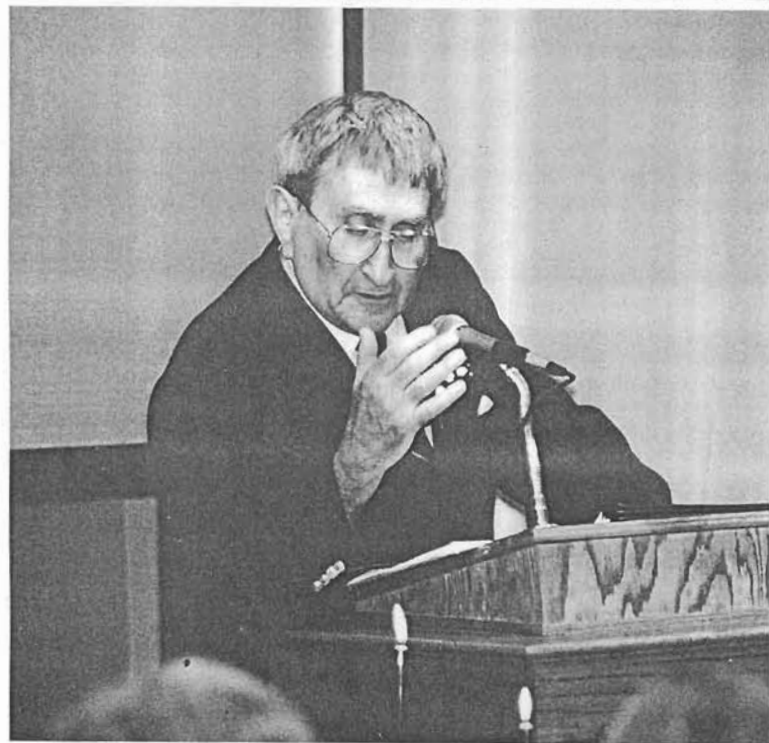


Days of Remembrance

The Truth, and the Imagination

Below left: keynote speaker Jack Bass fields a question from the crowd. Below right: a middle school participant of the "Imagining the Holocaust" writing contest reads her winning poem.



Living through the Terror

Mr. Bass, a Holocaust survivor who now resides in Adamsville, Alabama, speaks about what happened to him during the Holocaust.

Bearing Witness

"For the dead *and* the living we must bear witness," states the seal of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. To this end, Jacksonville State University commemorates the Holocaust every year with a special program. The Jacksonville State University Holocaust Commemoration began as a project of the Wesley Foundation in 1982. Since then, the program has grown from a small gathering attended by about 25 people to a large program on the eleventh floor of the Houston Cole Library with almost 250 people in attendance. Those on the committee at JSU are Linda Cain, Michelle Kemp, Ryan Kruzinski, Russel Lemmons, Teresa Suco and Steven Whitton. One of the main goals of the program is to broaden understanding of the Nazi's systematic extermination of over six million Jewish people before and during World War II, known as the Holocaust.

The program began with a welcome from Student Government Association President, Elizabeth Webb. After welcoming everyone and thanking them for attending, she closed with the statement, "I hope you leave here tonight knowing more about the Holocaust than you did when you came in." The program proceeded with an invocation and candle lighting by the Rev. Margaret Northern, of the First Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville. Comments were made by Dr. Russel Lemmons, of the JSU History Department, and there was then a reading by the middle school winners of the "Imagining the Holocaust" writing competition. After this, Dr. Samuel Brown, accompanied by Dr. Patricia Parker, both of the JSU Music Department, presented the music. As the last chords resounded through the room, the speaker for the evening, Holocaust survivor Jack Bass, made his way up to the podium.

In his German-accented voice, Mr. Bass began, "The terror I lived through in the years of the Third Reich is indelibly imprinted on my mind. The excuse the Germans use about not having known about it is a *lie*." He went on to describe his trip in a cattle car to the first concentration camp. He invoked images of a train car, designed for cattle, but stuffed to overflowing with people of all ages. He told of standing in the suffocating crampedness, the lack of any type of food or water, and of stacking bodies in a corner as they began to pile up, to make room for the living. Finally, he arrived at Buna, a concentration camp on the outskirts of Auschwitz.

