

## What Does It Mean for Today?

# Holocaust Remembrance Day – Honoring 6 Million Jews

- by Andy Noguchi

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Japanese Americans reflect on the forced imprisonment of 120,000 members in America's WWII concentration camps. On April 8<sup>th</sup> this year, people across the world reflect on the genocide of 6 million European Jews in the Holocaust (Yom HaShoah in Hebrew) killed in executions, death, and forced labor camps by Nazi Germany and their collaborators.

What does this horrible human rights tragedy mean for us today? To better understand, we interviewed David Mandel, chapter leader of the Sacramento Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a progressive social justice group and ally of the Florin JACL-SV.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, describes the Holocaust as the "systematic, state-sponsored, persecution and murder of 6 million Jewish men, women and children by the Nazi regime and its collaborators". 11 million others, including Soviet POWs, Poles, East Europeans, trade unionists, the disabled, LGBTQ individuals, Roma ("gypsies"), Jehovah's Witnesses, and others were also exterminated. German Nazis under Adolf Hitler perpetrated this racial cleansing from 1933 to 1945.



**1. Many Japanese American families have been touched by their WWII American concentration camp experience. With the loss of 6 million Jews during the Holocaust the impact must be widespread.**

*Mandel: My ancestors all immigrated from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1905, and they lost touch with relatives left behind. So while I'm sure there were cousins, etc., killed in the Holocaust, we don't know specifics. Stories I've heard are through friends who are children of survivors.*

**2. Trauma and loss often plague a community far into the future, though sometimes not talked about by our parents. What has been your experience?**

*Mandel: The effect on me personally has been more political and ideological – a dedication that such things must not be allowed to happen to anyone, as opposed to a narrower Jewish nationalism / defensiveness that drives some more conservative elements of the community. As I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, [my parents] clearly found it hard to talk about the subject. They lived through the war era so perhaps experienced the collective traumatization more than I did. Nor do I recall my grandfathers (who immigrated as teenagers) talking much about what it was like in Europe, let alone their vicarious experience of the Holocaust. I wish I had asked more when I could.*

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***“How can we try to meet this challenge [of increasing anti-Semitic and other hate crimes today]? The answer is safety through solidarity.”***

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**3. In the U.S. 75 years after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, hate crimes, and attacks on Jewish synagogues continue, even reaching record highs the last 4-5 years according to the F.B.I. In Sacramento in 1993 and 1999, many people, including the Florin JACL, rallied against the firebombings of Jewish temples, Chinese American Councilman Jimmie Yee's home, Sacramento JACL and NAACP offices, women's clinic, and the murder of an LGBTQ couple. How can we try to meet this challenge?**

*Mandel: The answer is safety through solidarity. And we must not shy away from the fact that the recent rise in attacks on Jews as well as others – currently, anti-Asian racism is most “popular”. Fed by politicians and other ideologists on the white supremacist right, abetted by larger forces whose real aim is to thwart the progressive agenda of human rights, wealth redistribution and world peace by keeping us divided. Antisemitism can be particularly vexing, as it tends to undergird many other forms, inventing a supposed secret Jewish cabal to manipulate other groups in an effort to “displace” white people and their privileges.*

*Certain antisemitic beliefs and stereotypes persist among other political forces and ethnic groups as well. They must be called out when manifested and vigorously opposed, but I believe they stem mostly from ignorance.*

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***“[The Holocaust} was likely the biggest quantitative example of humanity's capability for mass murder flowing from racist-fed nationalism”.***

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**4. Today, we face countless international and domestic human rights challenges. What's the meaning of the Holocaust for today?**

*Mandel: To make sure it is not portrayed as sui generis [unique] though it was likely the biggest quantitative example of humanity's capability for mass murder flowing from racist-fed nationalism. There have been too many, all with unique characteristics, and we must discover how to prevent any more. The fact that it was perpetrated in a country [Germany] known until then as a beacon of European civilization must also be a lesson to dispel any notion that other peoples are somehow less civilized, more murderous, etc.*

**5. The Jewish Voice for Peace has been a leader in speaking out for human rights including for Palestinians in the Middle East, Muslim American civil rights, social justice, and peace. How has the Holocaust experience inspired you?**

*Mandel: The lessons lead JVP and other Jewish human rights advocates to defend and speak out on behalf of any group targeted on the basis of race, religion, national origin, gender and more. Especially at a time when racism of many types is being deployed against movements for radical*



**Jews and Muslims United: 2016 Hanukkah Solidarity Vigil against Islamophobia attended by 500 people at the State Capitol. Organized by JVP and Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR).**

social transformation, we need to re-emphasize that “Never again” means “Never again for anyone,” and that security for everyone can come only through social solidarity.

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## 6. Can you tell us more about the JVP? Why was it formed?



*Mandel: Founders of the original Bay area group in the late 1990s were driven to oppose the prevailing ethos in the Jewish community that because of the history of Jewish oppression, Israel needed to be defended no matter what damage its occupation was causing to Palestinians and to Israeli society itself. U.S. military aid was enabling the damage. It was a time when political solution based on two states seemed within reach, and while not explicitly endorsing that model, JVP’s pronouncements at the time were mostly in line with the view.*

**JVP members rallying for Palestinian rights in the Middle East.  
David Mandel pictured left of JVP banner.**

## 7. Do you have any other comments to share with us?

*Mandel: JVP has evolved since its formation into an organization that is much larger, nationwide and connected with similar groups in other countries. Its activities have expanded – with more interest in helping to create a renewed, more radical Jewish culture that is not tied to identification with Israel. It has moved beyond being an address for dissent on Israel/Palestine in the Jewish community to enthusiastic identification with the panoply of identity-based, intersectionality-oriented movements championing the interests of oppressed groups based on racial, ethnic and gender identities. Finally, it has oriented more toward solidarity with the Palestinian movement for freedom, endorsing the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions, demanding an end to occupation, equality for all in Israel, and the right of return for refugees.*

**For more information on Jewish Voice for Peace, please see:**

Sacramento JVP on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JVPSacramento/>

National JVP website: <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org>