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American Immigration Policies and Public Opinion on European Jews  
from 1933 to 1945

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in History

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by  
Wesley P. Greear  
May 2002

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Dr. Dale Schmitt

Keywords: F.D.R., Holocaust, State Department, WWII

## ABSTRACT

### American Immigration Policies and Public Opinion on European Jews From 1933 to 1945

by  
Wesley P. Greear

This paper examines the role and scope of the American public's opinion on European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. Significant attention is placed on several aspects of American politics and public perceptions at this time. The ideas that developed from the Great Depression through World War II on refugees and immigrants are closely scrutinized.

The approach to this study focuses on sources from renowned Holocaust scholars including Raul Hilberg, David S. Wyman, Martin Gilbert, Henry Feingold, Hadley Cantril, Robert Divine, and Deborah E. Lipstadt to name a select few of the authors referenced. Several newspapers and journals such as the *New York Times*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Century*, *The Nation*, and the *New Republic* are referenced. The areas of focus are on public attitude, governmental involvement, Jewish leadership in the United States, and military capabilities. Conclusions of this study include apathy from participating parties, the inability to organize strong rescue support, and the refusal to lower the immigration restrictions of the time.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to three very important people in my life. The first two are my parents, Danny and Louella Greear. I want to thank both of you for your love and support throughout the duration of this project. Not only was your insight into this project invaluable but also your financial support allowed me to pursue this degree. I also want to thank my fiancé and future wife Sonya for her patience, inspiration, and love throughout this endeavor.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

During World War II one of the greatest tragedies in world history occurred when the Nazis, under the orders of Adolf Hitler, began the systematic elimination of European Jews. In 1933, when the Nazis gained power in Germany, they began the systematic persecution of German Jews. Hitler and his government began a slow process of elimination that culminated in the mass killings, the “Final Solution,” that continued until the end of World War II. The Nazi treatment of the Jews is fairly well known but what is not so clear is the United States’ involvement, or lack of involvement, in stopping this atrocity. This writer will show that within the United States government, especially the State Department, several political factors contributed to tightened immigration laws. Considerable emphasis will be placed on President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his role in immigration policies during his presidency. The ideas, policies, and social problems of the time shaped public opinion and unleashed hidden anti-Semitism that affected decisions that pertained to immigration.

The United States’ attitude toward European Jews and all Eastern Europeans in particular was a peculiar one from the inception of the country. From time to time prior to World War II the United States intervened in Jewish affairs abroad, but when it pertained to domestic affairs the United States had a history of indifference. Thomas Paine in 1776 envisioned the United States as an asylum for mankind.<sup>1</sup> In reality the United States had a history of hostility toward immigrants that dated back to the late 1700s. In 1797 Representative Harrison G. Otis, who was a firm Federalist, instigated the first public outcry to restrict immigration into the United States. Otis was one of the first nativists to express views to restrict immigration fearing a French-type revolution within the United States. Otis concluded that too many immigrants would undermine the representative system that the United States was developing. This early attitude

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<sup>1</sup> Saul S.Friedman, *NO HAVEN for the Oppressed: The United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees 1938-1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973) 17.

continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century when farmers and commercial entrepreneurs were afraid that immigrants would take their land and destroy the advantages they enjoyed.

By 1880 more than 400,000 Eastern Europeans were immigrating to the United States and there were fears within the country that American civilization might be mongrelized by this influx.<sup>2</sup> This was not just the sentiment of protestant Americans, for Jewish Americans feared this would bring unwanted attention and hostility towards them. American Jewish indifference to their brethren in Europe dated back to the nineteenth century. American Jews unwillingness to help European Jews immigrate in the 1930s and 1940s found its prelude in the 1880s.

On several occasions the United States government intervened to protect Jews abroad prior to the 1930s. In 1857, the United States intervened in Switzerland when Jews were being persecuted and the American government proclaimed it was the principle of a civilized society to help.<sup>3</sup> This intervention caused the Swiss to adopt a constitution that established religious liberty. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of State, William H. Seward, intervened on Jewish behalf in Tangier on the issue of Jewish treatment within the Moorish empire. This would appear to be a more dubious time than pre-World War II, considering the American Civil War was undecided at this point. If the United States could concern itself with European Jews during the Civil War, why not in the early 1930s? The United States dissolved the Treaty of 1832 with Russia over events of 1881 in Warsaw, Poland, in which Jews were falsely accused of a fire alarm.<sup>4</sup> The Russians occupied Warsaw and they pillaged 1,000 shops that left 10,000 people without a livelihood. The United States policy abroad did not apply only to small countries but large ones as well. America had a history of aiding Jewish persecution until the Nazis gained power. The United States went from humanity to apathy on the issue of Jewish treatment throughout the world.

This entire discussion leads to why the most powerful organizations such as Congress, the State Department, the President, religious groups, war veterans, and worker's groups all opposed immigration into this country. The most damaging was the United States

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<sup>2</sup> Friedman, *NO HAVEN for the Oppressed*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (Random House: 1967), 124.

<sup>4</sup> Morse, *While Six Million Died*, 125.



Government and its implementation of anti-immigration laws, which later became anti-Jewish laws. United States Government officials did not want Jews to immigrate, and President Roosevelt demonstrated his lack of interest and indifference by showing little concern toward the quotas and restrictions placed on immigration.

Three culminating factors restrictionism, nativistic nationalism, and anti-Semitism contributed to public resistance of European refugees into the United States.<sup>5</sup> Restrictionism developed in the late 1800s and accelerated during the Great Depression with the emerging unemployment in the United States during the 1930s. In the early 1900s groups such as the American Protective Association, Samuel Gompers American Federation of Labor, and congressional restrictionists led by Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr. pushed for immigration restriction.<sup>6</sup> These influential men and groups were adamant about restricting immigration, but for the most part were not successful in pre-depression America. In the decade before World War I, 900,000 immigrants were admitted into the United States. Jews accounted for about 10 percent of the new immigrants, and they tended to congregate in urban centers in the East, which in turn gave them a greater concentration of European immigrants than most other immigrants. Jews evaded many of the restrictions placed on immigration, such as passing a literacy test, because of a special provision that exempted persons fleeing persecution based on race or religious faith. With this religious exemption the restrictionists could not limit Jews. They however, could exclude most other groups from immigrating. Hence, their frustration with their inability to keep the European Jews out of the United States.

In 1924 Congress responded to immense pressure from restrictionists by passing the Johnson-Reed Bill or as it was better known the National Origins Act. The National Origins Act provided two percent immigration of that country's population or 120,000 visas to people of North and West European stock. These people were the Europeans that were perceived to be the peoples that created the United States and they would preserve the American bloodline. The people from Southern and Eastern Europe were virtually excluded by this act. Samuel Gompers who represented the American worker championed this bill even though prosperity was at an all time high. Influential

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<sup>5</sup> David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, *NO HAVEN for the Oppressed*, 18-21.

congressmen and eugenicists Madison Grant and Harry Laughlin influenced business leaders and warned that the large numbers of immigrants allowed into this country was diluting the American bloodstream. The implementation of the strictest provisions of the National Origins Act coincided with collapse of the American economy that plunged the United States into the Great Depression. The strict enforcement of this act worsened the Great Depression because immigrants were not allowed to secure jobs before they entered the country as was allowed by the Alien Contract Law of 1885. About 300,000 immigrants a year entered the country after this act was implemented, but they could not secure jobs and this caused even more unemployment. In retrospect, the National Origins Act of 1924 did more damage to the economy than good and helped exacerbate the Great Depression.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars were another outspoken group against foreign immigration during this time. They began their anti-immigration struggle in the 1920s and were a strong force in this movement. They, along with organizations such as the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, and Father Charles E. Coughlin, brought this form of anti-Semitism to the public's attention in the early 1930s.<sup>7</sup> It was the first time that restrictionists began to use a public forum to advance their personal views.

Father Charles Coughlin, who was a Roman Catholic Priest from Detroit, would instigate and antagonize immigration proposals for several years come with his radio broadcasts and his publication *Social Justice*. Father Coughlin developed the theory of the "international banker" as the person who destroyed American social and economic structure in the 1920s, which in turn perpetrated the Great Depression. When Coughlin used the term "international banker" he meant Jews, and he reinforced the theme constantly. Coughlin used his radio talk show and his publication, *Social Justice*, as an outlet to spread his assessment of what was wrong with the United States. The closing of banks in the Detroit area in the 1930s strengthened his belief that bankers were evil and they were at the core of causing the Great Depression. Because his rhetoric played on American fears during the 1930s, Coughlin was able to convince many listeners to his point of view. The restrictionists also believed that refugees were taking jobs away from American workers. Jobs were an intense subject for Americans during this period, and

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<sup>7</sup> Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941*, 6.

refugees were perceived as a threat to any jobs that might be available. The Great Depression had a profound affect on American public opinion with respect to refugees from any country, not just Jews. This was one of the early movements that would shape public opinion against immigration.

Father Coughlin formulated his political and personal prejudices out of the Great Depression. Coughlin feared that wealth and power were being concentrated in a small number of people in the United States with small merchants and small bankers slowly being phased out. The problem with Coughlin's conclusions was that he looked for scapegoats as a cause for the Depression and did not consider the general process of centralization that engulfed the American economic system. Critics have pointed out that Coughlin failed to realize that the Depression was more a result of social and economic relationships within a community that developed from social status and class.<sup>8</sup> Coughlin concluded the bankers on Wall Street and in London were the cause of the Depression. Father Coughlin used the mood of the American public to convince many listeners that the great bankers, i.e. Jews, of the world were destroying American society. He referred to the American use of the gold standard for monetary purposes and he often used the Rothschilds and other Jewish names as the influence for keeping the gold standard. Coughlin gave the restrictionists, nativists, and anti-Semites a voice and further proof of a Jewish conspiracy.

Coughlin spent most of his adult life in the American Midwest where anti-Semitism had deep roots. The populist movement of the 1890s, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and the Catholic Church itself which had underlying anti-Semitism because of placing the blame for Christ's death on the Jews.<sup>9</sup> These developments shaped Father Coughlin's formative years and there was always a hint of this underlying bigotry within his sermons. Even Coughlin's colleagues perceived him to be personally anti-Semitic and they claimed that he had a large library of material on the subject. Father Coughlin was crucial in igniting American fears in the 1930s. He gave the anti-refugee restrictionists a strong voice with two important media outlets to spread his message.

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Brinkley, *Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, 1982), 160.

<sup>9</sup> Brinkley, *Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression*, 270.

The next idea, nativistic nationalism, also heavily influenced Americans during this period. Many members of Congress who were influenced by a virulent attitude were very vocal in their opposition to immigration. These early seeds that were being sown in the public's mind would have dire consequences in the near future. The main goal of the nativists was to eliminate foreigners from American society in order to preserve American resources for American citizens. In addition, they feared immigrants bringing a different culture into the United States that might change the status quo.<sup>10</sup> The people and organizations that were promoting this were not only hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, but also Congressmen and Christian ministers as well. They occupied positions that wielded an immense amount of influence on the public, especially in the 1930s and 1940s.

The third influence on immigration policies and public attitude, and probably the most damaging, was anti-Semitism in the United States. Anti-Semitism had always had an underlying place in American society, but it was more underground and not as obvious as it was in other countries at this time. Jews, like other minority groups in the United States, were excluded from clubs, social circles, and schools. Toward the end of the 1930s and mid-1940s anti-Semitism was prevalent and openly known. Father Charles Coughlin, was one of the most outspoken and influential proponents of anti-Semitism in the United States. Coughlin formed the Social Justice Movement, emulated by William Dudley Pelley with his "Silver Shirts", and the German-American Bund was also formed. The German-American Bund was made up of middle-to-lower class German born residents in the United States. This organization formed the American Nazi movement in the United States and incorporated the Nazi military uniforms, swastika armbands, and the Nazi military march into this country.<sup>11</sup> The Bund received its inspiration and direction from the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda and claimed a membership of 25,000. The Bund operated 24 retreat camps, distributed pamphlets, and sponsored a national radio program. The German-American Bund, which controlled the German-American press, estimated that 90 percent of their readers were pro-Nazi by 1940. The Bund reached its peak in 1939 and 1940 when they held patriotic rallies that sold out Madison

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<sup>10</sup> David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) , 54.

<sup>11</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, 14.

Square Garden.<sup>12</sup> Anti-Semitism became more organized and dangerous with the growth of these types of groups. These groups to spread their hatred to the masses used the media outlets of radio and newspaper print. Although the German-American Bund's influence would fade after World War II began, they helped lay the groundwork for anti-immigration groups.

One of the most dangerous anti-immigration and anti-Semites was William Dudley Pelley. Pelley developed a strong organization with his "Silver Shirts" that claimed a membership of about 100,000. Pelley's true influence lay not only in the prolific literary output that he dispersed, but also his association with magazines and motion pictures for release of propaganda.<sup>13</sup> Pelley operated and used advantageously, an 80,000-dollar publishing company in Asheville, North Carolina that published such pamphlets as *What Every Congressman Should Know*, to promote his point of view. In his most successful periodical called the *Liberation*, he claimed that there was a Jewish-Communist conspiracy to take over the United States. This periodical erroneously emphasized Roosevelt's supposed Jewish ancestry and continually made reference to the "Kosher New Deal". In the nineteen months prior to 1938, Pelley and his "Silver Shirts" were the largest, best financed, and best publicized fascist group in the United States.

Roman Catholic Church leaders, Protestant leaders, and American Jewish leaders were not exempt from blame either. The Roman Catholic Church had a history of indifference toward Jews, and this did not change throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The Roman Catholic Church never seriously reprimanded Father Coughlin for his anti-Semitic radio addresses. The lack of action by the hierarchy of the church allowed Coughlin's oral and written skills to galvanize anti-Semitic feelings in Catholic circles.<sup>14</sup> Protestant Americans, especially the press, gave minute attention to the persecution of European Jews from 1933 to 1945. Without any significant reports on Jewish persecution, the American public never entirely grasped the problem at hand. The American press, for the most part, virtually ignored the plight of European Jews.

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<sup>12</sup> Friedman, *NO HAVEN for the Oppressed*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and Refugee Crisis 1938-1941*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Haim Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983), 143.

American Jewish apathy was a significant factor that hampered immigration and rescue efforts. American Jewry did not organize into one cohesive unit until the War Refugee Board was created in 1944. However, by 1944 there was no real hope to rescue any large numbers of European Jews. Groups such as the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, the Joint Distribution Committee, and the B'nai B'rith showed a callous indifference to European Jews. The groups often used caution in matters pertaining to immigration because they did not want to bring unwanted attention on the Jews that were already in the United States. Also, the American Jewish leaders blindly trusted F.D.R and surmised he was truly interested in their cause. This misperceived trust in Roosevelt contributed to a deadly complacency of inaction from these Jewish groups. Rabbi Stephen Wise was the most prolific Jewish leader in the 1930s and 1940s and his blind faith that Roosevelt would save the European Jews influenced other leaders of American Jewry to follow F.D.R. without question.

The last chapter will explore the debate concerning whether the United States should have bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau. Could we have bombed Auschwitz, was it militarily feasible to do so, and why we did not have emerged as a major source of controversy among historians. The Auschwitz-Birkenau debate has strong proponents and opponents. Recent research has uncovered military reconnaissance photos of the annihilation camps that showed the camps in great detail. Allied bombers flew missions that passed over the rail lines that lead to the camps, the gas chambers, and crematoriums within the camps, making them clearly visible to the trained eye. The source of the main debate was how much did Allied commanders really know and would bombing the camps have diverted invaluable military resources? Consequently, the Auschwitz-Birkenau debate has come under intense scrutiny by historians.

## CHAPTER 2

### IMMIGRATION AND PUBLIC OPINION FROM 1933-1939

In the 1930s the question of immigration, which would ultimately become entwined with the Jewish question, became an issue with the American public. The refugee problem that developed in the 1930s was accelerated by the Nazis policy of systematic racial, political, and religious persecution.<sup>1</sup> With the deepening of the Great Depression, immigration, or a possible influx of aliens, was the issue that was sensitive to many Americans. Unemployment, estimated at 15 million in 1932, put a premium on jobs in the United States.<sup>2</sup> A strong consensus among Americans stressed that any available jobs should go to Americans without any competition from immigrants. In his 1932 presidential campaign Franklin Roosevelt, agreed with Hoover's Executive Order of 1930 limiting immigration.<sup>3</sup> As early as 1932 American Jewish groups foresaw serious problems if they pushed for unlimited immigration policies. The employment loss imposed by the Great Depression was tremendous, and the United States could not support its own workforce much less an influx of immigrants from Europe. These attitudes ultimately contributed to the loss of millions of lives.