At Buna, Mr. Bass was in a group of workers who made synthetic rubber to help drive the German war machine. Life in Buna was hard, and, "It was up to the SS who lived and who died. I saw many people beaten to death because they were unable to keep up the pace," Mr. Bass revealed. But the terror only got worse from there. After the period of about a year, Mr. Bass was moved from Buna to Auschwitz proper. His first job in Auschwitz was to sort women's hair. When the women entered the camp, they were all forced to have their heads shaved, and the Germans used their hair for assorted purposes. But besides the piles of hair, there were huge piles of eyeglasses and gold teeth, each one representative of the Jewish person from whom it was taken, but to the German soldiers, they were just so many objects to be melted down for other uses.

Mr. Bass was transferred to another work detail, and the labor was grueling. The laborers were constantly reminded of the closeness of death, and Mr. Bass remembers, "You could smell burning flesh. It permeated everywhere. At night when we came back from work, our heads were white with ashes."

JSU Holocaust Commemoration

He then told of how, on the last day of the gasings at Auschwitz, when the Allies were near, there were 14,000 people murdered in one day. Later, when the commander of the camp was questioned about this, he stated haughtily, "I would have done more, but it would've harmed the facilities."

After Auschwitz, as the Allies neared, Mr. Bass and others were sent to yet another camp, the first concentration camp that had been made by the Nazis--Dachau. To get to Dachau, the prisoners, in their vastly weakened condition from the harsh labor enforced upon them at Auschwitz, were made to march a great distance. Mr. Bass, remembering those who fell along the way, said, "Anyone unable to walk was immediately shot to death. Even dying in Auschwitz was not easy."

After reaching Dachau, he was sent to yet another sub-camp. Pulling his sleeve up, Mr. Bass showed the crowd the numbers tattooed on his arm, and recited them without pause, "106337." Up until the sub-camp at Dachau, he had been referred to only by this number. In this sub-camp, he was lucky enough to get in a "good" work detail, because they designated by last names and his started with a "B." All those with a last name starting after the letter "K" were gassed.

In April, he came down with typhus and was sent to the sick bay, which he describes as, "a place where people went to die, not to get better." He was still here when the Allies liberated the camp a short time later. "In my schoolboy English, I thanked them all [the liberating soldiers] for freeing us from the living hell," and Mr. Bass continued, "I myself sometimes cannot believe I went through it."

Jack Bass was 19 years old when he left the concentration camp. Of his entire family, one sister lived and ended up in England. All his other relatives were killed.

After his speech, Mr. Bass opened the floor for questions. As he had trouble hearing some of them, he walked out into the crowd so as to talk to his questioners face to face. Several questions were asked, and among them was what had been going through Mr. Bass's mind in the concentration camp. He answered, "You don't think. If you think, you're dead. You cannot think in the camp." One attendee asked whether or not Mr. Bass thought the German people were sorry for what had occurred. Saying, "I'm going back up to the microphone, because I want to be sure everyone can hear this," Mr. Bass returned to the podium and went on, "The German apology is still coming. They have *never* said they were sorry for what they did to the Jews." Another question put to Mr. Bass was whether or not he believed in God. He answered, "I am sorry to say that I do not. I cannot see how so many pious Jews could die there and I, who am not religious, survive. Where is the justice? How can it be that God could..." Mr. Bass paused and then concluded, "52 million people died in that war."

After the questions were answered, Mr. Bass returned to his seat to heavy applause. Then there was a musical presentation by Dr. Brown, accompanied by Dr. Parker, and afterwards a reading by the high school winners of the "Imagining the Holocaust" writing competition. To close the ceremony, the members of Temple Beth-El Synagogue, lead by Michelle Kemp, said the Kaddish, which, in Jewish tradition, is recited by mourners at public services after the death of close relatives. It was offered this night in remembrance of the millions who were systematically exterminated during World War II.

As they left, the words of Mr. Bass were still resounded in the minds of those attending, "I thanked them all for freeing us from the living hell." We must always remember and bear witness to the Holocaust, lest this "living hell" happen again.

Denial and Proof

Below right: Dr. Russel Lemmons, of the History and Foreign Languages Department, offers his comments on those who would attempt to deny the Holocaust happened. Below left: Mr. Bass stands as living proof.



A Prayer for the Dead

The members of Temple Beth-El in Anniston recite the Kaddish for the more than six million who died at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust.