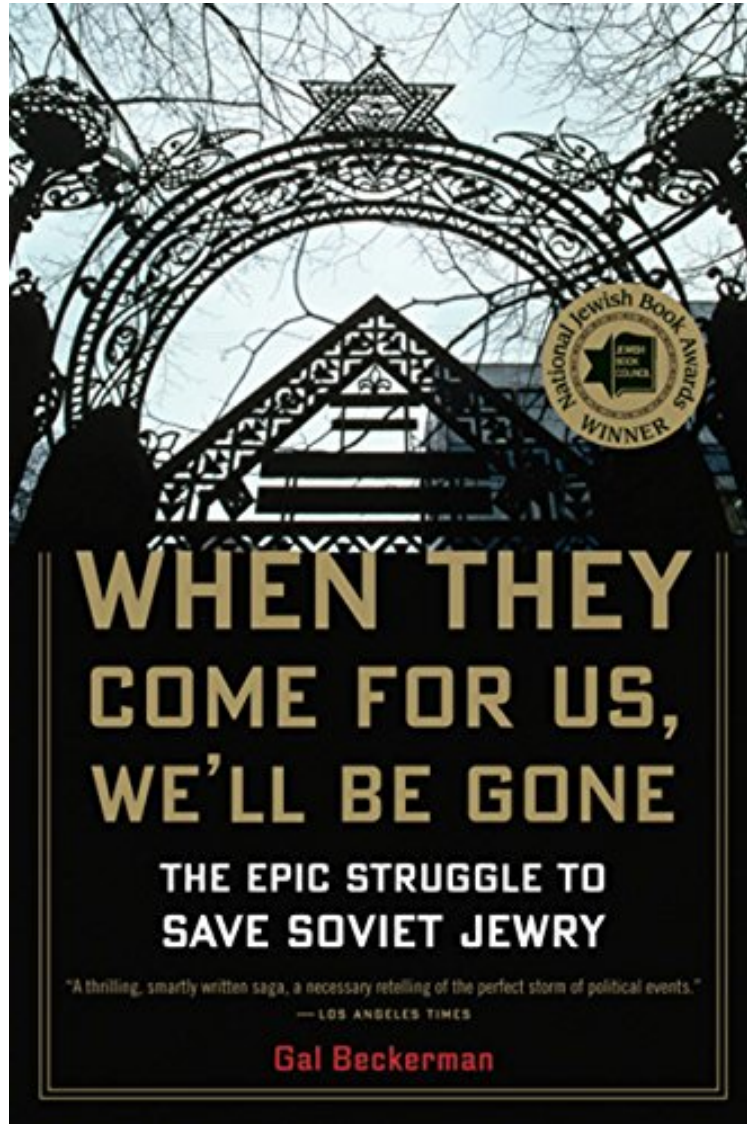


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Gal Beckerman

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Gal Beckerman : When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. There seems to be little coverage of events in Moscow ...By Customer There seems to be little coverage of events in Moscow in 1970. A friend's father was among demonstrators

who were able to emigrate in 1971 due to the demonstration and, presumably, other factors, and the demonstration should have been covered.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Exhaustively Detailed, Fascinating, Illuminating and Sometimes Deeply MovingBy Joe KAn exhaustively detailed, fascinating, illuminating and sometimes deeply moving history of the struggle to save Soviet Jewry, restoring to historical memory a movement that seems to fade into the background of retellings of the Cold War. While ultimately Beckerman doesn't successfully make the case for some of his broader claims about the movement's impact on the Soviet Union and doesn't quite connect the dots between his research and his overall thesis, this book is still a remarkable accomplishment and well worth reading for anyone interested in the Jewish diaspora, social movements, the Cold War or just a well-written history.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating and Moving - and RelevantBy CustomerWhile this is a history book, the events it describes are fairly recent and parts of it will be familiar to most readers. It's very well written, and successfully manages to tell two stories - about the American Jewish community and about Soviet Jewry - equally well. It is both interesting and insightful and raises a number of issues about politics, and the behavior and obligations of communities that are still relevant today.The immigration of Soviet Jews and the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s are events that we already take for granted, yet have huge historical significance and for some of us, a major impact on our daily lives. With this moving book, Mr. Beckerman reminds us to appreciate what we have already achieved - and that we have the power to do more if we persist until all of the necessary agents for change come together.I hope that he writes a second book about the Russian immigration to Israel and the tremendous impact it has had on Israeli society to date. He has a unique perspective on the US, the FSU and Israel which makes him uniquely qualified to take on the project.