In 1933 the Nazi Party under the leadership of Adolf Hitler legally gained power in Germany, and it did not take long for the persecution of Jews to begin. On April 7, 1933, the Reichstag, under Hitler's influence, adopted the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service Law that dismissed non-Aryans from governmental positions.<sup>4</sup> This restoration of this act was more significant than it appeared because the Civil Service decree included bankers, lawyers, railroad and hospital workers, medicine, law, schools, universities, and the arts. The Nazi intent of these laws was to eliminate Jewish influence in Germany.

Not long after the Nazis implemented the Civil Service laws in Germany the first significant protest against Jewish mistreatment came from the American Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> American Jewish Historical Society, "American Jewry, Refugees and Immigration Restriction," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society(1932-1942)*, vol. 45, (June 1956): 220.

<sup>3</sup> Society, "American Jewry, Refugees and Immigration Restrictions", 220.

<sup>4</sup> Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism*, 16.

Committee. This was a committee developed to protect the rights of Jews, and they asked the American government to properly investigate what was happening in Germany.<sup>5</sup> The American Jewish Congress began protests and had a strong membership and following that would help inform the rest of the country of the worsening conditions in Germany. For the United States to protest another country's treatment of its citizens during the era of segregationist Jim Crow laws was somewhat hypocritical. The United States had no basis to criticize another country for racial injustice when it practiced similar discrimination of certain races of people. Nonetheless protests began and Christian groups, such as the American Christians, made public protests against Nazi anti-Semitic acts with the support of influential public figures such as Alfred E. Smith, Newton D. Baker, and John W. Davis.<sup>6</sup> Slowly information about Nazi anti-Semitic acts began to filter into the United States. The State Department after hearing of these allegations asked the American Embassy in Berlin to investigate these accusations. The embassy liaison reported that there was good indication that the Nazis were hiding something.<sup>7</sup> When the Germans were questioned on this issue of Jewish mistreatment, the Nazis claimed this anti-Semitic rhetoric and attacks were isolated incidents and they were in process of being stopped. This was very early in Hitler's regime and the true magnitude of his hatred of Jews was not yet identified. Ranking United States government individuals probably knew that Hitler inherently disliked Jews because of his biography *Mein Kampf*, but there was no precedent of Jewish genocide to use as a guide to future events.

Throughout 1933 reports of Jewish mistreatment at the hands of the Nazis kept surfacing. H.R. Knickerbocker, who was the *New York Evening Post* correspondent in Berlin, reported in April 1933 that an undetermined number of Jews had been killed, or fled, or been deprived of their livelihood in the Reich.<sup>8</sup> In this *Newsweek* article Mr. Knickerbocker made two interesting observations. The first was that he did not understand why the Nazis had such hatred for the Jews, and secondly he concluded that the Germans were envious of Jewish accomplishments in Germany. These two

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<sup>5</sup> *Newsweek*, "Protests: Nazi Anti-Semite Atrocities Denounced Here," 1 April 1933, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Newsweek*, "Atrocities Denounced," 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Newsweek*, "Atrocities," 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Newsweek*, "Anti-Semitism Continues Home Policy of the Nazis," 15 April 1933, 13.



conclusions would prove to be very astute in the years that followed, yet few people in the United States seemed to understand what was happening to the Jews in Germany. From the everyday citizen to the higher powers in the government this hatred was not fully understood until it was too late. The Nazis under Hitler's leadership ignited the hidden anti-Jewish attitudes of gentiles in Germany. Hitler was a master orator and he convinced the German citizens that the Jews were the reason that Germany lost World War I and fell into economic despair in the 1920s.

As both protests and information increased throughout 1933, the magazine, *The Christian Century*, began to publish articles on German Jews. *The Christian Century*, a non-denominational publication, was the first Christian magazine to explore what was occurring in Germany. On May 15, 1933, *The Christian Century* reported that two dozen of the best known ministers in the United States united in a protest against Nazi treatment of Jews. It was the first major protest of any Christian group against the Nazis. With Christian group involvement the religious organizations in the United States began to take the Jewish question more seriously. Another sign that the undertakings in Germany were becoming serious surfaced when the National Conference of Jews and Christians released a joint statement condemning Jewish mistreatment.<sup>9</sup> Although organized Christian groups spoke out and protested against Nazi mistreatment there was never really anything done. There was no protest or movement to liberalize the restrictive immigration policies that were in place in the United States. The reoccurring theme was protest from afar without doing anything to help relocate the German Jews into the United States of another country.

In May of 1933 the League of Nations reacted to a petition developed by Franz Bernheim.<sup>10</sup> Bernheim, a German-Jewish refugee from Upper Silesia, appealed to the league that Hitler's anti-Jewish laws and administrative acts violated the Polish-German convention of 1922. The Polish-German convention of 1922 protected the rights of minorities in this region. Bernheim was concerned because the Nazis were not in accord with the rules set by the convention. For Bernheim even to appeal to the League

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<sup>9</sup> *The Christian Century*, "Hitler's Policy Rouses Protest: "Cold Pogrom" Against German Jews Threatens World Will Return to Medievalism, Say Ministers," 24 (May 1933): 702.

<sup>10</sup> *Newsweek*, "Germany: Chancellor Hitler's Anti-Semitic Laws Explosive Item on League Council Agenda," 27 May 1933, 16.

indicated that the situation was deteriorating rapidly. He was a refugee from this area and had first hand knowledge of the situation. The leaders of the American Jewish Congress were so disturbed by these statements that they held emergency meetings that included sympathetic congressmen and protested Nazi anti-Semitic acts.<sup>11</sup> They petitioned the Roosevelt Administration to condemn these actions, but nothing came of these efforts. Ignoring these protests seemed to be the policy that the government would follow. It was a time when the United States could have intervened, but the restrictionists in Congress were too strong for a significant action to be taken against the Nazis. To condemn the United States government for inaction at this point is not completely fair. The Depression had the United States economically strained and government focus was domestic. Anyway in 1933 no one could have predicted the atrocities that followed.

The debate over the treatment of Jews in Germany began to surface in prominent American papers by July of 1933. Rabbi Stephen Wise and many of his colleagues began to get the attention of the *New York Times*. Rabbi Wise was one of the most outspoken opponents of Jewish mistreatment throughout the duration of Nazi rule in Germany. Rabbi Wise declared that there would be “No Jewish Nazis”.<sup>12</sup> By this Rabbi Wise meant that German Jews should not try to assimilate into Nazi society because they would not be allowed to. With Rabbi Wise leading the protest 142 college and university presidents along with 77 of the United States’ top social scientists drafted a formal protest about anti-Jewish policies and sent it to educators in Germany.<sup>13</sup> This was an early sign that Jewish leaders and American educators were concerned with the Jewish situation, but not the nation as a whole. Economic hardships had a dampening effect on the public’s view of the Jewish situation. Many Americans were worried about having sufficient amounts of food, not with foreign affairs. The American public had a good reason for ignoring this situation this early on, but not the government. The Roosevelt Administration had access to all of this information and for all practical purposes ignored the situation. Rabbi Wise was a strong supporter of Roosevelt, and Roosevelt could have gone to him at anytime to find out exactly what had transpired in Germany. In

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<sup>11</sup> *Newsweek*, “Germany: Chancellor Hitler’s Anti-Semitic Laws Explosive Item on League Council Agenda,” 16.

<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times*, “No Jewish Nazis’ Rabbi Wise Says,” 3 July 1933, 22.

<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times*, “142 College Heads Appeal For Jews,” 3 July 1933, 42.

Roosevelt's defense it was difficult for him or State Department officials to do anything at the beginning of Nazi rule. German Jews could not be forced to leave Germany. Most German Jews stayed in 1933 because there was no historical precedent for the systematic murder of their people.

Although there was an obvious lack of interest from government officials, one person did speak out about the atrocities. James G. MacDonald, who was the chairman of the Foreign Policy Association of New York, condemned what he witnessed in Germany. Mr. MacDonald denounced the statement that Jews were not being mistreated as an insult to one's intelligence.<sup>14</sup> MacDonald had seen the persecution first hand in 1933 and he realized early that the problem in Germany was only going to get worse. MacDonald criticized the American people and American Jews for their indifference and lack of interest in the subject. He was openly critical of Jewish leaders and publicly asked how intellectual Jews could possibly conclude that the worst of the Nazi treatment was over.<sup>15</sup> In 1935 he was so distraught by the Nuremberg Laws that he wrote the Joint Distribution Committee lambasting Jewish leadership and called for all Jews to help their brethren in Europe. MacDonald was worried about the rivalry between Jewish leaders in America and their opposition to the Zionist would cause serious conflict in the Jewish communities. This problem would only worsen as the refugee issue became more prevalent. MacDonald understood early on that without Jewish unity in the United States the rest of the American population would not support their cause. He even stated that the most difficult part of any rescue effort was to get Jewish groups to cooperate with each other.

In July of 1933 a sign of future trouble surfaced when the Nazis, under the guidance of Colonel Ernst Roehm, dedicated a memorial tablet in honor of two Germans who assassinated German Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau in 1922.<sup>16</sup> This was a significant act because Rathenau was Jewish and Hitler's chief of staff made the presentation. The Nazis were making heroes out of individuals who murdered Jews. One might argue that the American South did the same thing with people such as Nathan Bedford Forrest. This argument had validity but neither F.D.R. nor the federal government ever erected these

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<sup>14</sup> *The New York Times*, "Cruelty of Nazis to Jews Asserted," 11 July 1933, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> *St. Louis Dispatch*, "Nazi Memorial To Assassins of Jewish Statesman," 18 July 1933, 22.

types of statues or memorials. Only the individual state officials did this. That is the difference that needs to be understood. The German state under Nazi control condoned these types of anti-Semitic acts.

In July of 1933 200 Jewish businessmen and shopkeepers were paraded through the streets of Nuremburg under arrest.<sup>17</sup> This was another blatant act of anti-Semitism by the Nazis. If these businessmen had not been Jewish, then they would not have been singled out by the Nazis. There was no response by the U.S. government officials and little exposure in the papers. In reality, the U.S. would have looked hypocritical because of their own segregation policies if they had protested. The Nazis would have ignored these protests anyway because the U.S. was not in position to impose any form of sanctions against them. The U.S. was in an economic quagmire and had no leverage to protest against the Nazis. The *St. Louis Dispatch* was the only major publication that reported this, but it was not a headline article by any standards. It seemed that just reporting this information was enough for everyone. There were no cries of outrage in America, only the common practice of the time, restrictionism. German Jewish leadership is not exempt from blame either. They chose to try and appease the Nazis and make concessions that they thought would keep the Nazis content. The religious community was a viable entity in 1933 and they could have appealed to the world or protestant German leaders, but they chose not to.

One influential publication carrying information about the persecution of Jews was *The Christian Century*. In August of 1933 the journal was extremely critical of the lack of interest and attention that the United States had given to the situation in Germany.<sup>18</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr was critical of the United States non-involvement and his outspoken rhetoric in *The Christian Century* was needed to make the public more aware of what was occurring in Germany. Several other publications began to address this issue and slowly many Americans began to discover that a problem existed. There was no acknowledgment by the president or the State Department after these publications.

By December of 1933 there were signs that some changes were about to take place in the State Department regarding the immigration issue. The first was when officials

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<sup>17</sup> *St. Louis Dispatch*, "200 Jews Seized by Nazis, Paraded Through Streets," 21 July 1933, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Germany Must Be Told!" *The Christian Century* (August 1933). 1014-1015.

urged special quotas for special groups of refugees.<sup>19</sup> The problem with special quotas was that they would solve the temporary problem of immigration but not the long-term problem of immigration. Special quotas were deemed necessary but lawmakers did not want permanent changes to immigration laws. Jewish leaders did not advocate the implementation of these laws either. The leaders of the American Jewish community were in constant fear of an anti-Semitic backlash. Attorney-General Homer S. Cummings ruled that consulates were obliged to give visas when the Secretary of Labor had accepted a bond from a responsible person in the United States. The United States fixed immigration quotas at 153, 774 in 1933. There were 23,068 new arrivals in 1934 and only 1,798 were Germans.<sup>20</sup> By 1935 the number of German immigrants rose to 5,117 and only about one-third were Jewish. This was a fairly significant jump in numbers for a three-year period for German immigration not German-Jewish immigration. The new policy that was implemented by Attorney General Cummings did not significantly change immigration of German Jews. After 1933 immigration quotas can be directly linked to anti-Semitism because the system favored northern and western Europeans and the National Origins Act of 1924 was heavily influenced by the threat of Communism and that was associated with Polish Jewry.<sup>21</sup>

By 1935 the treatment of Jews in Germany worsened. The Nazis implemented the Nuremberg Laws that severely restricted all facets of Jewish life in Germany.<sup>22</sup> The first stage of the Nuremberg Laws was to deprive German Jews of all their rights and the second stage was to remove them altogether. This did not go unnoticed by Jewish organizations in the United States. According to the *New York Times*, Rabbi Steven Wise began to protest the lack of State Department involvement in the situation. Rabbi Wise appeared before the House Investigation Committee to protest the lack of action taken by the individuals in American Government and the fact that the government officials had only made small protests and not taken any kind of action against the Nazis. Rabbi Wise definitely informed important State Department officials of the atrocities in Germany, but

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<sup>19</sup> American Jewish Historical Society, "American Jewry, Refugees, and Immigration Restriction," 222.

<sup>20</sup> Morse, *While Six Million Died*, 130.

<sup>21</sup> Henry L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995) 61.

<sup>22</sup> Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against The Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1975) 69.

again these protests fell on deaf ears. By 1935 Jewish organization in the United States was beginning to recognize that attempts to increase immigration would antagonize groups like the Coughlinites, the Silver Shirts, and the German-American Bund.<sup>23</sup> During 1935 David MacCormack, who was the Commissioner-General of Immigration, made a statement that could now be considered a summation of State Department opinions on European immigration during the depression. He stated that one of the best ways to promote racial and religious antagonisms was to advocate increased immigration during a period of depression and unemployment. This statement fairly well sums up what was on the minds of many Americans during the depression.

In a 1936 editorial in the *B'nai B'rith Magazine* (Sons of the Covenant) American Jewish leaders pleaded for Jews not to provide justification for anti-Semitism in the United States. By making the plea American Jews were implying that they were bringing anti-Semitism upon themselves. Many American Jews concluded that increased immigration was the main reason for increased anti-Semitism. One could surmise that many American Jews did not want Jewish immigrants to bring unwanted attention to them. A majority of American Jews in essence did nothing to help European Jews immigrate to this country as of 1936. Although Rabbi Wise and the American Jewish Congress protested, the majority of American Jews did not want to give nativists and restrictionists any reason to target all Jews. If Jews were not going to help each other, why would they think anyone else would help? American Jewry should receive considerable blame for a lack of interest in European Jews.

The American Protestant press also deserves partial blame in the lack of interest that the American people had on the Jewish situation in Germany. In 1936 32 periodicals were examined and 68 times church struggles were discussed and 49 times Jewish persecution was discussed.<sup>24</sup> Just one year later in 1937 33 periodicals were examined with 91 references to church struggles and only 29 of these were related to Jewish persecution. In one year's time discussion on the Jewish persecution dropped almost by half in protestant periodicals in the United States. That is a significant drop in attention in a very short time. Also in 1936 44 articles, book reviews, and letters to the editor

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<sup>23</sup> Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* , 236.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Ross, *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of Jews* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) 83-84.

pertained to the Jewish dilemma but by 1937 there were only five items related to this topic.<sup>25</sup> Again, this reinforces the fact that the American Protestant press had almost no interest in German Jews after 1937. It can be concluded that from 1936 through 1938 anti-Semitism was rampant in the Protestant press. The *Citizen Times*, in Asheville, North Carolina, which was owned by William Dudley Pelley, *The Advance*, *The Christendom*, *The Churchman*, and *The Lutheran* were all Protestant publications that did not hide their contempt for Jews. These publications in conjunction with Father Coughlin and American Jewish leaders unwillingness to speak out against the Nazis helped lead to apathy among the American public.

