

Chris Webb

**The Belzec Death Camp**  
History, Biographies, Remembrance

Revised and Updated



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Verlag

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Cover picture: The cover shows the site of the former death camp of Belzec in 2004.

Chris Webb Private Archive

This book is the revised and updated 2nd edition of the 2016 original edition.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-1696-6

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Printed in the EU

Dedicated to Robert Kuwalek and Michael Tregenza  
For Freya and Cora



# Introduction

Jerry Steinberg grew up on a tiny-tree lined avenue in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA, where oddly enough three tattooed Auschwitz survivors also made their residence. As their newspaper boy, starting at age 12, he would make weekly collections to these survivors homes and in one case, he would be invited into the house to sit and listen for up to 90 minutes at a time as Mr Moses Borenstein, recounted the horrors he was forced to endure in Auschwitz (witnessing the huge impact of ventilation / emotional catharsis helped shape his career choice as a psychologist. Steinberg's own family was touched by the Holocaust, as his father's sister was murdered by the Nazis, while her son, Chaim Kuritsky miraculously survived and wrote an incredible book entitled 'To Survive and to Tell the Story.'

Steinberg graduated with a B.A. in psychology from Temple University and received his graduate degree in psychology with a minor in history from Columbia University.

During the early advent of social media, Steinberg began to encounter websites that were rife with anti-Semitism and began to hone his debating skills as he challenged and refuted the libels, tropes and fallacies. That endeavour began to spill into fighting against the demonization and de-legitimization of Israel and those websites also became his battleground. As more social media sites cropped up—especially inter-active sites such as You Tube, Steinberg began to see the third component of the triad of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial/ revisionism, dominate comments sections and these hateful comments and lies garnered a much higher percentage of thumbs up / likes than factual comments.

With a background of 30 years of Holocaust research (which he terms 'proactive study') he then laboriously researched the challenges of his opponents (what he calls 'reactive study') he was able to refute all of them and match them up to one or more of the over 400 fallacies known to exist. This endeavour has led to his authoring

a book on the psychological underpinnings of Holocaust denial which is still in draft form.

This work also prompted Steinberg to establish two Facebook groups of which he is the administrator. The first is 'Treblinka Extermination Camp' which boasts 2,100 members, at the time of writing this, and 'Combat Holocaust Denial,' which has over 1,200 members. Steinberg now spends his time on a speaking circuit at universities, museums, and other venues.

Steinberg had a long clinical and administrative career in the field of mental health and served as CEO of a large mental health center that served the entire County of Gloucester in Southern New Jersey. He wrote several successful grants bringing in new facilities and innovative mental health programs to meet the previously underserved population of people with chronic and persistent mental illnesses.

Steinberg lives in Southern New Jersey with his wife Joyce. His four grown-up children and soon to be 10 grandchildren all live very close by.

# Foreword

Sometimes we have to step back before we open a history book and ask why this book should even be written; consider what should be included; and think about how we can trust that it represents the truth, which is a moral and ethical imperative.

Can readers trust in the historiography of works such as the one you are about to read? In an age where lack of objectivity and unreliable research methods characterize the reporting of so many events, past and present, it is incumbent upon those we rely upon to be trustworthy, honest and not present opinions (as we so often see in the news or political commentary) or bias based on one's self interests, preconceived notions, political / religious affiliations or confirmation bias.

People tend to read a history book without really stopping to consider all of the methods of historical research/ inquiry and the reliability and validity of each. Such methods are a crucial in understanding how true historians are able to investigate, recreate, and fact check a bygone era. The more the historian can see a convergence in various methodologies the more trustworthy they become—individually and as a whole.

The task becomes even more daunting when it comes to telling the story of an extermination camp because it is not just a historical event, but also a major crime scene based on its very purpose, structure, staffing, and mission. Also, it is set apart from traditional crime scenes by the massive scale of unfathomably heinous crimes against humanity—industrialized massacre of innocent people of all ages on an unprecedented level.

As is the case with most murder scenes, the perpetrators strives to obliterate all traces of crimes so as to avoid capture, indictment, prosecution and sentencing in addition to public shame and retribution / revenge. The erasure of small crime scenes may seem easy but is often carried out in haste, by one or two perpetrators, and

they usually know better than to risk returning to the scene of the crime. Contrast that with the methodical fastidiousness of the Nazis, their having several months (in some cases) to accomplish their tasks, and a slave labor force of several hundred to go to extraordinary lengths to eradicate as much evidence as they possibly could—as outlined herein.

