunited Jewish Family in the Feldafing Displaced Persons' Camp (1945). The original caption reads: "The first complete Jewish family unit from Poland. Parents survived years in concentration camps; their little girl was hidden with Polish peasants, until the parents called for her." From United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C. Photo Archives, <http://www.ushmm.org> (accessed January 15, 2014).

¹⁷⁷ Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's," 104.

¹⁷⁸ Ralph Segalman, "The Psychology of Jewish Displaced Persons," *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 23 (1947): 366.

Finally, the third group, which also came to the DP camps beginning the fall of 1945, were refugees from Eastern Europe, mainly from Poland and Russia. Some had fled into the Soviet Union when Germany invaded Poland, and others had never directly experienced Nazi occupation. These newcomers came to the U.S. zone of Germany seeking refuge after experiencing persecution in their native countries in the aftermath of World War II.¹⁷⁹ In the fall of 1945, small-scale pogroms erupted throughout Eastern Europe, which convinced many that they could never establish a permanent home in Eastern Europe. By December, Dr. Joseph Schwartz, the chairman of the European Council of the JDC, reported in the *New York Herald Tribune*, "Several hundred of the 80,000 Jews still alive in Poland are leaving the country daily without permits and visas to escape from rampant anti-Semitism."¹⁸⁰

Though not technically displaced during the war, these persecutees joined the "old DPs" in the camps and received the benefits of DP status.¹⁸¹ In addition to fleeing persecution, many were motivated to come because they believed it would be "easier to get to Palestine from a DP camp in the U.S. zone."¹⁸² They tended to be more religious, and their cohort included a sizable population of orthodox Jews. Since they had not experienced the same degree of depravation during the war, they were generally in better physical condition than the other two groups. More so than the second group of partisans and *Unterseeboot*, their entrance into the camps dramatically altered the age composition of the DP camps, as they brought large numbers of children. The effects of this new wave of DPs was particularly amplified

¹⁷⁹ Pinson, "Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP's."

¹⁸⁰ "Jews in Poland In Flight From Anti-Semitism," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 10, 1945.

¹⁸¹ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 51.

¹⁸² Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 53.

in Föhrenwald; out of the 1,400 Eastern European Jews who entered Bavaria at the end of October and the beginning of November, 1,080 were sent to Föhrenwald.¹⁸³ As a result, the Föhrenwald camp population swelled from 3,000 in October 1945 to 5,300 by January 1946.¹⁸⁴

Despite the relatively strong health of this third group, their entrance into the camps created a massive logistical problem that the military government did not know how to deal with. Since so many Eastern European Jews were simultaneously trying to enter the DP camps, accepting them all created severe overcrowding and reduced the quality of life for the other Jewish DPs, who were in dire need of relief, and reduced to the “bare minimum of existence.”¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, it seemed inhumane to turn down persecuted Jews so soon after the “Final Solution,” and the Harrison Report had already drawn so much unwelcome publicity toward the U.S. Army’s policy toward Jews.

Moreover, the Jewish DPs in the camps were adamant that no fellow Jew should be refused entry.¹⁸⁶ As Schochet recalled in Feldafig, “Despite the turmoil, all are eager to share what little they have with their compatriots in misery.”¹⁸⁷ The solidarity between the DPs fostered what the American psychiatrist and Landsberg UNRRA welfare officer Dr. Leo Srole termed the “psychology of the lifeboat,” in which newcomers to the camps were “accepted and squeezed in somehow, despite orders to the contrary.”¹⁸⁸ Even the usually cynical Heymont observed of the

¹⁸³ Königseder and Wetzol, *Waiting for Hope*, 97.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁸⁵ Judah Nadich quoted in “Jews in Poland In Flight From Anti-Semitism.”

¹⁸⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 75.

¹⁸⁷ Schochet, *Feldafig*, 27.

¹⁸⁸ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 16.

Landsberg DPs, “The people already registered with the camp will not turn away their fellow Jews. I am convinced they will share their rations and already overcrowded quarters rather than see the newcomers forced to return to eastern Europe or left to fend for themselves.”¹⁸⁹ Largely as a result of the fierce advocacy of the Jewish DPs on behalf of the Eastern European persecutees, the latter argument prevailed; despite the Army’s misgivings, Eastern European Jews would continue to pour into the camps unabated throughout the following years.

Americans working in the camp, as well as the DPs themselves, were sensitive to how these differences among the Jewish DPs shaped their involvement and presence in the camps. Major Heymont perceived important differences between the various groups of Jewish DPs at Landsberg, the vast majority of whom were born in Poland.¹⁹⁰ He observed that the Lithuanian and Latvian Jews were the most educated and contrasted with the majority of the Landsberg DPs “of humble Polish origin.”¹⁹¹ He also described the new wave of Russian Army veterans and Polish partisans as “a good element. They seem to be hard workers, intelligent, and disciplined.”¹⁹² Perhaps as a result of these differences between the groups, the Jewish DPs remained somewhat segregated by nationality despite the welcoming ethos of the “psychology of the lifeboat.” Another Jewish GI stationed at Landsberg during the fall of 1945, Bernard Bermack, noticed that “the Romanian Jews stick together, the Hungarian Jews stick together, the Polish Jews stick together... unfortunately, the Polish Jews

¹⁸⁹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 75.

¹⁹⁰ See “Place of Birth of Jewish Residents of Landsberg, October 1945” table in William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2008), 326.

¹⁹¹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 40.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 93.

hated the Hungarians and wouldn't have anything to do with them.”¹⁹³ Bermack's account challenges the Zionist narrative of the camps as a harmonious Jewish community where all prior differences were erased. Rather, even for Jewish DPs who refused to be repatriated to their native countries and eagerly welcomed unknown newcomers, one's nationality strongly affected one's social interactions within the DP camps.

As Bermack's observation of the hatred between the Polish and Hungarian Jews suggests, differences among the DPs could lead to conflict. Indeed, conflict between the Jewish DPs was inescapable, particularly as the cold weather of the fall increasingly confined them indoors, to their overcrowded quarters.¹⁹⁴ As Feldafing DP Schochet wrote, “The lack of comfort and privacy which we endured during the war is impossible to tolerate now that we are free... continuous intercourse with people of different temperaments, backgrounds and habits has brought about a multitude of disagreements and generated an atmosphere of tension.”¹⁹⁵ The tension resulted in a flood of requests to change one's barracks in order to live with different people, which created just another logistical headache for the already over-burdened and over-extended camp administrators.¹⁹⁶

However, the differences between DPs did not only lead to conflict. Rather, the variety of backgrounds and talents of the DPs could contribute to a healthier and richer cultural environment. Jacob Biber, a Föhrenwald DP who had been in hiding

¹⁹³ Bernard Bermack, interview by Yana Katzap, 30 March 1998, interview 39975, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

¹⁹⁴ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 108.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁹⁶ For a description of the logistical issues of changing the Jewish DPs' living arrangements, see Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 40.

during the war, embraced the differences between the DPs and happily welcomed the third wave of Eastern European Jewish DPs: “The war veterans and the youths who returned from Russia were a positive influence on our camp. This ‘new stream’ brought us many talented artists, teachers, and professionals.”¹⁹⁷ Although Biber embraced the diverse skills that the “new stream” of DPs brought to the camps, his differentiation between the new and old kind of DP implicitly recognized the relatively lackluster participation of the DPs who had been in the camps for the longest—the camp survivors.

Biber’s positive feelings toward the newcomers who had not experienced the concentration camps may have been related to his status as a so-called *Unterseeboot* (submarine), the term for those who had been in hiding during the war. Segalman explained in *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly* that it was difficult for concentration camp survivors and the *Unterseeboot* to mix because the former group “felt that they had suffered more” and the latter group “were unwilling and reluctant to associate with those who had lost much of their personal dignity and standards of cleanliness and appearance.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, the various pre-war and wartime experiences of the DPs affected, at least to an extent, their participation in camp activities and the people they connected to and spent time with.

The diversity among the DPs led to vastly different perceptions that Americans working in the camps forged of the “quintessential” Jewish DP as either a helpless and traumatized victim or as a courageous and enterprising survivor. The small sample size of Jewish Americans who wrote about their interactions with the

¹⁹⁷ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 30.

¹⁹⁸ Segalman, “The Psychology of Jewish Displaced Persons,” 365.

Jewish DPs also makes it difficult to generalize how most viewed the Jewish DPs. Thus, the following section will employ a micro-historical approach to analyze common themes in the accounts of individuals who worked with the Jewish DPs in different capacities, including Major Irving Heymont, the Jewish military commander of Landsberg; Leo Srole, the UNRRA Welfare Officer at Landsberg; and Koppel S. Pinson, the JDC Educational Director who worked throughout Bavaria. When available, the analysis will be supplemented by observations from contemporary Americans who worked with the Jewish DPs. These individuals from the military, UNRRA, and the JDC provide an interesting cross-section of the type of Jewish American that the DPs would encounter in the camps. Their perceptions of the Jewish DPs serve as valuable indicators of how Jewish DPs' were portrayed around similar issues, such as meeting the demands of orthodox Jews, the importance of Zionism, the capacity of Jews to work, and their psychological well-being. While their accounts may not be representative of the broader group of American Jews, they do shed light on how the Jewish DPs could be perceived from various vantage points.

Recognizing Conflict: Religious and Political Tensions

From all perspectives, it seemed that the greatest source of contention among DPs revolved around religion; the majority of Jewish DPs were secular, while a vocal minority was orthodox. Sharp religious cleavages in the camps contributed to tensions between the DPs and with Americans involved in the camps, who grew frustrated trying to balance the demands of the secular versus orthodox Jews. Both Pinson and Srole wrote disparagingly of the orthodox Jews in the DP camps. When it came to

allocating scarce resources, Pinson wrote, “[m]any a battle was fought in the camps between this militant minority and other agencies in the camp...and usually the determined and unbending attitude of orthodoxy had its way.”¹⁹⁹ His rhetorical treatment of the orthodox Jews as demanding could be partly due to his personal background as a reform Jew, but it is also indicative of the relationship between the JDC and orthodox displaced Jews. As an organization with a secular religious outlook, the JDC did not want to compromise its ability to help the most DPs at the expense of meeting the needs of a “determined and unbending” minority. In contrast to organizations like Va’ad Hahatzalah (Rescue Committee), a rabbinical organization that “focused exclusively on promoting the interests of the orthodox survivors and their religious concerns,” the JDC was committed to supporting all Jewish DPs and distributing their resources equitably, which occasionally led to conflict with the orthodox Jews.²⁰⁰

From an equity perspective, secular Americans had trouble understanding why a small group of DPs should have such an outsized influence in the camps. Like Pinson, Dr. Leo Srole observed that the aggression of the orthodox minority in imposing its views on the rest of the camp had altered the culture of Landsberg: “Though it is a minority, the religious group, with an alert rabbinical and lay leadership, is aggressive in enforcing general observance of the Sabbath, holidays, and other religious regulations.”²⁰¹ Srole’s use of the word “aggressive” to characterize the orthodox Jews, in contrast to his glowing portrayal of Jewish DPs in general, suggests that he had grown somewhat frustrated trying to meet their demands.

¹⁹⁹ Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP’s.”

²⁰⁰ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 74.

²⁰¹ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 19.

Lastly, Heymont's experiences with the Jewish DPs at Landsberg aligned with Pinson's and Srole's, though he expressed more ambiguous feelings toward the orthodox Jews. He noted that Jewish DPs of Landsberg were sharply divided between "the religious and non-religious elements"²⁰² and wrote of the mutual dislike between the two groups: "the non-orthodox majority ridicules the minority orthodox group as exponents of an archaic past. Similarly, the orthodox group views the non-orthodox people as nonconformists who are a threat to the continuation of Jewish life as the orthodox believe it should be."²⁰³ Personally, Heymont seemed to feel conflicted about his feelings toward the orthodox DPs, who he warily admired but could not understand. He explained, "I am baffled at the thinking of the orthodox group... Although they are exasperating and have a very narrow outlook, I can't help but admire the moral courage of the orthodox group."²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, he found the U.S. Army's policy toward orthodox Jews created a vicious cycle: the fear of interfering with Jewish religious practices translated into better treatment for the more religious elements of the camp, which further contributed to tensions between secular and religious Jews.

This tension is highlighted in various points of Heymont's account. First, he is horrified by the conditions of the kosher kitchen, where he saw human excrement on the floor, and threatened the man in charge that he would close the kitchen as a health threat if it were not cleaned up within 24 hours. However, he admitted to his wife, "As I spoke to him, my fingers were crossed. General Rolfe [Heymont's superior] had left instructions that we were to lean over backwards and make certain that

²⁰² Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 40.

²⁰³ Ibid., 84.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

nothing was done that could be interpreted as interference with religious practices.”²⁰⁵

Due to the negative publicity generated by the Harrison Report and Eisenhower’s strict instructions to be respectful of religious practices, the military generals were under pressure to satiate the demands of the orthodox Jews. This gave the orthodox Jews a degree of leverage over the camp administrators, which Heymont suspected they sensed and were using to take advantage of him.²⁰⁶ His account indicates that he did not have as much control over the orthodox Jews as he had over the majority of Jews, which he felt was unfair and contributed to the already hostile relationship between religious and secular Jews in the camps.

The non-religious majority at Landsberg soon sensed that the orthodox were receiving special treatment. When it came time to allocating the scarce housing that was opened up by the forced German evacuations described in Chapter 1, Heymont permitted the religious Jews to use one of the houses to form a rabbinical academy. Since so many new families longed for the privacy of a house, the rivalry to obtain one was keen. Many were outraged that one of these highly sought after houses was simply given away to a small group of DPs. Heymont was promptly accused of being biased in favor of the religious Jews and of “being unduly under the influence of [the orthodox] Rabbi Rosenberg.”²⁰⁷ Though irritated by these accusations, Heymont empathized with the secular DPs’ concerns because he was also growing frustrated with the relentless demands of the religious DPs.