By the end of 1937 the refugee dilemma had begun to stabilize somewhat and the United States had the feeling that this situation was beginning to solve itself. This was all about to change soon. In March of 1938 the Austrian *Anschluss* (annexation) and the further Jewish exclusion in Germany sent a flood of refugees out of these countries. With the Austrian *Anschluss* President Roosevelt decided to call for an international conference at the end of March to discuss this crisis. This was the Evian Conference and the timing of this conference confounded many members of Congress because the unemployment rate had reached a new low during the New Deal and the restrictionists in Congress were wielding immense power at this time.<sup>26</sup> This international conference offered Roosevelt very few advantages. The restrictionists were not going to allow any new immigration laws to be passed. At the time it was inconceivable that an attempt to modify immigration laws to draw a distinction between refugees and immigrants was a possibility.<sup>27</sup> This argument about making a difference between refugees and immigrants raged throughout the 1930's. Since quotas on immigration were being filled, it was when pro-immigration groups wanted refugees to be excluded from the quotas that the heated debates began. It was also believed that when Roosevelt found out what had been done to Jews in Austria he wanted to reestablish America as a place of refuge for the oppressed.

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<sup>25</sup> Ross, *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Persecution of Jews*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Feingold, Henry L. , *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1970) 22.

<sup>27</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 22.

During the conference Roosevelt was greatly influenced by two people. Dorothy Thompson, who was prominent in keeping the American public informed on the refugee situation and Rabbi Stephen Wise for whom Roosevelt had an enormous amount of respect and affection. These two people are probably the reason that Roosevelt called for the Evian Conference at a time when Americans were only interested in events at home. Others at the time viewed this as a subtle way for Roosevelt to inform the American public of the growing menace of the Nazis. What Roosevelt's true intentions were are unclear. This was possibly his way of finally getting involved without directly taking a stand on the issue. This conference made many Jewish leaders happy and Roosevelt received much praise for this action, but all inquiries on refugees were sent through the State Department. This would prove to be a difficult department to move toward their point of view.

Around the same time as the Evian Conference two congressmen, Emanuel Celler and Samuel Dickstein, tried to implement bills to allow for more refugees to enter the United States.<sup>28</sup> Samuel Dickstein wanted to increase the immigration quota by admitting refugees under unused quotas that amounted to about 120,000. His bill would not have affected immigration because these were unused quotas that could have been specified for refugees. Dickstein ran into opposition from public opinion in southern and western states. A *Fortune Magazine* survey on this subject disclosed that 83 percent of Americans opposed increasing immigration quotas.<sup>29</sup> The public opinion poll gave a strong indication that the American public had no interest in expanding quotas no matter what the circumstances were. The most puzzling part of the attitudes expressed in the poll was the lack of protest by prominent Jewish groups. The *B'nai B'rith Magazine* did not even mention the new immigration bills in editorials in 1938 like it did in 1935 when other legislation was proposed. The situation in Germany and Austria was worse in 1938 than 1935, so editorials should have been more numerous in 1938. It appeared that even the majority of American Jews were not interested in any kind of increased immigration. The *B'nai B'rith Magazine* periodically ran editorials entitled "the Old America" that often mentioned that the United States' doors were open to anyone that wanted to enter,

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<sup>28</sup> American Jewish Historical Society, "American Jewry, Refugees, and Immigration Restriction" , 227.

<sup>29</sup> American Jewish Historical Society, "American Jewry, Refugees, and Immigration Restriction" , 228.



but after 1938 these subtle editorial criticisms stopped. This seemed the typical response of influential Jewish magazines by the late 1930s.

In 1938 another set back incurred on the increasing of refugee immigration. The Roosevelt Administration chose to combine the German and Austrian quotas together. In essence when the Germans gained control of Austria the latter's quota was eliminated. An extra 190,000 Jews became refugees and the State Department did not increase the quotas to meet this demand.<sup>30</sup> Clearly the Roosevelt Administration was trying to navigate its way through two forces at minimal political risk to them. The restrictionists were strong because of the Depression and many Jewish communities were immensely loyal to Roosevelt and his administration. Roosevelt placed the dilemma of the refugee-immigration problem in the hands of the State Department and placed pressure directly on Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. It was definitely a political move on Roosevelt's part. Anytime there was negative public reaction to any immigration policy the State Department and Hull absorbed the brunt of the criticism. Which allowed Roosevelt to maintain his support from American Jews and appear to the public as a sympathizer to the refugee problem. In reality Roosevelt showed only a passing interest in the subject but his constituents still viewed him as Jewish sympathizer. Allowing the State Department to be in charge of the refugee crisis was an excellent political move but the move did nothing to help European Jews. In fact, during 1938 and 1939 restrictionists flooded the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization with anti-refugee proposals.<sup>31</sup> The House Appropriation Subcommittee refused to fund the policy that allowed refugees on visitor's visas to establish residency in Canada, which in turn would qualify them for regular visas in the United States. These restrictions placed an enormous amount of obstacles in front of the refugees and Congress was at the center of it.

The opposition in Congress was not limited to just a few congressmen, but rather it encompassed Congress as a whole. Representatives from several states warned of becoming immersed in European affairs, while one representative made the statement that every disgruntled element that applied for admission in this country claimed that they

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<sup>30</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 17.

were being oppressed, in their country.<sup>32</sup> This statement could be interpreted as implying that German Jews were claiming to be oppressed because they were not satisfied with the Nazis. Patriotic groups and veterans groups along with public opinion appeared to be hostile towards aiding refugees. The *Fortune Magazine* poll, taken in the summer of 1938, showed that 67 percent of the people did not want to give any aid to refugees.<sup>33</sup> This was well over a majority percentage of the American people polled. These attitudes factor back to the economic problems in the U.S. and the influence of the restrictionists in Congress.

1938 was a crucial year in regards to the refugee issue. Anti-Semitism was at a decade high in 1938 and Evian did absolutely nothing to solve the immigration issue. American Jewish leaders concluded that American Jews needed to be more patriotic than before and this caused the leaders to become more passive in their denunciation of the Nazis. Jewish leaders did form the General Jewish Council comprised of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith, and the Jewish Labor Committee to control the amount of protest that was printed about *Kristallnacht*—the night of broken glass.<sup>34</sup> In 1938 Jewish leaders made it a priority to not bring any attention to the refugee plight. The influence and power of the restrictionists in Congress was widespread even though American Jews chaired the three major committees on immigration and rescue in 1938. Representative Sol Bloom chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Samuel Dickstein chaired the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and Representative Emmanuel Celler chaired the House Judiciary Committee.<sup>35</sup> Although, these three men had considerable influence within these committees they could not get any significant refugee legislation passed or change the National Origins Act of 1924.

In 1939 the debate over the refugee crisis began to heighten. On *Krisallnacht*, or the night of broken glass, the Nazis had unleashed in November of 1938 an unmatched night

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<sup>32</sup> Robert A. Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) 96.

<sup>33</sup> Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952*, 96. The poll did not give the number of actual Americans that were polled.

<sup>34</sup> Haskel Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers? The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust 1938-1944* (New York: Hartmore House, 1985) 57.

<sup>35</sup> Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers? The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust 1938-1944*, 30.

of terror on German Jews and the Nazi invasion of Poland in September of 1939 shocked the people of the United States. Journalists from leading periodicals such as the *Nation* and the *New Republic* wrote editorials protesting the United States' strict immigration laws and accused the restrictionists of anti-Semitism, with one writer stating, "Slamming shut the gates of immigration is admitting that American democracy has failed in the past and no longer exists today." The restrictionists fought back with grave vengeance.

Henry Pratt Fairchild warned that the admission of large numbers of Jews would cause American anti-Semitism to "burst out into violent eruption." Representative Will Taylor of Tennessee argued that the New Deal showed more concern for European refugees than for the 10 million American refugees that walked our city streets in desperation. Public opinion at this time was again on the restrictionist's side when a *Fortune* survey in April showed that 83 percent of the American people were against raising immigration quotas. It was obvious to most Americans that by the end of the 1930s the New Deal had not solved the problem of unemployment as compared to Nazi Germany that had very low unemployment and a massive military build-up. Generally, the American people were not convinced that these immigrants would have little or no effect on the economy and they would not take jobs away. This is indicative that the Roosevelt administration did not want an influx of European Jews in this country.

Throughout 1939 more and more congressmen began proposing bills that would end or significantly reduce the immigration quotas. The most serious proposal against immigration was a cluster of five measures presented to the Senate by Robert Reynolds of North Carolina. The bill would have reduced quotas by 90 percent and halted permanent immigration for ten years or until unemployment in the United States fell below three million. The most interesting point about this proposal was that the Subcommittee on Immigration held three days of discussions on the bill.<sup>36</sup> In retrospect, it is difficult to comprehend that a proposal that would have virtually ended all immigration would even be considered. Senator Reynolds and the restrictionists wielded their influence when it came to issues of immigration. James L. Houghteling, who was Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, attended all meetings of the

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<sup>36</sup> Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers? The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust 1938-1944*, 70.

Immigration Committees in Congress in 1939 and reported to President Roosevelt that most of Congress leaned toward reducing existing immigration quotas. This reiterates the point that there were not a few congressmen that felt this way but a strong majority. Father Coughlin questioned this in the *Social Justice* and other journals such as the *Commonweal* and the *Christian Century* were irritated and openly opposed to any increase in immigration quotas. Non-Jewish groups were outspoken and adamant about not increasing the quotas. These groups were the majority in the United States and had a much stronger following than Jewish organizations did.

The introduction of the Wagner-Rogers Bill was the only proposal during this time that seriously attempted to liberalize the National Origins Act of 1924.<sup>37</sup> This bill was proposed to help emigrate 20,000 German refugee children under the age of fourteen. Even this bill met strong opposition in the United States. A Gallup Poll conducted in 1939 on the subject determined that 66% of the American people polled opposed the admission of the children.<sup>38</sup> The restrictionists argued that America should take care of America's children first and let Europe take care of European children. Only 45 Senators were willing to reveal their feelings on the issue and 21 voted in favor while 24 voted against the bill.<sup>39</sup> Most of the opposition came from the South. Less than 15 percent of southern congressmen in the upper house favored the bill. In the Far West and the Northeast about 25 percent supported the proposal and in the Midwest a strong percent of Senators supported the bill.<sup>40</sup> The support of the Midwest was surprising because isolationism and nativism was strongly supported in this region. Twenty-five percent of Democrats and less than 10 percent of Republicans in Congress supported this bill. This shows the strength of restrictionists, nativists, and anti-Semites in Congress at this time. This was a bill to help children under the age of fourteen and it still could not get any support. Again, there was no reaction from the Roosevelt Administration.

The British did nothing to help the refugee situation in 1939 when they passed the White Paper Order in May 1939. This order basically closed Palestine to immigration and left the United States out of options for relocation. Palestine was the biblical

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<sup>37</sup> Morse, *While Six Million Died*, 253.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) 232.

<sup>39</sup> Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924-1952*, 83.

homeland of the Jews and a desired place for relocation. The Germans and Poles were willing to allow Jews to immigrate in 1939 but there was just no place for them to go. The Great Depression and the anti-alien fear in Congress basically closed the door for any significant immigration to occur. The ordeal of the ocean liner, the *St. Louis*, in 1939 was an excellent example of American fear and indifference. The United States government refused to allow the German Jews on board to enter the country and sent them back to Germany. This was significant because the numbers were not that large and it showed the determination the American government had to keep refugees out of the country.

## CHAPTER 3

### IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND PUBLIC OPINION FROM 1940-1945

With the outbreak of war in Europe the restrictionists developed a new policy to support the need to deter immigration. The argument by congressmen and others that the admission of refugees would endanger national security began to gain credence when the restrictionists argued that the Nazis tried to use refugees to strengthen their economy. In addition the Nazis planted espionage agents in with refugees.<sup>1</sup> The argument was one that resonated with the American people. The American public was terrified that the Nazis disguised spies as refugees to infiltrate the United States and the advocates of refugee rescue suffered a tremendous setback because they did not want to jeopardize their credentials as loyal Americans by advocating the immigration of refugees regardless of the security risks.

President Roosevelt did nothing to dissuade the American public of this supposed threat. In one of his fireside chats of May, 1940 he stated that weapons were not our only threat. He saw traitors, saboteurs, and spies also as a threat to national security.<sup>2</sup> F.D.R.'s remarks were exactly what the restrictionists wanted to hear and Roosevelt had obliged. In his chat, Roosevelt also referred to the Trojan horse and the fifth column as new methods of attack against the United States.<sup>3</sup> His Trojan horse analogy reinforced the rhetoric of the Dies Committee, Leland Stowe, an anti-refugee columnist for the Washington based publication the *Evening Star*, also used this analogy. Many people listened. Restrictionists quickly discovered that the security issue could be played for political gain.

The biggest reason that the concept of refugee espionage gained strength within in the United States was the relative inexperience of the intelligence service personnel in the State Department. The State Department intelligence agency went as far as to claim they had sufficient evidence of fifth column activity that proved the German Jewish Children's Aid and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HICEM), which was the oldest and most

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<sup>1</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 128.

respected American Jewish rescue agency, was in actuality an espionage agency.<sup>4</sup> This statement alone was ludicrous enough for the general public, but to have people within the State Department believe this was inconceivable. Common sense should have told these officials that American Jews were not going to spy for a country that had persecuted Jews. The comments department staff was an early indication of the hysteria that would unfold in the next few years. William C. Bullitt, former ambassador to France, stated in a speech in 1940 that more than one half of the spies captured who were doing military spy work against the French were German refugees. Bullitt had no evidence or basis for these accusations. *The Nation* published a letter from Heinz Pol, a refugee journalist familiar with the French scene, that pointed out that not a single refugee was involved in espionage in France. Well-respected magazines did nothing to alleviate American fears that refugees were not a security risk. The restrictionists had such strong backing in the government that they convinced the American people of a conspiracy that did not exist. General anxiety among Americans at this time was on the rise because of the ease in which the Nazis invaded Poland and France. In retrospect it is understandable why the presence of a German fifth column could be so widely accepted within the United States.

Other entries into the refugees as spy's theory were the rumors of the seven Jewish *Abwehr* agents in Latin America and Samuel Lubell's article in the *Saturday Evening Post* that claimed, from State Department records, the Nazis had developed a special school in Prague where Gestapo agents learned to pass themselves as Jews.<sup>5</sup> Although some espionage was attempted in this way, it was not widespread nor was it the preferred way for the Nazis. It was just another way for the restrictionists, nativists, and anti-Semites to use the American public's fears and lack of information to stop immigration.

Throughout 1940, the idea of Nazi espionage through refugees spread throughout the United States. President Roosevelt fueled the suspicion and insecurity of the American people when he gave significant attention to German infiltration of the United States. The American press gave a significant amount of attention to this issue because of Roosevelt's earnest belief that the fifth column posed a serious threat to the United

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<sup>4</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 129.

<sup>5</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 130.

States. In the summer and fall of 1940, the *New York World Telegram*, *Pittsburgh Press*, *New York Post*, and *New York Journal American* were among the papers that ran a series of articles that detailed how the alleged fifth column gained power and functioned on a large scale all across America. American Press evidence concluded that the fifth column infiltrated countries in Europe such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, and France. Their beliefs supported their theory United States was also being infiltrated. These were not radical groups like Father Coughlin or the German-American Bund. On the contrary, these were well-respected newspapermen that had a major audience during the 1940s. Several articles in *America* made attempts to refute and even poke fun at these outrageous allegations. However these attempts fell on deaf ears. The majority of the American people believed what they read in the major publications. As seen in a Roper poll in July of 1940, 71 percent of the respondents concluded that Germany had created an organized fifth column in the United States. Almost three-fourths of the American people polled believed this conclusion, making it a perfect example of the mind-set of the American people in 1940. An article in the November issue of *McCall's* showed in detail how American preoccupation with the fifth column produced a nation of spy hunters, while a Department of Justice spokesman declared the department's most difficult job was to deflate the espionage hysteria.<sup>6</sup> The Attorney General's office prepared a report that stated the American press was more concerned with the fifth column than the war. This showed the extent of the hysteria about the fifth column and how preoccupied the American press and for that matter the American people were. The ease in which the Nazis invaded Poland and France has to be considered in any discussion about the press's concern with this alleged threat. F.D.R.'s firm belief in the German fifth column did little to curtail the fascination the American press had with it.

