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## **A measure of justice in Gold Train case**

OUR OPINION: U.S. IMPROVES ITS STANDING BY RIGHTING A MORAL WRONG

The U.S. government finally came to the right conclusion in agreeing to settle the "Gold Train" lawsuit brought by Hungarian Holocaust survivors who lost looted valuables seized by U.S. troops at the end of World War II. Though settlement details aren't final, what is important is that the United States correct this historical wrong.

### **Money will help victims**

According to sources close to the negotiations, to end the lawsuit, the U.S. government has agreed to pay \$25 million, which will go to aid needy Hungarian survivors worldwide. We would have liked to see payments go to individual plaintiffs, and a larger payout overall. The amount is paltry compared to present-day value of the Gold Train valuables. However, the money will go to help victims who need it most, and the U.S. government will acknowledge that it erred after the war in not returning valuables to the rightful owners.

Six decades later, the United States is morally -- if not technically -- obliged to apologize for its past misconduct and to compensate the victims. That's exactly what the U.S. government has demanded of European countries and businesses that exploited Jews for profit during and after the Holocaust. The United States should hold itself to no less a standard. Thus, it's regrettable that survivors have spent three years in court fighting technicalities and delaying tactics to get the Justice Department to agree to settle this moral debt.

Shortly after the Allied victory in 1945, the U.S. Army seized a train filled with gold, diamonds and other property looted from Jewish homes in Hungary. Only in 1999 did the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States issue a report documenting the fate of those goods.

### **Valuables stolen**

Much of the best china, glassware and silver was requisitioned by U.S. officers for personal use and never returned. The U.S. government shipped 1,181 paintings to Austria in 1949 in violation of international law. Other valuables were stolen. What was left was sold at auction for Jewish refugee-relief funds. Nothing was returned to the surviving Hungarian Jews, most of them destitute by then.

The presidential commission called the U.S. handling of the Gold Train, 'an egregious failure of the United States to follow its own policy regarding restitution of Holocaust victims' property after World War II.' Still, this was an exception to otherwise generally exemplary U.S. conduct after the war. By owning up to this failure, the United States validates its belief in moral values.