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Living with the Holocaust

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Speaker: Tom Segev

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time Transcription

00:00 [uctv / University of California Television / www.uctv.tv]

00:21 [Read Write Think Dream / The Library UC San Diego Channel / www.uctv.tv/library-channel]

00:28 [The UC San Diego Library and The Jewish Studies Program at UC San Diego Present]

00:34 [The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Living with the Holocaust / Featuring Tom Segev / Historian of Israel / June 1, 2016]

00:40 Brian Schottlaender: Tonight we are joined by a very special guest speaker historian Tom Segev who has traveled more than 7,500 miles across the globe to be with us here tonight. As an historian Tom is known for his probing questions into the prevailing assumptions of Israel's official history. His work draws on untapped archives, personal diaries, and declassified documents that deconstruct and illuminate the complex and uneasy relationship between Israel and the Holocaust. You'll hear more about and from Tom shortly, but first I would like to acknowledge a few other people and tell you a little bit more about the Holocaust Living History Workshop. I'd like to extend a special and very grateful thanks to Bill and Michelle Lerach and Jeffrey and Marcy Krinsk, the generous sponsors of this evening's program. I also want to recognize Hillel of San Diego for their support. While the Library and the Jewish Studies Program are very much continued, committed to continuing this compelling speaker series we need the support of friends like the Lerachs, like the Krinks, like Hillel to continue bringing in speakers like Tom Segev. So please, contact us if you'd like to learn more about how you can help.

02:13 Brian Schottlaender: Over the years the Holocaust Living History Workshop has grown to become one of the University's most captivating community outreach initiatives. Now in its eighth year of programming, the Workshop seeks to preserve the memories of the survivors of and the witnesses to the Holocaust by bringing in scholars, historians, journalists, and others who can share compelling personal narratives, shed light on new research, and stimulate thoughtful discussions about current events that underscore more than 70 years later the continued relevance of the Holocaust in world history. The workshop also plays a critical role in linking our students, teachers, area Holocaust survivors, and their families, and members of the community through the USC [University of Southern California] Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the world's largest collection of testimonies by Holocaust survivors. Before settling at USC this archive was developed under the auspices of filmmaker Steven Spielberg to document the histories of Holocaust survivors for his film *Schindler's List*. The UC San Diego Library is one of a handful of libraries and one of only two on the entire West Coast, that provides access to this tremendous resource through our ongoing licensing arrangement with the Shoah Foundation.

- 03:46 Brian Schottlaender: And now to our distinguished speaker Tom Segev. Born in Jerusalem to parents who fled Nazi Germany, Tom earned his BA [Bachelor of Arts] in History and Political Science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and his PhD [Doctor of Philosophy] in History from Boston University. Besides serving as a visiting professor at UC Berkeley, Rutgers University, and Northeastern University, he has contributed a weekly column to the prominent Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. Segev's international fame as an historian is based on his path-breaking works on Israeli history, works that have been translated into 14 languages. One of Israel's so-called new historians, Tom has helped to challenge some of the country's founding myths. His book *The Seventh Million: Israelis and the Holocaust*, published in 1991, was one of the first works to demonstrate the decisive impact of the Shoah on Israel's identity, ideology, and politics. His study of the pre-state period titled *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, published in 2000, won the National Jewish Book Award and was named *The New York Times* Editor's Choice Best Book. Tom's other noted works include *1949: The First Israelis*, *1967: Israel the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East*, and most recently *Simon Wiesenthal: The Life and Legend*. He is currently at work on a biography of David Ben-Gurion. It is a pleasure and a privilege to present Tom Segev in the concluding Holocaust Living History Workshop of the current academic year. Please join me in welcoming to the [unclear].
- 05:54 Tom Segev: Thank you very much. Thank you. Those of you who follow the news from Israel may be aware that the Israeli Ministry of Education has recently introduced a Holocaust program for nursery schools. In preparing our meeting tonight I asked my granddaughter to brief me on the program. Leah is four years old and so she's a good source. Exposing little children to the Holocaust is part of what it means to live with the Holocaust on an everyday basis. The Holocaust is part of our everyday life and it is a major element of our collective identity and it is constantly guiding us in the choice between basic values. There is in fact not a single day without some reference to the Holocaust in one of the Israeli media. And recently you may have, you may have followed the heated discussion about the proper lessons of the Holocaust which eventually led to a major government crisis. This has not always been the case. In fact, there was a time when the Holocaust was a complete taboo in Israel. Parents wouldn't talk to their children about it, and children wouldn't dare to ask.
- 07:35 Tom Segev: So, let me take you first to the beginnings of life with the Holocaust. The first reports about the extermination of the Jews arrived in Palestine more or less in real-time. Part of the information was published in the newspapers. Somewhere in the internal pages of one of the papers, you can find that the Nazis are pushing Jews into gas chambers, and this happens next to a little village in Poland called Treblinka. It was in the paper but the news about the extermination of the Jews very rarely hit the main headlines. The two major stories which interested the Hebrew press in Palestine at that time were obviously the the news from, from the front, in the war, the world war, and the future of Palestine. The story about the extermination of the Jews was