The orthodox Jews were not the only outspoken and controversial sub-group of the Jewish DPs; the militantly Zionist DPs aggressively asserted their demands and

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 11.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 84.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 40.

often came off as narrow-minded and intolerant to opposing viewpoints. Like with the orthodox Jews, the degree to which the DPs subscribed to the Zionist ideology could lead to conflict, as the DP camp increasingly became a terrain of competing Zionist identity claims. At Föhrenwald, the DP Jacob Biber irately “blamed the messengers from the land of Israel” for causing the camp to split into social and political subgroups, which meant that “suddenly, many called each other dirty names.”²⁰⁸ Ironically, the very characteristics that were shared by almost all of the DPs—a Jewish identity and an affinity with Zionist ideology—were also the qualities that divided them most sharply depending on the degree to which they subscribed to those beliefs.

Although most of the Zionist DPs were secular, they elicited similar reactions from the Americans in the camps as the orthodox Jews. On a practical level, Americans who worked in the camps were frustrated by the Zionists who separated themselves from the rest of the camp to live together on a kibbutz because this created administrative difficulties. Heymont was particularly irritated because these Zionist DPs refused to work on German farms as individuals, persistently asked him to give them farms belonging to former Nazis, and generally “caused problems.”²⁰⁹ Since these enthusiastic Zionists were insistent that the DP camps were a brief and temporary stopover on the way to Palestine, they showed little interest in contributing to camp life.

On a more theoretical level, other Americans expressed concern that the Jewish DPs were obsessed with Zionism to an unhealthy degree. In 1947, Pinson

²⁰⁸ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 87.

²⁰⁹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 21.

claimed that the DP devotion to Zionism, an attitude he called “Palestinocentrism,” possessed a zeal bordering on totalitarianism.²¹⁰ He asserted, “In many ways they have become totalitarians. All cultural activity must have only one aim, to make propaganda for Palestine. The leaders do not trust open discussion of intellectual problems.”²¹¹ Specifically, he claimed that contact with Nazism had influenced their emphasis on “disciplinary unity” and fostered a dangerous intolerance for opposing viewpoints.²¹²

While Pinson’s characterization of the Jewish DPs as undemocratic and narrow-minded was written in 1947, he also claimed that the same attitudes were present from the beginning of the DP camps, when the first Jewish DPs left to immigrate to the United States. According to Pinson, some of the first emigrants “were escorted out of the camp with stones and jeers of ‘traitor.’”²¹³ While there is little evidence to support that this sort of public shaming of U.S.-bound emigrants occurred on a widespread scale, Pinson’s description is not completely unfounded. Anecdotal evidence indicates that it was difficult for Jewish DPs planning on immigrating to the United States to vocalize that preference to their Zionist friends without eliciting negative reactions. Jacob Biber, who immigrated to the U.S. from Föhrenwald, recalled that his friends debated his choice and some viewed it as a betrayal, insisting that “no survivor should go anywhere but to the land of Israel.”²¹⁴ The perceived pressure that Zionist DPs exerted on other Jewish DPs against immigrating to places other than Palestine was also voiced by JDC worker Lucy

²¹⁰ Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP’s,” 116.

²¹¹ Ibid., 114.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 116.

²¹⁴ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 104.

Dawidowicz, who went so far as to claim, “Zionists believed that the ends justified the means, political goals prevailing over humanitarian needs.”²¹⁵

Pinson and Dawidowicz’s problems with Zionism are revealing because they shed light on the larger disconnect between the JDC, which was not officially affiliated with Zionism, and the Zionist Jewish DPs. Although the JDC provided a great deal of support to the Jewish DPs in the cultural sphere, it was also in the cultural sphere that “the fundamental political differences between the Jewish survivors and the JDC, which was not an avowedly Zionist organization, came to the fore.”²¹⁶ Since the JDC was not exclusively Zionist but in fact comprised of American Jews who largely intended on staying in America, they were more likely to experience conflict with the avowedly Zionist Jewish DPs who were hell-bent on immigrating to Palestine and convincing other Jews to do so as well.

Moreover, Pinson’s portrayal of Jewish DPs as totalitarian was particularly damaging in the burgeoning cold war climate that viewed totalitarianism, rather than Germany or even National Socialism, as the enemy. Just a month after the liberation of the concentration camps, *Time* magazine warned that the horrors should not be viewed as a German crime but as the product of totalitarianism.²¹⁷ Rather than blame National Socialism, Americans began to invoke totalitarianism as a way to justify why the Soviet Union, a former ally, had almost instantly become an enemy in the postwar period.²¹⁸ Thus, the categorization of Jewish DPs as totalitarian was highly

²¹⁵ Dawidowicz quoted in Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 79.

²¹⁶ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 73.

²¹⁷ “The End of Belsen?,” *Time Magazine*, June 11, 1945, 36.

²¹⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 86.

unfavorable and even dangerous, as it could lead to a perverted conflation of Jewish victims of persecution with a newer, more abstract struggle against an ideology.

The DPs' refusal to return to their native countries contributed to their perception as a threatening population who had the potential to destabilize the fragile peace in Germany. One GI warned in the B-Bag column of *Stars and Stripes* that since the Jewish DPs could not stay in Germany or return home, something had to be done or else "this will be the beginning of the end of a very short and brief peace."²¹⁹ The Zionist DPs' insistence on immigrating to Palestine posed a geopolitical threat that extended beyond the narrow realm of conflict within the DP camps.

Overall, religious and political differences among the Jewish DPs created distance between them and the Americans they encountered. At the same time, the Americans were also fascinated by the Jewish DPs and strove to understand them. Whether out of genuine concern for the welfare of the Jewish DPs or out of detached scientific curiosity, the Americans who worked with the Jewish DPs would come to formulate a wide range of psychological explanations for their behavior. For the most part, their observations were reflective of the Americans' preexisting prejudices and stereotypes about the Jewish DPs.

Assessing the Psychological State of the DPs

"This place would be a psychologist's heaven," Major Heymont wrote in a letter to his wife.²²⁰ However, for most of the fall of 1945, the efforts of the US Army and relief groups focused on rescue efforts, including the provision of food, clothing,

²¹⁹ Pfc. H. Kaplan, "Says DPs Want to Return Home," *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 12 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

²²⁰ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 45.

heat, and shelter, rather than on the rehabilitation and mental well being of the DPs.²²¹

As a result, little psychiatric aid was given to the DPs in the beginning of their stay in the DP camps and the Jewish DPs had limited contact with psychiatric professionals. Americans with no prior psychological training were among the first to write about the psychological state of the Jewish DPs. Their perceptions reveal the various stereotypes that the general public held of the Jewish DPs, which could contribute to misunderstandings surrounding the Jewish DPs' behavior.

Of the lay stereotypes propagated about the psychological state of the DPs, one of the most common was that they were products of a distorted process of natural selection. The conception of the concentration camps as a perverted form of Darwinism led to the widespread perception that those who had survived Nazi persecution had done so by being tough and ruthless; the Nazi genocide had led to a "survival of the worst."²²² As Morris Waldman, a leader of the American Jewish Committee wrote in 1946, "Those who have survived are not the fittest... but are largely the lowest Jewish elements, who by cunning and animal instincts have been able to escape the terrible fate of the more refined and better elements who succumbed."²²³ Given American Jewry's present-day fascination with and admiration for "Holocaust survivors," Waldman's inflammatory language that stigmatizes the displaced Jews for surviving Nazi persecution seems shocking. Even at the time, this kind of language elicited a strong backlash; the Adviser on Jewish Affairs, Judge Simon Rifkind, questioned "who in this wide world had the moral right to judge

²²¹ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²²² Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 69.

²²³ Morris Waldman to John Slawson, undated, but received August 1946, AJ Committee Papers, FAD-1, Box 80, Israel/Palestine Partition, AJC, 1937-48 in *ibid*.

them” and condemned “the calumny that the displaced Jews constitute the dregs of the East European ghettos.”²²⁴ Clearly, American Jews were divided in their perceptions of the Jewish DPs and on the crucial question of whether surviving was a product of cruelty toward others or simply a product of luck.

The Jewish DPs themselves agonized over the question of why they had survived, and felt an immense burden of guilt. They continuously asked themselves why they had survived while “more worthy human beings” had died, and wondered worrying questions like, “were we really saved, or were we being punished?”²²⁵ Schochet felt tortured by guilt during his time at Feldafing, and Biber’s feelings of guilt were so intense at Föhrenwald that he asserted, “we carried that guilt permanently...our souls would remain homeless forever.”²²⁶ The Americans’ suspicion surrounding their behavior during the war did little to calm their already tortured minds over the question of why *they* had survived when millions of others had perished.

However, the allegations that camp survivors had compromised their morals to survive were not completely unfounded; recollections from survivors portrayed a brutal life of “survival of the fittest” in the concentration camps. A huge body of literature, including Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*, has demonstrated that concentration camps suspended the rules of normal behavior and fostered an “every man for himself” mentality, as stealing someone else’s bread could mean the difference between starvation and survival. The brutal methods of turning prisoners

²²⁴ Simon H. Rifkind, “The Disinherited Jews of Europe Must be Saved,” in *American Jewish Conference* (New York: American Jewish Conference, 1946) from YIVO Institute Archives, DP Collection: DP Camps in Germany, 1945-1952, microfilm.

²²⁵ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 136.

²²⁶ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 25.

against one another was part of the SS method of shifting onto victims “the burden of guilt, so that they were deprived of even the solace of innocence.”²²⁷ While this attack on the character of Jewish DPs only applied to the portion of the Jewish DPs who had experienced the concentration camps, it indirectly implicated all Jewish DPs who, as discussed in the previous chapter, were portrayed as a lawless, rowdy group.

At least initially, the experiences of concentration camp survivors continued to shape their behavior in the DP camps, which seemed to confirm the stereotype that they were ruthless. It is important to remember that the Jewish DPs had to fight for every scrap of food or clothing in the concentration camps, and should not have been expected to “reaccustom themselves to the norms of civilized behavior” overnight.²²⁸ Nevertheless, Americans who visited the camps were repulsed to find people who seemed like animals; they stole food, refused to wash themselves, and had absolutely no patience for waiting.²²⁹ This portrayal was confirmed in part by DPs themselves: Feldafing DP Simon Schochet observed, “The majority of Feldafingers are edgy, and growl at the slightest provocation.”²³⁰ Similarly, Föhrenwald DP Jacob Biber described DPs as “kings of suffering” due to all they had experienced during the war. He explained that some “thought they were the only one who suffered, and still suffered” and consistently put their needs before the needs of others. As a result, they were less tolerant of everyday hassles like waiting in long lines and frequently fought with one another.²³¹

²²⁷ Primo Levi, “The Gray Zone,” in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 263.

²²⁸ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 24.

²²⁹ See Francesca Wilson’s description of Feldafing in Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell*, 40.

²³⁰ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 38.

²³¹ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 32.

In addition to confirming the stereotype that Jewish DPs had survived Nazi persecution due to their brutality, their behavior fostered the belief that the DPs would never become “normal.” Even those who believed that the DPs were essentially decent human beings feared that they were permanently damaged by the concentration camps and would never truly recover enough to resume a normal life.²³² Perhaps recognizing the negative perceptions that many outsiders held of the Jewish DPs, memoirs written by Jewish DPs are careful to emphasize that they adjusted remarkably quickly to “normal” behavior. Even Biber, who characterized the concentration camp survivors as impatient “kings of suffering,” was quick to clarify: “Within a very short time, though, all the survivors regained their dignity... It looked like a sudden awakening from a nightmare into a real world. Chaos transformed miraculously into order.”²³³ While recognizing that the brutal Nazi methods of control had profoundly affected the victims, Biber’s memoir is ultimately a story of triumph over trauma, as captured by the book’s title, *Risen from the Ashes*.

Over at Landsberg, Major Heymont did not share Biber’s confidence in the Jewish DPs’ ability to return to normal or chaos to miraculously transform into order. Rather, his views in the fall of 1945 were extremely pessimistic: “With few exceptions, the people of the camp themselves appear demoralized beyond hope of rehabilitation. They appear to be beaten both spiritually and physically, with no hopes or incentives for the future.”²³⁴ In short, the Jewish DPs were a hopeless case; they were too scarred by their wartime traumas to ever be rehabilitated.

²³² Eva Fogelman, “Coping with the Psychological Aftermath of Extreme Trauma,” (paper presented at the Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945-1951, Washington D.C., January 14-17, 2000), 90.

²³³ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 32-33.

²³⁴ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 5.

Heymont's belief in the utter demoralization of the Jewish DPs affected his attitude toward their capacity to work, which was problematic because workers were urgently needed in the camp. He observed that they refused to help maintain the camp, which he found bewildering.²³⁵ Much to his frustration, their refusal to work affected their hygiene and the cleanliness of their living spaces. He complained, "Even after concentration camp life, it is not too much to expect people to flush toilets that are in working order. Is it too demanding to ask that they use the urinals in the latrines and not the floors?... It is dispiriting that we still can't stir the people out of their inertia."²³⁶ Although Heymont was a Jewish US Army major with the "*Yiddische Neshume*" that the Jewish DPs had longed for, he failed to understand how the psychological effects of living in a concentration camp, a place that had deliberately undermined all customs associated with civilization, would possibly prevent the DPs from flushing the toilets or cleaning their living spaces.²³⁷ He also did not link their refusal to work with the traumatic association between work and the Nazi policy of annihilation by labor.²³⁸ Failing in his efforts to motivate the DPs to maintain a basic level of hygiene or work and at a total loss to understand why, Heymont grew increasingly frustrated with the Landsberg DPs.

