

YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR ABOUT THIS

Some people are tired of hearing about the Holocaust. They are thinking: Jews should get over the Holocaust already. The Holocaust is ancient history – 80 years ago might as well be 800 or 8000 years ago. None of us had anything to do with it. A hundred million people

died in wars in the twentieth century, and more in other disasters; Jews are not the only or greatest victims in all of human history. Jews should stop trying to guilt people who personally had nothing to do with the Shoah, and should stop trying to extract reparations for crimes of the prior generations. Why should the estates of wealthy European Jews be among the few that ever recover lost

property? Does contemporary Jewish identity have nothing to offer beyond wallowing in victimhood and historic trauma? Jews are prospering like nobody's business. Israel should not get a free pass due to European history. Isn't it time to move on and focus on newer, more pressing, problems and opportunities?

Those are the "nicer" thoughts people are expressing.

In short, "the world," if it registers the issue at all, is tired of hearing about it. You might have noticed the increasing tendency in ritualized civic "Holocaust Remembrance Days" to fail to mention anything about the Jewish People. There are a million – or maybe six million – reasons to not want to hear about the Holocaust.

They are also tired of hearing about the American Enslavement of Africans – which ended 160 years ago – not to equate or compare these historic enormities. Almost no one alive today actually met an American slave. Family trauma lasts

at most four generations – this one has expired. Most Americans did not own slaves in 1860, and the majority of today's Americans had no ancestors in the United States in that era. Most Americans live in states that opposed slavery. Meanwhile, former slaves and their descendants have received

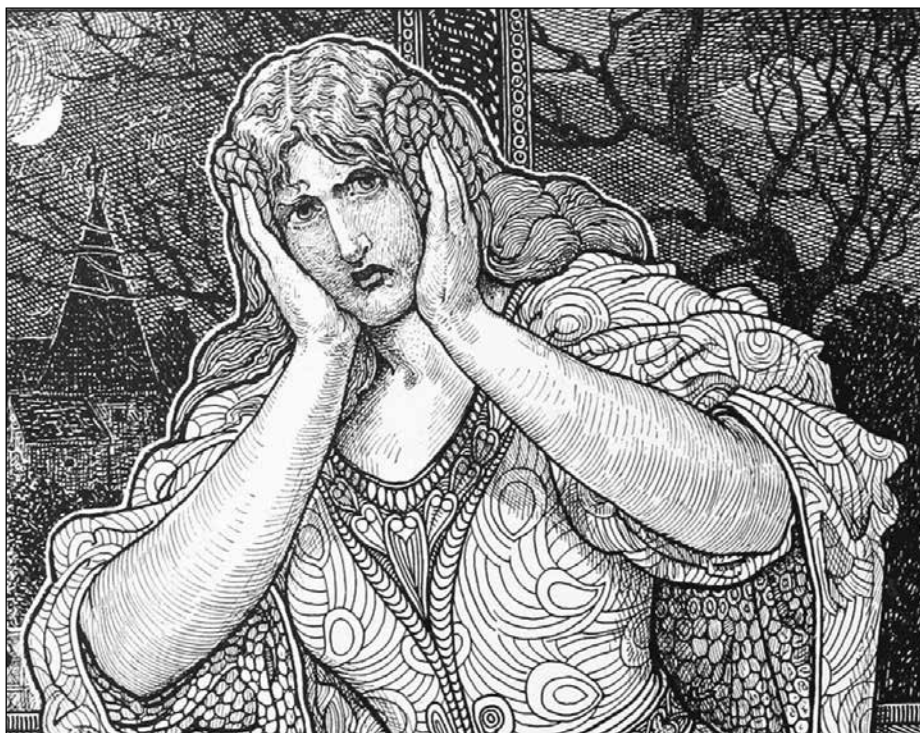
billions of dollars of welfare and other government benefits. Millions of Americans are descendants of both slaves and slave-owners.

There is really nothing to be done to undo the crimes of the past, and today the world is filled with opportunities for those with initiative and willing to work. Discrimination in housing has been illegal

for decades, and the non-felonious descendants of slaves are guaranteed the right to vote. There has hardly been a lynching in the last forty years. Slave descendants are fortunate they get to live in America instead of, say Sudan or Congo or other impoverished war-torn African countries, like those left behind. Why is 1863 even an issue? Crisis of Blacks in America – someone else's problem. Race is just made up anyway – let's just forget about it. There are 12 million reasons why we don't want to hear about the legacy of African Slavery in America – and 48 million reasons why we don't want to hear about what transpired *after* 1865.

These are the "nicer" thoughts being expressed. Slavery? Tired of hearing about it.

About 3,300 years ago, my ancestors were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. After leaving Egypt, they experienced a



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40-year ordeal of wandering, massacres, leadership battles, backsliding, idolatry and despair. They tried to expurgate



their culture of Egyptian influence – the Egyptian denigration of human life and labor, the economic system which concentrated power in the ruling class, even Egypt’s language and clothing fashion. Upon entering the Land of Israel, they continued to fight with their neighbors and among themselves for centuries.

Anyone who attends a public Torah reading is likely to hear the line, “*You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, ... as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt,*” or another lesson from the national trauma that constitutes our national genesis.

Anyone who reads the conventional Jewish daily prayers – morning noon or nighttime – or recites the Birkat HaMazon (Grace After Meals) recites numerous references to our enslavement, emancipation and the lessons we are to derive from it. The Sabbath Day – the weekly central Jewish observance – is, in the words of the Qiddush, “*zekher leytsiat Mitsrayim*” –



a “*memorial to the Exodus from Egypt.*” If that were not enough, an entire seven-day festival is observed annually, including the seder that includes a retelling and examination

of enslavement and exodus.

A Jew living with even the most tenuous connection to our culture and tradition cannot go more than a few hours without remembering this ancient historical-mythological episode. So has it been generation after generation.

After 3,300 years, we are still trying to deal with our original national trauma, not to mention other assaults, incidents, conflicts, and catastrophes experienced since, including some that were self-inflicted. We are still asking, “how did we ever get into that situation?” We are still asking, “What must we do in light of our experience?” We are still processing the Exodus, even as it is still not clear whether we will survive as a people.



So to anyone who wants the consequences of African Slavery in America, the Shoah, the American Native Genocide, or other recent

or current atrocities grand or local, to “just go away,” I say: You haven’t even begun to hear about them yet.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם
לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא
יצא ממצרים
שנאמר והגדת לבנך ביום
ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה
ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים

Rabban Gamliel taught: In each generation, one should view [or show] oneself as having personally exited Egypt, as Scripture says, “You shall tell

your progeny on that day, ‘for this purpose God took action for me when I left Egypt.’”