A New Yorker Reviewers Favorites Beckerman recounts the historic trajectory of this grand assertion of human rights with passionate clarity and pellucid conviction.Cynthia Ozick AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II, NEARLY THREE MILLION JEWS WERE TRAPPED INSIDE THE SOVIET UNION. They lived a paradoxunwanted by a repressive Stalinist state, yet forbidden to leave. When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone is the astonishing and inspiring story of their rescue. Drawing on newly released Soviet government documents and hundreds of interviews, Beckerman shows how the movement led to a mass exodus in 1989 and forced human rights into the center of American foreign policy. In cinematic detail, this multigenerational saga, filled with suspense and revelations, provides an essential missing piece of Cold War and Jewish history. Fresh, surprising and exceedingly well-researched.Anne Applebaum, Washington Post Best Nonfiction 2010 A riveting work of reporting and a magisterial history of one of the twentieth century's great dramas of liberation.Commentary

.com Product Description At the end of World War II, nearly three million Jews were trapped inside the Soviet Union. They lived a paradox--unwanted by a repressive Stalinist state, yet forbidden to leave. When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone is the astonishing and inspiring story of their rescue. Journalist Gal Beckerman draws on newly released Soviet government documents as well as hundreds of oral interviews with refuseniks, activists, Zionist "hooligans," and Congressional staffers. He shows not only how the movement led to a mass exodus in 1989, but also how it shaped the American Jewish community, giving it a renewed sense of spiritual purpose and teaching it to flex its political muscle. He also makes a convincing case that the movement put human rights at the center of American foreign policy for the very first time, helping to end the Cold War. In cinematic detail, the book introduces us to all the major players, from the flamboyant Meir Kahane, head of the paramilitary Jewish Defense League, to Soviet refusenik Natan Sharansky, who labored in a Siberian prison camp for over a decade, to Lynn Singer, the small, fiery Long Island housewife who went from organizing local rallies to strong-arming Soviet diplomats. This multi-generational saga, filled with suspense and packed with revelations, provides an essential missing piece of Cold War and Jewish history. Exclusive Essay from Gal Beckerman, Author of When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone In the summer of 2006, I traveled to Moscow, St. Petersburg and Riga. I needed to see the places I was writing about in the book, even though no activists or refuseniks lived there any more. All my characters were long gone--the story itself was about their fight to leave. So besides talking with a few former dissidents and some Russian Jews who had stayed, it was mostly just a chance to get a better feel for the lost world in which my book takes place. And so I found myself standing outside the refusenik Volodya Slepak's apartment on what was once Gorky Street, now Tsverskaya. I stared up at the balcony where he and his wife Masha defiantly and illegally unfurled a banner in June 1978, demanding that they be allowed to join their son in Israel (he was one of the few who had managed to leave). Hundreds of people clogged Gorky Street and jeered at them. Eventually they were arrested and sentenced to three years of Siberian exile. The street had obviously changed. There were now flashing lights, expensive stores, and half-naked women on billboards. But it didn't take too much of a leap to picture the stately slate-gray building and the wide boulevard as it once was. Many times on that trip, I realized that all I had to do was mentally remove two or three elements from whatever landscape I was looking at, and I could imagine the place as it was. Occasionally, I would call refuseniks now living in Israel and ask them to describe over the phone some episode from their life and where it had taken place--a square where a protest was held or the government office where they were finally handed an exit visa after a