All that said, writing about Bełżec demands wide ranging research to reconstruct its history. This research must rely upon ALL available aspects of historical methodology and then some. If one method is a bit difficult to employ, or lacking in some way, then other methods must be relied upon even more to make up for this.

With Bełżec, for example Rudolf Reder was one of only two survivors and the only one who was able to give a full account of his experiences in that extermination camp. Therefore this book offers a wealth of other testimonies from Nazis themselves, among many others. All of this adds considerable weight to layers of evidence.

This book exemplifies the proper applications of research methodologies in a way that relies upon the convergence of testimonies (inmates, escapees, local villagers, and craftsmen, camp staff, Nazi leaders etc) with physical / forensic / archaeological evidence, photographic evidence, documentary / archival proofs, and any other forms of research that can be brought to bear on uncovering the mysteries of camps such as Bełżec.

But how does one go about assembling the vast number of assorted pieces of the micro-mosaic?

To be done to the highest level of perfection that one can hope to achieve it, takes researchers/ historians that approach their work with dogged determination, a healthy form of obsessive compulsiveness, and among other things, an uncanny ability to pull together an amalgam of loose ends and tie them all together.

Enter Chris Webb, a historian who has dedicated his professional life to endeavours such as this—building on only solid foundations of his predecessors his discoveries, and those of his contemporaries, but adding so many components that his works have become a

sophisticated algorithm—defined as being a process or set of rules to be followed in approaching problem-solving operations.

I can personally attest to the thoroughness of the author. As one of several Holocaust scholars / researchers, I can recount of a number of e-mail ‘calls to action’ wherein we were asked by the author to research such mundane things as the first name of a survivors teacher, the spelling of inmates names, the service number of an SS-Officer who was part of the camp’s garrison—all in the interests of thoroughness. These unrelenting searches usually bore fruit.

In reading this definitive account of all that was Bełżec one would be hard-pressed to find any further stones that could be unturned to add to the comprehensiveness of this volume of work. After piecing together these stories a micro-mosaic adds up to a gestalt that gives us evidence of the structure and function of the camp in addition to a glimpse at the lives and personalities proclivities of many who served there and who perished there.

Still, one may ask what the point is to investigating extermination camps, recreating all aspects of them, retelling their story, and memorializing the innocent victims. After all, isn’t the disappearance of millions of people enough? Aren’t all the forms of proof enough? Why must this story be told?

The answer is multi-faceted and quite compelling. We know from reports of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz, who were in close proximity to people, as they were being ushered towards the gas chambers, that these ill-fated victims, asked for, and prayed for, two primary things: That people remember them and that people know what happened to them.

We therefore honor them by keeping their memory alive, by acknowledging and exposing all the horrors that befell them. We must never allow the Nazis to get away with their goal of taking everything away from them. They took their homes, families, assets, businesses, clothing, hair, gold, fillings, shoes, jewellery etc. They took their identities and reduced them to ashes, but we know what happened to them and we will remember them—All of them, if we can!

We bring the painful truths to the fore, lest in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the generations that follow it, there is a tendency or attempt to try and opportunistically deny it, whitewash it, revise it, invert victim and perpetrator, and even try and justify it. Such efforts are tantamount to re-victimization.

While it has become cliché to point out that history often repeats itself, we must, for the sake of humanity, use the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides to help prevent a gradual progression into the definable stages that culminate in such genocides.

As all Holocaust survivors will soon be extinct what are we doing to keep their experiences alive in the face and consciousness of the world; to keep them relevant; to warn; to educate; and to be their voices?

What are we, as concerned citizens of conscience, doing to make a difference in stopping the progression into succeeding stages? Are we pushing back or simply sitting back waiting to see the next stages unfold. This is not a scare tactic as all of the indicators are there and society as a whole will suffer—not just minorities.

This book serves as a stark reminder of just how horrifically man's inhumanity to man can reach its ultimate expression. As hard as it is to read and imagine the sheer barbarity and unparalleled cruelty it is a story that must be told.

Jerry Steinberg  
New Jersey, USA  
December 2021