

Thank You for Your First Century, Ben Ferencz!

*John Q. Barrett**

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In March 1920, no one was keeping very good birth records in Transylvania, then part of Romania. So all that we really know about Berrel Ferencz's birth is that it occurred in that place around the middle of that month.¹

In a short number of years following his birth, Berrel became an American, "Benjamin," a lawyer, a soldier, a war crimes investigator, and a prosecutor of Nazi mass murder.²

And today, March 11, 2020, marks, more or less, the 100th anniversary of Ben Ferencz's birth.

Ben's significant work after World War II included serving as a prosecutor in Nuremberg, in the United States occupation zone of what had been Nazi Germany. During 1947 and 1948, he was chief prosecutor in the *Einsatzgruppen* case (*United States v. Otto Ohlendorf, et al.*). He charged the defendants, leaders of Nazi killing operations in Eastern Europe, with crimes against humanity ("a systematic program of genocide"), war crimes, and membership in criminal Nazi organizations.

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¹ From the Jackson List archive, see a 2014 post, "Happy [94th] Birthday, Ben Ferencz," which includes a Ben email explaining why his exact birthdate is unknown: <http://thejacksonlist.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/20140311-Jackson-List-Ferencz.pdf>.

² See generally Gregory Gordon & Mia Swart, *Benjamin Ferencz: The Last Surviving Nuremberg Prosecutor*, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/benjamin-ferencz-surviving-nuremberg-prosecutor-200310100126998.html (Mar. 11, 2020). Professor Gordon is writing a biography, NUREMBERG'S CITIZEN PROSECUTOR: BENJAMIN FERENCZ & THE BIRTH OF INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE.

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Circa 1946: In Nuremberg, Ben Ferencz stands at the Zeppelinfeld, in front of the grandstand, once Hitler's, that flies an American flag.

Ben's cases against those defendants, built on their contemporaneous reports of their crimes, were brief, horrifying, and irrefutable. More than twenty defendants were convicted. The *Einsatzgruppen* case was and is the biggest murder trial in human history.

In the 1950s, Ben returned to the United States. Since then, and going strong, he has been a champion of justice, a builder of international and national institutions, a guide to and a teacher of peace through law, and a moral exemplar to millions.

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It is fitting—not to mention no surprise—that Ben Ferencz is the last living Nuremberg podium prosecutor, i.e., one who had a speaking role in court. What he is and represents is not only great and global. It is permanent.

For more information, I refer you to these sources, including many that are Ben’s wise voice—

- video excerpts of his 1947 opening statement at Nuremberg in the *Einsatzgruppen* case:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b67B-MoKG_o;
- a November 2005 interview of Ben:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-8m5YHt_4;
- a Ben TED talk from 2017:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zwa4zRWDsvI>;
- the trailer of the 2018 documentary, “Prosecuting Evil: The Extraordinary World of Ben Ferencz”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meDbZemxuK4>;
- Ben’s newly-enhanced website, a treasure house of his writings and speeches: <https://benferencz.org/>; and, of course,
- you should follow Ben on Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/BenFerencz>.

So Happy Birthday, Ben, and thank you for being humanity’s lawyer, teacher, and dear friend.

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May 3, 2019: In Boca Raton, Florida, Ben Ferencz, his lunch interrupted, charms an autograph seeker.