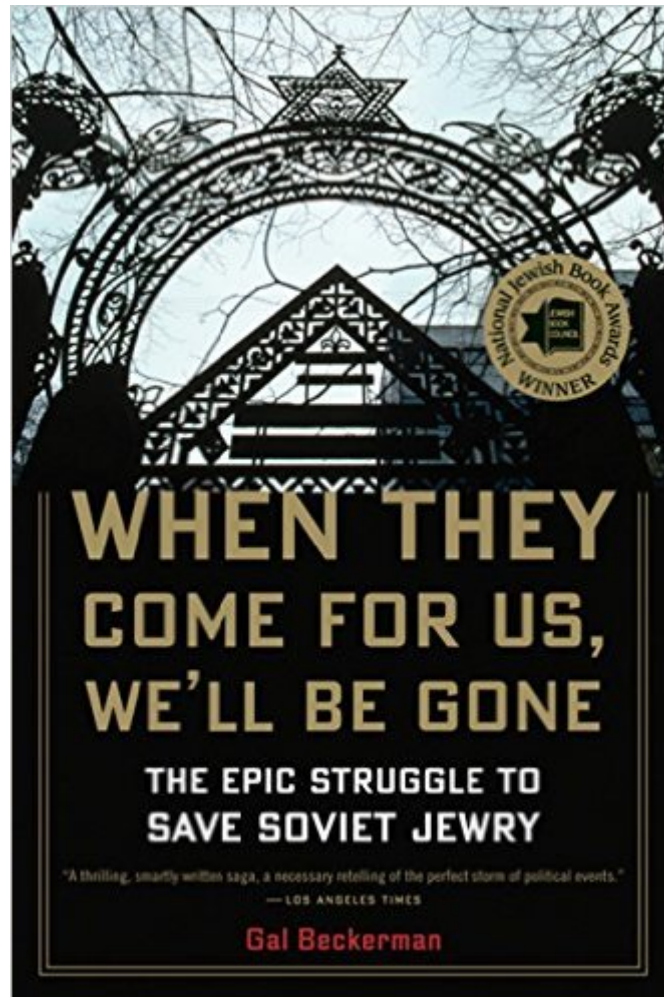


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# When They Come For Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle To Save Soviet Jewry



## Synopsis

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 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. 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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a work of incredible depth, great scholarship, and fantastic writing. I usually try not to gush over a book when writing a review because I figure that the reader would usually rather know more about the book and less about what I thought about it, but this one is an exception - I simply loved every page of it. I've read plenty of history books, but I can't remember ever reading one in the past that I would have described as a page turner until now. The cast of characters in this book is truly diverse - radical rabbis, activists, middle class housewives, US presidents, Russian dissidents, KGB

officers, and Israeli secret agents. It is a testament to Beckerman's skill's as a writer that he can weave a cohesive and compelling narrative through them all, giving them depth and their actions meaning. The book goes back and forth between the USSR and the rest of the world (mostly the USA), showing the Jewish movements within the USSR and the activities occurring on the outside, all set against the backdrop of the cold war. Mixed in with the story of the soviet Jews are also several larger stories that are revealed, including the role of human rights in foreign relations, Jewish-American guilt over not doing more during the holocaust, and the Jewish community's ability to become a political force. All of these are themes still playing out today, and this book shows where many of them got their start. Lastly the depth of scholarship in this book is impressive. A quick look through the sources at the end of the book reveals that Beckerman interviewed countless people for first hand knowledge of the events in the book. It seems that almost everyone he wrote about he talked to personally. When attempting to describe the appropriate cold war era machinations going on in the background of the story, Beckerman draws on a whole host of books, articles, and now declassified documents to give an accurate picture of the activities of the major players (US presidents, the KGB, etc.). As I said when I started, this is a work of incredible depth, great scholarship, and fantastic writing. I can't recommend it highly enough.

This book tells an amazing story, and it tells it really well. Like the author, my husband and brother-in-law both had seats reserved at their bar mitzvah celebrations for Jewish boys in the Soviet Union who shared their birthdays but could not have their own celebrations. This was, however, decades ago. The Soviet Union has been history for almost 20 years, and the vast number of Russians in Israel has long since become a fact of life taken more or less for granted. Natan Sharansky's daughters are both married and he may even be a grandfather by now. The Jewish Left has long since fragmented and moved on to multiple different causes. People forget, however, that once upon a time, Anatoly Scharansky spent nine years in Soviet prisons, almost no Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union, and non-Orthodox Jews in America (and some Orthodox Jews as well), having looked for something to unite them after the civil rights movement fizzled, found their unity, almost an obsession, with liberating Soviet refuseniks. People forget that Yosef Begun was once sentenced to 12 years of hard labor solely for teaching Hebrew. People forget that one small but determined group of Soviet Jews were so desperate to get out, they even tried to hijack a plane from the Baltics, a story Beckerman tells with particular flair. Beckerman has done an astonishing job here, of weaving together all of the threads that combined to make it possible for the Jews to leave Russia: the desperation, determination, and pride Jews began to feel

in Russia after 1967 in the face of increasing anti-Semitism; the Russian leadership, terrified that if the Jews were allowed to leave, their entire house of cards would collapse; the Jewish community in America, led by activists of varying degrees of chutzpah (with Avi Weiss and Meir Kahane at the extreme); and the American government itself, slowly waking up to the propaganda potential of the Soviet Jewish cause. I don't know enough about the subject to be able to tell whether Beckerman is wholly honest with his facts, or whether he has a particular agenda or axe to grind. All I know is, assuming he's a fair and honest storyteller, he's a really good one. This is a great book, about an inspirational strand of history that very few Americans may actually know much about (myself included). I recommend it highly. If you found this review helpful, please let me know.

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