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By Henry Weinstein

Judge Sets First Trial of Holocaust Claims Against Insurance Firms

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Florence-Marie Cooper scheduled the first trial in the United States or Europe in cases charging that Holocaust survivors are entitled to compensation from insurance companies and banks, as well as any firm that allegedly used them as slave laborers.

Over the objections of Italian insurance company Assicurazioni Generali Judge Cooper set the trial of Adolf Stern vs. Assicurazioni Generali for February 9, 2000.

In January, Judge Cooper ruled that under the Holocaust Victims Insurance Act, which was passed by the California state legislature last year, California state courts have jurisdiction in consideration of cases of this type.

"Ironically, today marks the 55th anniversary of the Stern family deportation to Auschwitz," said Lisa Stern, a relative of the family that brought the suit and Shernoff's co-counsel.

"This is a real benchmark day for Holocaust survivors because it means some of them may get trial in their lifetimes," says Claremont attorney William Shernoff, who represents the Stern family and three other plaintiffs in cases against Generali.