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Open Letter to the Editors of *Los Angeles Times*:

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***LA Times* Should Distance Itself from Robert Abele's Revisionist Assessments
in his Review of *Dara of Jasenovac* : While the Film's Artistic Value May
Leave Room for Questions, the Fact of the Genocide Does Not!**

The recent film [review](#) of *Dara of Jasenovac* in *LA Times* by Robert Abele screams politics. Evidently, its author would be the judge not only of the artistic merit of the film, but of the director's motives in this portrayal of Holocaust events. His verdict? - The film is driven by some base desire to settle ethnic scores. Abele's language here is so full of put-downs and cynicism that it is hard for the reader to tell apart his assault on the film and its director, Mr. Antonijevic, from a trivializing dismissal of this Genocide and its victims, the children included. Even the central protagonist, little Dara, is not spared: in Abele's words, she is a "10-year-old going on 40." Yes, being in a death camp alone with her baby brother might do that to a girl child, Mr Abele!

It would be a colossal understatement to say that Robert Abele's review serves up a grievous affront to the memory of the victims and this important, albeit little known chapter of the Holocaust history that is the film's subject. While acknowledging the existence of the Jasenovac concentration camp as "one more hell-on-the-Earth for Jews," Abele fails to inform the readership that Serbs were indeed the majority of its victims. So, are we to agree with him that because the film is about Serbian victims and is told with unflinching directness, it must propagate a nationalist message about "Serbian victimhood"? Such is an unconscionable affront not only to Serbian victims in the featured Jasenovac WWII concentration camp complex, but to all victims of the Holocaust. None of these people suffered from a victimhood complex, for theirs was real victimhood.

Holocaust history is simply not complete without its Jasenovac chapter. Its horrors transcend the region where they unfolded, just as they transcend the boundaries of one nation: thousands upon thousands of Jewish and Roma prisoners were tortured and perished there alongside the Serbian ones. For once Abele is correct: there was even a special camp for children, believed to be the only of its kind in the Nazi occupied Europe, but which the review mentions in a cynical way leading to the following statement: 'if only it did not smack of scoring points in a longstanding regional feud'. If only Abele did some research, he would have learned

that the prosecution and extermination of Serbs was a historically documented goal of the fascist Ustashe regime.

Robert Abele neglects to tell his readership that this film is a collaborative effort - a product of many years of extensive research on the part of its director, Predrag-Gaga Antonijevic (whose name Abele misspelled) and its executive producer Michael Berenbaum, a renown Holocaust scholar and the director of the Sigi Ziering Institute at the American Jewish University where he is a professor of Jewish studies.

Antonijević and Berenbaum took part in an online discussion that accompanied a virtual screening of the film hosted by the Miami Jewish Film Festival, reported in the [Sun-Sentinel Jewish Journal on January 29](#). Hearing what the film's makers had to say in their own words will help the readers understand the true significance of this untold story. Excerpts of this discussion follow.

“Knowing this is a story that had to be told, I talked to Michael Berenbaum a few years back, and he discussed all the aspects of the camp, since Michael is very familiar being a historian of this whole area,” Antonijevic said, further adding: *“We pretty much decided to use facts which are historically proven and documented. In other words, we did not want to allow any kind of superficial fiction to enter the story, because the events are so gruesome and so hard by themselves. It was absolutely unnecessary to try to add to it, because it was our duty to let the history present itself.”*

Berenbaum added, *“Many of the details, large and small, are taken from the actual experience of camp inmates, and this is the rare time that a film takes us inside the camp, most especially the children's camp of Jasenovac. The power of the film lies in the story being told through the eyes of a child who loses the innocence of childhood and is forced to experience what no child and no adult should have to go through.”*

Movie reviews are there to assess artistic qualities of films, and not to assign motives. That fact aside, Robert Abele's recent review in LA Times amounts to mockery and revisionism of one of the darkest chapters of human history. It does an injustice to the powerful message of this film and carries the risk of discouraging the telling of other less known, but immensely important stories waiting to be told. For these, and many other reasons, *LA Times* should distance itself from the claims Robert Abele makes in his review of *Dara of Jasenovac*.

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