



A Final Reckoning: A Hannover Family's Life and Death in the Shoah (Judaic Studies Series)

Ruth Gutmann

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Ruth Herskovits Gutmann's powerful memoir recounts her life not only as a concentration camp inmate and survivor, but also as a sister and daughter. Born in 1928, Gutmann and her twin sister, Eva, escaped the growing Nazi threat in Germany on a *Kindertransport* to Holland in 1939. The false expectation of being allowed to immigrate to Cuba as a family led her father, Samuel Herskovits, to bring the twins back to Hannover in 1941. Rather than receive travel visas, however, they, their father, and their stepmother, Mania, were arrested and deported first to Thereisenstadt and then Auschwitz-Birkenau. After their parents were killed, the girls spent the remainder of the war in numerous other camps.

Gutmann's compelling story captures many facets of the Jewish experience in Nazi Germany. She describes her early life in Hannover as the daughter of a prominent and patriotic member of the Jewish community. Her flight on the *Kindertransport* offers a vivid, firsthand account of that effort to save the children of Jewish families. Her memories of the camps include coming to the attention of Josef Mengele, who often used twins in human experiments. Gutmann writes with moving clarity and nuance about the complex feelings of survivorship.

Gutmann paints a multifaceted portrait of her father, Samuel. A leader in the Jewish community of Hannover, he was cajoled, coerced, and ultimately forced to communicate with and cooperate with Nazi and public officials. Gutmann uses her own memories as well as years of reflection and academic study to reevaluate his role in their community. *A Final Reckoning* provides not only insights into Gutmann's own experience as a child in the midst of the atrocities of the Holocaust, but also a window into the lives of those, like her father, who were forced to carry on and comply with the regime that would ultimately bring about their demise.

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