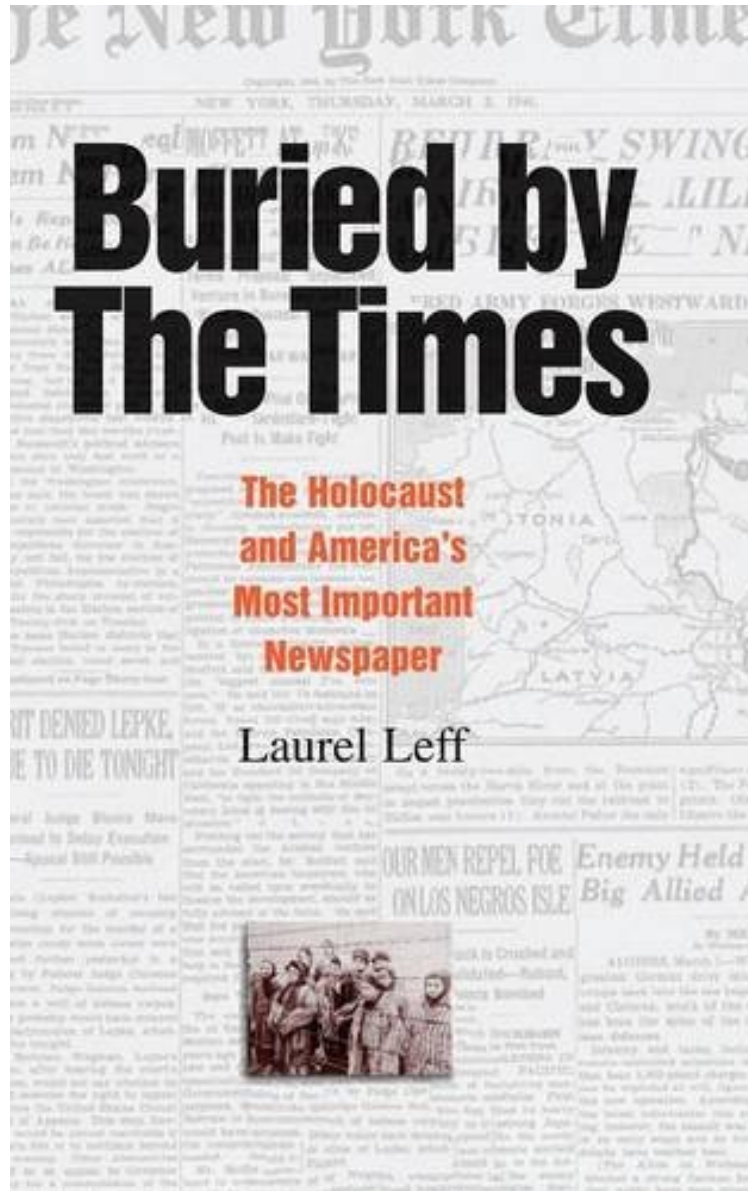


(Online library) Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper

# Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper

Laurel Leff

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**Laurel Leff : Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper:

