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Exodus 1947: The Ship That Launched a Nation

Ruth Gruber

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Exodus 1947: The Ship That Launched a Nation Ruth Gruber
With more than 100 photographs by the author

"The ship looked like a matchbox that had been splintered by a nutcracker. In the torn, square hole, as big as an open, blitzed barn, we could see a muddle of bedding, possessions, plumbing, broken pipes, overflowing toilets, half-naked men, women looking for children. Cabins were bashed in; railings were ripped off; the lifesaving rafts were dangling at crazy angles."

On July 18, 1947, Ruth Gruber, an American journalist, waited on a wharf in Haifa as the Exodus 1947 limped into harbor. The evening before, Gruber had learned that this unarmed ship, with more than 4,500 Holocaust survivors crammed into a former tourist vessel designed for 400 passengers, had been rammed and boarded by the British Navy, which was determined to keep her desperate human cargo from finding refuge in Palestine. Now, though soldiers blockaded both exit and entry to the weary vessel, Gruber was determined to meet the refugees and hear their tales. For the next several months she pursued the émigrés' stories, from Haifa to the prison camps on Cyprus (where she was misled by the British to believe the DPs would land, though they never did), to southern France, and, appallingly, back to Hamburg, Germany, where they were ultimately sent by the intractable British authorities.

As the lone journalist covering this story, Gruber sent riveting dispatches and vivid photographs back to the New York and Paris Herald Tribune, which in turn sent them out to the rest of the world press. Gruber's relentless reporting and striking photographs shaped perceptions worldwide as to the situation of postwar Jewish refugees and of the British Mandate in Palestine, and arguably influenced the United Nations decision to finally create the State of Israel in 1948.

In 1948, Gruber assembled her dispatches and thirty of her pictures into Destination Palestine, the book that became the basis for Leon Uris's bestselling novel Exodus and the film of the same name. In this revised and expanded edition, Gruber has included a new opening chapter of never-before-published material on the wretched DP camps of Europe, where the refugees were living before boarding the Exodus 1947; updated the fate of many of the passengers, describing how they smuggled themselves into Palestine--despite the myriad obstacles thrown up by the British authorities--even before the State of Israel was born; and selected seventy additional photographs from her personal archives.

Bartley Crum's introduction to the original edition, retained here, likened Gruber's achievement to John Hersey's Hiroshima for its powerful compression of a momentous event, its vivid reportage, and its capacity to change the way people think about contemporary history. **Exodus 1947** is an enormously moving account by one of the twentieth century's most remarkable women, stirring and shocking us more than fifty years after that battered ship entered Haifa harbor.

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