During 1940 anti-Semitism spread throughout the United States. Although most Americans disagreed with Fascism and Nazism they were more receptive to anti-Semitism. The American Institute of Public Opinion found that Father Charles Coughlin and his radio show had amassed a large listening audience in which he attacked Jews on a regular basis.<sup>7</sup> Father Coughlin had an estimated listening audience of about 15 million

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<sup>6</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 127.



with a regular audience of three and half million. Sixty-seven percent of his regular listeners approved of his violent anti-Semitic message while 51 percent of his occasional listeners approved.<sup>8</sup> The size of Coughlin's audience and the fact that one-half to two-thirds of his listeners agreed with him demonstrated that anti-Semitism grew from specific groups to a broader portion of the population. The preaching of Nazis on one side and Coughlinites and the German-American Bund members on the other had convinced many Americans that their antipathy toward Jews and immigrants was justified. In surveys taken from 1940 to 1946 Jews were seen as a greater menace to the welfare of the United States than any other national, religious, or racial group. The American people held this opinion during the war years with the Nazis and Japanese. It would have seemed more plausible that the Germans and Japanese were a greater threat to the United States than anyone else. Jewish refugees were not seen as a humanitarian concern for the American people, but rather as a threat.

Several voices of reason spoke out against the accusations that refugees served as spies. The editors of *The Nation* and *The New Republic* were part of the liberal press that wanted the State Department to prove some of the accusations leveled against refugees. When the editors of *The Nation* challenged the State Department to prove a single instance of coerced espionage with Jewish refugees, the State Department produced no sufficient evidence to support this claim. A writer for *The New Republic* claimed that prominent Nazis found few obstacles when they applied for admission into this country while it was almost impossible for political refugees to receive admission. The journal *PM* blamed Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long for this policy. Long was an important figure in the refugee question and his policies will be discussed later on in further detail. These were some of the few organizations, journals, or magazines to speak out against the refugees as a spy theory. Since no evidence was brought forth to prove this theory, these groups were on the right track. However, the press, radio, newsreels, movies, books, churches, and patriotic groups generated the fears of the fifth columnists. Every form of mass communication in the United States supported the theory of the refugee as a spy.

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<sup>8</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 127.

Up until 1940 Roosevelt was able to publicly keep out of the refugee issue. However, this changed with the fifth column claim and the paranoia that went with it. In May of 1940, President Roosevelt transferred the Immigration and Naturalization Service from the Labor Department to the Justice Department because he felt the Justice Department could control the refugee situation more effectively.<sup>9</sup> At a press conference Roosevelt explained the move as necessary for national defense and to curtail sabotage and spying. When the President concluded that this was a serious threat, so did the American public. Congress did its part to help the President when it passed the Alienation Act of 1940. The new law became commonly known as the Smith Act and it dealt with three issues. These included the outlawing of certain submissive activities; the disloyalty of the military forces and advocacy to overthrow the government by using force; and affiliation with a group that advocated the forcible overthrow of the government. This law expanded the grounds for deportation and required all aliens in the United States fourteen and older to be fingerprinted and to register. The passing of this law, viewed as an immense victory for the restrictionists, was the direct result of President Roosevelt's fears of the fifth column. A Roper Poll in the July issue of *Fortune* solidified the restrictionist claim when it reported that 71 percent of its respondents believed that a German fifth-column existed. When President Roosevelt advocated passage of legislation that potentially restricted immigration, he became publicly involved.

By late 1941 and early 1942, the news of massive numbers of Jews being massacred in Poland leaked out to the United States. Because no one in the State Department wanted to accept this information or for that matter was concerned with it, it was investigated with caution. The main figure in the Roosevelt Administration in regard to immigration was Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long a longtime friend of Roosevelt's who had served in the Roosevelt Administration since the New Deal.<sup>10</sup> This friendship with Roosevelt allowed Long to influence the President on immigration policies and the implementation of stricter quotas on refugees. With the outbreak of World War II, State Department officials created a special War Problems Division with

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<sup>9</sup> Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941*, 187.

<sup>10</sup> Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust*, 81.

Long at the head of this department.<sup>11</sup> The crucial point of Long's appointment was that the new division that he was in charge of included the State Department's visa section. This meant that Long was in the position to make critical decisions in regard to refugees. By 1943 he supervised 23 of the 42 divisions within the State Department related to immigration. This was an immense amount of power for a man who had a questionable opinion of Jews.

Breckinridge Long was a restrictionist from the 1930s, and he viewed immigrants as a menace. Initially, he admired Hitler and Mussolini before the United States became involved in the war. Long even went as far as to say that the *Anschluss* (Austrian annexation) of 1938 was acceptable because the Germans were the only people with the intelligence and courage to bring peace between the Rhine and Black Sea. In retrospect this was an ominous signal to Jewish groups that Roosevelt and Long did not have a favorable opinion of Jews and had no interest in any significant attempts of rescue. This indifference proved fatal to refugee immigration during World War II.

With difficulty historians have tried to decide Long's exact opinion of Jews. Long was intelligent enough not to criticize Jews openly. His diary was introspective but never really gave his definitive opinion on the subject. He was a typical bureaucrat of the times resenting the intrusion of Jews into the upper echelons of public service during the New Deal.<sup>12</sup> Long never referred to Jews directly; he would use terms such as "New York liberals" and he longed for the Wilson Administration that catered to wealthy America. Long played the idea of refugees as security risks to the fullest. By 1941 he had convinced the President that anyone with a relative under Nazi control was a security risk. Long was a key component in building the "paper wall" that David Wyman used as a metaphor to describe the State Department's policy toward refugees. Another reason, and probably the most important, was that Long held the assumption that communism was linked to Jewish internationalism.<sup>13</sup> Long distained the change of the status quo in Washington politics and communism helped form his opinion of Jews. His inherent misunderstanding of Jews fed on his fears of a communist takeover and formed his policy

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<sup>11</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Friedlander, Sybil Milton, eds., *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide* (Millwood: N.Y.: Kraus International Press, 1980), 248.

<sup>13</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 135.

on immigration that was consistent with the rest of America public opinion during the 1930s and 1940s.

In July of 1941 the State Department again received negative attention when the accusation of anti-Semitism within the Foreign Service was publicly questioned. This was the division that Long was directly involved in. After Alfred Wagg was forced to resign under mysterious circumstances for his involvement with the Dominican Republic Settlement Association, he began a series of articles in the *New Republic* that claimed anti-Semitism was widespread within the department. Long and Secretary of State Cordell Hull prepared an acceptable explanation for Roosevelt which also convinced the American public that the State Department had worked diligently at attempts to emigrate refugees into the United States. Roosevelt, worried about his own political status did not want to alienate Congress. With unresolved diplomatic problems with both Germany and Japan he accepted the State Department's conclusion and never really worried if its reports were accurate. Only liberal publications such as the *New Republic* and *The Nation* questioned State Department accounts. There were no public statements by the prominent Jewish groups, and even Rabbi Stephen Wise was uncharacteristically silent on the issue.

During 1941 Breckinridge Long gained absolute authority over refugee immigration policies. His first order of business was to stop funding the Presidential Advisory Committee on Political Refugees (PACPR) because it was in opposition to his restrictive immigration policies.<sup>14</sup> Long claimed that the committee members' opposition to his policies on immigration was an oversight. He then pressured the head of the PACPR, James MacDonald, and Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife, to correct his mistake. When he pressed for consuls in occupied countries to decide whether visas were accepted or rejected, it all but guaranteed that the visas would not be accepted. Long knew that consuls in occupied countries were subject to removal by him, and then no one would be able to decide a refugee's fate in those countries without his approval. The policies that he developed were so restrictive that in September 1941 of 985 applications received, only 121 were accepted.<sup>15</sup> By October 1941 of 9,500 visas applied for and only 4,800

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<sup>14</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 160.

<sup>15</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 162.

were cleared. This was an improvement but Long deliberately kept the process slow and also kept State Department officials at odds with the Justice Department officials. Attorney General Biddle was the only significant opposition to Long at this time. Long compromised so that President Roosevelt could appoint two outside members to review visa cases, but Long could reverse any decision that he deemed pertinent. This basically did nothing to curtail Long's power because he could view all cases as pertinent and deny any visa that he wanted to. Breckinridge Long escaped his most serious threat to absolute control of the refugee issue.

Long implemented his plans on how to keep immigration quotas low and refugee entry into the United States at a minimum throughout 1941. Most historians agreed this was the last year that the United States or any other interested country had a legitimate chance to rescue any significant number of European Jews. Long effectively stopped most efforts when he tightened immigration policies. Again, Roosevelt's indifference to the situation proved costly. He could have removed Long but he chose not to, basically ignoring the problem. Because the United States had not yet entered the war, a rescue plan was still a viable option. Because Roosevelt allowed Long to be his henchman, for the lack of a better term, he escaped any kind of political backlash from liberal sympathizers and Jewish groups. No one within the State Department gave Long any type of significant resistance to his policies. Although Attorney General Biddle provided nominal resistance to Long, there was nothing that amounted to any formidable opposition.

The Jewish leaders in the United States are not without blame on this issue. By remaining silent in regards to Long, they basically did not draw any attention to themselves. Again, the question must be asked if American Jews were unwilling to help their European brethren, how could they have expected the State Department to help. When the United States entered into World War II in December, the refugee question had little significance to the Roosevelt Administration.

Almost single-handedly, Breckinridge Long ended refugee immigration into the United States. There was one person in 1941 who reported to the American people what transpired with European Jews in Vichy, France. The reports of Varian Fry, the European Director of the Emergency Rescue Committee, wrenched the soul with

accounts of what happened to European Jews in occupied France.<sup>16</sup> However, neither American nor French Government officials welcomed Fry, and he was often referred to as a nuisance. With little or no support, Fry often used two types of policies to obtain visas for refugees. He tried to convince French officials that the United States government would not be pleased with denial of a refugee release, but if that did not work he resorted to bribery.<sup>17</sup> Fry stated that the French were more interested in the Germans than the Americans because the Germans controlled two-fifths of France. Therefore, bribery was the best way to get refugees released. A common example of the difficulties that Fry encountered was when a German Jew applied for a visa with the American Consul and was denied the visa. He was asked what he would do if someone asked him to do something to aid German or Italian interests and he replied whatever was in the best interest of the United States. The consul stated that the United States wanted no one who would get involved in politics. In reality, whatever these refugee applicants answered was wrong.

In a strange turn of events, when Fry mentioned that the Communists were the strongest and most organized group in Vichy France, the State Department was given the public support to end all immigration from France based on the fear that a refugee was a Communist. Fry inadvertently hindered immigration when he wanted to increase it. Fry was even more disillusioned with the Roosevelt Administration when he claimed its decision was immoral. He stated that he felt abandoned by the United States when there were thousands of refugees who needed help. The standard response from the State Department after the outbreak of war was to place the refugee issue even further back on the shelf. By the end of 1941 in the United States, there was the possibility of taking 212,000 refugees but only 150,000 or so were able to immigrate.<sup>18</sup> By not allowing all the allotted immigration places to be filled was an excellent example of the problems rescue advocates faced in bringing refugees into the United States. At the last possible time for the State Department to help refugees and get public opinion in favor of supporting increased immigration only roughly 70 percent of the refugees were brought

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<sup>16</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 165.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy P. Maga, *Holocaust Studies Annual: America and the Holocaust*, vol. 1, Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker, eds. (Greenwood, FL: The Penkeville Publishing Company, 1983), 77.

<sup>18</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 126.

into the U.S. With this, the window of opportunity all but closed for refugees and the Roosevelt Administration missed the best chance to help European Jews. To further emphasize Roosevelt's position of the immigration issue in June of 1941, he signed the Bloom-Van Nuys bills that allowed the American foreign consulates to reject anyone they concluded might be a threat to American society.<sup>19</sup> Roosevelt played his political hand perfectly because he could blame someone else if refugees were not admitted into the United States. He again avoided directly being involved in the refugee issue.

By September 1941 Allied military officials heard reports about Jews being exterminated in large numbers. The British military even received reports as early as October 1941 that mass killings had taken place in the Soviet Union. The British Government's Code and Cypher School deciphered around twenty reports by the Nazi Order Police that stated and described in detail the execution of some 45,000 Jews.<sup>20</sup> This was sound proof and a first hand account of the killings. Because the U.S. had not entered the war at this point, it can be deduced that the British did not share this information with the United States. The British, up to this point, had shown minimal interest in helping refugees. They did not share this information with the United States and the White Paper Order in 1939 had closed relocation to Palestine.

By 1942 the situation for European Jews worsened and concentration camps were transformed into extermination camps. The number of Jews who were deported and killed was so immense that the Nazis were not able to hide the information from intelligence agencies scattered throughout Europe. The Nazis now implemented the "Final Solution". Dr. Henry Shoskes, a prominent Jewish leader who had escaped from Poland, reported to the Office of Strategic Services in Lisbon that an average of 10,000 Jews were killed monthly in the Polish ghettos.<sup>21</sup> This first hand information from an influential Jewish leader did not raise an eyebrow from the United States or other Allied countries. Another impeccable source that reported information similar to Dr. Shoskes was Edgar Salin. Salin, a professor of Economics and Sociology at the University of Basle, uncovered a secret drop used by the Nazis in his garden that contained

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<sup>19</sup> Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry, 1933-1945*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Student Edition* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1985) 313.

<sup>21</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Student Edition*, 313.

information that the Nazis had developed extermination camps in Poland and for European Jews and Russian prisoners of war.<sup>22</sup> Salin reported this information to the BBC and stressed that they pass the information on to Roosevelt and Churchill. When this information was actually reported, it never made front-page headlines. A report from Lisbon's Office of Strategic Services stated that Germans no longer persecuted Jews, but in fact, had started to exterminate them. A British officer who escaped Nazi captivity also presented information on extermination. The officer stated that Hitler wanted the Jews eliminated with more expediency. This was at the time the Nazis implemented the gas chambers to follow through on Hitler's orders. These were two reports from qualified people with first hand knowledge that were ignored by the United States. Neither the State Department nor Roosevelt initiated a response or even any acknowledgement of these reports.

The most important news of Jewish extermination was received in the summer of 1942. Dr. Gerhard Riegner, the head of the Geneva office of the World Jewish Congress, reported that the Nazis planned to exterminate the Jews of Europe at one time.<sup>23</sup> Riegner iterated that the information could not be confirmed, but his informant had connections with the highest Nazi authorities. Even though Riegner could not conclusively confirm Nazi plans, his information came from a reliable source within the Nazi hierarchy. Riegner sent details of the plans to prominent Jewish leaders in the United States and Great Britain. Although, Rabbi Stephen Wise was sent the information, he did not receive it for a couple of months. Whether this was intentional or not is not known. Messages on Jewish issues being delayed within the State Department were standard practice in 1942. When Rabbi Wise finally received this information, he immediately brought it to the attention of Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles. The State Department, following the standard practice of the time, delayed the report pending verification. With the report delayed in the State Department, publications such as *Newsweek*, *The New York Times* and *the Jewish Frontier* ran accounts of the gas chambers in the extermination camps.<sup>24</sup> By now there was no way the Roosevelt

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<sup>22</sup> Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 59.

<sup>23</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Student Edition*, 314.

<sup>24</sup> Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Student Edition*, 314.



Administration could ignore the report or justify the delay imposed by verification. Before action could be taken on these reports, Rabbi Wise had to wait for State Department verification. He was able to report to the *New York Times*, after at least a month had passed, that two million Jews were dead. What was needed for U.S. Government officials to take action on the Jewish situation?