treated like a local angle of the real big story. The assumption was that the only way to save Jews was by defeating Nazi Germany in the war. When you look at the newspapers today, you'll get a strange awkward feeling. In fact, after the war newspaper editors were asked about it and they said that they were unable to internalize the magnitude of the horrors. They were unable to verify it. They felt a responsibility not to cause unnecessary panic, and perhaps they also felt that the public is not really interested in that story.

- 09:42 Tom Segev: By the way, the Hebrew press in Palestine was not different from newspapers in other countries who all missed that story, including *The New York Times*. But the newspapers in Palestine did not properly report the extermination of the Jews also because the Zionist movement was in fact unable to do much for those Jews. So this was, gave them an awkward feeling. And by the way, almost everything I'm saying tonight can make a book; almost every sentence has made books. There's lots of books, your library is full with books about other things, what could have been done for the Jews during the Holocaust. Zionism, as you know, predicted the Holocaust, but in the moment of truth, it was quite unable to do much for for the Jews. Here and there, there may have been missed opportunities. What's more troubling, we in with an historical view is the fact that most leaders of the Zionist movement were preoccupied with the events in Palestine rather than with the events in Europe. Already during the war the extermination of the Jews, the Holocaust was treated like something that belongs in the past, some piece of, of history.
- 11:31 Tom Segev: Most victims of the Holocaust were still alive when leaders of the Zionist movement already began to accuse each other for not having done enough to save them. Most victims of the Holocaust were still alive when people in Palestine began to plan a memorial campus, and they also had a name for it, Yad Vashem. This was in 1942. And most victims of the Holocaust were still alive when jurists began to explore the possibilities of demanding compensation from Germany after the war. And of course, everybody was preoccupied with planning the future State of Israel. As you said, I'm working now on a biography of David Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion spoke a great deal about the need to save the Jews, but he always meant saving the survivors after the war. He always talked about saving Jews after the war. He was also preoccupied with the future of Palestine. In other words, he regarded the surviving Jews as the main power, the soldiers that would populate the future State of Israel.
- 13:03 Tom Segev: The Zionist dream, as you know, was a European dream. But the Jews in Europe were gone now and so the only Jews who were potentially regarded as the future population of Palestine were Jews living in other, in Arab countries. And when the magnitude of the Holocaust became clear, the fact that six million European Jews were gone - most of them European Jews - were gone, Ben-Gurion understood that it's time to discover the Jews who live in Arab countries. And he did so with great apprehension. He did so with great disappointment because that was not the country he saw in his dream. The, he understood that the future State of Israel will not be

based on people who grew up in Europe, not people who will bring to the new state European culture, European values. And he also feared that these people will not be able to fulfill the tasks. For example, he feared that people from Arab countries who will be settled in some new areas along the border, they will escape the moment they hear the first shot because they are not like us, people from Europe who are heroic and know what should be done.