dozen years of being denied. Except for a few changed street names, they could usually describe everything about a given location. The past, I understood, was still fresh. Somehow it made the history that much more powerful--to think that not so long ago these things happened here, that good people were arrested for nothing. One place that definitely hadn't changed was Rumbuli, where the book begins. It was here, in 1963, that a group of Jews from Riga organized themselves to clean up and consecrate the ground where a massacre of tens of thousands had taken place during World War II. This act--of coming together as a community to remember--signaled the start of the Soviet Jewry movement. Underneath a canopy of tall birch trees, the place was solemn and felt sacred. It was not hard to imagine how those Jews could have been moved to action by the knowledge of all those buried beneath them. You couldn't help but be affected by it. This was the kind of emotional motivation that was simply impossible to understand from a distance. I needed to stand on that earth, too. -Gal Beckerman (Photo Nina Subin) Photographs from *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone* (Click on images to enlarge) June 1964, a week-long interfaith fast takes place in front of the Soviet mission in Manhattan. The movement inspired some striking poster art, including this 1969 design by Israeli artist Dan Reisinger. An iconic photo of the most famous refusenik activists, taken in 1976. 1978 gathering--Leonid Volvovsky, who was later imprisoned for his activities, is at the microphone. 1981--Yuli Kosharovsky with his wife and baby. Kosharovsky kept alive a network of Hebrew teaching all over the Soviet Union In May 1981, Ronald Reagan invited Avital Shcharansky and Yosef Mendelovich, recently released from prison, to the White House. 1982--Alexander Lerner, a celebrated scientist in the Soviet Union, was later ostracized and became a leading figure among the refuseniks. One of the first signs that Gorbachev's liberalization was affecting the refuseniks was this protest in March 1987. A QA with Gal Beckerman Q: Why was there a "movement"? What made Soviet Jews so much worse off than other people living in the totalitarian state? A: I get this question a lot and it's important to answer. First, Jews have always occupied a strange place in the Russian psyche, often perceived as parasites or fifth columnists, the constant outsiders. They were never allowed to completely assimilate and at times of upheaval became convenient scapegoats--a situation that did not change even after the Bolsheviks created a socialist "paradise." But the other, more crucial distinction is that unlike Ukrainians or Latvians or any other "national" group in the Soviet Union, Jews had no indigenous land they could go to where they could speak their language and express their identity. Israel was the only option. Once a new self-awareness among Jews started to catch on in the early 1960s, they tried at first to imagine opening up a space of cultural and religious life for themselves within the Soviet Union. When it was clear that even this threatened the authorities, they turned their sights toward emigration. Thus, a movement. Q: Is there any relevance today to this story? Any modern parallels? A: The story is still very relevant, and not only because Russia is behaving more and more like the old Soviet state in its suppression of dissent. One of the big questions the book poses is how a country like the United States balances its national security interests with moral imperatives. Soviet Jewry very much introduced this tension into the Cold War, turning it into a conflict that was about more than just who had how many missiles. This balance still poses incredible challenges for the United States. Take the case of China. On the one hand, the expansion of relations since the 1970s has had great economic benefits, but it has been accompanied by a deep undercurrent of discomfort about the censorship and repression that allows China's nominally Communist authorities to stay in power. Iran is an even more dramatic example. The issue of how much and how publicly to support the growing democracy movement while also trying to stop their nuclear program strongly echoes debates from the 1970s surrounding Soviet Jews. Q: What kind of research did you have to do? A: Since there really wasn't much primary material on the Soviet side of the story, I had to conduct many interviews. I spoke to over two hundred people for the book, mostly in Israel, the United States, and Russia, sometimes for hours, sitting in their living rooms over cups of tea or--often--glasses of vodka and plates of pickled mushrooms. Many of these people felt like they had been forgotten. When I arrived in their homes with my tape recorder, they were only too happy to share the part they felt they had played in history. Also crucial for telling the Soviet side were documents uncovered by an Israeli researcher that gave a view into how the Kremlin saw their "Jewish problem." It was quite an experience to read the transcript of a politburo meeting in which Leonid Brezhnev suddenly says, "Zionism is making us stupid" For the American side, it was much more straightforward: huge and largely untouched archives exist for the two largest organizations dealing with Soviet Jewry. Q: What was the most dramatic part of the story? A: Just in terms of heart-racing plot, nothing can really beat the episode of the Leningrad hijacking. This was the story of a group of Soviet Jews who tried to hijack a plane and fly it out of the Soviet Union. At some point they were sure they would get caught but continued anyway with the hope that even if they were arrested or killed, this was the best way to reveal their cause to the rest of the world. I interviewed most of the plotters and even spent the thirty-fifth anniversary of the hijacking with them at a BBQ cookout in Israel. This allowed me to describe in great detail the tick-tock leading up to the moment, on the tarmac, when they were tackled to the ground and taken into custody. What happened afterward was pretty remarkable as well. The Soviets put on a show trial and sentenced the two leaders to death. But there was such a world outcry in response that the death sentences were commuted. From Booklist*Starred * Late in the twentieth century, the three great population centers for Jews were the U.S., the Soviet Union, and Israel. This absorbing and inspiring story moves between those three nations to recount one of the most extraordinary episodes in recent Jewish history. This was the survival (and in many cases a rediscovery) of a sense of Jewish identity among Soviet Jews, which led