Rabbi Wise was criticized when he remained silent until State Department officials verified the report. This criticism was not completely justified and fair to Wise because there were two political points he had to consider with this situation. The first was that without State Department confirmation, the report was not considered credible. Secondly, Wise needed to avoid a problem with the State Department because they were in charge of rescue and without them European Jews had no chance.<sup>25</sup> David Wyman made the point that Jewish leaders placed immense criticism on Wise that was not warranted. Although, The World Jewish Congress, the British Foreign Office, and many prominent American Jewish leaders knew of the Riegner report, they did nothing to help. Therefore, the blame for the delayed response to the report cannot be placed solely on Rabbi Wise because other organizations could have pursued the issue. Wise was not the only spokesperson for European Jews. It must be remembered too that most of the European Jews were under Nazi control at this point and what could the United States have really done to save them? Unless the Nazis agreed to release the Jews there was nothing at this point that could have been done. Consequently, the time for action was the years before 1942.

Along with the Riegner report in August of 1942, the Jewish Labor Bund smuggled a report out of Poland about Jews being killed. This report was called the “gravediggers report” because three Jewish gravediggers escaped and gave their account to the Jewish Polish underground. The report claimed that 700,000 Jews were killed at Chelmno in Poland. However, we now know that these numbers were grossly exaggerated and this is where credibility can be challenged. Even though the exact figures were overestimated, the fact that any number of Jews were being systematically slaughtered should have raised some form of concern. The only outcome of this report was the American affiliate of the Jewish Labor Bund reported the account in their publication the *Ghetto Speaks* and

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<sup>25</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 54.

so did the *Workmen's Circle Call* and the *Jewish Frontier*. The American mass media and most other Jewish organizations did not mention the “gravediggers report”. Jewish leaders later stated that they did not think these accusations were true because they could not conceive that this type of barbarism could occur in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> This was a fairly common response among many Jewish leaders of the time when mass killings were reported. Most people could not fathom that this was really happening to European Jews. By the autumn of 1942 all major Jewish leaders throughout the world had received information about the extermination camps.<sup>27</sup> The major Jewish leaders were old and promoted their own self-interest. The unwillingness of the Zionist and non-Zionist to formulate a unified rescue plan severely limited their influence with Roosevelt.

Finally, in October of 1942 Myron Taylor, who was Roosevelt’s emissary to the Vatican, reported to F.D.R. that he was convinced that the reported atrocities in France and Poland were true.<sup>28</sup> November of 1942 brought additional setbacks to rescue and immigration of Jews. Jewish sympathizers received another blow in Congress when conservative congressmen gained seats in both houses. This was not good for increased immigration quotas because even liberal Democrats and Republicans never pressed to increase immigration quotas significantly. When the conservatives gained strength, it was guaranteed that immigration would not increase. With the increase in power by the conservatives, Breckinridge Long now had even more support for his immigration policies. His power was shown when Emmanuel Celler, a Democrat from New York, proposed a bill that allowed refugees in France to enter the United States. The proposal went before the House Committee on Immigration but Long used his influence with the committee to stop the bill. Long knew that President Roosevelt was not interested in increased refugee immigration, and he noted in his diary that the word “persons” was the problem because it meant refugees and the President could, but would not throw open the doors.<sup>29</sup> This statement was made by one of the highest-ranking members of the Roosevelt Administration and the person who controlled immigration in the United

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<sup>26</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Seymour Maxwell Finger, *American Jewry During the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1984) , 43.

<sup>28</sup> Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Fred Isreal, *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long: Selections from the Years 1939-1944*

States. President Roosevelt was the only person who had more influence than Long in regard to implementing legislation on the refugee issue.

According to *Newsweek*, anti-Semitism was a definite factor in the strong opposition received when the President requested a suspension of immigration laws during the war. During this time, *Newsweek* was one of the few non-Jewish publications that saw anti-immigration laws as anti-Jewish laws. In retrospect, this writer feels that their observation was justified. Although Breckinridge Long was the person who implemented the barriers for immigration, some of the blame needs to be placed on Roosevelt. President Roosevelt never made a statement on the extermination of European Jews during his twice a week press conferences. Neither was he ever asked any questions concerning the reported mass killings. Blame can be placed on the President, the State Department, the American Press, and American Jewish leaders for the lack of attention the mass killings received.

There were several opinion polls during 1942 about the Jewish situation in Germany. In one poll in the United States in July of 1942 the question was asked, “Why do you think Hitler took away the power of the Jews in Germany?” Twenty percent of the public concluded that Hitler thought the Jews were too powerful, while 18 percent believed that Hitler hated Jews, and 26 percent concluded that Hitler thought that Jews ran the German economy.<sup>30</sup> The reason the percentages were not higher was there were ten different questions asked and the total reached 104 percent. The three questions that received the greatest response among the public were questions on how Americans viewed Jews at this time. Another poll taken in July of 1942 posed the question, “Do you think the Jews have too much power and influence in this country?” Forty-four percent of the American public polled answered yes, while 41 percent answered no, and 15 percent had no comment.<sup>31</sup> Almost half the people polled concluded that American Jews had too much power in the United States. The point that tied these two polls together was that the American public viewed Jews as too powerful in this country, and thus they perceived that Hitler concluded they were too powerful in Germany. Although the American government did not implement a state sponsored policy of extermination of the Jews as

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<sup>30</sup> Hadley Cantril, *Public Opinion 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951) , 383.

<sup>31</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion 1935-1946*, 383.

the Nazis did, they did nothing to alleviate their woes. In retrospect, we now know that there was little the U.S. could have done.

By 1943, the American Jewish Congress headed by Rabbi Wise hoped that public opinion within the United States had swung in their favor. While most Americans believed that numerous European Jews had been killed, public opinion never drastically changed. Jewish groups received little interest from government officials when it was reported that atrocities had occurred. Sumner Welles, Breckinridge Long, Cordell Hull, and President Roosevelt were not interested in any type of Jewish rescue. A perfect example of the State Department's attitude was when Gerhard Riegner and Richard Lichtheim reported in early 1943 that 6,000 Jews per day were killed in Poland. Although the State Department relayed this information to Rabbi Wise, they wanted no association with this report.<sup>32</sup> The State Department's Division of European Affairs tried for months to keep any information that leaked out about Jews under wraps. Secretary of State Cordell Hull sent a telegram to the European Affairs Office to ignore a report that was to be transmitted to private persons because it jeopardized the relationship with neutral countries on confidential official matter. This was Cable 354 and it instructed Leland Harrison to cease forwarding reports on mass murder.<sup>33</sup> The State Department did everything within its power to halt all information into the United States about European Jews. Once the Riegner-Lictheim report reached the American Jewish Congress and related organizations, the American press did little to spread the information to the American public. A public opinion poll in January of 1943 showed that almost 50 percent of the Americans polled concluded that Jews had too much influence in the business world.<sup>34</sup> This was an increase from the poll in 1942, it can be deduced that American public opinion had worsened instead of improved in regard to Jews. As the situation for Jews in Europe worsened, American opinion of Jews declined with it.

In February 1943 a slight glimmer of hope was presented to European Jews when Romania offered the United States and its allies a proposal to send 72,000 Jews from Romania to Palestine or another allied port.<sup>35</sup> Although this appeared to be a perfect

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<sup>32</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust*, 173.

<sup>34</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion 1935-1946*, 383.

<sup>35</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 83.

solution to save Romanian Jews, Palestine was closed by the British in 1939 and transporting this many people would have proved a daunting task for the U.S. The State Department needed help from the British and did not receive it. The State Department probably considered the event as a Nazi initiated distraction from the war effort. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau brought the proposal to Roosevelt. F.D.R. referred him to Sumner Welles, who in turn dismissed the proposal. This was exactly how every report on European Jews was handled in the State Department. President Roosevelt passed the reports to individuals within the State Department who tried to help, but the restrictionists in the State Department prolonged investigations and extended responses for several weeks. The only paper that had any response to the Romanian proposal was the *New York Times*. It could be surmised that this was a major development. The fact of the matter was that the Romanian government tried to sell Jews to the United States and the Allies. How can only one major publication in the United States run this story? Even though the Romanian government offered this proposal to the Americans and British, there was really nothing either government could do. The Allies did not have control of North Africa at this point and this was their priority. The rescue of European Jews was not. The Allies looked at the plight of European Jews through the eyes of the war. The Allies had not secured any significant ground against the Nazis, so rescue was not a viable option at this point.

American Jewry in 1943 did not sit idly by as the government deliberated over what to do about European Jews. Rabbi Wise and prominent American Jewish groups organized the Joint Escape Committee and organized a rally in New York City. At this rally Jewish leaders developed eleven ways the United States could rescue European Jews, and they sent a copy to every prominent government official.<sup>36</sup> This was the first time that all the American Jewish groups organized into one group and formulated one protest. *The Nation* and *New Republic* responded to the Jewish protest and again supported the Joint Emergency Committee's ideas for rescue. In keeping with its usual stance, the State Department had no response to the proposals. The Joint Emergency Committee focused on two points in 1943. The first was public formal protests against United States rescue policy and to get the United States Congress to make a public statement of their support

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<sup>36</sup> Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 89.

for rescue. However, the Joint Emergency Committee did not get Congress to issue a public statement on rescue. David Wyman stated that Congress agreed that the perpetrators deserved to be punished, but there was no mention of rescue. This attitude was common during this time. Most officials believed that punishment was in order, but no one ever mentioned any rescue efforts. Most officials concluded that rescue was not attainable nor a desired response.

By the spring of 1943 the State Department was still in the process of deciding what to do in regards to Jewish rescue. The State Department and now the British government viewed any attempted rescue not only as a burden and danger but also as something that should be avoided. In retrospect, Hitler was not going to negotiate on this issue, but the United States and the Allies did not know this for certain in 1943. A prime example of Roosevelt's non-public response to the refugee crisis was when Rabbi Wise and several members of the Joint Emergency Committee asked to meet with Roosevelt. The White House received this message and relayed it to the State Department, which refused the meetings saying that they and Roosevelt were not interested. Secretary of State Hull denied the request for this meeting, and this was how he typically operated on all Jewish refugee questions. Seven Jewish congressmen led by Emmanuel Celler did obtain a meeting with Roosevelt about this time. Oddly, the congressmen did not press the President on rescue issues but rather focused on loosened immigration restrictions and increased immigration to reach the amount allotted by the quotas.<sup>37</sup> Again, this was an opportune time for these congressmen to press Roosevelt hard on this issue and they did not. When the congressmen emphasized the subject of immigration restriction, Roosevelt was able to divert them to Long. Long held strong to his restrictionist and anti-Semitic beliefs and did nothing. Roosevelt seemed to only take an interest in European Jews when American Jewish leaders confronted him. American Jewry along with State Department officials should take a considerable amount of blame because they let an enormous opportunity slip away.

Roosevelt made one attempt to facilitate a Jewish rescue mission in 1943 when he organized the Bermuda Conference for discussion on Jewish rescue with Allied countries. The conference met with fierce opposition by Breckinridge Long. Long exercised his

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<sup>37</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 89.

authority and influence when he tried to control the direction of the conference by selecting members of his committee such as R. Borden Reams who viewed the refugee situation in the same light he did.<sup>38</sup> This time Long faced fierce resistance because both the American and British governments needed to bring home or attempt to bring home a solid plan of rescue because they could no longer publicly deny the seriousness of the Nazi intentions toward European Jews. Credible publications, such as the *New York Times*, reported the atrocities and by even having the Bermuda Conference both countries admitted that the reports were factually credible.

Both the British and the Americans agreed that a rescue attempt in occupied Europe was not feasible, so they decided to reestablish the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees. The British were not easily sold on the idea until Long used his influence to reestablish the committee. With Long as the chief architect of the committee, this allowed the State Department to slowly diminish the committee's effectiveness. It was understood that the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees was to be the instrument the Allies used to save the refugees. In fact, it was a calculated plan by Long to form a committee that would go through the motions of rescue and not actually do anything.<sup>39</sup> The power that the State Department gave Long over immigration insured there would be nothing done for European Jews.

The idea of Jews being relocated to North Africa was discussed in enormous detail at the Bermuda Conference, but this idea was soon dropped because of the perceived problem of Jews being placed in an area heavily populated with Muslims. It was also proposed that Jewish refugees be placed in Latin America, but this too did not develop. The State Department used the Nazi spy threat to their security and convinced Latin American countries to close their doors. The Bermuda Conference concluded that the fastest way to rescue the Jews was to win the war and nothing was to interfere with that goal. As sad and unsatisfying as this conclusion was, it proved to be correct. Although, the Bermuda Conference was noble in theory, it had no credible plan of rescue. The Germans controlled the continent of Europe in 1943. Therefore, even if North Africa was a feasible place to relocate the Jews, where were the Jews going to come from to

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<sup>38</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 199.

<sup>39</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 201.

emigrate? Breckinridge Long ensured that the Bermuda Conference would not succeed when he sent Sol Bloom, Chair of House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Senator Scott Lucas, assistant majority leader in the Senate, to represent the United States.<sup>40</sup> Both of these men were adamant restrictionists that had no intention of helping rescue European Jews. The one good event of the Bermuda Conference was that it was the start of the demise of Long. However, it was regrettable that under Long's leadership pre-war opportunities had been missed for rescue that could not be regained.

American and world Jewry believed that the purpose of the Bermuda Conference was for the Americans and the British to develop a strategic plan to rescue European Jews. This was not the case, and it did not take long for American and British Jewry to conclude that this conference was for public opinion only. When the Bermuda Conference ended, most government officials knew that mass killings of Jews had taken place in the concentration camps since this was no longer a secret, and the Conference did address the needs of the European Jews. Representative Celler was one of the most vocal critics of the Conference and called it, "A fiasco like the Evian Conference and a diplomatic mockery that betrayed human interests and ideas."<sup>41</sup> Rabbi Stephen Wise made public his disbelief and anger with the State Department, stating that again they had done nothing to help rescue efforts. The United States was even more engulfed in World War II that afforded Roosevelt little inclination toward refugee rescue. Even if Rabbi Wise had been able to discuss with Roosevelt how the Conference proceeded, there was no real chance to save any significant number of Jews by this point. The only information that Roosevelt received on rescue efforts was through Secretary of State Hull via Breckinridge Long. Long reported inaccurate numbers and information to the President. For example, he reported to Roosevelt that from 1933 to 1943 that the United States had allowed 580,000 refugees to immigrate.<sup>42</sup> The actual number was closer to half of this. Roosevelt accepted these reports without question, and he continued to allow people with restrictionist and anti-Semitic tendencies, such as Long, Hull, and Senator Reynolds, to control American immigration.

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<sup>40</sup> Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry*, 142.

<sup>41</sup> Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry*, 208.

<sup>42</sup> Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry*, 209.



Several important groups and ideas came to light from the Bermuda Conference. The Bergson Group, a militant Zionist group that supported a full-scale rescue of the Jews, took out a full-page ad that denounced the State Department's policy on rescue. This group was short lived because they used thirty-three Senator's names without consent, and several of these Senators publicly denied any association with the group. The Bergson Group did get the public's attention with the ad and brought to light that the Bermuda Conference made a mockery of a rescue effort. The idea to make Palestine a home for refugee Jews was discussed seriously at the Conference. American Zionists concluded that this was the appropriate solution to the problem. The problem with this plan was that Palestine and the countries that bordered it were predominately Muslim. The Egyptian Minister, Mahmoud Hassan Bey, warned the State Department that if they and the Zionists continued to press for Palestine relocation, conflict was imminent.<sup>43</sup> The State Department in 1943 never conceived that Palestine was a viable option because of the British White Paper Order of 1939. Most members of the State Department wanted to wait until the end of the war to determine relocation and address the plight of the Jews. However, the State Department underestimated the Zionist influence on American Jewry, and by 1943 the Palestine option was perceived as an attainable option. American Jewry was divided into Zionists and non-Zionists. This caused disunity within American Jewry, the most important group pressing the rescue effort was divided. This problem plagued American Jewry throughout the 1940s because there was no unified effort to fight German persecution of Jews. This lack of unity within American Jewry with the Zionist focusing on a Jewish state after the war instead of rescue made it easier for Cordell Hull and Breckinridge Long to procrastinate when it came to rescue efforts.