- 14:49 Tom Segev: So on the basis of what he wrote about the Holocaust, and what he said about the Holocaust, I've concluded that for Ben-Gurion the Holocaust was not first and foremost a crime against humanity, not first and foremost a crime against the Jewish people, but first and foremost a crime against Zionism. And specifically, a crime against the State of Israel, which was in the making. With which we arrive at the 1950s and to the period of the great silence, the guilt feelings, and the shame. In this connection, I've often thought about a woman I know next to nothing about. Her name was Rivka Waxmann and she was one of the first Israelis, a new immigrant in from, from Poland. It's been almost 25 years since I first heard that story and, although it had been repeated very often in various languages, nobody came up to me and gave me any information about, Rivka Waxmann, and so I'm repeating the story the way I, I first read it.
- 16:12 Tom Segev: It happened on one of the first days of 1949, a few months after the independence of Israel was declared, the first Arab Israeli was drawing to a close. It was one of Rivka Waxmann's first days in Israel. She went out shopping on Herzl Street in Haifa, and suddenly she noticed a soldier who emerged from a jeep and approached the ticket office of a nearby movie theater. And Rivka Waxmann cries out Haim, and the soldier stops and for the next few seconds, they stare each other in disbelief. The soldier was Haim and Rivka Waxmann was his mother. They had not seen each other for eight years or so, the last time she saw him he was 14. She thought that he'd perished in the Holocaust and he also thought that he will never see his mother again. A popular afternoon newspaper published the story on the same day. Indeed it had symbolic value and this is why I keep repeating it also to you, because thousands of people young and old had been torn from their loved ones during the Nazi occupation of Europe, and never knew what had become of them in the forests, in the camps, in the ghettos, and the deportations. And in Israel, they found each other purely by chance, by word of mouth, by ads in the newspapers, and also - thanks to a heart-rending radio program called Who Recognizes, Who Knows?, [Hebrew].
- 18:07 Tom Segev: And I'm now talking to you about my own childhood in in Israel. And I can tell you that among the voices of my childhood, I can still hear those names of people looking for, for relative, relatives coming, coming over the radio. Aryeh Leibush - what's his name Leibush - Aryeh Leibush Rabinowitz, now in kibbutz Hazorea, formerly from Łódź is looking for his brother Aaron. Hopefully, somewhere they will find each other. All were recent immigrants on the threshold of a new life. I guess that

life after the Holocaust was not easy for Rivka Waxmann. It was not easy anywhere, but it was particularly difficult in Israel. Many of the survivors felt guilty for having stayed alive, and more than once they were required to feel ashamed. The assumption was that if somebody survived the Holocaust he must have survived on the expense of somebody else, and therefore by definition a Holocaust survivor must have been bad and evil very very common view by the way expressed in so many words by Ben-Gurion among, among other people.

- 19:48 Tom Segev: They were referred to as human debris, Avak Adam in Hebrew, again by Ben-Gurion. Again and again, they were asked, why did you not defend yourself. Assuming that we proud, heroic Israelis would have not let the Nazis do these things to us. Everybody of us, as you know, is Paul Newman. So why did you go to like, like, like sheep to the, to the slaughterhouse? The survivors radiated weakness which Israelis wanted to get rid of. And there is a famous story, written by Aharon Appelfeld the novelist, about a boy who survives the Holocaust and gets to be in Palestine, is sent to a kibbutz, and he remains pale. He comes pale, and he remains pale, and so the other kids in the kibbutz beat him up. And he said, I'm trying, I'm trying to get a suntan. I'm sitting in the sun all day but I can't. And so, his paleness reminds them of the Holocaust. He's actually bringing the Holocaust with him to the kibbutz. That's what they want to get rid of and so they, they, they take revenge at him because he he remains pale. You may also know that a very popular reference, slang reference in, in Israel for Holocaust survivors was Sabon, based on the erroneous assumption that the Nazis manufactured soap from the bodies of their victims. So this was a difficult time for, for survivors. They were also constantly asked, why didn't you come earlier? Why did you stay? Why didn't you see the Zionist light, as we did? In other words, accusing the victims for being part of what happened to the Jewish people. And nobody wanted to hear the stories, and very often their stories were not believed.
- 22:03 Tom Segev: This is the famous story of another boy who comes to Palestine and tells his relatives that in the camp he was whipped by the camp commander 80 times and his relatives don't believe him. They say, if you were whipped 80 times you would be dead. So you are making it up. And this, he later expressed, described, as the 81st blow. This is a very common expression in, in, in Holocaust memory. The 81st blow, the blow that my relatives didn't believe me. Now we are talking about Israelis who very often felt guilty themselves because the Zionist movement was not able to do more for rescue because they didn't really care. And the survivors very often told them, look at your newspapers - there are stories about opera performances, there are stories about fashion shows, there are stories about football games. There is, in fact, one item in a newspaper printed about, about a football game printed above a story about the fate of Jews in some Polish town. So we have a very, very painful conflict here. There was the, the person-level also of, of veteran Israelis. They left the town in Poland, or somewhere, leaving their parents behind. Naturally one would think, well maybe if I stayed in Poland I would have been able to do something for my parents. Now my parents are gone.

