

The Lynching of Leo Frank and the Nation State of the Jewish People.

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Aug. 17, 1915: It was reported by a member of the lynching party; Leo Frank met his death with unexpected composure. A Georgia court had found him guilty of the murder of 13-year old Mary Phagan.

Frank was a prominent member of the Jewish community, a past president of Atlanta's B'Nai Brith. The evidence against him was flimsy, mainly circumstantial. The Police investigation was seriously flawed. The trial, the very air, was inflamed by antisemitism.

Leo asked his executioners to give his wife, Lucille, his wedding band. The chair was kicked out. The Jew lurched downward, his neck snapping.

All day, gawkers came to see Frank's lifeless body hanging. Pictures were taken of many smiling faces. Ghoulish bigots looked under the long shirt Leo's body was clothed in. They wished to see if the stories about the monstrous size of Jewish privates was true.

Three months later, Thanksgiving 1915, William Joseph Simmons invited the Knights of Mary Phagan to join him atop Atlanta's Stone Mountain for a Cross Burning punctuated with Bible readings. The Ku Klux Klan was reborn that night. Over the next decade, the Klan grew to over six million members across America.

American Jews, everywhere, were horrified. The Jew lynching was successful. Terror, fueled by anti-Semitic hatred in America, was real. Leo Frank had been lynched in an American pogrom.

Between 1860 and 1930 there were more than 4,700 documented lynchings in America. Over 3,000 were American Blacks, nearly 1,500 were Whites, Hispanics, Chinese, and unknown numbers of Native Americans. The Mexican government protested on behalf of Mexicans. The Chinese Government protested. The Italian government protested the lynching of Italian immigrants. No government protested for the Jew.

There was no Nation State of the Jewish People to stand up for Leo.

Just 25 years after Leo Frank's lynching, the American government did little to save Jewish lives as the Holocaust exterminated European Jewry. No government in the world did much to save Jewish lives.

There was no Nation State of the Jewish People to try and save Jews.

During the American revolution, Jewish merchants with connections to weaponry and war materials converted the tiny Dutch Caribbean Island of St. Eustatius into the “Armory of the Revolution.” A ship out of St. Eustatius bound for Holland carried a copy of the Declaration of Independence. The ship was captured by the British who discovered the document wrapped in a secret cypher. The cypher was Yiddish. The Declaration was being delivered to the Jews of Holland. The British were sure it was an American secret code.

By 1780, the war was not going well for the British. They sent a battle fleet, with 11 ships of the line and three thousand marines, to destroy St. Eustatius. When British Admiral Rodney arrived, Ft. Oranje fired one shot for honor. Its 45 men surrendered.

Rodney took the Island. He immediately rounded up the Jews. He robbed them with impunity. He stripped them of everything. He dug up their dead looking for buried Jewish gold. He exiled the men. Rodney had a rabid hatred of Jews.

Though there were others major arms merchants on St. Eustatius, from France, Spain and other countries, Rodney did not dare to treat them as harshly as he treated the Jews. France and Spain had Armies and Navies.

What did the Jews have?

Edmund Burke, an Anglo-Irish, British opposition leader, rose in Parliament to speak:

“If Britons were so injured, Britons have armies and laws to fly to for the protection and justice. But the Jews have no such power and no such friend to depend upon. Humanity then must become their protector.”

Humanity has never been the protector of the Jews.

There was no Nation State of the Jewish People to defend Jews.

Today Jewish schools do not teach about Leo Frank. It is uncomfortable. American Jews never heard of the exiled, impoverished Jews of St. Eustatius whose crime was helping America. If the Holocaust is taught in American Jewish schools, it is done with diplomatic niceties. The children must be sheltered from trauma and the schools from enraged parents.

Better to forget....



Perhaps they are taught about Israel but not as the Nation State of the Jewish People. It is an uncomfortable thought for minds barely out of the Ghetto unable to perceive Jews are a people with a National Jewish State.

Will they teach their children about Leo? Probably not.

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Jerry Klinger is president of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation.

Aug. 23, 2018, [JASHP](#) is dedicating the Leo Frank Memorial in Marietta, Ga. A planned element is the first National, Universal, Anti-Lynching Memorial.