

## A VIDEO REVIEW ESSAY: PART 2

### WITNESSES TO THE HOLOCAUST

Michael Howell  
College of the Ozarks

*Witnesses to the Holocaust: Jewish Responses*  
(67 minutes running time)

**Witnesses to the Holocaust, part 6—from a six-part series in DVD format.** Overland Park, KS: Midwest Center for Holocaust Education, Inc. DVD, \$15.

This DVD marks the final work in the series *Witnesses to the Holocaust* by the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education, which this reviewer welcomed enthusiastically in the previous issue of *Teaching History*.<sup>1</sup> *Jewish Responses*, although a bit longer than the others at just over an hour, follows the same format as those films, with off-screen narrators setting the context for stories told movingly by survivors. However, after viewing the other titles in the series, I think this latest offering adds only a little of value to the set. Viewers have heard at least parts of many of these stories before in a more specific context, whether about discrimination, attempts to preserve community life, to flee to safer places, to hide in dangerous areas, or to survive under Nazi oppression. This film lacks the compelling drama inherent in meeting these survivors and hearing their stories for the first time.

Jews coming to Europe faced problems in the majority culture from the start, but the film explains that they generally tried compliance when authorities demanded they wear distinctive clothing or live in limited areas. It does not explore employment restrictions. When compliance failed to achieve desired results, Jews resorted to bribes, protests, evasions, or flight. But such responses failed after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, because he wanted to make Germany *Judenrein*, Jew-free, and later decided to annihilate all the Jews under his control.

Using an illustration from a German children's book of stereotypical Jews taking a one-way road from Germany, the filmmakers describe how the Nazis tried to drive out Jews: through economic boycotts, deprivation of rights and citizenship, arrests, imprisonment, concentration camps, and even violent attacks like *Kristallnacht*, the focus of an earlier film. Once again we hear stories of excluded Jews creating their own organizations. Survivors tell of their families' escapes to safer countries, even to Latin America or Shanghai. Others sought escape to Palestine, but British authorities there

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Howell, "Witness to the Holocaust: A Video Review Essay," *Teaching History*, 38 (Fall 2013), 94-101.

restricted entry. Many Jews wanted to go to the United States, but restrictions again stopped them.

*Jewish Responses* then tells again the story of the *Einsatzgruppen*, or Special Action troops, killing thousands of Jews on the Eastern Front in World War II, and then details the creation of death camps for the slaughter of remaining Jews. There are some new survivor stories here about Jews being rounded up and shot or sometimes escaping into hiding, but viewers of earlier DVDs will learn little they did not know already. One new aspect of survival described here is teaming up with nonrelatives to increase survival chances through cooperation. The film then makes a point of mentioning Jewish partisans and resistance fighters, but there are no survivor stories here. Finally, *Jewish Responses* insists again that Jews responded to the Holocaust persistently and assertively, even if most were killed. That is true, but this final film in the series adds relatively little to the excellent proof presented in the heart-wrenching tales told earlier.