- 23:57 Tom Segev: And then there also was the everyday level. I mean, how do you talk to, first of all, how do you live in a country after Auschwitz? How do you build your life after Auschwitz? But there was also the problem of life with those people. How do you live with a person who carries a blue number on, on his arm? How do you work with them? How do you go, go on the bus with them? How do you go to the movies with them? How do you fell, fall in love with them? How do you accept their children in school? What do you do with, with, with these people? How do you relate to them? So I think that never before did any society face a more difficult confrontation with what we call the other, then, then the Israeli society in those days. And this is when everybody agreed that the best thing to do is not to talk about it, and that's when the period of great silence was born. The Holocaust was hardly mentioned. We did learn something about the Holocaust in school. When I grew up, in in the late 1950s, the Holocaust was depicted mainly in form of Nazi sadism. Very little was ever said about the political and ideological background that made Nazism possible.
- 25:34 Tom Segev: We were given to read books by a writer called Ka-Tzetnik, the pseudonym of that writer was Ka-Tzetnik and I later had to realize, unfortunately, that much of it was pornographic. Ka-Tzetnik described acts of sexual assault, acts of cannibalism, and when he later appeared as a witness in the Eichmann trial he described the Holocaust as something that happened on another planet, in other words, outside the realms of history, outside the limits of responsibilities of human beings, and beyond any, any, any political responsibility particularly. Now, we were told a great deal about the heroism of the ghetto fighters and we were also told a great deal about Jewish collaborators with the Nazis. The first were meant to make us proud, the later were meant to show us that Holocaust survivors are, are evil people.
- 26:59 Tom Segev: And this went on about until 1960 and changed as result of the capture of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official who dealt mainly with the organization of the extermination. He was abducted by Israeli agents in Argentina, brought to Jerusalem, stood trial, and for many Israelis, this was the beginning of victory. We began to feel that we are actually defeating the Nazis. We are punishing the Nazis. We are avenging. And the survivors, for the first time, found themselves in a position where the country was interested in their story. The country needed their story, needed them as witnesses. And looking back, the trial really became the beginning of therapy for an entire country. And what we did was exactly what therapists suggest - talked about it. So, began to talk about the Holocaust, began to be interested in, in the Holocaust. And at this point, the big silence cracked, and was broken, and the Holocaust became into what it is today, as I said, a very central element of our collective identity.
- 28:30 Tom Segev: You can show how this happened gradually on many spheres, but one of them is when you follow the development of school system. The Holocaust as, as the Holocaust was taught in in schools. Every year more hours were devoted to, to the Holocaust. And today, as I said, they already teach Holocaust or talk about the Holocaust in, in nursery schools. So here is what I learned from Leah, or rather from

an email which her parents got from telling them what Leah would expect on Holocaust Day. At 10 o'clock we have the national siren, whole country's paralyzed, nothing, everybody stand still. And this they will also do with the children. And then the children will be encouraged to talk about their, what they did during the Passover vacation, which precedes Holocaust Day. Many of them will have taken trips with, with their parents. So, they will be encouraged to say how beautiful it was because we have a very beautiful country - our country. And then they will be told that not all children are so lucky to have a country because there were bad people who prevented these children, and their parents, to come and live in Israel, and have such a beautiful country, but at least they fought back. They resisted and they won. The victory, the evidence, is our country. We have this beautiful country. This is our victory. So we won and we stand still in memory of those children.

