

The Council and the Museum

By: **Marek Jan Chodakiewicz**

Translated by: **Pawel Piotr Styrna**

My five-year term on the US Holocaust Memorial Council (USMHC) ended in January 2010. The mission of the USMHC embraces all matters related to commemorating the Holocaust – both within and without the United States - as an advisory and supervising body to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). This Museum is the main center of research and education about the genocide of the Jews by the German National Socialists, and other related topics. The Museum is a very influential institution in the educational, social, cultural, and political life of America.

The USHMM's prestigious position is the American Jewish community's crowning achievement. This is the result of a paradigm shift which affected American society, including Holocaust survivors and their children.

The Context

In the wake of the Second World War, the majority of the Jewish community did not focus on commemorating the Holocaust. Well into the 1960s Israel faced other, more pressing challenges. In addition, an aversion of sorts existed toward the European Jews who were blamed for passivity in the face of extermination; this was the reverse of the assertiveness cultivated by the young state of Israel. Moreover, the new Jewish immigrants in the West, including the USA, wished to simply forget about the nightmare of the Holocaust. They were preoccupied with their families and adapting to their new homelands. Society was indifferent at best. The universities were passively hostile. The dominating paradigm was WASP – White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Nobody cared to hear about Jewish matters.

In 1952, Raul Hilberg, a student at Columbia University, decided to write a doctoral dissertation about the extermination of the Jews. Upon hearing this, his advisor urged him to wake up and declared it “a kiss of death.” It would allegedly ruin Hilberg's career. But the young scholar was adamant. Hilberg completed and successfully defended his thesis. But no one would publish it for almost ten years. Finally, a small Chicago publisher agreed to publish his doctorate only because the costs were covered by a donor who purchased 1,000 copies (300 copies paid for the cost of the printing).

Meanwhile, other, more knowledgeable representatives of the Jewish community took steps to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. They ignored the hostility of mainstream American institutions and began to create their own instead. They even adapted the existing Jewish foundations and organizations to the new demands. They provided grants promoting the study of the Holocaust. To begin with, they gathered and encouraged the writing of memoirs, and sought photographs, documents, and other items from the Holocaust. Quite naturally, this process connected the grass-root effort with loose coordination from above. Thus, individual persons wrote memoirs or asked young people to assist in collecting them. These strengthened inter-generational ties and conveyed Jewish history to the youth. Also, entire communities participated in the process of writing and collecting; there are hundreds of memorial books (*Yizkor bücher*) published by emigrants from both small and large towns in Poland, usually written in Hebrew or Yiddish. On a higher level, they initiated the collection of funds, and the founding of new institutions, outside of the universities at first, followed by university chairs. New publishing houses were established which specialized in both popular and scholarly works. At this point the State of Israel began to work closely with the Jewish Diaspora. Cooperation and mutual assistance characterized the relationship. This buttressed both the national identity and religious unity, and provided grounds for numerous meetings, discussions, and conferences. It is important to note that for quite some time this phenomenon existed outside of the American mainstream.

New Cultural Paradigm

Two decades following the conclusion of the Second World War the dominant attitudes of Western Christian communities began to change. Following the cultural revolution of 1960s, mainstream America began to see her minorities in a more favorable light. A new generation of scholars was not only interested in Prof. Hilberg's discoveries but also initiated its own research. Much of it was based on unverified Jewish testimonies, including memorial books. Thus, the testimonies contained at Yad Vashem and other

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**In a land
where all
men are
created equal**

Justyna Ball

<http://justyna-polishdelight.blogspot.com>

My daughter told me about a dream she had recently. In it, she exits a mall and can't find her car in the huge parking lot. She starts desperately searching the lot, looking and looking, walking in circles, pressing the panic button to see which car responds. Still... nothing! Getting very nervous, after such a restless night, my tired daughter finally gives up, sighs, and says, “Oh well, I'll get another one,” and walks away...

Not long ago, but still far away in the country of Poland, when my grandmother needed a haircut, she did not go to a hairdresser. The hairdresser (Mrs. Motylowa - the wife of Pan Motyl / Mr. Butterfly), came to her. Also doctors and vets still do rounds, and shoes are being fixed when the worn-out soles give up.

When my favorite pair of Steve Maddens lost their grip, I replaced their bottoms with new ones for \$30 at the local shopping mall. The repair cost half of what I paid for them originally. When it happened again, I decided it was not worth fixing. As I came to such a conclusion, others must have too, because the craftsmanship of shoe repair is all gone now.