Several other obstacles were implemented by the State Department in 1943 to restrict immigration. The time required to screen applications was increased to nine months.<sup>44</sup> There was no apparent reason for this increase in time other than to delay applications as long as possible. Long was continually criticized by proponents of rescue because the visa application was more than four feet long and had to be filled out on both sides by one of the refugee's sponsor, sworn under the penalty of perjury and submitted in six

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<sup>43</sup> Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry*, 215.

<sup>44</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 127.

copies. They surmised that the only reason for this kind of detail was to delay the application process and discourage attempted immigration. The sponsors' backgrounds were checked along with their references. The process checked background information from the sponsors past ten years, which took several months to complete.

In 1943 State Department officials added the provision that the refugee had to be in acute danger before a rescue attempt was a reasonable option. This virtually allowed the State Department to close its doors at will because it claimed that no one who applied for visas was in danger. The group that saved immigration from complete shutdown was the Board of Appeals. The Board of Appeals overruled about one-fourth of the negative recommendations made by the visa review board. Without the Board of Appeals, immigration into the United States would not have existed. In 1941 47.5 percent of the quota was used, in 1942 only 19 percent of the quota was used, and by 1943 the Axis nations had limited immigration to the U.S. to 9.8 percent of the allotted quota. This was a significant decrease in the number of recommendations from the previous two years. Even with the positive work of the Board of Appeals, the restrictionists, nativists, and anti-Semites in the State Department along with German occupation of most of Europe had successfully decreased immigration to an almost non-existent level.

Although the Bermuda Conference in 1943 did not solve the refugee immigration problem to any significant extent, by 1944 the political pressure placed on President Roosevelt forced him to take an active role in regard to the refugee question. There was no way to hide from the American public and Congress what had happened to the Jews in occupied Europe. President Roosevelt enacted Executive Order 9417 that created the War Refugee Board.<sup>45</sup> The premise of the War Refugee Board was to get the State, Treasury, and War Departments to provide whatever support the board needed to help with refugee immigration. In theory this board was an excellent idea and had it been used in accordance with its designed purpose, it very well could have helped. The State and War Departments found ways around the Board and provided a minute amount of help to the Board. A stipulation that hindered the War Refugee Board was that these departments were required to help so long as it did not interfere with war operations.

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<sup>45</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 209.

This in effect eliminated the War Department's help because their main focus was on winning the war.

The State Department was still under the guidance of Cordell Hull, and this board did nothing to change his view of refugee rescue. In fact, the men Hull appointed had very little time to devote to the board, and they did nothing to stop the opposition of mid-level State Department officials. All of the rescue efforts that Roosevelt supported involved the same people who opposed any kind of real rescue effort. Although he did support some sort of rescue effort the people he placed in charge did not. The Treasury Department under the leadership of Henry Morgenthau was the only department that met their full responsibility with respect to the War Refugee Board. The Treasury Department housed the Board and provided most of the staff that was needed, and Morgenthau took an active role in this operation. Morgenthau was the highest ranked cabinet member that took an active role in rescue. The others, such as Cordell Hull and Breckinridge Long succeeded in hindering and opposing every action that might have helped a rescue effort. Without Morgenthau, the War Refugee Board would have dissolved like the other rescue efforts.

Another problem that hampered the War Refugee Board was the miniature staff that was funded for such a large-scale project. The Board at its highest number had no more than 30 members, and most of the time the board revolved around 12 persons who were mostly gentiles and veterans of the Treasury Department that battled with State Department officials over rescue efforts. First and foremost, a rescue effort on this scale needed more than twelve to thirty members. Also, it can be concluded that American Jews should have been more prevalent on this board. While the War Refugee Board was in theory an excellent way to help refugees, in reality it was understaffed and under supported by the government. In Breckinridge Long's final months as a policy maker for rescue, he stated that the War Refugee Board was just Jewish propaganda and they could not have saved any more Jews than his policy did.<sup>46</sup> Until his demise within the State Department, Long maintained his restrictionist and anti-Semitic stance on refugee rescue. It is obvious these restrictionists were the people that should have been removed from a prominent position within the State Department long before 1944.

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<sup>46</sup> Israel, *The War Diary of Breckinridge Long: Selections from the Years 1939-1944*, 336-337.

Henry Morgenthau won a substantial victory for the War Refugee Board when he recommended John Pehle as chair to President Roosevelt.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, Roosevelt accepted Pehle as chair and action by the Board was underway. The first major situation that faced Pehle and the Board was the Hungarian Jewish dilemma. At this time the Jewish population in Hungary was the third largest in Europe and the Nazis placed them on the liquidation list.<sup>48</sup> By 1944 the Nazis realized that they could not win the war and there were 800,000 Jews in Hungary who lived unprotected in the heart of German occupation. Also, by this time the Allies knew about the “Final Solution” and Hungarian Jews were next on the Nazis liquidation lists. The War Refugee Board tried to implement a rescue plan for the Hungarian Jews, but with a small staff and no physical presence in Hungary this was virtually impossible. Although Hungary was an ally of the Nazis, they did not occupy the country until March 1944. By 1944, under pressure from the Germans, the Hungarian government allowed the deportations of Jews to begin. The War Refugee Board tried in vain to get the Hungarian government to disassociate itself from the Nazis and not cooperate in the deportation of the Jews. The Board concluded that without Hungarian help the Nazis would not be able to deport Jews on such a large scale. Pehle and the rest of the board were not under the illusion that they could save a large number of Jews, but any saved was better than none. Roosevelt reinvolved himself with the refugee issue when he warned the Hungarian government that people who did not help the Jews faced retribution after the war.<sup>49</sup>

This seemed to have little effect on the deportation, but it was significant that Roosevelt promised retribution without the consent of the British. Prior to this both countries typically issued joint statements with respect to retribution. Some felt that the political pressure at home was the reason for Roosevelt’s threat. This argument had merit because it seemed that Roosevelt in the past had only acted on this issue when he was politically pressed. If it had been a moral issue for him, he had had ample opportunity before American involvement in World War II to rescue European Jews. The Board attempted a small-scale physical rescue in Hungary when they implemented a plan that

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<sup>47</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1981) 402-03.

<sup>48</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 248.

<sup>49</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 252.

liberated 2,000 Jews when they were sent to Romania. The War Refugee Board worked with limited funds and manpower, but this did not deter them from at least an attempt at rescue.

During 1944 Samuel Grafton, a popular columnist for the *New York Post*, developed an idea that by-passed the immigration laws implemented by Breckinridge Long. Grafton, with the complete support of the War Refugee Board, created the idea of “free ports” in the United States that would harbor refugees until something permanent could be done for them. This idea, which would buy pro-rescuers time, was an ingenious way around the existing laws. Oddly enough, Grafton developed his idea from Breckinridge Long, who allowed unfriendly aliens from Latin American into the United States as non-quota immigrants. Grafton and Pehle argued that European Jews should be allowed to immigrate based on the same idea. This was the basis of the “free port” idea. President Roosevelt was a reluctant participant because 1944 was an election year, and the restrictionists were not supportive of the “free port” idea. Henry Morgenthau influenced the President on this issue, but Roosevelt pointed out that he expected European countries to take the majority of the refugees.<sup>50</sup> Roosevelt was cautious at this point making sure that the restrictionists knew that Europe was expected to participate so that the war effort was not compromised.

In a predictable reaction in the 1940s, the War Department and the State Department’s Visa Division opposed this temporary haven for refugees and even several members of the War Refugee Board were opposed to this idea. Persuading passage of the “free ports” temporary solution would take all of the political persuasion Morgenthau and Pehle could devise. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson stated that the President had no power to act unilaterally on an issue that affected a large portion of the American public. Powerful people within Roosevelt’s Administration were strong in opposition to the “free port” concept. Pehle, along with the *New York Times*, pleaded for public support for this idea. The *Times* stated that this proposal did not open the floodgates to unrestricted immigration, but it was the intention of the War Refugee Board to save innocent people from dying. Roosevelt was very cautious on this issue, and even avoided taking a stand on a congressional debate on this issue. The restrictionists were furious over this and

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<sup>50</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 252.

they protested loudly. Robert Reynolds, who was referenced earlier, was a friend and supporter of Long's immigration policy and he asked Attorney General Francis Biddle how the President received the authority to enact this executive order? In an ironic twist Biddle, replied that when Breckinridge Long admitted unfriendly aliens from Latin America, he had set the precedent.<sup>51</sup> Long tried to cease all immigration into the United States but in actuality gave Roosevelt a loophole to enact the "free port" act.

In the State Department there was an immense amount of opposition to rescue efforts, but there was also disagreement within American Jewry that did little to help with rescue efforts. The Zionist and non-Zionist Jews were always in conflict on the fate of the European Jews after the war. It was difficult for people such as John Pehle and Henry Morgenthau to initiate any kind of effective action. Because of the lack of a united Jewish front with respect to rescue efforts, American Jewry carried some of the burden for lack of a systematic rescue effort. In 1944 two Jewish leaders, Laurence Steinhardt and Ira Hirschman, stepped to the forefront and convinced other countries such as Turkey to be a haven to Jews. Rabbi Stephen Wise publicly applauded Hirschmann for his work in Turkey and Pehle used the publicity that Hirschmann created to promote the Board's cause. The significance of Rabbi Wise's public adulation of Hirschmann was that Hirschmann was associated with the rival Jewish group to Wise, the Emergency Committee. The fact that two prominent, American Jewish groups were rivals further hampered rescue efforts. Millions of their religious brothers and sisters perished at the hands of the Nazis while these groups competed with each other. If he praised him, that should have helped relations. This was another example of how American Jewry failed the Jews in Europe. Did they expect the American public, with a strong majority of gentiles, to support their efforts if they did not support each other? The disunity amongst American Jewry caused unneeded delays in rescue within the United States.

Several public opinion polls conducted in 1944 revealed that the majority of the American public did not grasp the extent of the extermination. One poll in December 1944 found that a majority of Americans believed that Hitler was cruel to Jews but they were unaware of the extent of the cruelty. Another poll in December 1944 showed that almost half of the Americans concluded that Jews were a nationality not a religious

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<sup>51</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 264.

group.<sup>52</sup> These surveys demonstrated two critical points. First, was that the American public had no idea what the Nazis were actually doing to European Jews. Secondly, Americans, along with Hitler, viewed Jews as a race not a religion. An analysis of these surveys indicate that 12 % of the American public believed the stories of mass murder were untrue, while 27 % percent surmised that the murder total was only 100,000 and only 4 % believed that five million Jews had been eliminated.<sup>53</sup> These percentages showed that the vast majority of Americans had no idea what was going on in Eastern Europe during World War II. No matter how many times it was reported, the magnitude of the Holocaust never sank in with the majority of Americans. Even if the American public believed these reports, would they have cared? Since World War II raged in Europe and with Japan, the refugees were not on the minds of the public at large.

The War Refugee Board and American Jewry did warrant considerable blame but the State and War Departments offered miniscule help. In addition, the Russians and British did very little to help plus Roosevelt's interest appeared to be politically motivated when it publicly helped him.<sup>54</sup> The War Refugee Board efforts were severely compromised by the lack of cooperation it received and its inability to physically move the refugees to a safe haven.

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<sup>52</sup> Cantril, *Public Opinion 1935-1946*, 384.

<sup>53</sup> Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1941*, 289.

<sup>54</sup> Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 214.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DEBATE OVER THE BOMBING OF AUSCHWITZ

In April 1944 the United States and the Allied countries received conclusive proof that the concentration camp in Auschwitz, Poland did in fact exist. The more appropriate term for Auschwitz was “death camp” instead of concentration camp because everyone there was scheduled to die. Two reports in June of 1944 gave proof without a shadow of doubt that Auschwitz was a death camp. The reports were known as the Verba-Wetzler report and the Mordowicz-Rosin reports.<sup>1</sup> Both of these reports were from men who escaped from Auschwitz at different times but gave the same horrendous account of the camp. Two of these men saw the preparation for the killing while the other two actually saw the slaughter take place. This was credible first-hand knowledge of the camp from four people who had just escaped. There were hints of the mass killings at Auschwitz throughout the war, but the Allies did not take these reports seriously. With first-hand accounts of the preparations and the killings, the United States and the Allies could no longer ignore what took place in Auschwitz and the camps in eastern Poland. Gerhard Riegner realized very quickly from the reports out of Geneva that the Nazis were killing Jews in massive numbers. He immediately telegraphed the BBC and tried to alert the world to what had taken place at Auschwitz and Birkenau. The Riegner telegram reached London and was sent to Elizabeth Wiskemann who was an expert on eastern European affairs.<sup>2</sup> She immediately sent this information to Alan Dulles who was head of intelligence for the United States in Switzerland. In a response that exemplified the United States’ reaction to European Jews throughout the 1930s and 1940s Dulles sent this information to the American Minister in Berne instead of the State Department or the War Refugee Board. Dulles seemed unconcerned with this report and the American Minister did not forward the message to Washington for almost two weeks.

The debate that raged at the time was the focused on whether the reports were believable. Because the Vrba-Wetzler report was supported by the Mordowicz-Rosin

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981) , 231.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 233.



report, the groups that supported rescue efforts concluded these reports needed to be given immediate attention. Large numbers of Hungarian Jews were sent to the Auschwitz-Birkeanu camps during this time. Everyone sent to these camps was told they were under a six-month quarantine, which in reality meant they were to be gassed within six months. The information had spread throughout Allied Europe about Auschwitz, but Allied commanders did not consider these reports an urgent matter. The two telegrams relayed from the World Jewish Congress and other European rescue organizations that reached the War Refugee Board in the United States urged for the bombing of railway lines in Kosice and Pesov.<sup>3</sup> The Kosice and Presov railways were the two closest to Auschwitz and the most important because these were the only rail lines into the camps that were not in battle zones.

Almost a month passed before these telegrams reached the State Department. John Pehle was asked to use his influence on this issue and to get urgent attention placed on it. Pehle visited Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, who was placed in command of the War Refugee Board, to discuss the feasibility of bombing these railways. Uncharacteristically, Pehle had serious doubts about the effectiveness of bombing these railways and made his feelings evident to McCloy. Pehle stressed to McCloy that he was not requesting that any action be taken by the War Department on this matter other than the exploration of the subject. Pehle was one of the staunchest supporters of Jewish rescue efforts in the State Department and he questioned the practicality of railway bombing. The War Department considered the bombing impracticable and they refused to bomb anything they did not deem viable to military operations. The leadership in the United States government concluded that the only way to save the Jews was to defeat Germany. Even if Allied commanders had deemed Auschwitz-Birkenau a feasible military target in June 1944, the earliest that bombing could have begun was July or August. We have now have learned that the Nazis had, for the most part, stopped gassing by this point. The evidence that was available clearly showed that the United States and the Allies knew about Auschwitz and the purpose of the camp. Although the State and War Department's knew the purpose of the camps, they concluded that high altitude bombing was too inaccurate and the collateral damage of killing Jewish prisoners was too

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<sup>3</sup> Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 236.

significant of a risk. Also, keep in mind that the Normandy invasion was underway and all the resources that the Allies had were given to this operation.

The State Department and the American military supported the War Department's position by stating that the bombing of Auschwitz was not feasible or militarily possible in 1944. In retrospect, the evidence indicated that bombing was possible because the United States had bombed targets within a twenty-mile range of Auschwitz throughout 1944. Contrary to what the American military stated to the War Refugee Board and Jewish groups, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force based in Italy had the capability of carrying out successful raids throughout 1944. In fact, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force flew two missions in June and July of 1944 that crossed directly over the five railway lines into Auschwitz. On June 26, 71 heavy bombers flew directly over one of the railway lines and were within thirty miles of the other two. Then on July 7, 452 bombers traveled along and crossed over the other two railroads.<sup>4</sup> The argument over the feasibility of being able to reach Auschwitz had no credibility after these reports. It was easily ascertained that at the very least three of the five railroads could have been neutralized as deportation vehicles. Also, there were several oil refineries within fifty miles of Auschwitz. In 1944 the destruction of these installations became the main focus of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Auschwitz was in the direct flight path of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force on their way to bomb these refineries. Again, the State Department and the U.S. military concluded they were not militarily beneficial to the war effort.