16 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Missing: A Comparative Treatment By Werner Cohn  
 Laurel Leff has given us a nicely detailed description of how the New York Times, then as now the most eminent newspaper in the country, failed to appreciate the historical significance of the Holocaust while it was under way in Europe. This was not a matter of suppression of news. Whatever news was available was published in the Times, but it was buried in back pages. The Nazis' systematic killings of Jews, when news of them reached the West, were not accorded the front-page status that, in hindsight, these events warranted. And here lies the fundamental weakness of the book as I see it. The author's vision is ahistorical, anachronistic; it applies what we know now to a judgement of what was done then. Nevertheless, Leff's book cannot help but be of importance to anyone interested in the period. Her strongest point is the role of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the Times from 1935 to 1945. Scion of a wealthy family of German Jews, living in a period in which Jews were still excluded from many positions of influence and were strictly limited in the prestige universities, Sulzberger felt uneasy about his Jewish identity. He was, in the language of those days, an assimilationist. He was very much worried that the public might consider him a Jew before it recognized him as a newspaper man. Leff's description of his role in the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism is most enlightening. But, as Leff also points out, the Reform Judaism of his day was also largely anti-Zionist. Sulzberger was not the only, nor the most rabid of the anti-Zionists among prominent American Jews. In any case, as Leff indicates, he was also basically fair-minded and was not given to suppressing news. The extent to which Sulzberger's personal values may have influenced the Times's coverage of the Holocaust is not clear. This question, as well as the larger question of how unique the Times was in its Holocaust treatment, can only be explored by a comparative treatment. How did the Times compare with other news outlets? How much better could it have done, given the limitations in the world's understanding of the significance of the Holocaust while it was in progress? Leff suggests that the Times was not unique, but she gives no particulars. She is not interested in making comparisons with other papers, either here or abroad. The New York Yiddish press of those days was still very important and very vibrant. There were several Yiddish dailies, with the Morning Journal and the Forward probably the most important. There was also the Tug (Day), and the Freiheit, the Communist Yiddish daily. Leff takes scant interest in any of these. She certainly does not do what would be required to understand the Times's treatment of the Holocaust, viz. a detailed comparative analysis of the Yiddish press accounts in relationship to those of the Times. We are left with a description of what happened at the Times only, and this description is both enlightening and thorough. But we are not told whether, with all of Sulzberger's qualms and other institutional peculiarities of the Times, that newspaper could have given us a sustained, balanced, meaningful treatment of the Holocaust as it was unfolding, given the fact that the world simply could not grasp the horror and the novelty of the Nazi crime. I was a newspaper reader in those days, not only of the Times, but also of a variety of Jewish sources (but not of the Yiddish press). I read all the little facts. But I had no inkling of what was really happening, of the magnitude of the Holocaust. That came to me, as it did to the rest of the world, only some years after the war. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Buried indeed By Stephen J. Whitfield  
 How the pre-eminent American newspaper got wrong the signature evil of the last century is poignantly and powerfully told in Laurel Leff's carefully researched account. 3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Shame on the New York Times (Anti Semitism) By Bernie Freedman  
 This book proves conclusively that the New York Times deliberately refused to report virtually anything at all about the Holocaust during World War Two. The owners of the Times admitted this and excused itself because they are Jewish.

An in-depth look at how The New York Times failed in its coverage of the fate of European Jews from 1939-45. It examines how the decisions that were made at The Times ultimately resulted in the minimizing and misunderstanding of modern history's worst genocide. Laurel Leff, a veteran journalist and professor of journalism, recounts how personal relationships at the newspaper, the assimilationist tendencies of The Times' Jewish owner, and the ethos of mid-century America, all led The Times to consistently downplay news of the Holocaust. It recalls how news of Hitler's 'final solution' was hidden from readers and - because of the newspaper's influence on other media - from America at large. Buried by The Times is required reading for anyone interested in America's response to the Holocaust and for anyone curious about how journalists determine what is newsworthy.

"...[an] important book..." -New York Post "...excellent..." -Commentary Magazine "Laurel Leff has written an exceptional study of one of the darkest failures of the New York Times--its non-coverage of the holocaust during World War II. How could the best newspaper in the United States, perhaps in the world, under-estimate and under-report the mass killing of more than 6,000,000 Jews? Read this book, which provides answers and in the process stands tall in scholarship, style and importance." -Marvin Kalb, Senior Fellow at Harvard's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy "Laurel Leff[...]has done a fine job...[a] wonderful book..." -New York Daily News "...impressive..." -The New York Times "This is the best book yet about American media coverage of the Holocaust, as well as an extremely important contribution to our understanding of America's response to the mass murder of the Jews." -David S. Wyman, author of The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust "This important book answers--in a compelling fashion--some of the questions which have long been asked about the New