The psychiatric professionals who began entering the camps through UNRRA in late fall offered a wide range of explanations for the seemingly bewildering behaviors of the DPs, and each psychiatrist came away with his or her own full-fledged analysis of the DPs. Some were quick to extrapolate severe psychological

²³⁵ Ibid., 10.

²³⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

²³⁷ For another interpretation of Heymont's quote, see Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell*, 38-39.

²³⁸ Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1369.

deficiencies from minor behaviors.²³⁹ At the *Life Reborn* Conference, psychologist Eva Fogelman, who specializes in the psychological effects of the Holocaust, explained how each professional's eagerness to psychoanalyze affected their interpretations of the DPs' behavior: "If a survivor took an extra potato, he was a hoarder because he did not get over starving in the camps; if a child kicked a soccer ball too hard, they labeled him violent. If a Jew became involved in the black market, he was immoral. Negative labels abounded."²⁴⁰ While these psychiatrists looked for clues to prove that the DPs were permanently scarred by their wartime experiences, other psychiatric professionals were amazed that the survivors "did not present severe psychopathology," and were in fact eager to work and return to normalcy.²⁴¹

Dr. Leo Srole, a psychiatrist from New York, was one of these professionals who challenged the stereotype of the Jewish DPs as "demoralized beyond hope of rehabilitation" based on his observations at Landsberg.²⁴² He began working as the UNRRA welfare officer at Landsberg in December, and soon assumed a key role in the camp's operations. While Srole worked at the same DP camp as Heymont, the two viewed the DPs completely differently.²⁴³ Unlike Heymont, he did not believe the Jewish DPs were in any way responsible for the poor state of the camp. Rather, the anxiety-provoking and straining environment of the camp itself was poisonous to

²³⁹ Fogelman, "Coping with the Psychological Aftermath of Extreme Trauma," 90.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 5.

²⁴³ While the majority of his time at Landsberg was in 1946, when Landsberg had received a new influx of Eastern European émigrés and the dynamics of the camp had shifted considerably, his time at Landsberg did partially overlap with Heymont's.

the health of the traumatized DPs and led to a state in which “their psychic wounds are not only not being healed, but are actually being aggravated.”²⁴⁴

In regards to the DP capacity for work, Srole rejected Heymont’s characterization of the DPs as idle drones, which he deemed a “false stereotype.”²⁴⁵ Rather than portraying the DPs as paralyzed by inertia, “The displaced Jews have an almost obsessive will to live normally again, to reclaim their full rights as free men.”²⁴⁶ Whereas Heymont asserted that the DPs felt a lack of social responsibility to maintain the camp grounds, Srole found that all of the indispensable services at Landsberg “are performed exclusively by camp residents, not merely because it is expected of them or out of necessity, but out of a sense of personal, social responsibility, a moral regard for work, and the normal drive to develop one’s skills and talents for a better future.”²⁴⁷ Given the jarring contrast between Srole’s and Heymont’s perceptions of the Jewish DPs at Landsberg, it seems incredible that they were at the same camp at around the same time. Thus, suspicion arises that their perceptions reflect their own personal sympathies and biases more so than the actual behaviors of the DPs.

Similar to Srole, JDC official Pinson did not view the DPs’ psychological state as irreparably damaged but as understandable by-products of their experiences and current conditions. He felt it was “wrong on general principles to set up a pattern of DP personality.”²⁴⁸ Rather, he viewed the DPs as a “cross-section of ordinary Eastern-European Jews, who have been harder hit than other Jews and who naturally

²⁴⁴ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 23.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP’s,” 108.

bear scars of these experiences.”²⁴⁹ Accordingly, he did not think the identity of the DPs was defined by the tragedy they had experienced; rather, they possessed an identity outside of surviving Nazi genocide that he believed they would approximately return to once given “normal surroundings.”²⁵⁰

However, Pinson shared Heymont’s concern that the DPs were resistant to working. He wrote that the Jewish DPs “show an incapacity for sustained effort and concentration” due in part to a “reduced sense of social responsibility and in a diminution in the sense for private property.”²⁵¹ Unlike Heymont, Pinson qualified their resistance to work as specifically aimed at working for Germans; while the Jewish DPs did not want to contribute to the German economy, he found them willing to work for UNRRA, the occupying powers, or for the camp administration.²⁵² This more hopeful explanation was embraced by higher-up American officials as well. Judge Rifkind, the Adviser on Jewish Affairs, explained at the American Jewish Conference that only a small percentage of Jewish DPs categorically refused to work as a result of their negative associations between work and slave labor, while the rest of them merely refused to work for the Germans. Although this was understandable, it did severely limit their employment opportunities.²⁵³

The observation that Jews were idle primarily due to a lack of avenues for non-German employment and their association of work with slave labor undermined the idea that they were too traumatized to work, and suggested that they would be

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 110.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., 113.

²⁵³ Simon H. Rifkind, “The Disinherited Jews of Europe Must be Saved,” in *American Jewish Conference* (New York: American Jewish Conference, 1946) from YIVO Institute Archives, DP Collection: DP Camps in Germany, 1945-1952, microfilm.

able to resume a normal work life after they emigrated out of Germany. Thus, unlike previous observers, Leo Srole and Koppel S. Pinson were careful to emphasize that many of the psychological traits of the Jewish DPs were exacerbated by their current status as displaced Jews in Germany, and that they would recover once they returned to a more normal environment.²⁵⁴

“Obsessive Remembrance” and the Evolving Memory of the Jewish DPs

As an incredibly diverse group of individuals forced to live together, one of the only threads that bound them together was the shared experience of suffering and the compulsion to tell and re-tell their stories. Contrary to the modern-day perception that all Holocaust survivors remained completely silent about their past, it appears that the oft-cited obligation to “never forget” already existed in some form in the DP camps. The DPs repeatedly shared their stories of suffering with each other, which they would have a much harder time doing outside of the DP camps with people who could not comprehend what they had experienced. The sharing of stories simultaneously served a therapeutic purpose for the DPs and widened the emotional distance between the DPs and the American Jews who worked in the camps.

The intense psychological need for the camp survivors to share their stories is well-documented. In Primo Levi’s landmark book, *Survival in Auschwitz*, he articulated this urge: “The need to tell our story to ‘the rest’, to make ‘the rest’

²⁵⁴ While this portrayal of the DPs is considerably rosier, it might have underestimated the severity of the DPs’ problems that could not be fixed simply by changing their environment. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor (albeit with no personal experience living in a DP camp), was not as optimistic that DPs would inevitably return to normalcy: “a tortured person remains tortured...a person who went through those experiences hasn’t really changed. For we know now that there are wounds that don’t heal. There are wounds that time doesn’t heal.” See Elie Wiesel, (keynote address presented at the Life Reborn: Jewish Displaced Persons 1945-1951, Washington D.C., January 14-17, 2000), 84.

participate in it, had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse, to the point of competing with other elementary needs.”²⁵⁵ In fact, this desire was so strong for Primo Levi that he had constant nightmares of not being able to tell his story even while he was a prisoner at Auschwitz. For Levi and other survivors, the need to bear witness was one of the only reasons they refused to give up on living despite the horrors of everyday life in the concentration and death camps.

In the first few months after liberation, the Jewish survivors finally had an outlet through which to share their stories. Consequently, telling each other about all that they had experienced and witnessed during the war was one of the first conversations the DPs had. Biber described his first day of arrival in Feldafing as a scene of newcomers eagerly “perched on beds and standing in circles” to find out about “the devastations each had experienced.”²⁵⁶ In Biber’s experience at Föhrenwald, the sharing of these stories immediately brought the DPs closer together. Despite their differences, the shared experience of trauma and suffering created an environment in which the DPs “embraced one another with loving looks and sincere friendliness.”²⁵⁷ For Biber as well as many other DPs, the process of sharing and listening to stories of hardship was a cathartic form of social bonding that tied the DPs of vastly different experiences together and helped them understand that they were not alone. Biber poetically wrote that sharing stories was a way for DPs to “unload a little of the heavy weight that pressed on their hearts.” Though not all of the

²⁵⁵ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 9.

²⁵⁶ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 7.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

DPs opened up about their suffering, those who did found that it helped alleviate their mental anguish.

The constant sharing of stories of suffering also made an impression on the American observers, whose reactions ranged from interest in their stories to annoyance at the DPs for fixating on their past rather than looking toward their future. Rabbi Stanley Abramovitch, who worked for the JDC, visited Landsberg and Feldafing in the fall of 1945 and was intrigued by the intensity of traumatic stories each DP had to share: “Everybody had a story and everybody’s story was a shocking story and no two stories were alike. The people were in the mood of talking, they had to talk, they wanted somebody to listen. You could spend days and nights just talking.”²⁵⁸ Rabbi Abramovitch was somewhat unique among the American workers in that he wanted to *listen*, and recognized how important the presence of a listener was to those who had survived genocide to bear witness.

According to other American observers, however, the “constant reliving” of the past sometimes bordered on an obsessive fixation with one’s traumatic experiences. In a speech that Heymont delivered to the Landsberg DPs on September 29, he alluded to the DP fixation on their past by gently reprimanding them, “No man can ask you to forget what you and your families have been through. However, you can’t live in the shadow of the past forever.”²⁵⁹ More bluntly, JDC staff member Koppel Pinson wrote two years later, “the DP is preoccupied almost to the point of

²⁵⁸ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁵⁹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 28.

morbidity with his past.”²⁶⁰ Pinson, like many other Americans at the camps, felt appalled by the extent to which DPs talked about and emotionally relived their past.

Peter Novick’s book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, may shed light on why American Jews like Pinson felt that the DPs ought to move on. According to Novick, Jewish Americans in the 1940s wanted to distance themselves from the association with victimhood. Their desire to “shun a victim identity” resulted in their decision to downplay the distinctly Jewish aspect of the Nazi genocide.²⁶¹ As Jewish Americans longed to be assimilated into the fabric of mainstream American society and prove that they were “just like everybody else,” they may have been frustrated by the Jewish DP insistence that the Jewish people were different because they were uniquely bound by a shared experience of suffering that transcended national boundaries.²⁶² The Jewish Americans’ desire to “obliterate memories” of the Nazi persecution, as Pinson put it, rather than to “never forget” is startling to modern-day readers because it contrasts so sharply with the importance of the Holocaust to American Jewish identity today.

More broadly, the Jewish American depiction of the Jewish DPs in the 1940s is antithetical to the modern-day depiction of the Jewish DPs. During the DP era, competing stereotypes of the Jewish DPs abounded and American Jews were conflicted over which ones they subscribed to. As Ralph Segalman explained in his 1947 article for *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, “American Jewry today has little or no understanding of the Jewish Displaced Person,” as their perceptions were drawn from either exaggerated fundraising appeals or, conversely, from

²⁶⁰ Pinson, “Jewish Life in Liberated Germany: A Study of the Jewish DP’s,” 109.

²⁶¹ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 8.

²⁶² Ibid., 7.

unsympathetic newspaper reports that focused on the Jewish DPs' "black marketeering," "continual demanding" and "unwillingness to work."²⁶³

Over time, however, a different sort of portrayal emerged: the Jewish DP as a heroic figure who was vibrant and full-of-life. Today, this remains the dominant narrative. In 2000, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, the Chair of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Council, praised "the incredible survivor response of renewing personal life and re-creating Jewish community and dignity," which he attributed to the "primordial Jewish religious instinct to *choose life* and re-create communities after every destruction [emphasis added]."²⁶⁴ Yehuda Bauer, one of the most prominent historians on the DP era, is quoted at the beginning of the chapter referring to Jewish DPs as "the quintessential Jews of this century."²⁶⁵ Greenberg and Bauer had sincere intentions; to acknowledge and admire the efforts of the DPs in light of the hardships they faced. However, the label is a heavy burden to bear. Uniformly praising the resilience of the Jewish DPs inadvertently neglects the experiences of those who were not able to "choose life"—those who were depressed or even suicidal.

Depression and suicide *were* part of the DP experience, as participants in the era were well aware. Biber described that for the first few months at Föhrenwald, his wife "cried bitterly every day," and he himself was overwhelmed by "feelings of blame and a sense of unworthiness for having outlasted our loved ones."²⁶⁶ Their

²⁶³ Segalman, "The Psychology of Jewish Displaced Persons," 361.

²⁶⁴ Rabbi Irving Greenberg, foreword to *Life Reborn, Jewish Displaced Persons 1945-1951: Conference Proceedings*, ed. Menachem Z Rosensaft (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2000), 2.

²⁶⁵ Yehuda Bauer, "The DP Legacy," 35.

²⁶⁶ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 24.

depression was brought on for a variety of reasons: the loss of loved ones and traumatic experiences during the war, the seeming indifference of the world to their suffering, the meager camp rations and poor conditions, and the lack of opportunities to work. While certainly not all DPs were depressed, there was a distinguishable group that had a far more difficult time moving on. Schochet described a group of “Feldafingers” who, still in the summer of 1945, had lost interest in living:

I can spot them at once. They are still clad in the same outfits which they were liberated in or the pyjamas which were given to them upon entering Feldafing... They wear the wooden clogs of the concentration camps and are generally unkempt, unshaven and rumpled-looking... Most of them have not once left the confines of the camp and are not interested in any of the activities around them... They are happy to be left alone to do as they please and will avoid all contact to escape being caught up in any problem or enduring relationship. None of these men has registered to go back to this country or emigrate to another. Many have not acknowledged letters from old friends and relatives.²⁶⁷

Schochet’s description of this lethargic and apathetic group of DPs, who were too depressed to even try to re-connect with their friends and family, complicates the public memory of miraculously high-spirited DPs, who were constantly organizing and working toward a better life. At times, the inescapable anguish that Biber described compelled DPs to kill themselves. Biber soon saw people who had survived even the horrors of the Nazi camps commit suicide by hanging themselves,²⁶⁸ and Feldafing DP Simon Schochet wrote of the unsettling suicide of a fellow DP who threw himself onto the railroad tracks, which disturbed the entire camp community.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 41.

