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RESEARCH ON HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN CANADA

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One of the fastest growing areas of Holocaust research and writing is that dealing with the survivors' post war experiences. In both the United States and Israel, a growing body of work traces the processes by which survivors adjusted to their

new surroundings.

Some of this research picks up the thread as early as the DP camps. In general these studies focus on three distinct themes. The first has to do with the individual struggles of survivors and their families, and concerns psychological as well as economic consequences of their experiences.

The second focuses on the reciprocal impacts of the host Jewish communities on the influx of survivors. How were survivors received by the established Jewish/Israeli communities? What impact did survivors, their concerns, agendas, and organizations, have on American Jewry and Israel?

A third area of inquiry concerns the host society. To what extent did the governments and leading political and social institutions of the receiving states facilitate or hamper the arrival and settlement of the survivors?

One can trace a developing research tradition dealing with survivors in the United States quite clearly. Among the earlier studies were Dorothy Rabinowitz's *New Lives* and Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust*. In addition to these journalistic accounts there were many early clinical studies by mental health professionals and researchers focusing on psychological problems faced by survivors and their children.

William Helmreich's 1992 landmark volume *Against All Odds* presents a broad overview of the personal struggles and triumphs of survivors as well as their impact on many aspects of Jewish communal life in the United States. While the general message is positive, Helmreich does not gloss over tensions between the survivors and the established Jews, or experiences of antisemitism or economic difficulties. More recently, Alan Berger's *Children of Job* traces the artistic responses to the Holocaust of children of survivors.

Published Canadian scholarly literature on these themes is sparse, and indeed the material in this journal can be seen as a contribution, as well as an effort to focus attention and energy for further research. Dissertations at the masters and doctoral level have addressed various aspects of the experiences and impacts of Canadian survivors, and these have on rare occasion appeared as chapters in books or journal articles. (As an example see Myra Giberovitch "The Contributions of Holocaust Survivors to Montreal Jewish Communal Life.") Two volumes have looked at child survivors: Ben Lappin's *Redeemed Children* in 1963 and Fraidie Martz's *Open Your Hearts* in 1996.

Book length treatments of a more general nature remain rare. Joseph Kage's *With Faith and Thanksgiving*, and Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None is Too Many* include material on the struggle of Jewish DPs to get into Canada after the war, in the face of governmental resistance or inertia. The second volume of Gerald Tulchinsky's history of Canadian Jewry, *Branching Out*, includes material dealing with the migration of the survivors to Canada and their reception by the Canadian Jewish community. John Sigal and Morton Weinfeld's *Trauma and Rebirth* represents the only monograph describing the actual psycho-social functioning of random, non-clinical, samples of survivors and their children. A recent volume edited by Jerry Grafstein, *Beyond Imagination*, includes the personal reactions of leading Canadian Jewish personalities to the Holocaust; it does not deal specifically with survivors.

Yet these studies do not yet represent a large corpus of work. Smaller scale studies as well as works of synthesis are needed. Canadian scholars could do well to follow in the well worn paths of scholarship on the American, Israeli, or European survivors in terms of developing a research agenda, as described in the following review essay by William Helmreich. For some issues the Canadian story will be similar. For others, it will be distinct.

There can be no doubt that the impact of the survivors on the life of Canadian Jewry has been at least as great as in the

American case. From the very moment of the liberation of the camps themselves, the Canadian government and the Canadian Jewish community began a process of engagement with the remnants of European Jewry.

But in some ways the survivors who came to Canada found a more receptive environment, if only because the awaiting Canadian Jewish community was itself closer than their American counterpart to the European Jewish experience. The roots of Canadian Jewry were not as influenced by Reform as were those of American Jewry. Thus when the survivors arrived, the great majority from Eastern Europe, they were more at home. Some found a particular niche in Jewish education, notably within day schools which were more common than in the United States.

But it was not all roses. As in the United States, the more established, Anglicized elements of the Canadian Jewish community retained some social ambivalence toward the newcomers. The friendship and social circles of most of the survivors remained insular, even subdivided by European origins and pre-war lifestyle. Thus Polish speaking survivors did not fully mingle with Yiddish speaking Polish survivors, to say nothing of those from Russia, Lithuania, Hungary, Rumania, Germany, etc.

As more Canadian research and writing becomes available, comparative studies can follow. The following review essay by William Helmreich offers a portrait of the range of studies and topics which await Canadian scholars.