thousands of them to demand the right to emigrate to Israel. Beckerman is a reporter for the Jewish daily publication *The Forward*. His narrative moves between the centers and also moves back in time to describe Jewish life in the Soviet Union. His description of the Nazi slaughter of Latvian Jews is horrifying, but the slow strangulation of Jewish culture under Stalin and his successors is almost as repellent, because it had the clear intention of causing spiritual death. Once a remarkable rebirth of Jewish consciousness and assertiveness emerged, supporters in the U.S. played a vital role, through demonstrations and indefatigable lobbying efforts to pressure the Soviet government to allow Jewish refuseniks to emigrate. This is an outstanding chronicle of a great effort conducted by determined and courageous men and women. --Jay Freeman "Gal Beckerman has written the definitive account of what might be the most successful human rights campaign of our time. This is a wonderful book: The narrative is thrilling and propulsive; the writing is beautiful; and the research absolutely authoritative. The movement to free Soviet Jewry will be studied for years to come as a model of non-violent civil disobedience, and Gal Beckerman's book will be read years from now as the masterwork on the subject." Jeffrey Goldberg, National Correspondent, *The Atlantic*, and author of *Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror*"Gal Beckerman's book shines a long-needed spotlight on one of the great human rights struggles of the past century. It is dramatic, revelatory and deeply inspiring." Ron Rosenbaum, author of *Explaining Hitler and The Shakespeare Wars*"Among the great liberation strivings of the twentieth century civil rights in America, the end of apartheid in South Africa, the independence of India one of the most painfully achieved was the exodus of Jews from Soviet oppression. Gal Beckerman recounts the historic trajectory of this grand assertion of human rights with passionate clarity and pellucid conviction. His tireless persistence in pursuit of a stirring heroic chronicle is itself a form of heroism." Cynthia Ozick"Gal Beckerman has written the *Parting the Waters* of the Jewish experience. In this stirring epic intellectually brilliant, historically authoritative and emotionally heartfelt in equal measure he has chronicled one of the great liberation struggles of modern times. And he has placed himself at the apex of his generation of nonfiction writers." Samuel G. Freedman, author of *Jew vs. Jew*"A beautifully written book with both depth and cinematic qualities." Gary Shteyngart, author of *The Russian Debutantes Handbook and Absurdistan*"A fascinating, deeply researched, and revealing account of the brave Jews in the Soviet Union and of those in the West who worked tirelessly on their behalf." Sir Martin Gilbert, author of *Churchill: A Life*"At last, the Soviet Jewry movement has found its chronicler. To read this book is to relive the heroism and the heartache, the desperation and the jubilation that marked the long struggle to free Soviet Jews. This is a moving, reliable and memorable narrative of one of the greatest human rights dramas of our time." Jonathan D. Sarna, Joseph H. Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University, and author of *American Judaism: A History*