²⁶⁸ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 16.

²⁶⁹ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 115.

Even the characteristics of the DPs that are traditionally hailed as signs that they were moving on, like their high marriage rate, were not necessarily indicators that they were “returning to normal.” Rather than viewing marriage as a way to “choose life,” Rabbi Stanley Abramavotch, who worked with the Jewish DPs, viewed the high marriage rate as a way to stave off depression and “overcome isolation and sadness.”²⁷⁰ Similarly, Biber wrote in his memoir, “[w]eddings were performed, children were born, anniversaries were celebrated, but not with a normal happiness; more like a forced smile.”²⁷¹ In this way, the usual indicators of community rebirth could also be evaluated as methods of coping with profound trauma. Indeed, UNRRA welfare officer Leo Srole felt that the acclaimed “return to normalcy” masked the profound anxiety and despair of the DPs, in which the camp’s cultural institutions were really just a “behavioral façade, behind which ran progressively deepening currents of bewilderment, depression, despair, and fear of abandonment to a limbo existence as ‘stateless, homeless, rejected living-dead in this bloody graveyard.’”²⁷² While this may have been an underestimation of the important role that cultural life did play in the DP camps, Srole’s analysis justifiably underscored that there was something wrong beneath the surface.

The disconnect between our present-day memory of the DPs and the reality of everyday life portrayed by the participants themselves—Jewish DPs and American workers in the DP camps—can be partially explained by the way Jewish DPs are treated: as symbols in a broader narrative about Jewish vitality. As historian Hayden

²⁷⁰ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

²⁷¹ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 54.

²⁷² Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 21.

White cautioned in his seminal work, *Metahistory*, the various modes of emplotment—the form and structure of a historical narrative—shape history into a story that conforms to certain literary tropes. The “romance” mode of emplotment “celebrates the triumph of the good after trials and tribulations.”²⁷³ Historians as well as the general public have almost unanimously embraced the “romantic” mode of emplotment to structure the narrative of the Jewish DPs. Even the title of the most recent conference on Jewish DPs, *Life Reborn*, captures the notion that “life” ultimately triumphed over death. Since the experiences of those who were depressed or suicidal during their stay in the DP camps do not easily fit into the narrative of Jewish strength and vitality, their stories have been downplayed or labeled as unimportant. However, uncovering these subaltern histories are critical to understanding the complexity of the DP period.

To further understand the complexity of this period and the ambivalent relationship between Americans and the Jewish DPs, the next chapter will use the tools of cultural anthropology and the concept of liminality to conceptualize the contested space of the displaced persons camp and the relationships formed within it.

²⁷³ Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 10; Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

Chapter 3

Conceptualizing the Waiting Room: *The Search for Permanence in a Liminal Space*

“Tell me where can I go? There is no place I can see. Every door is closed to me. To the left or to the right. It is the same in every land: there is nowhere to go. Please understand.”²⁷⁴

“*Where Can I Go?*” Tune sung at assemblies at DP Camp Föhrenwald.

“I only wish to God that tomorrow the Landsberg camp and the others like it would close their gates forever. I only wish to God that tomorrow I could speed you all on your way to the countries of your choice. That time will come soon – I hope. In the meanwhile, we are still here at Landsberg... Let this be an active beginning and not a passive, unchanging interlude.”²⁷⁵

Major Irving Heymont in speech to the Landsberg DPs, September 27, 1945.

The incomprehension that the Jewish DPs encountered when they tried to connect with outsiders occurred because the two groups inhabited different worlds. The UNRRA workers, relief workers, and military officials were based at the camps for a definite period of time, after which they would return to their homes and families and resume their normal lives. The Jewish DPs, on the other hand, had no “normal life” to return to or even a concrete destination. The DP camps were their new permanent homes, forming the tenuous basis from which a normal life could be constructed from the fragments of the old.

The Jewish DPs occupied a transitory space between the world that they had known before the war and the life they hoped to begin outside of Germany. They knew it would eventually come to an end, but they had no idea when or how. In *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner uses the term “liminality” to categorize this kind of ambiguous transitional period:

²⁷⁴ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 79.

²⁷⁵ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 25-29.

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.²⁷⁶

Turner's concept of liminality is valuable in understanding how the DPs came to make sense out of and adapt to living in an in-between space between two worlds, where their long-term plans were temporarily and indefinitely suspended. In a liminal space, the "threshold people" are typically treated as equals with no clear hierarchy and an "unstructured or rudimentarily structured" society emerges, with horizontal bonds connecting individuals to one another.²⁷⁷ The characteristics of *liminal personae* include a minimization of sex distinctions, absence of rank, and a lack of wealth-based distinctions.²⁷⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, there were important distinctions among the DPs, such as those based on nationality, religiosity, and political views, which undoubtedly affected their social groups and participation in camp life. Nevertheless, the DPs' shared identification as Jewish created a largely inclusive environment in which other distinctions were at least partially undermined, as the classifications that separated people in the "normal" world did not necessarily apply. Since the DPs were living in a space that existed between laws, conventions, and ceremonies, they had the unique opportunity to develop their own.

The implications of this unstructured, relatively egalitarian society for the Jewish DPs are two-fold. First, there was a stark contrast between liminality and the rigidly structured, hierarchical world that the military administrators operated in. The

²⁷⁶ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969), 95.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 106.

dissonance between these two realms shaped the values and concerns of each group and impeded the ability of each to understand the other group on their own terms. Conversely, the frequent interactions between the Jewish DPs and Americans could also help the Jewish DPs conceptualize a world beyond the DP camps by forcing them to socialize with people who operated outside the realm of liminality. While the Americans could not completely understand the instability that the DPs were experiencing, their very presence represented the possibility that a normal world existed outside the realm of the DP camps.

Second, the lack of structure in a liminal state is fundamentally unsustainable in the long-term, which led to an internal tension among the Jewish DPs, who craved permanence. Turner argues that liminality cannot be a permanent state because it is too chaotic; society cannot function without some sort of structure, division of labor, and hierarchy.²⁷⁹ As a result, the DPs experienced conflicting urges to treat their camp as a temporary waiting room and as a permanent new home. Initially, the DPs resisted establishing a home in a situation that was, by definition, temporary.²⁸⁰ As contemporary observers noticed, the DPs lived in a “state of mental mobility, detached from their localities and ready to proceed at the first opportunity.”²⁸¹ While the DPs were eager to leave the camps, the indeterminate nature of their situation—there was no clear ending to the period of liminality—forced them to create structure within the liminal space of the DP camps and find permanence wherever they could find it.

²⁷⁹ See *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception,” 454.

²⁸¹ Simon H. Rifkind, “The Disinherited Jews of Europe Must be Saved,” in *American Jewish Conference* (New York: American Jewish Conference, 1946) from YIVO Institute Archives, DP Collection: DP Camps in Germany, 1945-1952, microfilm.

Although the DPs longed to live in a stable and permanent place after years of constant transfers and movements, they were resistant to exerting their energies toward establishing a permanent home in the DP camps. The camps were not the ideal place for the Jewish DPs to find permanency for several reasons. First, they were temporary assembly centers whose residents were in constant flux. As described previously, there was a continuous flow of new DPs into the camps, residents were continuously leaving either by emigrating out of Germany or transferring to different camps, there was a rapid change of personnel working within the camps, and even the policies toward the DPs were constantly changing. This created a perpetual state of instability and uncertainty within the camps.

Second, the DP camps themselves were painfully reminiscent of the DPs' earlier sites of trauma: the concentration, labor, and death camps. According to Föhrenwald DP Jacob Biber, the camp environment "evoked the terrible memories of the concentration camps"²⁸² since "the caged-in environment forced a constant reliving of scenes from our horrible pasts."²⁸³ The feeling of being "caged-in" was manifest in the camps' physical structure and regulations; at least initially, barbed wire surrounded the camps and a pass system required that the Jewish DPs could only leave with a written pass. Moreover, Biber resented the "crowdedness, meager rations, and secondhand clothes."²⁸⁴ The camp housing in overcrowded barracks deprived the Jewish DPs of privacy, which they felt was key to regaining their self-dignity and respect and re-establishing family life. The DPs were also subject to frequent and intrusive inspections of their living quarters, a reminder that they were

²⁸² Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 95.

²⁸³ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 16.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

subjects of a military government with no autonomy over their own living space.²⁸⁵ Even Heymont, himself not usually the most sympathetic to the DPs, grew concerned that the unexpected inspections were “jarring notes to their desire to return to normal existence.”²⁸⁶ He observed that inspectors treated the DPs as if they did not exist, opening their closets and perusing their personal belongings. He sympathetically speculated, “It must be intensely degrading and humiliating to them to have strangers barging into their miserable rooms and looking around with an obviously critical attitude.”²⁸⁷ Thus, the very presence of Americans in the camps could undermine the DPs’ attempts to create a semblance of normality and demonstrate an utter lack of sensitivity for the DPs’ desire for privacy.

Lastly, the DP camps were located in perhaps the most inappropriate place for Jews to find peace and security: Germany. Almost all of the Jewish DPs had no desire to make a permanent home living as refugees in Germany; they wanted to get out of the country as soon as possible. Besides for the minimal personal contact needed to sustain the black market, the Jewish DPs despised the surrounding Germans and did not want to have any interactions with them. They felt that they were living in the midst of their killers and viewed the surrounding German civilians as responsible for or complicit in the mass atrocities perpetrated against the Jews.²⁸⁸ The Jewish DPs’ intense hatred for the Germans was seen again and again by American observers throughout Bavaria. Heymont observed that the Landsberg DPs, “had an undying

²⁸⁵ Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception,” 462.

²⁸⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 43.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 82.

hatred of the Germans”²⁸⁹ and the Adviser on Jewish Affairs, Judge Simon Rifkind, declared at the American Jewish Conference that the German population was hated “with an intensity beyond the capacity to describe.”²⁹⁰ For obvious reasons, the Jewish DPs were anxious to immigrate to their final destination and “leave the country which once was hell.”²⁹¹

When the DPs realized that their long-anticipated final destination was more of a nebulous abstraction than a concrete reality and that they were to live in the DP camps indefinitely, many became distraught and bitterly disappointed.²⁹² As Biber recalled about his arrival into Föhrenwald, “I am sure that all of us survivors thought that this might be a place of quick transit, a chance to briefly recoup our energy and spirits, but the word *camp* started my heart pounding in stress.”²⁹³ The word “camp” strongly evoked the horrific sites of trauma from which the Jews wanted to escape. Moreover, “camp” signified a long-term stay in an unknown place, a displaced life without an end in sight. His fear of confinement to a camp was confirmed when he and his wife were assigned to live permanently in a small room: “We experienced a queasy feeling over our apparent luck- ‘We got *permanent* rooms’... This brought on another question: ‘For how long?’ We felt like we were stranded in a desert.”²⁹⁴ The Jewish DPs had believed that, after all that they had been through, they would be the highest priority for the Allied governments and they would be speedily sent to their

²⁸⁹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 39.

²⁹⁰ Simon H. Rifkind, “The Disinherited Jews of Europe Must be Saved,” in *American Jewish Conference* (New York: American Jewish Conference, 1946) from YIVO Institute Archives, DP Collection: DP Camps in Germany, 1945-1952, microfilm.

²⁹¹ Helena Tischauer quoted in Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 2109.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 1371.

²⁹³ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 3.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

country of choice. Instead, they were not only stuck in an indeterminate waiting area, but they were stuck waiting in Germany.

The difficulty of remaining suspended in a “betwixt and between” position was exacerbated by the seeming normalcy of life outside of the camp for the German civilians. The separation between the two worlds was particularly dramatic in Bavaria, which had been spared the worst of the air raids and bombings of World War II. Residents of the three displaced persons camps observed life “as normal” continue outside the gates of the camp, without noticing “any spiritual transformation or change of the German people.”²⁹⁵ To the Jewish DPs, the towns of Bavaria appeared picturesque and virtually “unscarred by the war.”²⁹⁶ Moreover, the availability of fresh food in the agriculturally fertile area meant that, “to the eye of the observer in the Bavarian area, the Germans still give the appearance of being the best fed people in Europe.”²⁹⁷ The Jewish DPs in Bavaria were acutely aware and angered by their deprivation relative to the surrounding Germans. The contrast between the DPs’ cramped and uncomfortable living conditions and the German civilians living comfortably outside of the camp’s borders, as if the war had never happened, intensified the DPs’ sense of injustice at remaining stuck in the camps.

This feeling of injustice aggravated the already fraught relationship between the Jewish DPs and the German civilians, which the Americans sought to diffuse by separating the two groups physically.²⁹⁸ The degree to which the Germans and Jewish DPs occupied separate physical spaces has recently been the subject of historical

²⁹⁵ Oleiski quoted in Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1372.

²⁹⁶ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 15.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception,” 458.

debate. On one hand, the space of the DP camps was clearly demarcated, as represented by the two-meter-high mesh wire fence surrounding camps like Föhrenwald. Due to the physical separation from the Germans, historians have argued that the DP camps quickly became their own insulated community with limited contact with the outside world. Historians Königseder and Wetzel deemed Föhrenwald “yet another tiny insular Jewish state inside Germany, a state that had virtually no contact with the surrounding German population.”²⁹⁹

On the other hand, the Jewish DPs and the German civilians did come into frequent contact. After the pass system was removed, the Jewish DPs were not obliged to stay in the camps, which allowed them to interact with Germans and blend German and Jewish spaces. The interpenetration of DP and German spaces in the postwar period has recently been termed “spatial indeterminacy.”³⁰⁰ In contrast to Königseder and Wetzel’s assertion that the camps constituted an “insular Jewish state,” Anna Holian, the scholar who applied the term to Jewish DP camps, argues that the DP camps were not “closed and isolated,” because the DP camps were only partially separated from the surrounding Germans.³⁰¹

It is indisputable that Jewish DPs in Germany and German civilians came into contact with one another, but it is unclear how meaningful that contact was. Personal interactions with Germans were usually a result of necessity; many Jewish DPs had to maintain German contacts to sustain the black market trade. It is questionable whether trade with the Germans constituted real “contact” though, because the

²⁹⁹ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 97.