In recent years several discoveries and events have refuted the above argument for bombing. The first was the Normandy invasion with all available resources allocated to it, second was the ineffectiveness of bombing railway lines, third was that the Germans had all but stopped gassing prisoners by this time, and the fourth was the fear that bombs would kill more Jewish prisoners than it would save. In defense of pro-bombing attempts reasons two and three are discoveries that were made after the war. Allied commanders did not know that railway bombing was ineffective and that the gassing of prisoners was almost non-existent by this time. As far as the Allies knew the gassings continued until the end of the war.

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<sup>4</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 298.

In August of 1944, 127 bombers dropped over 1,500 pounds of high explosives on factories that were within five miles of the Auschwitz gas chambers. The Allied planes were only five miles away from the gas chambers, but it was militarily impossible to bomb them. According to the records, the weather conditions were perfect for bombing and the American and British planes faced almost no opposition from either the concentration camp defenses or the Luftwaffe. Because the Luftwaffe had become ineffective at this point, they could not formulate a viable resistance to the Allies. Consequently, the argument that the risk of losing valuable military war planes at Auschwitz-Birkenau had no merit. On August 7, over 400 heavy bombers dropped bombs on Blechhammer and Trezbinia and these targets were within thirteen miles of Auschwitz. Throughout August of 1944 Auschwitz and the area around it was under heavy Allied attack. The War Department had the audacity to state that the only way it was possible to bomb Auschwitz was to divert airpower from operations elsewhere. However, since Allied bombing operations took place all around Auschwitz this statement was completely false. No operational plans needed to be changed to bomb the gas chambers. A case in point was that on September 13, 1944, the Allies bombed areas close to Auschwitz and received no opposition from the Luftwaffe. They did not attempt to bomb any of the gas chambers. Inadvertently, two bombs veered off course and hit near Auschwitz. These were the only two bombs the Allies dropped on Auschwitz-Birkenau throughout the war.

By the middle of 1944, the Germans gave little resistance to Allied aerial bombing. This was the main argument of the United States military against intense bombing of Auschwitz. The United States and the Allies were concerned with losing heavy bombers. Two other alternatives to heavy bombers were available to Allied forces at this time. Mitchell medium range bombers were available, more accurate than the heavy bombers, and the Lightning P-38 dive-bombers.<sup>5</sup> Both of these aircrafts proved accurate and capable of traveling long distances. There were refueling capabilities on the island of Vis, which was 110 miles closer than the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force's air base in Foggia, Italy. Obviously, this was an option the Allies did not try to explore. The argument that the only way to save the Jews was to win the war was echoed time and time again when the

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<sup>5</sup> Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*, 303.

War Refugee Board proposed bombing. In retrospect, the best possible time for the United States and the Allies to bomb Auschwitz was from March through July of 1944. One might argue that the Allies did not know about that Auschwitz was an extermination camp until June of 1944. That was when the camp was confirmed to be a death camp by the Verba-Wetzler report. The Allies had suspected that Auschwitz-Birkenau was a death camp for some time. Roosevelt stated on March 24 of 1944, after the Nazis had established a puppet government in Hungary and less than two months before the deportations began, that the wholesale systematic murder of Jews in Europe went unabated by the hour. If F.D.R. concluded that European Jews were being murdered, it is reasonable to assume that the Allies did also. The mass killings would have continued but not on as large a scale as before had the bombings taken place. No one knows how many lives this could have saved if the Allies had acted in March 1944 after Roosevelt's statement. The United States had the military capability to destroy these gas chambers but chose not too. The War Department developed the same attitude that the State Department developed when they considered rescue a burden instead of an option to save lives. The argument that bombing Auschwitz jeopardized military interests had no merit when the aforementioned facts were brought forth.

Another supporter of the idea that the bombing of Auschwitz-Birkenau was feasible was Dino Brugioni. Brugioni was a member of a bomber crew during World War II and had a first-hand account of the atrocities Nazis committed towards Jews. It was an interesting point that Brugioni flew bomber missions during the war and knew how important aerial reconnaissance was to bombing raids, but he had no idea that pictures were taken of the camps. After the war, he worked for the CIA and helped found the National Photographic Interpretation Center that interprets aviation photography, including military photographs.<sup>6</sup> Brugioni said that he was interested in researching to see if any aerial photographs were taken of the death camps during bombing raids of World War II. His interest was piqued even further when he remembered that during all raids the cameras on board were turned on and he knew that on several raids on the I.G. Farben plant the raiders flew over the Birkenau death camp. With the help of an

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<sup>6</sup> Dino Brugioni, *The Aerial Photos Of The Auschwitz-Birkenau Extermination Complex*, eds. Michael J. Neufield and Michael Berenbaum (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) , 52.

associate, Brugioni obtained film that was taken on the missions to the Farben plant. Much to his surprise, they discovered that many pictures were taken of both Auschwitz and Birkenau and these photographs were completely overlooked in 1944 and 1945. One problem with Brugioni's statement is that the photographs were not developed until after the war. This could go to the argument of the Allies lack of interest in the camps. Roosevelt stated in March 1944 that European Jews were being murdered and the Allies knew that Hungarian Jews were being transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Verba-Wetzler report confirmed that the camps were extermination camps. If the Allies were committed to saving European Jews, why were the photographs not developed? It is reasonable to deduce that Allied commanders with the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force knew that their bombers were flying over the camps.

With this discovery Brugioni was perplexed by several images that were clear in the photos and overlooked by the Allied commanders. Brugioni along with other historians pondered how the Allies did not notice the unusually large size of Birkenau that was not typical of concentration camps. The unusually large numbers of boxcars at Birkenau when there were little, if any, industrial installations at the camp, and the four separately secured extermination areas that included an undressing room, a gas chamber, and a crematorium. These were questions to which no one had a legitimate answer. The pictures were available to Allied commanders in 1944 and 1945, but they did not deem them necessary enough to develop.

Brugioni concluded that five factors influenced Allied policy during the bombing of Germany; these were Tasking, Priority Projects, Training, Precedence, and Photo Interpretation Equipment.<sup>7</sup> The first, Tasking, was a military term that meant the formulation of intelligence information on enemy targets. Tasking was used for military targets that were considered a priority. Concentration and extermination camps were never considered a priority by the military so Tasking was not used for them. The target sheet on Auschwitz focused on the I.G. Farben fuel and rubber plant and never mentioned Auschwitz I and Birkenau. These targets were known to military officials, but they did not consider them significant because they were not trained to look for extermination camps. Priority was not given to the death camps during this time because the Normandy

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<sup>7</sup> Brugioni, *The Aerial Photos Of The Auschwitz-Birkenau Extermination Complex*, 53-56.

and southern France invasions were underway. Consequently, the argument to give the camps priority was difficult to defend. The invasion of France was of greater military significance than bombing the concentration camps.

In aerial reconnaissance the major problem was the lack of training the interpreters received on distinguishing between concentration and extermination camps.<sup>8</sup> The interpreters only received a four to six week training course, which concentrated on military equipment such as airplanes, tanks, artillery, and ships. The interpreters received insufficient training in the differentiation between the types of camps, and the only camps that they were specifically trained to detect were the ones that contained American prisoners. Jewish prisoner camps were not considered a priority in their training. The fourth factor identified by Brugioni was Precedence. This factor relied heavily on knowledge that already existed of the target. Studying the photoreconnaissance of the chambers and the crematoriums, Brugioni found no reference for interpreters to use in the identification of these types of installations. The interpreters cannot be blamed because they were not trained to identify this type of installation. The U.S. military and the State Department officials are too blame because they knew the extermination camps existed as early as 1942. Another problem faced by the interpreters was that they worked secluded from most other military communication. Had they known about the Vrba-Wetzler report, they could have found and pinpointed the gas chambers and crematoria. This information was not relayed from the top to the interpreters at ground zero. The argument that bombing was useless because gassing had stopped by this time is irrelevant because the Allies did not know that the killings had stopped. We know that now but the Allies had no idea in the summer of 1944. It is easy to excuse non-bombing when it is looked at in retrospect. The point that cannot be emphasized enough was that the Allies did not know that the killings had stopped.

The final obstacle to action referenced by Brugioni was Photo Interpretation. Brugioni pointed out that during World War II the magnification of photographs were not as in depth as they are today. Most images were magnified four to seven times as compared to 35 or more times today. Although magnification was not as developed as today, Brugioni concluded this was not a reasonable excuse for the lack of action. Photo

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<sup>8</sup> Brugioni, *Aerial Photos Of The Auschwitz-Birkenau Extermination Complex*, 55.

interpretation was critical for bombing raids. The Allies deemed the photoreconnaissance of Auschwitz-Birkenau was not critical enough to be studied during the war. Without photo-interpretation Allied bombers had minimal chance at bombing the crematoriums.

The problem with aerial interpretation was not only in the interpreters and quality of film but also with Allied air commanders acknowledging that photos of Auschwitz-Birkenau existed. It seemed the Allied air commanders were the only people with access aerial information but they supposedly did not know about the camps, the roads, and rivers around the Auschwitz. Winston Churchill and subordinates to Roosevelt, such as John J. McCloy, Cordell Hull, and John Pehle knew all about the camps. How could the Allied air commanders not know? It boiled down to the simple fact that they did not consider the camps to be of strategic, military value and used the excuse of not being able to divert valuable military resources. Notwithstanding the fact that the Allies flew directly over Birkenau on their way to the Farben plant. For instance, the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Italy sent pictures to the Allied Central Interpretation Unit in Medenham, England that contained information about Auschwitz-Birkenau. Medenham was fifty miles outside of London and easily accessible to the Allies if they had so chosen to obtain aerial photos of the camps. Lack of accessible and credible information was not an acceptable defense. Roosevelt's son was commander of the Mediterranean Allied Photo Reconnaissance Wing in Italy. The aerial information about the camps could have very easily reached Roosevelt or at least Secretary of War Stimson and from there to John J. McCloy.

Two major critics of the proposed bombing of Auschwitz-Birkenau were James H. Kitchens III and Richard H. Levy. Both of these men argued vigorously that bombing the gas chambers and crematoriums was neither feasible nor would it have been effective. Kitchens strongly argued that any Allied attack from the air on the death camps was illusory and so ludicrous that air commanders never considered it a viable option.<sup>9</sup> Stuart G. Erdheim disagreed with Kitchens' conclusion in an article entitled "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau." Erdheim argued that Deputy Chief of the Air Staff Norman Bottomly and Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, General Carl Spaatz both knew about the camps and they were sympathetic to finding a

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<sup>9</sup> James H. Kitchens III, "Auschwitz Reexamined," *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 58, no. 1 (1994): 264-265.

reasonable answer to the problem.<sup>10</sup> Air Marshal Bottomly wrote a memo to the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff in which he requested a significant amount of aerial photographs taken immediately so they could be studied for possible action. This memo alone indicated that the bombing of the camps was not out of the question at this point. This memo was a strong counter point to Kitchens' argument by maintaining that as of June of 1944 Auschwitz-Birkenau was an achievable target. Yes, the camps were achievable targets but military leaders never seriously considered them targets because they did not want to train photo interpreters and pilots to destroy the crematoriums

Erdheim refuted Kitchens on his argument that the Vrba-Wetzler report had minimal military purpose. Kitchens argued that the report gave little detail of the camp and did not help in the planning of bombing raids. The point of Erdheim's argument was that this report was as good as most first-hand reports the Allies received during the war on any targets they chose to explore. Photo intelligence was crucial to any bombing plan and had the allied command looked seriously at the report and used the photoreconnaissance available then Auschwitz-Birkenau was a feasible target. Kitchens quoted Richard Foregger, who was a medical doctor and an amateur historian as his main source on the aerial reconnaissance issue.<sup>11</sup> Richard Levy in his article "The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited: A Critical Analysis" argued that aerial reconnaissance was a necessity but the military would have needed to have the aid of escapees to pinpoint targets. Levy completely ignored the Vrba-Wetzler report and he based his entire argument on Foregger's research. That alone undermined the credibility of his argument. Neither Kitchens nor Levy referred to the study by Dino Brugioni. Brugioni is an expert in photoreconnaissance and maintained that had photo interpreters been trained about what to look for, the gas chambers and crematoriums would have been easily found. This was the point that Kitchens, Levy and Foregger missed. The Allied commanders gave no priority to the rescue of Jewish prisoners at these two camps.

Other mistakes made by Kitchens were that he described the layout of the camps as a lot wider in scope than they actually were and he referenced them as "dauntingly complex." Erdheim disagreed with this assessment, and he pointed to several reasons

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart C. Erdheim, "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 130.

<sup>11</sup> Kitchens, "Auschwitz Reexamined," 240.



why the task was not as daunting as Kitchens made it appear. In the second half of 1943 Crematorium I at Auschwitz I was no longer operational and by the spring of 1944 when most of the photographs were taken, it was being used as bomb shelter. Auschwitz had no buildings with tall chimneys like the one at Birkenau; therefore, there was no confusion on which were the gas chambers and which were the crematoriums. The crematoriums at Birkenau were not widely dispersed as Kitchens contended, but in reality they were lined in a periphery in the westernmost part of the camp. The crematoriums stood alone in the camps and they for the most part were the tallest buildings in the camps and would have been relatively easy to detect if the interpreters had known to look for them. Levy argued that even if the killing units were attacked, it would not have made a significant difference in the killing process. Levy also argued that the other killing facilities like Crematorium I, which was not functional in 1944, and other gas chambers would have had to be bombed.<sup>12</sup> Erdheim presented evidence that refuted this conclusion when he stated that the crematoriums at Birkenau, not Auschwitz, incinerated the vast majority of the Jews in the camps. If the U.S. military had used Levy's logic and rejected other targets based on the premise that not all possible targets could not be destroyed, how many other missions would have been aborted throughout the war? The point of emphasis was that a different set of rules and rationales were used for Jewish rescue targets than were used for other military targets.

There has been a considerable amount of debate over how much the Allies actually knew about the death camps. Some historians argued that the Allies did not know enough about the camps to develop a bombing campaign and others had concluded that there was sufficient evidence to prove the information was available. It was widely known within the War and State Departments that Auschwitz existed and these two departments had located a total of six death camps. By 1944, the War Department had identified the leading Nazi SS men by name and rank and the State Department had classified Birkenau as a "Special KL" annihilation camp for women that consisted mostly of Hungarian Jews.<sup>13</sup> High-ranking members of the State Department concluded that the reports of the concentration camps were pushed to the side and conveniently misplaced

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<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Levy, "The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited: A Critical Analysis," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Winter 1996), 279.

<sup>13</sup> Levy, "The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited: A Critical Analysis," 139.

because Washington and London did not want any diversions to their total emphasis on defeating the Nazis. It was reasonable to accept this because it was consistent with Allied attitudes toward European Jews throughout the war. There has not been any definitive argument presented that the Allies did not know what went on at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The evidence clearly indicated that information about the concentration camps was in existence since 1939. In 1944, F.D.R. stated that, “The systematic murder of Hungarian Jews was one of the blackest hours in all of history and those that stand idly by are as guilty as the executioners.”<sup>14</sup> With this statement Roosevelt admitted knowledge of the existence of the camps, but he did not commit the resources that were available to help rescue the Hungarian Jews in the camps. His statement was made two months before the Nazis began the mass deportations of the Hungarian Jews into the camps.

German defenses at Auschwitz have often been used as a reason that attacks would have been ineffective on the camp. It was true that 79 heavy flak guns were added to Auschwitz-Birkenau camps in August of 1944. These guns were not at the camps from March through July of 1944. From March through July of 1944 there were only twenty flak guns at the camps that could have reached the altitude that the Allied bombers flew. This was the perfect time for the bombing to begin. The Allies had the airbase in Foggia, Italy that could reach the camps and as we now know F.D.R. knew about the camps by March of 1944. Most of the arguments against bombing were because of the increased anti-aircraft flak guns at the camps and in the surrounding area after August 20<sup>th</sup>. March through July was the time that bombing raids could have been successful on the camps. Critics have argued that small arms fire, the Luftwaffe, and weather factors could have disrupted bombing plans. Small arms fire was almost no threat to the bombers because SS guards at the camps were reported to run for cover when air raids occurred. They were trained to guard prisoners who were half-starved instead of defending against Allied heavy bombers. By 1944 the Luftwaffe represented no threat to Allied planes and they did not mount any serious opposition to any Allied attacks on oil plants in the Upper Silesia. The argument that the Luftwaffe could establish and sustain a formidable defense was merit less by the middle of 1944. The belief that bad weather could hamper

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<sup>14</sup> Levy, “The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited,” 139.

the bombing raids and make them utterly useless was also debatable. General James Doolittle was influential in the placement of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Italy because the weather conditions were better than in London. The 15th Air Force experienced a lower percentage of aborted missions due to bad weather than the 8th Air Force in London from April to September of 1944. To give the argument of bad weather less credibility, the Allied bombers reported clear visibility throughout the summer of 1944 in Upper Silesia. This was the area where Auschwitz-Birkenau was located.

