



Chambon Foundation

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President and Founder: documentary filmmaker Pierre Sauvage



Amis du Chambon (France)

Weapons of the Spirit—20th anniversary!



2010 **And Crown Thy Good: Varian Fry in Marseille**
a feature documentary

2009 **Not Idly By: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust**, a documentary short

Pierre Sauvage shows excerpts from his documentaries in his DVD-accompanied lecture **The Challenge To Us of Holocaust Rescuers**

**We said we didn't know.
We said we couldn't have done anything even if we had known.
Meet Peter Bergson!**

The Varian Fry Institute presents
a new documentary short (40 min.) by Pierre Sauvage



Not Idly By

—Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust

**A militant Jew from Palestine, Peter Bergson led
a controversial American effort to fight the Holocaust**

This is his testimony

Peter Bergson in *Not Idly By*:

We cannot resurrect the dead. Eighty-five or ninety percent of those that Hitler wanted to kill were killed. What we *can* do and what we *must* do is reexamine ourselves.

I am the last one on earth to condone the passivity of the political leadership of the United States—with President Roosevelt at the head—and of Great Britain, and of the Soviet Union, itself in a state of occupation by a tyrant.

But the people who should have dramatized, shook up, awakened the... otherwise busy, like Ben Hecht's ballad [below]—"the world is busy with other news"—the otherwise "unrealizing" world leadership to what's going on should have been the Jewish leaders.

They *knew* the Jews were being killed. But the *grasp* wasn't there. Jews should begin not by screaming, "While they're murdering six million Jews, the Gentiles stood idly by." They should say, "We stood idly by."

over, please

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A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt charity founded by Pierre Sauvage in 1982 to explore and communicate the necessary lessons of *hope* intertwined with the Holocaust's unavoidable lessons of despair. The Varian Fry Institute, a division of the Chambon Foundation, specifically explores and communicates the *American* reaction to the massacre of the Jews of Europe. In the area of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, some 5,000 Jews were sheltered from the Nazis by 5,000 Christians, as recounted in Le Chambon survivor Pierre Sauvage's documentary *Weapons of the Spirit*. *And Crown Thy Good: Varian Fry in Marseille* tells the story of the Americans who participated in a determined American rescue effort during the refugee crisis of 1940-41—and of the government response. *Not Idly By: Peter Bergson, America & the Holocaust* provides the testimony of the leader of the "Bergson Group" that sought to make saving the Jews of Europe an American objective.

Until 1941 Nazi Germany had persecuted and sought to expel the Jews. But the doors of the West had remained closed. It was only then that the free nations of the world had faced a new Nazi policy: mass murder of the Jews of Europe.

A Palestinian Jew who had served with the freedom-fighting *Irgun* organization in pre-Israel Palestine, Peter Bergson (born Hillel Kook, 1915-2001), had come to the U.S. in 1940. In America, this firebrand led what came to be known as the Bergson Group, whose strenuous efforts from 1942 to 1945 underscore just how much was known and attempted during those difficult years.

Vilified at the time—American Jewish leader Rabbi Stephen Wise reportedly characterized him as “equally as great an enemy of the Jews as Hitler,” while others castigated the group as fascist or terrorist—Bergson remains a controversial yet relatively obscure figure in the history of America and the Holocaust.

Not Idly By—currently nearing release—provides the riveting first-hand testimony of the charismatic and eloquent Bergson, who comments on the response to the crisis by non-European Jews and describes his own activities: the innovative and provocative full-page political ads in major newspapers, the poignant, assertive Ben Hecht/Kurt Weill pageant *We Will Never Die*, the rabbis’ march in Washington, the creation of various activist committees and the energetic and productive lobbying of American government officials that ultimately helped lead to the establishment at last of a U.S. rescue agency.

A play about Bergson’s efforts, *The Accomplices*, will be performed again in Los Angeles in April, and Bergson is also the posthumous star of the Simon Wiesenthal Center feature documentary, *Against the Tide*. Has Peter Bergson’s time come at last? **Do we not need to consider further *our* share of responsibility in the mass murder of the Jews of Europe?**

Both Bergson documentaries (Sauvage’s has been in the works since 2007) draw on the unused interview shot by Claude Lanzmann in 1978 for his epic 1985 *Shoah*. In addition, *Not Idly By* exclusively benefits from the passionate and detailed interview Bergson granted to filmmaker Laurence Jarvik for the latter’s 1982 documentary *Who Shall Live and Who shall Die?* Also featured in *Not Idly By* are materials that have not been seen or heard since the war years.

An Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker (*Yiddish: the Mame-Loshn*, to be released this year on DVD), Sauvage, himself a child survivor of the Holocaust, is the president of the Varian Fry Institute and the Chambon Foundation (www.chambon.org). Upcoming in 2010 is Sauvage’s long-in-the-making feature documentary about American rescuers in 1940-41, *And Crown Thy Good: Varian Fry in Marseille*.

Sauvage is best known for his acclaimed feature documentary *Weapons of the Spirit*, which will be rereleased in 2009 in a special 20th anniversary edition. The film tells the story of a unique “conspiracy of goodness” during the Holocaust: in and around the Christian village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in France, 5,000 Jews found shelter, including Pierre, who was born there.

A popular lecturer on the Holocaust and its continuing challenges, Sauvage has been a student for over twenty years of what he has called the *American* experience of the Holocaust. His address *Did Americans Fight the Holocaust?* tackles this thorny subject, which is also woven into his video-accompanied presentation *The Challenge To Us of Holocaust Rescuers*.