³⁰⁰ Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception,” 453.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

interactions were almost always brief and depersonalized *cash nexus* transactions. As Jacob Oleiski, a DP at Landsberg, put it in an August 1946 interview:

There is no common life between the Jews and the local German population and there never will be such... Sure, it may happen that a Jew from a lager may trade with a German for one object or another... But that is only an instant, a passing episode, which does not signify any contact.³⁰²

Nevertheless, the fact that so many Jews and Germans had any contact, albeit an insignificant and meaningless kind of contact, is a testament to the failure of the American occupation authorities' goal of completely separating the Germans and the DPs. Beyond the superficial trading contact, a minority of Jewish DPs, usually men, formed relationships or intimate "liaisons" with the surrounding German women.³⁰³ On the whole, the Jewish DP community reacted with disgust and outrage at these Jewish-German relationships. In 1946, Landsberg DP Jacob Oleiski reported the Committee of Liberated Jews in Germany's decision that Jews who formed "intimate friendship with the Germans" were to be "ostracized, excommunicated, and excluded from the Jewish community."³⁰⁴ Jewish DPs felt that the space of the DP camps should be a distinctively Jewish one, and the very presence of Germans violated the sacredness of that space. Perhaps as a result, they felt threatened and betrayed by the relationships between Jewish DPs and Germans.

The debate over the separation of Jewish and German spaces is useful in understanding how the Jewish DPs maneuvered the uncomfortable task of finding permanency as refugees in Germany, the country that had so recently been declared

³⁰² Oleiski quoted in Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1376.

³⁰³ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 161.

³⁰⁴ Oleiski quoted in Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1377.

“judenrein” (cleansed of Jews).³⁰⁵ The more the Jewish DPs were separated from the Germans, the greater was the perceived protection and security of the camps, making it easier for the Jewish DPs to “create a provisional sense of home” in Germany and fulfill their longing for permanency.³⁰⁶

At Landsberg, the intense desire for permanency, even in the setting of a DP camp, manifested in a resistance to being forcibly transported to a different camp with better conditions. By December of 1945, Landsberg was severely overcrowded: 5,300 Jewish DPs were living in a space built for only 4,200.³⁰⁷ The Landsberg DPs were uncomfortable with the overcrowded conditions, which afforded no privacy and reminded many of their experiences in the concentration camps. The Landsberg UNRRA welfare officer, Dr. Leo Srole, summarized the Landsberg DPs’ complaints: “overcrowding is a constant irritation, depriving one not only of privacy, but of self-respect as well.”³⁰⁸ According to a coalition of American and Allied investigators, the overcrowding was so extreme that it was “unfit for human habitation”: 25 people were crammed into 15’ by 24’ rooms, multiple people were sleeping in the same three-foot bunk, and the wooden barracks were bitterly cold.³⁰⁹ As a result, Heymont received orders from Corps Headquarters to send 1,000 people away from the overcrowded Landsberg DP camp to go to Föhrenwald, which had much more space.

³⁰⁵ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, xiv.

³⁰⁶ Holian, “The Ambivalent Exception,” 456.

³⁰⁷ “Conditions in Landsberg Camp for Displaced Jews Criticized by Allied Correspondents,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency: The Global Jewish News Source*, December 11, 1945, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/1945/12/11/archive/conditions-in-landsberg-camp-for-displaced-jews-criticized-by-allied-correspondents>.

³⁰⁸ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 16.

³⁰⁹ “Conditions in Landsberg Camp for Displaced Jews Criticized by Allied Correspondents,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency: The Global Jewish News Source*, December 11, 1945, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.jta.org/1945/12/11/archive/conditions-in-landsberg-camp-for-displaced-jews-criticized-by-allied-correspondents>.

Since the living conditions were better at Föhrenwald, he was surprised to encounter fierce resistance from the Landsberg DPs. However, after speaking with the DPs, he came away with a new insight:

To most of the people of the camp, the very mention of a ‘transport’ or move brings back bitter memories of when a transport or move to another camp meant that many were to die... Psychologically, the people are still unprepared for any shifts of camps... Now, they want to be secure in one place unless they know the move is a definite step along the path leading out of Europe. Landsberg, to them, represents a form of security in Europe provided by habit, friendships formed, and participation in communal activities.³¹⁰

Heymont’s observation illuminates the conflicting feelings the DPs felt about their new home in the DP camps. It was not a particularly appealing place to find refuge, but it was the only “form of security in Europe” that they had. The unique environment of the exclusively Jewish DP camps, comprised mostly of Eastern European Jews, provided a space in which new social connections could be forged on the basis of one’s Jewish identity—the only identity that bound all of the DPs in the camp.

Because the all-Jewish camps were known to be welcoming environments with a strong sense of community and security, Jews in other DP camps asked to transfer to camps like Föhrenwald, Landsberg, and Feldafing.³¹¹ A former DP at Landsberg, Hilda Mantelmacher, explained in an interview, “we were very safe, because everybody had the same background... we had lost our families and we had all suffered the same way.”³¹² The DPs were aware of their obligations to other survivors and felt an acute sense of belonging to a wider Jewish community. Since all

³¹⁰ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 75.

³¹¹ Myers, "Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany," 305.

³¹² Hilda Mantelmacher quoted in *ibid.*

DPs had experienced suffering and persecution based on their religious identity, the camps were spaces that enabled group mourning and identity formation.³¹³ In short, the all-Jewish camp environment accelerated the process by which Jewish DPs could re-create their identities in the otherwise unstable realm of the DP camps.

The Search for a Stable Identity

During the fall of 1945, the Jewish DPs strove to break away from the anonymity of “liminal *personae*.” Having an individual identity was integral in incorporating *structure* into the daily lives of the DPs—a phenomenon that was at odds with the *communitas* of camp life, a term that Turner uses to describe the feeling of shared humanity that comes from being in a liminal space with few distinctions between individuals. Speaking at the *Life Reborn* conference, psychologist Eva Fogelman explained that maintaining some sort of identity in the DP camps was essential in transitioning to normalcy, as “we are often defined by our roles in our family, our sexual identity, religious identity, professional identity, national identity. Living without closure and without an identity impedes adaptation to the real world.”³¹⁴ In the first few months after liberation, many of the DPs had no clearly defined professional identity or family role, which contributed to the *communitas* and equality of the camps. However, since these attributes are important cornerstones of identity, the DPs quickly embarked on the task of re-establishing a professional identity and family.

³¹³ Fogelman, “Coping with the Psychological Aftermath of Extreme Trauma,” 93; Myers, “Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany,” 311.

³¹⁴ Eva Fogelman, “Coping with the Psychological Aftermath of Extreme Trauma,” 92.

The task of re-creating a professional identity was complicated by the dissonance between one's pre-war profession and their wartime professional identity. During the war, many had assumed new informal professional identities based on the role they played within that group, like "doctor" or "rabbi," and adopted nicknames that sometimes carried over to the DP camps.³¹⁵ Unfortunately, Jewish DPs experienced a sort of double bind when they tried to hold onto the professional identities they had been associated with during the war. It was difficult for the Jewish DPs to renounce their professional titles and "start living the anonymous life of a displaced person" after they had already been stripped of so much of their identities.³¹⁶ However, those who did try to maintain their wartime professional titles were ostracized and accused of being liars and impostors in the DP camps, since they were not officially trained in their "professions."³¹⁷ Thus, to begin the process of adapting to the real world and creating structure within the DP camps, the Jewish DPs had to find a basis for a new, postwar professional identity.

To forge an identity on professional grounds, the Jewish DPs first had to dispel their wartime association between work and slave labor. The ORT (Organization for the Rehabilitation through Training) was instrumental in breaking this association. One of the key figures in the ORT was Jacob Oleiski, himself a Landsberg DP, who could speak to the specific concerns of the DPs because he understood where they were coming from. In an interview with the American psychologist David Boder, Oleiski explained that since the Jewish people were

³¹⁵ At Feldafing in September 1946, David Boder recorded an interview in which a DP woman still used the nickname "Zippy" given to her in Auschwitz Birkenau. See Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 2066.

³¹⁶ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 73.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

“condemned to perish by labor” in the concentration and labor camps, the Jews had developed a “certain complex” against working that ORT aimed to eradicate by persuading them that “times are different and conditions are different.”³¹⁸ ORT proved hugely successful in its objective to inspire Jewish DPs to work and learn new skills. Beginning in the fall of 1945, ORT provided vocational training and workshops, first at Landsberg and later at Feldafing (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: Two Women Stand Outside the ORT Vocational School in the Feldafing Displaced Persons’ Camp (1947). From United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C. Photo Archives <http://ushmm.org> (accessed January 15, 2014).

³¹⁸ Oleiski quoted in Boder, *Topical Autobiographies of Displaced People*, 1369-70.

In October 1945, the first vocational school opened at Landsberg. “We are not going to remain in the camps forever; we must view them as a phase, as a transition to normal life,” Oleiski explained to the residents of Landsberg at the school’s opening.³¹⁹ A “normal life” was one “filled with useful and productive labor,” which would be accomplished by teaching the DPs specific vocational skills that would help them find employment in their new homeland.³²⁰

Though the Jewish DPs did not necessarily know what their future had in store, they wanted to do something productive while in the camps to prepare for it. By helping the DPs learn vocational skills to distinguish themselves from one another, ORT created a division of labor in the DP camps. In addition to serving as a marker of identity, working was empowering for the DPs because it gave them a form of agency over their situation. The “displaced person” status meant that an individual was completely dependent on charity, which created a feeling of helplessness.³²¹ Although working at the DP camps was unpaid and only yielded slightly better food and clothing rations, many chose to work because it gave them a purpose and created meaning within their transitional and confusing living situation.³²² Working was thus a way for the DPs to find purpose in a state of liminality while working towards a skill that they could transfer to their unknown permanent destination.

Unfortunately, the Americans were not always receptive to the Jewish DPs’ desire to add structure to their lives through work. As discussed in Chapter 2, many Americans viewed the Jewish DPs as idle, needy, and lacking the capacity for work.

³¹⁹ Oleiski quoted in Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 110.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 22.

³²² Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 116-17.

For this reason, the Americans initially did not take the DPs' efforts to work seriously. In his memoir, Schochet recounted an interaction at Feldafing that occurred soon after liberation in which a group of able-bodied Feldafing DPs wanted to express their gratitude to the Americans by volunteering their labor. Though they knew little English, they rehearsed their best English phrases to say to the American GIs. When they finally reached the depot at the gate of Feldafing, they encountered a young soldier. Schochet "told him that we were at his disposal, and would he be so good to find us something to help out with." Failing to understand Schochet's words, the soldier shifted his gun and shouted, "Stop! Don't move!" While the Feldafing DPs "stood there, uncomprehending," other soldiers ran into the building and came out carrying cartons and cans. Misunderstanding the DPs' intentions to help, they assumed that the DPs had come because they wanted extra rations. Defeated, the DPs ran "back down the road we had so hopefully marched up, while the soldiers stood gaping at us from the gate."³²³

These types of everyday miscommunications were likely frequent in the camps, as each group had a certain perception of the other group that prevented them from understanding one another. Living in an unstructured liminal state, the DPs were transformed into social equals with no clear hierarchy to sort them. This might have led them to assume that they were equal to the Americans in their capacity to work, and expect that the soldiers would welcome their help. The soldiers, on the other hand, viewed the DPs as their subjects with whom their care was entrusted. It might have been inconceivable to them that the Jewish DPs were even capable of helping

³²³ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 16-17.

them run the camps. This underestimation of the DPs' abilities could be intensely hurtful to the DPs. Schochet's vivid memory of a relatively minor miscommunication underscores the importance of working to the Jewish DPs, even for those who were physically scarred by the slave labor they had to perform in the labor and concentration camps. Contrary to the popular American perception that the Jewish DPs were too damaged to ever resume working, Schochet's recollection suggests that the ability to work and contribute to the camp was of vital importance to the Jewish DPs' sense of dignity and self-worth.

Establishing New Kinship Groups

In addition to finding a purpose through work, the Jewish DPs' sought meaning and companionship in their relationships with other DPs. As with the loss of their wartime professional identities, the Jews had forged family-like social groups, or "kinship groups," during the war, whether they had survived in concentration camps, partisan groups, or by hiding. Their new kinship groups were at least partially broken up in the postwar period. Since most DPs present in the camps in the fall of 1945 had lost much of their families and prewar social groups, the DPs' identities in relation to others, or their "social identities," had experienced a total upheaval. Despite the psychological toll of the concentration camps, which had ingrained a deep sense of distrust in the camp survivors, the search for long-lasting and meaningful social bonds began immediately after liberation.³²⁴

³²⁴ Myers, "Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany," 306.

Once in the DP camps, the Jewish DPs began forming new kinship groups and restoring ties with existing kin. Working with the Landsberg DPs, Dr. Leo Srole theorized that since they were “[d]estitute of family in most cases, the first step in the process was the establishment by each of a special patchwork type of kinship group.”³²⁵ This group incorporated the few surviving distant kin, as well as surviving friends one had made while imprisoned at a concentration camp. The kinship group also slowly expanded as DPs located estranged relatives and prewar friends. With the aid of the American chaplains, particularly Rabbi Abraham Kausner, lists were compiled of survivors beginning in June 1945 to help re-unite families. Reviewing these lists for familiar names became a regular pastime for the DPs, even if the names were merely acquaintances from one’s native town; the DPs held onto whatever social connection they had.³²⁶

Soon, the DPs had formed bonds with one another that were so close they truly resembled familial relationships. Srole observed that “these relationships are so close and intense that they often provide administrative difficulties when overcrowding requires the redistribution of a group to other rooms or, worse, to other camps.”³²⁷ Their intense closeness is apparent from oral histories with Jewish DPs, many of whom still keep in touch with and regularly visit the friends they made in the DP camps. “We know we have no home, we know we have no parents, we don’t have anything so we just have to make the best of whatever, and friends become families,”

³²⁵ Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait," 16.