30:42 Tom Segev: By the way, in the email it says should one of the children specifically ask what is a Nazi, we will tell them. We will tell them that Nazis are bad people who killed Jews, and the children will understand it because in Jewish history we have other bad people who, who kill Jews, like Pharaoh. They just been talking about Pharaoh before the Passover vacation, so this will make sense. Now, the collective Holocaust experience in Israel today is a childhood experience. Obviously, it happened 70 years ago. There are about 200,000 Holocaust survivors living in Israel and they experienced the Holocaust as children. Consequently, the Holocaust is very often depicted as a crime against children. You have many Holocaust memorials, children memorials and, and, and so on. Now there are are polls taken in Israeli schools and it turns out that, if you go to a high school today, eight out of ten high school kids will tell you, yes I am a Holocaust survivor. Why are you a Holocaust survivor? You were born in Israel; your father was born in Israel; your grandfather was born in Morocco. What makes you a Holocaust survivor? I'm a Holocaust survivor because of the magnitude of the experience which, that's what makes us into Israelis.

32:19 Tom Segev: And there are about 20,000 Israeli high school kids who travel to Poland every year to visit the German extermination camps in Poland. And this is interesting, first of all, to me because it's not a free trip and it's very expensive. In other words, 20,000 Israeli families every year spent about or almost \$2,000 for their children to be, to see the camp - and, and, and if you have two children in school, it's quite a lot of money. So the commitment to this identity, I think, this is is being shown here. The identification with the Holocaust becomes deeper and stronger all the time. It now includes also, as I said, people who originally come from Arab countries, or their ancestors come from from Arab countries. It includes Arabs, Israeli-Arabs, and it includes ultra-orthodox Haredi, in whom always you know have a problem with God and and the Holocaust, but they have also become in recent years part of that same national memory and and part of identity.

33:55 Tom Segev: And now we get to the more sensitive part of the story. The Eichmann trial laid down the foundation for Israel's official Holocaust memory. Its main

contention was that the extermination of the Jews was a unique crime, unlike anything that ever happened before in history. The uniqueness of the Holocaust was to add force, indeed to dramatize the separate identity of the Jews as a nation in accordance with the Zionist ideology, which as you know is the existential ideology of Israel. In fact, Israel regards itself as the historical, indeed the moral answer to the Holocaust. David Ben-Gurion stated, as early as 1946 that, the establishment of Israel would constitute proper compensation for the destruction of European Jews. It also states as much in the Israeli Declaration of Independence. This is also the purpose of encouraging the International use of the Hebrew word Shoah, which really makes no sense. Shoah is a Hebrew word, most of the Holocaust survivors, or victims, did not speak Hebrew. But the need to monopolize the Holocaust is, is reason why, especially in France and, and in Germany also people are encouraged to say Shoah in research, Holocaust research, and so on.

35:52 Tom Segev: And so, Israel adopted a firm and almost sacred Holocaust doctrine, and any deviation from this doctrine was, and to some extent, still is considered to be in dangerous proximity to Holocaust denial. But as part of the Israeli identity, the Holocaust has generated much moral and political discussion. We constantly argue about the proper Holocaust lessons. This argument often leads us to consider whom we are, whom we want to be, and this is obviously a political discussion because collective memory is always the result of some political arguments and, and, and decisions. This past year you probably saw, more than once, Prime Minister Netanyahu waving Auschwitz pictures and planes when he talks about Iran; Iran being the new Hitler, not the first. There is not a single Arab leader who was not, at one point or another, compared to Hitler. And Netanyahu of course also made the historical revelation this year that Hitler got the idea to exterminate the Jews from Palestinian leader Hajj Amin al-Husayni the Mufti of Jerusalem. He's the one who, according to Netanyahu, told Hitler to kill the Jews. To which Hitler probably said, wow. Why didn't I think about it myself?

37:33 Tom Segev: And on the other hand of the political spectrum, these few weeks ago the Deputy Chief of Staff, General Yair Golan said in a Holocaust ceremony, memorial ceremony, that when he looks at the Israeli society today, he sees signs which remind him of the German society in the 1930s. This is a very, very controversial thing to say and it was the beginning of the, of the present government crisis. Those of you who look at *Haaretz*, as I'm sure you all do, may have seen yesterday an article against Major-General Golan, written by Moshe Arens who was not only a Holocaust survivor but himself Minister of Defense and and ambassador, Israeli Ambassador in, in America. And he tried to prove that it's wrong, and it's wrong to say, and, and but you, you see how I'm, it's, it's, at any other time I would be able to give you these examples because, as I said, it's constantly, constantly there. Now it is often very, very difficult to distinguish between genuine Holocaust sentiments and manipulated Holocaust arguments.