York Times' coverage of the Holocaust. Probing far behind the headlines, Leff tells the fascinating story of how the Sulzberger family was rescuing its relatives from Germany at the same time that it was burying the story of the Holocaust in the inner recesses of the paper." -Deborah E. Lipstadt, author of *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*"Laurel Leff has written an engrossing and important book about the abject failure of the world's most influential newspaper, The New York Times, to report on the Holocaust its owner and key figures knew was occurring. Her book tells us much about America at the time, the level of anti-Semitism, and the assimilationist desire of the Jewish owner of the Times to avoid stressing the unique Jewish nature of the genocide. It is part and parcel with the same mindset of the Roosevelt Administration. One can only wonder in great sorrow at how many lives might have been saved if the nation's and world's conscience had been touched by full and complete coverage by the Times of what remains the greatest crime of world history." -Stuart E. Eizenstat, former senior official in the Clinton Administration and the Special Representative of President Clinton on Holocaust-Era Issues. Author of *Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor and the Unfinished Business of World War II*"...skilfully[...]written, researched, and analyzed..." -New Haven Advocate"A complicated important look back." -The Atlanta Journal-Constitution"This is a well-researched and well-written book." -Haim Genizi, *The Journal of American History*"Buried by the Times is admirably relentless." -Ron Hollander, Montclair State University, *American Jewish History*..."thoroughly researched and so carefully written." -Owen V. Johnson, *Jhistory*About the AuthorLaurel Leff has been a faculty member at Northeastern University since 1996. Prior to her university appointment, she was a professional journalist, reporting for 18 years for such newspapers as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Miami Herald*. She served also as an editor for *American Lawyer Media* and *The Hartford Courant*. This is her first book.From *The Washington Post*During World War II, most Americans didn't pay much attention to what we now call the Holocaust. Many knew that the Nazi regime was persecuting and murdering Jews in Europe, but few had an overall grasp of the scope and nature of that genocide. In *Buried by the Times*, Laurel Leff puts under the microscope the coverage given to the Holocaust in the New York Times during the war. She reports that while there was, on average, a Holocaust-related story every other day, only a few dozen of those stories made the front page. Moreover, Jews were often described as "among" the Nazis' victims rather than as their primary victims. By thus "burying" the Holocaust, she charges, the Times sabotaged efforts to rouse the American public -- efforts which, had they been successful, might have produced an effective rescue program. The tone of Leff's account is one of unremitting outrage. When the Times fails to report any Holocaust-related event, she is outraged. If the paper reports on it, she's outraged that the report isn't on the front page. When a Holocaust story is on the front page, she complains that it isn't high enough on the front page. When there is no editorial on some Holocaust-related subject, she is outraged, and if there is an editorial, she's outraged that it isn't the lead editorial. She is regularly outraged when either reportage or commentary, wherever placed, mentions not Jews alone but other victims as well. When one item made clear that a majority of those killed at a certain locale were Jews, she complains that this was noted "only once" in the story. All of this is so over-the-top as to verge on self-parody.Other writers have offered various explanations for the failure of the American press to feature the Holocaust more prominently during the war. Sources were scanty, not always reliable, and often contradictory. Americans' attention was focused on battle zones where American troops were engaged. And there was sometimes a calculated reason for deemphasizing special Jewish victimhood. Americans were far more focused on the Japanese than on the German enemy ("Remember Pearl Harbor"). That the Nazis were the enemy of the Jews was well known; the task was to portray Nazi Germany as the mortal enemy of "free men everywhere." Hence the (sometimes exaggerated) emphasis on other victims. And, given continued high levels of anti-Semitism in the United States, not emphasizing Hitler's war against the Jews was an attempt to sidestep the claim that America was engaged in a war for the Jews.Leff notes these and other explanations but finds them inadequate. For her, the keys to the Times's failure to live up to its journalistic obligations were the character and mindset of its publisher, Arthur Hays Sulzberger. Sulzberger was a Jew of a sort now rare: a believer in the classical Reform position that Jewishness means solely religious belief -- not ethnic "peoplehood." His political loyalties were strictly American, his sensibility was liberal and universalist, and he was an opponent of the campaign for a Jewish state in Palestine. And he didn't want the Times to become -- or seem to be -- a spokesman for any parochial Jewish concern. Therefore, according to Leff, he bent over backward to deny the specificity of Jewish victimhood, refused to allow the Times to give prominent notice of the Holocaust and withheld support for rescue programs that focused on European Jewry.This argument is not completely wrongheaded. All of us are pulled this way and that by our ways of seeing the world, and surely this was true of Sulzberger. But the great difficulty with blaming the behavior of the Times on the particularities of Sulzberger's belief system is that so many others -- Jews and gentiles, universalists and particularists, Zionists and anti-Zionists -- behaved more or less identically. Yehuda Bauer, a leading Israeli Holocaust scholar, writes that the wartime Palestinian press would "go into ecstasies about some local party-political affair, while the murder of the Jews of Europe is reported only in the inside pages." In the United States the Zionist Jewish Frontier warned against forgetting "what was done to the Czechs, the Poles, the Jews, the Russians." Universalizing the portrayal of Nazi barbarism was a common strategy to discredit the idea that the war against Nazi Germany was a war for the Jews. One can argue, as Leff does, that this concern was exaggerated, but if ever a strategy was "well meant," this was it.Buried by the Times

offers a good deal of interesting information about Times coverage of the Holocaust -- although the reader should be wary of paraphrases and truncated quotations that are sometimes tendentious. But those who would like to understand the reasons behind the Times coverage will have to await a chronicler less consumed by prosecutorial zeal. ed by Peter Novick Copyright 2005, The Washington Post Co. All Rights Reserved.