³²⁶ Myers, "Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany," 305.

³²⁷ Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait," 16.

Sara Baron, a DP at Landsberg, explained.³²⁸ There was not a single person from her biological family at her wedding, though there were around 100 people from the new “family” of friends she had met at Landsberg.³²⁹

Like Baron, the DPs often formalized their new kinship groups through marriage and childbirth. The marriage and birth rates of the DPs were astonishingly high, especially when considering the demographics of the camps. Due to the Nazi practice of immediately killing the elderly and most women and children upon arrival at the labor camps, these groups had low survival rates, which skewed the demographics of the DP camps. A JDC census of Bavaria in early 1946 found the sex ratio of males to females was two to one and that 81% of the Jewish DPs were between 17 and 39 years-old.³³⁰ The skewed composition of the camp posed obstacles in the way of marrying and starting a family; the disproportionately male gender ratio made it difficult for men to find female spouses with whom to have children, and the youthful composition of the camp meant that there were virtually no elders to turn to for guidance and advice in starting a family.

Despite these obstacles, the Jewish DPs married and had children at almost unprecedented rates. In the months after liberation, thousands of weddings occurred, and the Jewish DPs in Germany soon had the highest birth rate of any Jewish community in the world.³³¹ Biber recalled that at Föhrenwald, adults of all ages “were

³²⁸ Sarah Baron, interview by Betsy Stern, 5 November 1996, interview 22391, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait," 14; A census of the U.S. and British zones of occupation in July 1945 found that only 3.6% of Jewish DPs were between the ages of 0 and 15; Berek Goldman, "Cultural Activities among Jews in the Displaced Persons Camps in: Germany, Austria and Italy after World War II," 1980, YIVO Institute Archives, DP Collection: DP Camps in Germany, 1945-1952.

³³¹ "Weddings," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/displaced-persons/daily2.htm>

struck with a strong desire to be married,” which he believed “may have resulted from the need for close family and the need for establishing a new existence, regardless of its form.”³³² Having a spouse gave the Jewish DPs a new way to define themselves—as a “husband” or “wife”—and was instrumental in overcoming loneliness.

The idea of kinship played a dual role in promoting both *structure* and *communitas*. Kinship groups are the most fundamental form of human structure, as it allows individuals to feel a sense of belonging to a specific group rather than to everyone. Yet the extension of kinship terms to individuals beyond one’s biological family is characteristic of the *communitas* that exists in a liminal space.³³³ In this sense, establishing kinship groups in the camps fostered both *communitas* and structure by formalizing and categorizing the relationships between the *liminal personae*.

Symbolic Importance of Children in the DP Camps

As the Jewish DPs scrambled to get married and form new kinship groups, the birth rate in the DP camps soared. Children were highly prized in the DP camps, as they represented a return to normalcy and inspired optimism for a better, rejuvenated Jewish future. Initially, children were remarkable in the DP camps because they were so rare; immediately after liberation, there were almost no children in the camps. In fact, the mere sighting of a child was a source of awe. Rabbi Stanley Abromovitch, a Jewish American working for the JDC in September 1945, observed how a large

³³² Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 36.

³³³ See Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

circle of Landsberg DPs formed around a girl of about 7: “They hadn’t seen a child in years... they didn’t say anything, they didn’t do anything... [they] just stood around watching that girl.”³³⁴ The amazement at seeing a child was certainly not unique to Landsberg; in the beginning of October in Föhrenwald, there were only nine babies and forty-three children between three and fourteen in a total population of around 3,000 Jewish DPs.³³⁵

However, as people began having children and new arrivals of families entered the camps in the fall of 1945, the composition of the camps changed rapidly. This led to the rapid creation of childcare programs like the nursery school that opened in early November 1945 at Föhrenwald.³³⁶ Each child was treated like a rare treasure; a miracle whose very existence represented a return to normalcy and a more hopeful future.³³⁷ Having children was also seen as a way to fulfill one’s obligation to the Jewish future, and youth and babies were attached with special significance.³³⁸ The use of contraception of any sort was frowned upon; having children was the only way to ensure that the Jewish people would continue.³³⁹

In a more vindictive way, children also served as an indirect form of revenge against National Socialism. Samuel Gringauz, the president of the Council of Liberated Jews, instructed young people to have children because “your children, the

³³⁴ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³³⁵ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 100; “Foehrenwald”.

³³⁶ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 109.

³³⁷ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 45.

³³⁸ Avinoam J. Berkowitz and Michael Patt, *We are Here: New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 6.

³³⁹ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 45.

carriers of our revenge, must find revenge in existence.”³⁴⁰ The theme of defying National Socialism through procreation is evident in oral histories with former DPs. Hannah Modenstein, who gave birth to her first child at Föhrenwald, felt that having a baby showed “the Germans actually that they did not eliminate us all. We are starting again.”³⁴¹ However, it is unlikely that revenge played a strong role in one’s decision to have a child. On a more immediate and personal level, having a child was one of the few sources of genuine happiness for the Jewish DPs. After the birth of his child in October 1945, Biber recalled that “[m]y whole being was changed into happiness. It was as if a bright sun suddenly appeared from within a cloudy sky.”³⁴² His child was the firstborn baby to survivors at Föhrenwald, and the newborn’s picture was prominently featured on the first page of the camp newspaper. The article framed the birth as a source of joy for the entire community, emphasizing “the pride of the displaced persons’ firstborn,” rather than the pride of the child’s parents.³⁴³ The birth announcement indicates that the presence of children in the camps was hugely important in changing the mood of the entire camp, and affected even those who were childless. Thus, raising a child was viewed as a responsibility of the entire camp community. Sonia Dodek, who was one of the few children at Föhrenwald, remembered that the children were treated “like diamonds that they found.”³⁴⁴ The entire camp looked after them lovingly, and they even received better food than the adult DPs. At a time when the adult DPs were still trying to rescue themselves, the

³⁴⁰ Gringauz quoted in Myers, “Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany,” 307.

³⁴¹ Modenstein quoted in *ibid.*

³⁴² Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 46.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Sonia Hochman Dodek, interview by Marianna Kador, 28 January 1996, interview 11472, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation

presence of children forced them to put someone else's needs before their own and to work toward the greater goal of raising the next generation of Jews.

Role of Objects

In the process of reconstructing new social identities and reconciling their new identities with the old, objects assumed a newfound significance. In the liminal space of the DP camps, Fogelman argues that "[t]he DPs had to reconstruct themselves to their pre-Holocaust selves and reintegrate this with their most recent horrific pasts... Without transitional objects, people, places, values from the past, the rupture is more onerous to reconstruct."³⁴⁵ To fully understand the value of everyday objects to Jewish survivors in the DP camps in the fall of 1945, it is important to grasp the significance of objects in the deprived realm of the concentration camps as substitutes for memories. Primo Levi described the role of objects in Auschwitz:

Consider what value, what meaning is enclosed even in the smallest of our daily habits, in the hundred possessions which even the poorest beggar owns: a handkerchief, an old letter, the photo of a cherished person. These things are part of us, almost like limbs of our body, nor is it conceivable that we can be deprived of them in our world, for we immediately find others to substitute the old ones, other objects which are ours in their personification and evocation of our memories.³⁴⁶

The few objects that remained from the past, however mundane they may have seemed to an outsider, became overinvested with meaning. The value enclosed in everyday objects that Levi described continued to affect the way that the Jewish DPs treated objects once in the DP camps. As in the concentration camps, ordinary objects

³⁴⁵ Fogelman, "Coping with the Psychological Aftermath of Extreme Trauma," 93.

³⁴⁶ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 27.

and daily habits were imbued with a meaning that was not readily apparent to the American workers and observers in the camps.

Being *liminal personae* meant that the DPs had an ambiguous relationship to the past and to the future. Any artifact that the DPs were able to keep from the past became symbols of security and stability; it provided a link between the lost pre-war world and the present transitional state. Physical objects anchored the DPs in reality, and anything tangible that the DPs could hold onto, including photographs, letters, money of currencies that were not even usable by the DPs, and saved food cans, became “items of attachment.”³⁴⁷ Since many of the DPs had few to no objects that they were able to hold on to from their lives prior to the DP camps, these seemingly mundane objects played a crucial bridging role that helped close the gap between the past and the present.

Photographs epitomized this type of connective artifact, and their absence made the very existence of a life before the war seem surreal. In his memoir, Feldafing DP Simon Schochet described the incredible emptiness the DPs felt because they did not have pre-war photographs of themselves or of their relatives:

The loss of these sentimental but cherished celluloid treasures of our loved ones' faces, of the houses we lived in, of the happy vacations we spent, has left us with a great sense of unreality and fantasy concerning our past. It is as if we are truly displaced—that is, without a previous history and lacking a physical relationship to the present. And so, we are like newborns and must start recording the events of life anew.³⁴⁸

As part of the process of “recording the events of life anew,” the DPs became obsessed with having their photographs taken and keeping photographs of their

³⁴⁷ Segalman, “The Psychology of Jewish Displaced Persons,” 364.

³⁴⁸ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 80.

friends. At Feldafing, the DP photographer quickly became one of the most popular and most frequently visited men at the camp.³⁴⁹ As concrete objects, the photographs constituted “final unmistakable proof that we are really living creatures, and despite the long, arduous journey we have made, we can confront ourselves.”³⁵⁰ The idea that a photograph was necessary to prove that one was alive, a feeling certainly outside the realm of one’s ordinary life experience, is a testament to how desperate the DPs were to hold on to something tangible and permanent.

Role of Americans in the Waiting Room

The process of “building a home in the waiting room” was very different for the Jewish DPs and the Americans working in the camps. Whereas the Jewish DPs emphasized the meaningful relationships they forged in the camps, Americans were almost exclusively concerned with the poor sanitation in the camps and the rampant black market trade. Consequently, the Americans played a complicated role in the “waiting room” of the DP camps; their presence could cause the DPs to feel profoundly isolated or provide a crucial link between the insulated Jewish DP community and the outside world. In some ways, such as the frequent inspections of the DP living quarters or the inability to accept the Jewish DPs’ capacity to work with the Americans, the presence of Americans consistently undermined the desire of the DPs to return to normalcy and establish permanency. In other ways, the American presence in the camps helped the Jewish DPs transition to structure and stability.

³⁴⁹ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 117.

³⁵⁰ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 79.

On one hand, the Jewish DPs were mainly concerned with returning to normalcy and establishing a camp community. Biber compared Föhrenwald to a *shtetl* (small town), citing its rich cultural and social life.³⁵¹ His use of the word “*shtetl*,” a word that harkens back to the pre-Shoah Eastern European Jewish communities, indicates how strongly the Jewish DPs’ Eastern European identities influenced the culture of the DP camps. In this sense, DP life was “a final efflorescence of destroyed East European Jewish culture” in which Jewish DPs could bring back vestiges of their life before the war.³⁵²

However, the picture of the camps constructed from military government and U.S. Army records is far less rosy. Instead, they reveal an intense concern with the sanitation of the camps and the hygiene of the Jewish DPs. Major Irving Heymont wrote in September of 1945 about Landsberg that “[t]he camp is filthy beyond description. Sanitation is virtually unknown. Words fail me when I try to think of an adequate description.”³⁵³ His letters are filled with detailed reports of the living quarters littered with human excrement, trash, and old food, all of which he found appalling. Inspectors from the military government were similarly horrified by the conditions of the camps. A military government investigation conducted in Föhrenwald in May 1946, after a violent confrontation had occurred between the Jewish DPs and German policemen, concluded that the camp was “a security threat” and a “public health threat” that was burdening the Tactical Personnel.³⁵⁴ The contrast

³⁵¹ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 47.

³⁵² Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 10.

³⁵³ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 5.

³⁵⁴ Philip L Steers Jr. to Commanding General Third Army. “DP Camp Föhrenwald (Jewish-5,000).” May 9 1946, Office of Military Government for Landkreis Wolfratshausen, NARA at College Park.

between this cold bureaucratic language and Biber's poetic descriptions of the cultural life at Föhrenwald during the same time period could not be more stark.