- 39:11 Tom Segev: In Israel, you find them all. And if you develop the ability to distinguish between them, then you hold in your hand a key to the understanding of the Israeli society. I would argue that genuine Holocaust sentiments led Israel's decision to bring into Israel in 1949 an enormous number of people, new immigration, emigration of 1940. Make, makes really no sense to bring hundreds of thousands of people when you don't have housing for them, and no hospitals, and no school. But after the Holocaust that's, you can't expect anything else. And I think that genuine Holocaust sentiments led to the decision to develop Israel's own nuclear project. Because after the Holocaust you really need to have everything available, anywhere to defend themselves. And genuine Holocaust sentiments also led to the Six-Day War. Because on the eve of the Six-Day War, there was this genuine Holocaust fear in Israel.
- 40:27 Tom Segev: In other words, three of the major decisions ever taken in Israel's history were taken under the influence of the Holocaust. And perhaps we can add a fourth decision, and that is the decision to run the State of Israel as a democratic country. Although the Zionist movement had always followed practice of parliamentary democracy, but still it's a decision. Do I, do I, do I run Israel is a democracy, or do I give it a different? And, and of course, the meaning of democracy is in itself a metaphor, political disagreement. The high school students who travel to Auschwitz are most often expected to recharge their patriotic batteries there. So at the entrance to the gas chambers, they would repeatedly hoist the Israeli flag and sing the Israeli anthem. The lesson they are supposed to bring back from there is that never, never again should anything like that happen. Therefore Israel must be as strong as possible and therefore we, as heirs of the victims, are also entitled to do everything and anything that it takes to preserve the existence and security of Israel.
- 41:55 Tom Segev: All in all basically a very pessimistic message. The whole world is, is against us and and we are alone. Now, not surprisingly for a deeply divided society like Israel, some schools also expect their students to recharge their humanistic batteries in Auschwitz, and there is a humanistic interpretation to, to, to the Holocaust. The Holocaust as a warning against racism and, and protection of human rights. Those students will be taken, for example, to a monument in memory of the Sinti and Roma the, the gypsies as we commonly call them. At the National Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, the Yad Vashem Museum, some reference, not very visible but some reference, is made to the Nazi euthanasia program, and to the persecution of gays, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Some, but very few, genocide studies are today available in Israel. Again, only last week, the argument broke out again in connection with an academic conference dealing with the genocide to be held in Jerusalem. Yad Vashem does not look, does not view it with favor, and is in fact not participating in, in that conference.
- 43:36 Tom Segev: So this is something which we also constantly argue about. What, what, what is the Holocaust, and what is, is, what is genocide? Yehuda Bauer, Israel's most senior Holocaust scholar, has ventured to rethink the uniqueness of the Holocaust in a

book which he wrote, the English title of which in fact is *Rethinking the Holocaust*. While the more prudent and less provocative Hebrew title is simply *Thoughts about the Holocaust*. And in a chapter called “Comparing the Holocaust to Other Cases of Genocide,” Bauer counts a number of Holocaust singularities. But in a final statement, he describes the Holocaust as an extreme form of genocide and this is as far as one may go officially in Israel. Outside Israel, the subject has been taken further. One particularly interesting voice to me came from the late Simon Wiesenthal. Largely known, as you know, as the Nazi hunter, Wiesenthal developed a wide humanistic and universal concept of the Holocaust.