The idea of buying a camera for more than a hundred dollars is not very convincing to me since the cheap and the expensive ones, in my case, break just the same. Let's face it, things are not built to last anymore. My friend was talked into buying a new, generally desired, stainless steel refrigerator although there was nothing wrong with his old one except that it was old. Now, after four years and several costly repairs, they miss their old ice box dearly.

Years ago, upon my arrival as an immigrant, seeing an American woman buy a shirt in one style, but in a variety of hues made me think of them as of rich. Not very bright but rich, rich because to pay cash for so many almost identical shirts you must have money. It never occurred to me that you can just “charge it.” And ridiculous, because all your shirts may be fashionable now, but next season, they will be out all at once. Twenty something years later, I know that being rich is not about how many credit cards you have in your wallet, but when there are enough jobs in manufacturing nationwide so that I could afford shirts “Made in the USA” and not manufactured in some third world country. Any exclusion from this puts a country's wealth in jeopardy. Otherwise, we are acting as distributors contributing to somebody else's wealth.

My old friend, upset about many American jobs gone, says that if he were any younger he would start a revolution. But I remember when he and his wife did their weekly rounds to Wal-mart lured by low prices.

When I stopped shopping at Wal-Mart in June 2004, I was going to point out to people around me, among other things when they asked me for a reason why, that we do not need half the stuff we buy there. We buy it because the corporation's strategists assured us that nobody will sell

us the same stuff cheaper. The insecurity factor convinced us that although we may not need it now, we surely will need it later. My “boycott” was meant to make them think...some did. Some still say, “I wish I could stop, but I can't,” which sounds like a confession of an addict, a heavy shopaholic.

My shirt-maniac friend bought as many shirts as she could because they were cheap. If they were made in the USA, they may have been pricier, but she still would buy them because she has to wear something, and she likes to be fashionable, but she just wouldn't buy so many. That's my point. And she would take better care of them as well.

What's wrong with this?

(See how much you can get from local businesses, and don't give to corporations - they are only good for shipping our jobs overseas.)

A rich country does not necessarily mean how wealthy the people at the top are, but also how the nation takes care of their poor.

Does the judicial system serve the wealthy and poor equally? Is access to education fair and most importantly, does the health care system provide for all or discriminate against the lower classes?

WE may think of our system as the best in the world but as long as the US won't provide health care to all, and does not concentrate on “preventive medicine,” it will drag behind in statistics. Only in America a person can become so sick that when he can no longer work, he loses his insurance benefits, at a time when he needs it the most. Other times the insurance company may refuse to pay for treatment of first symptoms of lupus but then pays for complications of untreated lupus, when it's already too late. That's right... it is crazy but very true. That's why our system is the most expensive in the world. Even with the best medical equipment and the best specialists, we can't compete with the rest of the civilized world. When the WHO (World Health Organization) conducted its newest studies on 191 countries, we did not score too high. In an overall ranking (based on the comparison of each country's performance to the overall performance), considering its level of education and how much the country spends on health care, US placed 37. France, Japan, Norway, and Germany always come in the first ten.

We do well compared to poor countries, but we do poorly compared to rich developed countries. Ironically, it is our experts writing programs for others telling them how their systems should work, but can't have such programs in their own country. The main problem is insurance companies, which make our health care system work like a market. In other countries, all systems vary, they are all different with private hospitals and private doctors, even private insurance companies, the mechanism in each country is much more complicated than we think, but one thing that unites them all is the fact that THEIR insurance companies, in each and every country, are NON-PROFIT and often act like a charity. Ours are loved on Wall Street!

“Socialism” (the word often brought up by universal health care opponents) already exists in the US, and is used by our government to treat veterans, the elderly and Native Americans. It is actually the only developed country where

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Calendar of Events

May 23, Polish American Congress meeting in - Los Angeles - For info - page 5.

May 26 – 29, Wed to Sat, Paderewski Piano Competition, at Thayer Hall, Colburn School Conservatory of Music, Los Angeles

Jun 13, Sun., 10:30 - 6:00 pm, 11th Proud To Be Polish Festival - Please see page 1.

Jun 20, Sun., 10:30 am, Polish National Alliance meeting at the Polish Parish in Los Angeles.

Jun 20, Sun., 1:30 pm, Polish American Congress, General Meeting at the Polish Parish in Los Angeles.

Please send information for the calendar to Bish Petryka - e-mail: zbyskoopet@aol.com ★