High altitude bombing came under immense scrutiny by critics because they felt that bombers in World War II were not accurate and many camp prisoners would have died in the bombing raids. This contention loses its credibility when the Buchenwald bombing raid is reviewed. The Buchenwald air raid was a perfect example that allied bombers could incapacitate a camp without killing many prisoners. Three hundred eighty-four prisoners were killed at Buchenwald but that was because they were working in the factories at Gustloff Works and were not allowed to take shelter in the adjacent camp during an air raid.<sup>15</sup> This was another example that these camps could be bombed with precision and with minimal prisoner casualties. Most of the prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau worked outside the camp and would be nowhere near the gas chambers and crematoriums. Bombing accuracy increased dramatically with good weather and weather conditions during the summer of 1944 were perfect for high altitude bombing. In this type of bombing raid, P-38 bombers were considered a valuable resource because they could carry 1000 pound bombs and a sufficient amount of fuel that was needed to complete the round trip flight to the camps.

Critics argued that the Ploesti raid was the perfect example of why the P-38 bombers would not be useful against Auschwitz. What critics did not realize was that Ploesti was the third most heavily fortified city under German control in 1943 plus there was heavy smoke and bad weather that caused visibility problems. Auschwitz was not as heavily defended as Ploesti in 1944 and the weather was not a factor. Critics of the bombing of Auschwitz-Birkenau used scenarios that were not applicable to these camps. Thus, the situation in 1944 was perfect for an attack on the death camps in Poland.

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<sup>15</sup> Levy, "The Bombing of Auschwitz Revisited," 145.

The arguments against the bombing of Auschwitz-Birkenau do not carry as much weight as the arguments for bombing. Scholars such as James H. Kitchens III and Richard H. Levy concluded that if the Allies had bombed the camps that many prisoners would have been killed. This argument was not correct because most of the prisoners at the camps, especially Birkenau, worked outside the camp as was mentioned earlier. The discussion of weather conditions at the time the bombing raids should have occurred were ideal for high altitude bombing. The crematoriums were clearly visible and a significant amount of bombing accuracy was achievable. In addition, the bombing opponents misjudged another point by mid 1944; the Nazis did not have the capability to rebuild the gas chambers and crematoriums as quickly as they had originally built them. If the Allies had bombed and destroyed Crematoria II and III at Birkenau, then 75% of the Nazi killing capability at the camp would have been eliminated.<sup>16</sup> Even though the destruction of these crematoriums would not have ended the mass killings, this would have significantly altered the Nazi means of killing by making them less efficient. Many historians will argue, what is the point of bombing the crematoriums if they were not in use? If you are looking at the situation from today's perspective then there is no reason. We are studying the bombing from the information available in 1944. In 1944 the Allies did not know the crematoriums were not functional.

No one can conclusively argue that the destruction of the Nazi extermination camps would have saved thousands of Jews. However, the evidence that has surfaced since the Holocaust proved that bombing was a viable option and one that would have helped slow the mass murder. The argument that bombing was not accurate enough to hit the targets at the camps and the diversion of invaluable military resources misses the point about the Auschwitz-Birkenau debate. The United States government never made the rescue of European Jews a priority during World War II and this was the major reason why the camps were not bombed. Aerial reconnaissance photos taken during 1944 clearly showed the gas chambers and crematoriums. This nullified the argument by Allied commanders that the targets were indistinguishable and difficult to find. In fact, Auschwitz was bombed once by accident. Numerous bombing raids flew over Aushwitz-

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<sup>16</sup> Mitchell Bard, "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?" *Jewish Virtual Library*, [www.us-isreal.org](http://www.us-isreal.org): October 2001, 2.

Birkenau in 1944, but it was militarily unfeasible to drop any of those bombs on the camps killing machines? The true lack of understanding about the Jewish issue by the Allies resulted in massive loss of life. Doris Kearns Goodwin, a noted Roosevelt historian, surmised that F.D.R. misunderstood the importance of this issue, which caused opportunities of monumental proportions to be missed.<sup>17</sup> What has eluded some scholars on the Holocaust is that Roosevelt and Churchill had only to order the bombing of these camps to make them a priority of Allied field commanders. The implementation of Jewish rescue plans had to come from the top in order for priority to be given to it. F.D.R. had the ultimate power over rescue operations. He chose not to order the bombing raids as a means to rescue the Jews.

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<sup>17</sup> Bard, "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?", 3.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The American response to the Holocaust and European refugees is difficult to describe and put into historical perspective. There are many aspects to this issue that make coming to a single conclusion as to what the United States should have done a difficult task. There were many factors that contributed to the actions taken by the American government on the issue of refugees, i.e. European Jews, which influenced the American public's opinions at the time. Three key factors that influenced American policy toward European Jews were anti-Semitism, nativism, and restrictionism. During the first four decades of the twentieth century anti-Semitism was prevalent throughout American society; Jews were barred from many professions, and it was not uncommon for vacation resorts to advertise themselves as preferring a "Christian clientele."<sup>1</sup> The National Origins Act of 1924 that was enacted by Congress severely limited the immigration of Eastern Europeans to the United States. Many of the Europeans were Jewish. The act would later be the cornerstone of American policies in the 1930s and 1940s. Another factor that hindered a constructive response was a failure of imagination, intelligence, misjudgment of the murderous nature of Nazism, and a false optimism that the 'Final Solution' was not as horrendous as it turned out to be.<sup>2</sup>

The rise of anti-Semitic figures grew throughout the 1930s. Father Charles Coughlin and his social justice movement preached virulent anti-Semitism throughout the decade. Coughlin following and radio program had an impact on the American public and helped shape their opinions on European refugees. Along with Coughlin, William Dudley Pelley and his 'silver shirts' was a hate group that rose to prominence during the 1930s. Not only did Pelley use his vast newspaper resources to spread hatred, but he also helped awaken the American public's misperception that immigrants would destroy the United States. Another hate group that had a loyal following in the U.S. was the German-

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<sup>1</sup> John Elson and Daniel S. Levy, "DID F.D.R. DO ENOUGH? Some Believe that U.S. failed to save Jews during the Holocaust," *Time Domestic*, 18 April 1994, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1980) 55.

American Bund, which helped evoke hidden fears that the American people had about European Jews. Also, this group helped unleash an anti-Semitism that was part of American society. These were individuals and groups who used the economic peril that the U.S. was in to unleash fear and misunderstandings of different cultures.

The Great Depression also had impact on American public opinion to the Holocaust. To understand why the American public and the U.S. Government wanted and enforced such strict immigration policies must begin with the depression. Anti-Semitism, nativism, and restrictionism flourished with the scarcity of unemployment in the U.S. during the 1930s. A common slogan was “American jobs for Americans.” Immigrants were seen as competitors for jobs and were viewed with animosity. The public was led to believe that refugees would cause the American economy to collapse. In retrospect, allowing European immigrants into the U.S. would not have affected the economy significantly one way or the other. The reality of the time was that finding sufficient amounts of food was more important than worrying if the Nazis were mistreating German Jews. The Great Depression was the major obstacle that prevented immigration laws from being loosened by Congress and Roosevelt. The restrictionists exploited the fears of the American public and convinced them that immigrants offered no benefits for this country.

F.D.R. was the single-most important figure in the United States in regards to immigration of refugees. Roosevelt had two policies when it pertained to refugees. The first was compliance with restrictionist legislation in the 1920s and second was the symbolic humanitarianism extended toward a suffering minority.<sup>3</sup> These two policies summed up Roosevelt’s attitude toward European Jews. He was handcuffed by the policies enacted by the restrictionist congress. His ‘New Deal’ economic policy only partially succeeded because politically he was inclined to lean towards the restrictionists. However, this does not absolve him from blame on this issue. He knew from reliable sources that the Nazis were mistreating Jews, and if he had any doubt, Kristallnacht in 1938 should have dispelled misconception. The Evian Conference did not produce any type of solution to the problem because the unemployment rate in the U.S. was at an all time high and the restrictionists were not going to allow any type of loosened

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<sup>3</sup> Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy on European Jewry, 1933-1945*, 223.

immigration laws. In the 1930s, even if Roosevelt had wanted to help European Jews, Congress was not going to allow it. Roosevelt's indifference toward European Jews began to show in the 1940s. He was convinced by the State Department that a German 'fifth column' had developed within the United States. After the U.S. entered World War II he had no interest in European Jews until it was too late. The war was Roosevelt's focus, and he was convinced that the only way to save European Jews was to defeat the Nazis. All the resources that were available to him were given to the war effort. Roosevelt did organize the Bermuda Conference in 1943, in reality the conference was organized to appease the American Jewish leadership and divert political pressure away from him.

Long was the State Department's chief architect on immigration during the 1940s and he probably did more to cease immigration than anyone. Long, a restrictionist in the strongest sense, was convinced that the German "fifth-column" was a reality. He told Roosevelt that the fifth-column was a serious threat, and this allowed him to tighten restrictions to make immigration almost non-existent. The State Department's visa division made the immigration application extremely difficult and the processing of the application very time consuming. David Wyman referred to the process as the 'paper wall' that the U.S. Government developed to stop refugee immigration. Many historians and scholars have argued that Long was anti-Semitic along with being a restrictionist. Long was too well educated to verbalize directly or put into print any anti-Semitic views. He often used the term "the New York Boys" to refer to Jewish political leaders, without ever directly linking himself with anti-Semitism. Long and other State Department officials, such as Secretary of State Cordell Hull, demonstrated a lack of interest in saving European Jews. Long did everything in his power to make sure the Bermuda Conference made a mockery of rescue attempts. This again is where F.D.R. deserves some blame. He appointed Long, knowing that he was a restrictionist and borderline anti-Semitic. Roosevelt never questioned any of Long's decisions in regards to immigration and thus gave him total control with respect to American policies on immigration. Long had strong support for his ideas throughout the State Department and without the efforts of Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Long would have prevented the development



of the War Refugee Board. Long and Roosevelt should be linked together on the issue of immigration. Long applied the restrictions and Roosevelt allowed him to do so.

Although the Great Depression, the rise of anti-Semitic groups, Roosevelt, Long, and World War II had an immense impact on immigration policy and American public opinion, two other groups deserve considerable blame, American Jewry and the Vatican. American Jewry failed miserably in two critical facets of rescue. They never developed one unified organization to protest and they had blind faith in Roosevelt. American Jewry was divided between Zionists and non-Zionists. These two factions could never formulate a united group for protest. American Jewry's most important spokesman during this critical time was Rabbi Stephen Wise. Rabbi Wise was growing older and this dilemma was too much for one person to bear. Rabbi received excessive criticism from other Jewish leaders on his handling of the refugee situation. His complete trust that Roosevelt would do everything in his power to save the Jews was his second major mistake that hindered rescue efforts. Even though he was criticized for his efforts in the refugee dilemma, no other Jewish leaders stepped to the forefront to take over for him. Rabbi Wise, being just one person, received too much blame from the Jewish community. American Jewry as a collective whole did a terrible job in convincing the American public how serious the Jewish problem was. American Jewry did not want to separate the Jewish community from the rest of the American public, the non-Zionist in particular, and they basically wanted to blend in with the rest of American society. Even though Jews held power positions within Congress and many places within F.D.R. State Department, American Jewry was afraid that they would alienate themselves from the rest of America and this would result in even less rescue efforts.

The Vatican, which was not addressed in detail throughout this study, deserves significant blame as well for indifference towards European Jews. During the 1930s and 1940s the Vatican, under the direction of Pope Pius XII, was the most powerful and organized church organization in the world. Consequently, a study of the Nazis treatment of Jews would not be complete without some discussion of the Vatican's silence. Throughout the Holocaust the Vatican conveyed a persistent and depressing attitude of disbelief.<sup>4</sup> The Vatican did not believe, or ignored, the reports of mass murder. The

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<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust In History* (London: University Press of New England, 1987) 156.

Vatican had a long history of indifference when it related to Jews. Rarely, during the 1930s and 1940s did the Pope and the Vatican council denounce Nazi discrimination of Jews. Was it a lack of interest in the Jewish plight or was the Vatican delicately playing the Nazis? No one really knows the true answer to that question. The Vatican could have been waiting for a more opportune time for rescue efforts. Even after the Vatican learned of the mass killings it did not denounce them. Again, the Vatican may not have felt it was in any position to help. They may have been satisfied to leave the subject alone because of the fear of Nazi retribution. The Vatican leadership cannot use the excuse that they did not know the entire details of Jewish mistreatment. For instance, around the same time as Gerhard Riegner made his report known, March-April 1942, the Vatican was fully aware of the situation of the Polish Jews. The Vatican knew as much as anyone else about what was transpiring in Poland and did nothing. The Vatican response has also been called one more of cowardness than anti-Semitic.<sup>5</sup> It can be argued that it was a mixture of both. The Vatican was well aware of what the Nazis could do and had done to those who opposed them. Historically, the Vatican had a track record of indifference when it pertained to Jews. The Vatican had resources that could have helped rescue European Jews. They chose not to use them. All of the groups mentioned share to some degree of blame for the extent of the Holocaust.

The final chapter concerned the debate over the bombing of Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. Some historians concluded that both could have and should have been bombed, while other historians surmised that bombing would be extremely dangerous, and by 1944 the raids would have been ineffective. Historians on both sides of this debate have valid points. The pro-bombing historians show that the raids were possible because the U.S. had an airbase in Italy in 1944 and air force bombers had the capability to reach Auschwitz-Birkenau. In fact, the U.S. bombed the I.G. Farben plant that was only fifty miles from the extermination camps. Many pilots claimed that they flew almost directly over the camp on their bombing missions. The U.S. military used the excuse that the bombing of the camp was too dangerous because of the Nazi fortifications surrounding the camps. Auschwitz-Birkenau, however, was not as heavily

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<sup>5</sup> Randolph L. Brahm, *The Holocaust as Historical Experience: Essays and Discussion*, eds. , Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotestreich (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981) 11.

fortified as the military claimed. Most of the pilots who flew over the camp had no idea at the time what the camp contained. They were trained to look for military targets.

The Allies had no intention of helping the Jews at Auschwitz. By 1944 the vast majority of Jews had been killed by the Nazis, but this in no way excuses the Allies from attempting rescue. Based on the information that was available to the Allies, they did not know that bombing was futile in saving any significant amount of Jewish prisoners. In retrospect, we know that the crematoriums were not in use by mid-1944, but we did not do this in 1944. As far as the Allies knew the prisoners were still being gassed in large numbers. Morally the Allies should have tried bombings even if they turned out unsuccessful.

Any study on European refugees in the 1930s and 1940s is difficult especially when dealing with American public opinion and government actions. The American response to the situation conveys several different ideas of the time. The first was the U.S. Government's and the American public's disbelief that the Nazis were capable of mass murder of European Jews; second, was the widespread indifference throughout the U.S. when it pertained to European refugees; and third, the unwillingness of the United States to break established patterns of nativism, restrictionism, and anti-Semitism that were prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s. These three factors influenced all parts of American life at the worst possible time for European refugees. Because the Great Depression and World War II were very influential in the way Americans viewed refugees, these two events caused the restrictionist attitude, that later became anti-Semitic, to gain acceptance with the American public. The events also influenced Congress, Roosevelt, the State Department, and American Jewish leaders. When all factors were placed together, the U.S. became indifferent toward European refugees and this allowed the Nazis to implement the 'Final Solution' that almost erased Jews from Europe.

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