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Why Study the Holocaust?

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Why Study the Holocaust?

Remarks at a Reception Honoring the Ike and Roz Friedman Family Foundation and Announcing the Forthcoming Publication of the Comprehensive History of the Holocaust Series by the University of Nebraska Press

February 17, 2003

Good afternoon.

Let me introduce myself—I'm Paul Royster, director of the University of Nebraska Press.

We are here today to inaugurate a new series of books—The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust—to be co-published by us, the University of Nebraska Press, and **Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority** in Jerusalem.

The series will contain 15 to 20 volumes representing the latest and best research by an international collection of scholars and historians. It will tell the story, in a detailed and specific manner, and on a country-by-country basis, of unmitigated

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evil, of untold suffering, and unparalleled heroism in the darkest hour of the twentieth century.

Here, today, over 50 years after—let me say, rather, only 50 years after—we should take this occasion to remember, to observe, and to continue to try to understand what links us today with the terrible events of 50 years ago. Our role, as a publisher, is to help establish the truth in all its particulars; the parts played by men, and women, and governments, and armies.

This series will, for the first time, present a complete authoritative history of oppression and mass-murder in Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, the Soviet Union, Italy, Germany, Bulgaria, Poland, France. Some of the scholars participating will include Steven Bowman, Yitzhak Arad, Mosche Mosek, Lilliana Piccotto, Livia Rotkirchen, Wolf Grunner, Rene Poznansky, Jean Ancel, Yoav Gelber, and Christopher Browning.

Let me claim to be not a newcomer to Holocaust studies—I have had the privilege of working on Walter Laqueur's *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, and on Raoul Hilberg's newest edition of his classic and

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ground-breaking study, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Both are invaluable works, destined to be standards in the field for many years to come, but neither of them does what this series here does—and that is to paint an even larger and more detailed picture and to ensure the enduring memory of those who died and those who survived—of a world destroyed and lost forever and of human courage and sacrifice that cannot be washed away.

The question “Why study the Holocaust?” deserves to be asked. It is, perhaps, the defining event of the 20th century, whose aftereffects surround us still today. It cannot be denied, or ignored, or even explained in any regular way. It poses the greatest moral challenge of modern times. No other subject challenges us so deeply and existentially, or requires so much from us in terms of our commitment to the whole truth, our need for moral insight into the human condition, our balance and perspective in historical analysis, and our faith in the goals and ends of our labors. What we hope to achieve by studying these events is the creation of a permanent historical record and an understanding that, while good does not come out of evil, yet the good

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persists and overcomes and outlasts the evil, as long as we maintain our commitment to remembering and showing the truth.

Before I introduce our other 2 speakers, let me acknowledge the contribution of one of my predecessors at the Press—former director **Dan Ross**. It was Dan's vision that brought this series to Nebraska. Yad Vashem originally approached a number of publishers, and it was Dan who reached out to Alan Steinweis, then a visiting professor at Ben Gurion University in the Negev, to go up to Jerusalem for a face-to-face sit-down that laid the initial groundwork for the deal. Dan ultimately made the deal because he had the faith to take on the entire project, with no safety-net I may add. He made the deal because 1) it was important, and 2) it was important that Nebraska do it. We are here today *specifically* to recognize the **Ike and Roz Friedman Family Foundation** whose generous support will make publication of the series possible. Dan must have known there would be an angel out there, and thankfully, it has proved to be the case. He really, really wanted Nebraska to be the ones to work with Yad Vashem to publish this series, and so

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I think it is appropriate that we remember him here today.

I want also to acknowledge the essential help of three key people in getting us this far. They are:

- **Stephen Hilliard**, former acting director at the Press
- **Gerald Shapiro**, Professor of English and Director of the Norman and Bernice Harris Center for Judaic Studies
- **Beth Brase** of the University of Nebraska Foundation

Finally, I want to thank the folks of the Great Plains Center, and their director **Jim Stubbendieck**, for their hospitality today, and **Terry Fairfield**, president of the University of Nebraska Foundation.

Obviously, a great deal of work remains to be done to bring this series to its culmination. We are here at the beginning of the effort, not the end. But the parts are in place, and we hope over the next 10 years to see the concrete products of a great cooperative effort to write this international body of scholarship into the historical record of human

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affairs. We are proud to be associated with Yad
Vashem in this effort

With that, let me stop, and introduce **Alan Steinweis**,
the Rosenberg Professor of History and Judaic
Studies at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln.