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Jewish Heritage Week, 1985

A Proclamation

By the President of the United States of America

Those who set out to describe Jewish contributions to Western Civilization soon learn how enormous is their task. The Jewish people have contributed to the West its fundamental spiritual values. They introduced the world to monotheism and to the high ethical principles expressed in the Ten Commandments and the writings of the Prophets. The other great religions of the West—Christianity and Islam—can recognize their roots in Judaism. Western literature owes many of its most inspiring themes and allusions to the Hebrew Bible. Great Jewish thinkers—from Philo of Alexandria, to Maimonides and Saadya Gaon, to Spinoza and Martin Buber—have engaged in powerful symbiotic dialogue with Christian and Muslim writers to add vital insights to the Western philosophical tradition. In addition, individual Jews have made extraordinary contributions to the arts, literature, sciences, and humanities.

Yet throughout history the Jewish people have endured countless bloody massacres from the Inquisition to pogroms throughout Europe. None of these remotely approaches the genocidal undertaking of the Nazis who planned the wholesale destruction of European Jewry. In our own time this plan was conceived and, before we could stop it, it had taken the lives of six million Jewish men, women, and children.

Even as we herald the glory of the Jewish heritage, we commemorate as well Jewish suffering in this era. It is up to us to show the way out of this shameful cycle. We must remember the sins of the past and rededicate ourselves to shaping a future marked by tolerance, respect, and compassion. We must rededicate ourselves to the proposition that the Holocaust will remain a solitary horror and that its like will never be repeated.

Jews throughout the world have just celebrated Passover, the holiday that marks the Exodus from Egypt and the deliverance from slavery. The Jewish people came forth from the house of bondage and flowered with an abundance of creativity which has maintained itself until the present day. We learn from this that the emergence from slavery to freedom can release powers hidden within the human spirit, as the Jewish people have once again shown since the end of the Nazi terror. The faith in God and in the Jewish people which sustained them through these tribulations has infused new life into the Jewish communities in America and the State of Israel.

In recognition of the special significance of this time of year for America's Jews, in tribute to the contributions they have made to American life, and in an effort to foster understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity that has made America a unique society, the Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 17, has designated April 21 through April 28, 1985, as "Jewish Heritage Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim April 21 through April 28, 1985, as Jewish Heritage Week. I call upon the people of the United States, Federal, State, and local government officials, and interested organizations to observe that week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 19th day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and ninth.

Ronald Reagan