- 45:00 Tom Segev: He regarded the extermination of the Jews as an inevitable result of crimes the Nazis at first committed against themselves. And he did not hesitate to compare the Holocaust to other forms of genocide committed after World War II, such as in Cambodia, and in Rwanda, and the Balkan Wars. I find that all too often the Holocaust is being used too loosely for the sake of ideological and political arguments. And this is true also in Israel, on both sides of the political spectrum, right and left - and that is also my view concerning any comparison between the Nazi, the the Nazi occupation policies, and Israel's oppressive policy in the Palestinian territories. I do however respect Simon Wiesenthal's approach to the universal and humanistic lessons of the Holocaust. I think that young people in uniform anywhere in the world, including Israel, should be told that they may receive orders which they must not obey. These are manifestly illegal orders, and if they do obey such orders and commit war crimes they might find themselves in jail, even half a century after the act. This notion is, of course, so crucial because unfortunately, crimes of war have not stopped after the Holocaust.
- 46:45 Tom Segev: The legal system in Israel obliges a soldier to dissimulate, to disobey a manifestly illegal order, including in combat situations. And the soldier is expected to realize, to be decent enough to recognize, that here is, that the order he received, this is the illegality of, of the order. Obviously, not an easy thing for an 18-year-old person to do. And this, to me, is the most significant lesson Israel learned from the Holocaust, so far. There are others which we still have to learn, and if you follow the news from Israel, you know that we are going through a very difficult period these days. So much so that threats to democracy often seem a graver danger than threats from the outside. I regret to say that racism is becoming widespread in Israel, very common and often legitimate. And so, it needed an Army General and Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army to warn us that we are drifting away from the original ideas of democracy and human rights. Even in the past, we have not always respected these ideas but most Israelis have regarded them as the major that the, as the most appropriate lessons of the Holocaust. Many of us still do, but not enough. Thank you very much.
- 48:47 Deborah Hertz: Well thank you very much. Every theme that we discuss in the classroom, everything we think in them when we read the newspaper, all the conversations over dinner, have all been expressed in a, in a very concise and and

fascinating manner. So we have time for questions, and I know we have a very well-informed audience here, so let's hear the questions. Bring them on.

- 49:11 Speaker 1: In 1943, late 1943, my father was among a very small group of Jewish teenagers who found their way out of Bulgaria and made their way to Palestine. Perhaps you know Kibbutz Beeri? He did not expect to see his family again. In 1949, shortly after the state was declared independent, the Bulgarian Communist Regime allowed nearly all of the 48,000 surviving Jews to emigrate, many of them to Israel, inexplicably. Yet the Russian government did not allow the Jews of Russia to leave for many years. Can you explain why that occurred?
- 50:06 Tom Segev: Yes. First of all, other communist countries also allowed the Jews to leave and they did so for two reasons. One, because they got permission from Russia to do so. And secondly, because Israel and the Jewish people paid a lot of money for them. In fact, the price for a Jew, the beginning price was 1,000 dollars as Hungary demanded and eventually they let them go for 300 dollars a head. Bulgaria by the way, counted two children as one adult, or the same price of 300 dollars. So that's, they needed the money and they wanted to get rid of the Jews. And the Soviet Union had ideological difficulties letting so many people, admitting that so many people are unhappy, as the Jews. Eventually they, that, that's the main reason why for so many years they did not let them go. It was only after they went through this ideological revolution that they said okay, if they want to go, let them go. But not even money, obviously money was offered to, to Russia as well, but they did not let their own Jews go. So that's the difference. And, and if you look at the, at the minutes of the, of the Israeli cabinet - which are now open for for research - it's quite chilling how they are discussing how much are we willing to pay, and how much do we risk if we bargain, and can we bargain with the Hungarians or not. But it's, they really, you know, they are extracting too much money. It's not worth 1,000 dollars for per head. That's terrible discussions but eventually, that's the way it was. And, and in Bulgaria also. Bulgaria, it was the first country Ben-Gurion visited during the, right after the Holocaust, very important historical visit for him, the Jews of Bulgaria.
- 52:15 Deborah Hertz: We'll take two more questions.
- 52:18 Speaker 2: Shalom be toda. I wanted to know what's your opinion of Jewish day schools in the United States teaching a very biased Zionist view of Israeli history, and of Jewish history. And also on the same token, if you have any recommendations to my generation, who now is, you know, becoming very involved in elections in the United States, will become the generation that leads this country. And how would you recommend someone with an interest in really understanding Israel, in its history, to not only be a voice for American Jews but to bridge that gap in understanding and also the difference of opinions?
- 53:02 Tom Segev: It all depends on your opinion. If you support the government of Israel, then you know what to do. If you don't support the government of Israel, then you are

in trouble because you have to convince everybody else to make a distinction between the government of Israel, and the State of Israel. And that's a difficulty which many people in America have, and perhaps you, as a young person, also to, to make the distinction which is very natural thing for you as an American. You can easily say I don't like this president, but that doesn't mean that I don't like America. But it's very difficult for many Americans to make the distinction. Also because it takes a lot of thinking, a lot of responsibility, a lot of sophistication to say, I support Israel. I support the idea of Israel but this is not the kind of policy I support. And to make the distinction between the policy and the country is something which, I wish I would, I would find more in, in America. But I very often find myself in a situation where people don't quite understand what it is I want to say. I told in the meeting today how I once talked to an American audience and they did, bitterly complained about how anti-Israel CNN is. They kept saying CNN, CNN. They keep attacking Netanyahu, all the time. And I said to them, if they attack Netanyahu then they are pro-Israel, they're not anti-Israel. But it didn't work so well. So.