The clash between the Army's vision of the camps as a public health threat and the DPs' vision of the camp as a "shtetl" came to a head on everyday issues. At Landsberg, for instance, conflict erupted over the *Mikvah*, a bath that orthodox Jews use on certain occasions to achieve ritual purity. Claiming that the *Mikvah*, full of stagnant and dirty water, would spread scabies throughout the camp, Heymont demanded that the orthodox leaders empty the *Mikvah* or he would have it boarded up. The orthodox leaders threatened to strike, and Heymont had to call in a third party to mediate. They eventually decided that the *Mikvah* would be kept open as long as people showered in clean water before and after using it. The heated debate over a seemingly mundane question was of great importance to both the orthodox DPs, who longed to return to normalcy and viewed the *Mikvah* as a crucial ritual in doing so, and Heymont, who cared deeply about the public health of the camps and viewed the *Mikvah* as a dangerous health hazard.³⁵⁵

Another source of conflict was the hoarding of food by the Jewish DPs, a behavior that Heymont and other military officials unhappily reported. The DP fixation on food epitomized how the oddities of DP life could frustrate or help the Americans working with them, depending on their ability to work with them on their own terms. An obsession with food and calories was one of the many long-lasting effects of the DPs' wartime experiences in concentration and labor camps. As a wide

³⁵⁵ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 83.

body of psychological research has demonstrated, food deprivation has long-term consequences from which it is impossible to fully recover.³⁵⁶

Immediately after liberation, the camp survivors' instinct to eat as much as possible had deadly consequences; many died from overeating and other DPs had to literally "stand vigil" over the camp survivors, resorting to physical restraint at times, to keep them from "consuming everything in sight."³⁵⁷ Even those who were able to restrain themselves from overeating had a difficult time knowing when to stop. Schochet described of his first month at Feldafing, "I wake every few hours and eat, no matter if it is day or night."³⁵⁸ This extreme behavior slowly faded over time, but by the fall of 1945 food was still a constant topic of conversation. Rabbi Stanley Abramovitch, who worked for the JDC in all three DP camps, recalled that for a long time, the DPs would continue to steal food and hide it in their barracks, even though the DPs were provided enough food in their rations to satiate their hunger and the food that they did hide would go bad.³⁵⁹ This created a health hazard in the camps, as rotting food attracted insects and created an environment conducive to mold and other pathogens. Consequently, the DPs' desire to store food in their barracks became a source of frustration for American officials working in the camps. The Americans and the Jewish DPs were operating with different explanatory frameworks; it was mystifying to the Americans that the Jewish DPs could not trust that they would keep

³⁵⁶See AJ Sindler et al., "Holocaust Survivors Report Long-Term Effects on Attitudes toward Food," *Journal of Nutrition Education & Behavior* 36 (2004); A Favaro et al., "Binge Eating and Eating Attitudes among Nazi Concentration Camp Survivors," *Psychological Medicine* 30 (2000); C. T. Morgan et al., "Food-deprivation and Hoarding in Rats," *Journal of Comparative Psychology* 35, (1943).

³⁵⁷ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 28.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

³⁵⁹ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

receiving rations and felt compelled to hoard food in their barracks, while for the Jewish DPs it was impossible to “turn off” their instinct to save as much food as possible in case they went hungry in the future.³⁶⁰

The Americans found they were much more successful negotiating with the Jewish DPs once they accepted that their seemingly irrational concerns were real and affected their behavior. Eventually, the DP fixation on how many calories they were consuming was used to the advantage of Americans who wanted to transfer DPs to other camps. Americans used the number of calories the Jewish DPs were given as a type of currency with which to negotiate with Jewish DPs who were resistant to changing camps. Rabbi Stanley Abramovitch described his strategy of convincing Jewish DPs to move to different camps in the fall of 1945:

The key word in negotiations for people to move from one camp to the other—because we were negotiating really with Jews from Feldafing and Landsberg and other camps—‘how many calories will we get a day?’... The more calories you could offer, the more persuasive our arguments were.³⁶¹

Thus, understanding the importance of calories to the Jewish DPs rather than dismissing their concerns as irrational was crucial in Americans’ ability to negotiate and work with them on their own terms.

The ability of outsiders to accept the Jewish DP concerns as valid, if irrational, was also crucial in addressing the issues the Jewish DPs had with the UNRRA-

³⁶⁰ The difficulty of throwing food away and the impulse to store excess amount of food sadly persisted throughout the entire lives of the camp survivors. A 2004 study of Holocaust survivors living in Florida found that nearly every subject reported that it was *intensely* difficult to throw away food, even when spoiled, and half reported storing excess amounts of food in their homes to ensure that food was always readily available. See Sindler, "Holocaust Survivors Report Long-Term Effects on Attitudes Toward Food."

³⁶¹ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

provided supplies. A popular myth after World War II was the “human soap” myth; German soap was allegedly made from the corpses of Jewish victims. The initials imprinted on the soap, “RIF”—for the soap company, Reichsstelle für industrielle Fettversorgung (National Center for Industrial Fat Provisioning)—were interpreted as “RJF,” Rheines Juedisches Fett (pure Jewish fat).³⁶² At Feldafing, camp residents refused to use UNRRA-provided German soap, which bore the “RIF” initials. American and English soap became the most expensive black market item, forcing many of the DPs to stop using soap at all or to concoct their own substitutes out of sand and bleaches. “We are all aware that the fat used [in the soap]...was obtained by these efficient people from the bodies of our gassed comrades in the crematoriums,” Schochet wrote, convinced of the veracity of the human soap myth.³⁶³ As a result, the stock of soap in the supply warehouse piled to ridiculous proportions, leading the bewildered UNRRA officer, who could not understand why the DPs were averse to soap, to investigate the matter. In the end, the UNRRA team decided to supply the Jewish DPs with non-German soap.³⁶⁴ The resolution of the soap investigation reflected the UNRRA decision to accept that the myth affected the Jewish DPs’ behavior rather than dismiss the myth as false and unimportant, which was almost certainly more effective in improving the DPs’ quality of life and the cleanliness of the camps. At the same time, supplying the Jewish DPs with non-German soap undermined the black market trade for American and English soaps.

³⁶² Richard Harwood and Ditleib Felderer, “Human Soap,” *The Journal for Historical Review* 1, no. 2 (1980), 131.

³⁶³ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 37.

³⁶⁴ The Feldafing soap incident is in Schochet’s autobiographical memoir and, as a result, the facts of the conflict and its resolution may not be completely accurate.

Unfortunately, the soap incident was not representative of the way the Jewish DPs and the American authorities handled conflict that involved the black market trade; it was generally much more difficult for the Jewish DPs and the American authorities to reach a compromise. The greatest number of displaced Jews were concentrated in the Munich area, and their involvement in the black market soon loomed large in the American administrators' concerns.³⁶⁵ Trading on the black market was a deeply ingrained habit for those who had experienced the Nazi camp archipelago, where receiving black market favors had been a mode of survival.³⁶⁶ Despite the Jewish DPs' legitimate association of the black market with survival, they did not participate in the illegal trading more so than other groups; rather, resorting to the black market was ubiquitous throughout Germany.

The cigarette, which the DPs had easy access to through their rations, became the currency of postwar Germany as "the black market replaced orderly and regulated exchange."³⁶⁷ The black market enveloped all of Germany, involving civilians, soldiers, relief workers, and DPs from every nationality. The fact that even American troops and UNRRA officials traded in the black market was no secret; it was a source of constant consternation in *The Stars and Stripes*.³⁶⁸ Since the black market was the economy in Germany, it was impossible to separate the Jewish DPs and Americans

³⁶⁵ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 267.

³⁶⁶ See Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

³⁶⁷ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 337.

³⁶⁸ See "Soldiers in Berlin Sent Home 11 Million Bucks More Than Pay; Army Says They 'Sold Watches,'" *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 17 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library; Capt. C.W. Howell, "Captain Says Black Market Raises Taxes," *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 23 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library; "UNRRA Fires 600 'Operators'," *Stars and Stripes: Southern Germany Edition*, November 30 1945, microfilm, New York Public Library.

living in Germany from the black market, despite the efforts of the Military Government.

Though Jewish DPs were not more active in the black market than German civilians or other groups, they were far more conspicuous and easily vilified because they fit into existing prejudices. Since the Eastern European Jews “spoke a different language and often were of different appearance,” they were easily identifiable.³⁶⁹ Their decision to participate in the black market unfortunately aligned with the image propagated by the Nazis of greedy, conniving Jews. Indeed, the *Landrat* (chief administrative officer) of Wolfratshausen, the county that contained Föhrenwald, wrote to the *Regierungspräsident* (head of Government in Bavaria) that the Eastern European Jews of the camp were “engaged in black marketeering and smuggling on an unimaginable scale,” and falsely claimed that “their wealth can be measured in the thousands.”³⁷⁰ Recognizing this slander, Föhrenwald DP Jacob Biber wrote in frustration that whereas when anyone else traded on the black market it was viewed as ordinary business, “the survivors who tried to do the same were called smugglers.”³⁷¹ Treating the Jewish DPs more harshly than the rest of the German civilian population, the military government records framed trading on the black market as a criminal action that had to be dealt with harshly.³⁷²

The black market became a constant source of conflict between the displaced persons and the military government and German authorities. The military government’s extreme concern with illegal trading affected the lives of Jewish DPs in

³⁶⁹ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 268.

³⁷⁰ Quoted in Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 131.

³⁷¹ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 87.

³⁷² Srole, “Why the DP’s Can’t Wait,” 18.

a very direct way: they were subjected to severe sentences for minor crimes. As described in Chapter 1, the Jewish DPs were constantly being arrested for possessing items not provided in their rations and were subjected to frequent inspections. Upon checking the records of Jewish DPs in the area jail in Landsberg, Heymont found that the DPs were being sentenced for several months for crimes as mundane as possessing several pounds of butter or selling an Army shirt for cigarettes. Heymont asserted, “If these facts are correct, then someone in Munich, where the trials took place, is insane. The sentences are outrageous.”³⁷³

The sentences seemed all the more outrageous to the Jewish DPs because they did not tend to think of the black market in terms of legal versus illegal. Rather, it was the only semblance of a normal economy and “the only means of livelihood.”³⁷⁴ They traded the UNRRA and Red Cross-provided American luxury goods, like the abundant cigarettes, coffee, and chocolate, for basic necessities like clothing and bed sheets as well as for recreational activities like theater tickets and the ability to eat at a restaurant, all of which could only be accessed by trading on the black market.³⁷⁵ While they knew it was true that they were technically breaking the law, refraining from trading seemed like an absurd law to follow, especially given the DPs’ unfortunate situation as persecuted Jews forced to remain in Germany. As Schochet pointed out, “we have seen many more sacred laws disregarded in our own lifetimes.”³⁷⁶ Oral histories from former DPs treat the black market matter-of-factly;

³⁷³ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 63.

³⁷⁴ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 82.

³⁷⁵ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 63.

³⁷⁶ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 82.

when they did not use their cigarettes, they sold them to buy other things.³⁷⁷ Realizing how dire these conditions were, relief workers and other Americans who worked directly with the DPs generally expressed greater sympathy toward the DP involvement in the black market than the military government officials who were removed from the everyday struggles of life in a DP camp. Rabbi Stanley Abramovitch, who worked for the JDC at Feldafing, Landsberg, and Föhrenwald, explained that camp life had to be supplemented with items acquired through the black market trade; the rations were simply not sufficient to conduct normal life.³⁷⁸ Rabbi Abraham J. Klausner, a Jewish army chaplain who worked in DP camps throughout Bavaria, expressed a similar sentiment:

The liberated people had nothing, they had no resource to money, they weren't allowed to have money, but they needed *things*. So what happened was that the market began really simply. When the people were given some items, like a packet of sugar or butter or something, they wouldn't use it...they would make a deal with the Germans.³⁷⁹

Klausner himself traded on the black market, and used the money he made to bail Jewish DPs out of jail for breaking one of the many restrictions the military government imposed on their movement. Klausner's interview conveys an understanding and sympathy for the situation of the Jewish DPs that the military government records lack. The contrasting reactions of Americans led to conflicts between Americans working directly in the camps and Americans working in the surrounding areas. Heymont, for example, wrote of his frustration with the head of

³⁷⁷ Sarah Baron, interview by Betsy Stern, 5 November 1996, interview 22391, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁷⁸ Stanley Abramovitch, interview by Nathan Lavie, 28 February 1998, interview 41282, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁷⁹ Abraham J. Klausner, interview by Toni Binstock, 1 September 1998, interview 45818, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

the local military government, who prioritized clamping down on the black market over respecting the dignity and security of the DPs:

I am having trouble with the head of the local military government detachment. He strikes me as not knowing the situation...His phobia is black market activities... It has reached the point where he stops the Jews on the street and searches them in public. In his searching, he has roughed up a few of them.³⁸⁰

The behavior of the head of the military government is an example of the US Army confirming the accusations of the Harrison Report: treating the DPs as prisoners rather than liberated victims who needed to heal. Heymont, aware of the harm of these tactics, told him to stop and complained about him to the Division, writing to his wife, “One man like him can undo all the good work that the Army is trying to do.”³⁸¹ Heymont’s and Klausner’s reactions to the black market trade demonstrated that those who lived and worked in close proximity to the DPs could more easily sympathize with the difficulties of living in an overcrowded and under resourced assembly center than the more removed military government officials.

Though the rigid structure of the military and their general misunderstanding of the DPs’ created ongoing tensions in the camps, the American presence in the camps also helped create an atmosphere of security. Even with occasional incidents of abuse like the Feldafling railroad incident, the Americans were overall perceived as protectors of the Jewish DPs. At Feldafling, Schochet viewed the Americans as key to the security and freedom of movement of the Jewish DPs. He wrote in his autobiographical account, “[o]ur new feeling of freedom, despite the fact that we are

³⁸⁰ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 60.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

strangers in this country, is due to the amazing Americans.”³⁸² He was astounded by how quickly the Americans, through their orderly rules and governance, transformed a space of terror and fear into one of relative comfort and safety.

The presence of Americans and their relief efforts also helped the Jewish DPs transition from liminality to structure. “Our liberators are helping us to feel our way back to normalcy,” Schochet wrote.³⁸³ After the DPs’ prolonged isolation from the rest of the world during the war, they had a lot of catching up to do. Schochet compared the feeling to the story of Rip Van Winkle, who awoke after a prolonged sleep to find a world completely transformed. The lack of cultural knowledge about the music, movies, books, plays and philosophies that were developed during the war made it difficult to readjust to the present and created a feeling of estrangement.

The Americans played an important role in bridging the cultural gap and helping the Jewish DPs make up for lost time. In the realm of leisure activities, the Americans brought in movies, books, circus groups, dance groups, musicals, operettas, and other entertainment. The Hollywood movies brought to the camps were particularly influential in creating a romantic image of American as a golden land where “faces and figures glow with health and vitality” and everyone looked well fed, energetic, and happy.³⁸⁴ For the more contemplative, the Americans established library reading rooms and brought in scholarly visitors to give talks and facilitate discussions. At the library at Föhrenwald, for instance, the JDC and other relief organizations provided board games and reading material from the United

³⁸² Schochet, *Feldafing*, 151-52.

³⁸³ Ibid., 21.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 93.

States, including forty newspapers from the U.S., Palestine, and Germany.³⁸⁵ The newspapers, which supplemented the individual camp-wide newspapers, provided a crucial informational link between the camps and the outside world. Like Harry Sokol, the Jewish GI who brought the Feldafling railroad incident to Eisenhower's attention, some Americans volunteered their free time to delivering letters back and forth between the Jewish DPs and their relatives in America, which further connected the Jewish DPs to a larger social network of Diaspora Jews. The American camp administrators even scheduled for VIPs like Eisenhower and Ben Gurion to tour the DP camps and boost the morale of the isolated DPs. In these ways, the Americans were essential in connecting the Jewish DPs to the present and reducing their feeling of estrangement.

Though the DP camps were spaces for the Jewish DPs to recover and transition to normalcy, the plethora of problems that the DPs faced in the camps continued long after they left the DP camps. Speaking to children of Holocaust survivors, Elie Wiesel explained in his keynote address at the *Life Reborn* conference the philosophical implications of being displaced: "One can be displaced not only in space, but also in time, and I think your parents... are displaced, not only geographically. They are displaced in time. Somehow we live in two time zones."³⁸⁶ Decades after immigrating to their final destinations, the feeling of being detached from the present remained. As Wiesel's speech indicated, one's status as a "liminal *persona*" did not necessarily end with the DP era.

³⁸⁵ Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*, 122.

³⁸⁶ Wiesel quoted in Rosensaft, *Life Reborn*, 9.

Epilogue

Exiting the Waiting Room: *Adjusting to “Normalcy” and Remembering DP Life*

Interviewer: “It sounds like there are some good memories from the DP camps?”
Gloria Abrams: “That was the best memories, you know.”³⁸⁷

Interview with Gloria Abrams, Former Resident at Föhrenwald DP Camp, 1995.

“While reliving in my memoirs my life and my experiences at the time of the Holocaust, the two years of my life in Föhrenwald appear like an extension to the horrible past.”³⁸⁸

Jacob Biber, Former Resident at Föhrenwald DP Camp, 1990.

The Jewish DP camps would remain active throughout the next decade, with the last camp, Föhrenwald, closing in February 1957.³⁸⁹ For most Jewish DPs, their time living in the DP camps ended far earlier, ushering in the long-awaited era of finally creating a new, permanent life outside of Germany. However, the feeling of *communitas*, the emotional bonds created with the liminal space among the Jewish DPs and between the Jewish DPs and the Americans, stayed with the DPs long after they exited the camps.

The interactions between the DPs and the Americans in the camps were often the first sustained contact they had with one another. For those who chose to immigrate to the United States, these interactions were formative in their decision. Dora Abend, a resident at both Landsberg and Feldafing, explained her excitement at finally immigrating to the United States in 1949: “American people are so good to

³⁸⁷ Gloria Abrams, interview by Daisy Berl, 12 November 1995, interview 06198, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁸⁸ Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 84.

³⁸⁹ Königseder and Wetzell, *Waiting for Hope*, 95.

us... We were so hungry and they fed us, they clothed us...how can I go away from a country like to go to a different country which I am not familiar? I wouldn't go, no, I'll stay here and go to America."³⁹⁰ For Abend, her familiarity with America and the gratitude she felt towards the American people made the United States a more appealing destination than Palestine. However, many other Jewish DPs, feeling alienated by the Americans and tired of living in a "gentile world," were uncompromising in their decision to immigrate to Palestine.³⁹¹ Though Palestine was by far the most highly sought after emigration destination, over a hundred thousand Jewish DPs ultimately immigrated to the United States, the second most popular destination.³⁹²

Once in the United States, many were disappointed to find a culture of indifference to their experiences; it was difficult for them to find willing listeners with whom to talk about their wartime ordeals or experiences in the DP camps. When they tried, they faced incomprehension or worse, disinterest. One Jewish Holocaust survivor who immigrated to the United States was told by his aunt, "If you want to have friends here in America, don't keep talking about your experiences. Nobody's interested, and if you tell them, they're going to hear it once and then the next time they'll be afraid to come see you. Don't ever speak about it."³⁹³ The apathy conflicted with their deep urge to "bear witness" to the horrors of what they had experienced to

³⁹⁰ Dora Abend, interview by Shelly Roberts, 20 May 1996, interview 14339, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁹¹ See Biber, *Risen from the Ashes*, 104.

³⁹² Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 81. The vast majority of the DPs wanted to immigrate to Palestine, not the United States. For example, in a poll in the beginning of 1946, 15% of Landsberg DPs chose the United States as their first choice for emigration while 80% chose Palestine. See Srole, "Why the DP's Can't Wait," 20.

³⁹³ Quoted in William B. Helmreich, *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 38.

the outside world, which arguably kept some of them alive in the concentration and death camps. Instead, the Jewish DPs had the profoundly isolating experience of confronting the incomprehension they faced with outward silence, talking about their experiences only among themselves.³⁹⁴ Remaining silent about one's wartime experiences was also difficult for the Americans who worked in the camps and wanted to share their stories. Aaron Cohen, a Jewish GI who liberated the German concentration camps and was stationed in the town of Feldafing after the war, recalled that in the United States, "for years and years and years, nobody talked about it... it was like a conspiracy of silence—nobody wanted to hear about it."³⁹⁵ However, most Americans did not have any personal experience liberating the camps or working with the Jewish DPs. Like Koppel Pinson, most felt that the DPs were obsessively remembering the past. This accusation was repeated constantly, and survivors were told that they should look forward and forget the past.³⁹⁶

The lack of interest in their experiences reinforced the fear that the memory of the DP camps would fade over time. In his autobiographical novel, Schochet described his feelings about leaving Feldafing, which he guessed would turn into a lake resort "swarming with happy people."³⁹⁷ As for the fate of the Jewish DPs, they would be "forgotten and dispersed throughout the world. Are the happiness and sorrows experienced here to vanish without any impact? Probably yes."³⁹⁸ Just as Holocaust survivors expressed concern that the Nazi atrocities against the Jews would

³⁹⁴ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 83.

³⁹⁵ Aaron Cohn, interview by Adrian Hirsch, 24 April 2001, interview 51569, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

³⁹⁶ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 83.

³⁹⁷ Schochet, *Feldafing*, 175.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

be forgotten and repeated, Schochet feared that the history of Feldafing would soon be forgotten as its inhabitants left and moved on with their lives. However, unlike the horrific story of the concentration camps, the story of the DP camps was much easier to tell. While the concentration camps told the story of suffering and loss, the DP story was more ambiguous; it could be a heartwarming story of rebirth and life or a tragic story of prolonged suffering, albeit to a lesser degree than during the Shoah.

Thus, for both the Jewish DPs and the Americans who worked with them, the DP camps had a mixed legacy. As the quotations at the beginning of the Epilogue from two former DPs at Föhrenwald demonstrate, individuals who experienced the same camp at the same time sometimes came away with radically different impressions. Their memories ranged from viewing the camps as “an extension of the horrible past” to among the “best memories” of their lives. Even the same individual could maintain mixed feelings about the DP camps; Biber’s assertion that his two years at Föhrenwald were years of continued anguish coexists with his view of Föhrenwald as a site of rebirth and renewal, which is embodied in the memoir’s title, *Risen from the Ashes*.

Regardless of their feelings about the DP camps, the DPs were undoubtedly affected by the camps long after emigration. The pride of being a “Feldafinger,” or resident of any particular DP camp, added a layer to the DPs’ complex identity as a Jew, a Holocaust survivor, and a member of a new national group.³⁹⁹ The fact that one’s DP camp identity was retained so long after exiting the DP camps demonstrates the extent to which the time spent at a DP camp shaped the inhabitants’ future

³⁹⁹ Throughout *Feldafing*, former DP Simon Schochet uses the term “Feldafinger” to define the Feldafing residents. See *ibid*.

experiences and significantly informed their worldviews.⁴⁰⁰ Many of the DPs had forged lifelong friendships in the camps; in oral testimonies recorded some fifty years afterwards, former DPs still counted the friends they made in the DP camps among their closest friends and described regular reunions to bring together the scattered former DPs living in the United States.⁴⁰¹ Maintaining these relationships would forever influence their connection to the Jewish community and their conception of their own Jewish identity.

For many Americans who worked in the DP camps, their interactions with the Jewish DPs proved to be similarly formative, although to a lesser extent. Given the worldwide attention to what would come to be known as the Holocaust, Americans who participated in the DP era would largely come to view the Jewish DP story as one of great drama and value. The memoirs from Americans who worked in the DP camps were some of the first to commemorate the richness of Jewish DP life. As discussed in earlier chapters, the day-to-day interactions between the American occupation authorities and the Jewish DPs tended to center around administrative frustrations with the DPs. Despite the ongoing tensions between Americans and the DPs, many Americans from both the military government and relief organizations latched on to a romantic narrative of the displaced Jews in the immediate aftermath of the DP era as a story of triumph and resilience. In 1953, just a few years after the events analyzed in this thesis, Lucius Clay deemed the story of the Jewish DPs an “epic story” in the preface to Leo Schwarz’s memoir about his work with the JDC is

⁴⁰⁰ Myers, “Jewish Displaced Persons Reconstructing Individual and Community in the US Zone of Occupied Germany,” 304.

⁴⁰¹ See Gloria Abrams, interview by Daisy Berl, 12 November 1995, interview 06198, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation.

postwar Germany. Clay had served as the Deputy Governor of Germany in the Allied Military Government, and felt that Americans had failed to understand the miraculous revitalization of the displaced Jews in Germany.⁴⁰² Schwarz took the drama a step further, calling the story of the Jewish DPs legendary proof that “man can, if passionately devoted to an ideal, lift himself above his poverty and vanity and by force of will attain his cherished goals.”⁴⁰³ Clay and Schwarz, along with other Americans who had played a role in the DP camps, were among the first to narrate the DP era as a romantic story of trials and tribulations that culminated in the rebirth of the Jewish community. Just as the narrative we know today fails to account for the experiences of the DPs who were depressed or suicidal, Clay wrote that the experiences of the “small number who were unable to adjust their lives... were insignificant in comparison with the determined and successful effort made by the great majority.”⁴⁰⁴ Already in 1953, the memory of the DP camps was being molded in such a way that negative experiences were dismissed as “insignificant” and positive “success stories” that demonstrated resilience and regeneration were highlighted.⁴⁰⁵ In their desire to tell a story of vitality, the positive and more palatable DP experiences were prioritized over the unsettling and unpleasant subaltern ones. Contrary to Schochet’s fears, the DP camps were actually celebrated in this sanitized form and the story retold in the immediate postwar period.

This retelling of the DP era as a story of triumph affected the way Americans remembered their own role in the DP camps. In the postscript to Irving Heymont’s

⁴⁰² Lucius Clay, “Prefatory Note,” in Schwarz, *The Redeemers*, vii.

⁴⁰³ Schwarz, *The Redeemers*, x.

⁴⁰⁴ Clay, “Prefatory Note,” viii.

⁴⁰⁵ See Hyman, *The Undeclared*, 17.

publication of letters he wrote to his wife while serving as the camp commander at Landsberg, Heymont reflected on why the DP camps continued to affect him “so deeply.” Despite his day-to-day annoyances with the DPs, which were excerpted throughout this thesis, and despite his refusal to even reveal his Jewish identity while he was working at Landsberg, he still felt that “the few months at Landsberg taught me to be a Jew again and that the human spirit can be virtually indomitable—particularly the Jewish spirit.”⁴⁰⁶ Written in 1981, the postscript may also reflect a broader shift from integrationist to particularist tendencies among minority groups in the second half of the twentieth century; American Jews shifted away from emphasizing their “American” attributes toward highlighting their uniquely Jewish attributes.⁴⁰⁷

The story of the DP camps continues to be re-told and re-written. In recent years, as the second generation of children born in the DP camps have urged historians to treat the DP era as a subject of inquiry in its own right, our understanding of the DP camps and the complex interactions that occurred within them has been substantially expanded.⁴⁰⁸ Yet, even within the limited timeframe of the fall of 1945 and the geographic area of Bavaria, it remains impossible to categorically answer the question that inspired the writing of this thesis: whether the camps were contentious spaces of prolonged agony and conflict or joyful spaces of communal rebirth. Though it is tempting to formulate generalizations about DP life as an “epic story” or a site of continued trauma, either narrative flattens out the diverse history of the Jewish DP camp era, which was both a time of frequent conflict and

⁴⁰⁶ Heymont, *Among the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 111.

⁴⁰⁷ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 6-7.

⁴⁰⁸ See Berkowitz and Patt, “*We are Here.*”

misunderstanding as well as an exciting transition that ushered in a period of rebirth and community renewal. Some Jewish DPs were depressed, suicidal, or otherwise unable to “choose life” in the DP camps, while others were enthusiastically involved in the social fabric of the camps and preparing for a brighter future in Palestine, the United States, or elsewhere.

The sheer variety of people who came into contact with the DPs, as well as the diversity of the DPs themselves, makes this time period particularly difficult to examine as a whole. Even the same individual could have conflicting experiences, as memory is remarkably malleable. By recovering the everyday lived experiences of the Jewish DPs and the Americans who worked with them through micro-historical accounts, this thesis has tried to understand the past on its own terms rather than impose a presentist master narrative. To do justice to the complexity of DP life and to the complicated, ambivalent relationship between the Americans and Jewish DPs, historians must continue to strive toward a fuller understanding of both the good and the bad that occurred in the highly unusual space of the Jewish displaced persons camps.

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