- 54:38 Deborah Hertz: Okay. I see, it doesn't take us long to wander into the present. Last question, Professor [unclear].
- 54:44 Speaker 3: When I think back on your comments about your four-year-old granddaughter and the Holocaust education, it made me think that it seems that there's a big gap between Israeli scholarship - which is more sophisticated than ever on the Holocaust and thinking critical thoughts. They've even now translated Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* since 2000. So at the scholarship level, it seems very sophisticated, yet it seems at the popular level, it's gotten more propagandistic, more simplistic than ever, and something that's becoming very unhelpful for the future of Israeli democracy. So, do you think that's a fair statement of this gap?
- 55:25 Tom Segev: Yes, unfortunately, the most important works on the Holocaust have not been written in Israel. Actually, the most important book that today exists has been written by a professor who left Israel and that's Saul Friedländer, who spent many years at UCLA. If you want to read only one book, I will tell you this is the book to read. So it's, perhaps, again it needs much more thought and much more discussion, but you can perhaps prove that the atmosphere in Israel - the fact that the Holocaust is such a political issue and such an important element of the Israeli identity - makes it impossible to produce worthwhile research. I think that Israel's main contribution to Holocaust study concerns specific places. So yes, you have very good books about the ghetto here, or the ghetto there, but you know, the Holocaust as a part of history is something which many Israelis have, have difficulty, had, had - many, many researchers in Israel - had a difficulty to do. And so I think that may be the answer.
- 56:52 Deborah Hertz: Okay just a couple of words to sum up. It's been quite a day and I'm very thrilled that Tom Segev has been with us. I've been wanting to hear this talk for, I don't know, 30 years. So for me, it's a great culmination -

- 57:07 Tom Segev: Oh my God. Why didn't you send me an email? Oh, there were no emails 30 years ago, that's probably why.
- 57:12 Deborah Hertz: I was first given a copy of *The Seventh Million* when my husband and I were living on a kibbutz. And we were in a search for a VCR to play movies for our for our infant son and when I got to the house where we were staying, where the VCR was - as we'd escape from the rigors of the kibbutz - my friend handed me a copy of *The Seventh Million* and I had nothing to do with the VCR until I had read to the last page. So it's been, it's been fascinating. I want to sum up by stressing the complexities of scholarship in the, in the questions and in the answers. I think we heard again and again this paradox, which the gentleman over here I think expressed very well, which is sometimes the more we learn the less we understand. Does that mean we should stop reading books, and writing books, and trying to get the great synthesis and the small details and bring them into conjuncture and then to use that work and our studies to illuminate the present? We can only keep trying. So thank you very much.
- 58:10 Tom Segev: Thank you. Good night.
- 58:23 [Read Write Think Dream / The Library / UC San Diego / Channel / www.uctv.tv/library-channel]
- 58:28 [The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Living with the Holocaust / Featuring Tom Segev / Historian of Israel / June 1, 2016]
- 58:34 [was presented by / The Holocaust Living History Workshop / The Jewish Studies Program at UC San Diego and The UC San Diego Library / with special thanks to / Phil and Marcy Kinsk and William and Michelle Lerach]
- 58:40 [The Audrey Geisel University Librarian, Brian E.C. Schottlaender / Director of Communications and Outreach, Dolores Davies / Director, The Jewish Studies Program, UC San Diego, Deborah Hertz / Program Coordinator, The Holocaust Living History Workshop, Susanne Hillman / Event Manager, Mariah Fellows]
- 58:45 [UCTV / Producer, Shannon Bradley / Camera Operators, Marci Bretts, John Menier / Editor, Marci Bretts]
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