



CONFRONT THE ISSUE

FDR AND THE PREWAR REFUGEE CRISIS

TOUCH TO BEGIN

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

In recent decades, some scholars have criticized President Roosevelt for his approach to the pre-war Jewish refugee crisis. They maintain he could have lobbied Congress to liberalize American immigration policy and taken a stronger hand with the State Department, which was administering America's strict immigration laws and quotas with cold indifference.

Others insist such assessments fail to account adequately for the American public's pre-war isolationism and anti-Semitism. The quota laws enjoyed wide public and Congressional support amid the high unemployment of the Great Depression. President Roosevelt felt constrained in taking a more proactive stance with regard to European refugees. Eleanor Roosevelt was less restrained. As the crisis worsened, she became an important advocate for Jewish refugees and intervened in a number of cases to assist them.

Scroll down to view
select documents
from the FDR Library
and excerpts of the
historical debate.

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FDR's Handwritten Comment on a 1933 American Edition of Hitler's Mein Kampf (My Battle), 1933

Hitler came to power in Germany just weeks before Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated on March 4, 1933. Soon after his inauguration, FDR received this 1933 English translation of Hitler's treatise, *Mein Kampf* (My Battle), published by Houghton Mifflin. In translating and editing down the lengthy work, the publisher stripped out much of Hitler's anti-Semitic rantings and kept chapters on Nazi ideas of a restored German militaristic economy and society. The edited version outraged the American Jewish community. Roosevelt, who spoke and read German, was also appalled by the book. On the flyleaf of his copy, seen here, FDR wrote a rare editorial comment: "This translation is so expurgated as to give a wholly false view of what Hitler really is or says—The German original would make a different story."

President's Book Collection

Hamilton Ross with
The White House
1933 -

This translation is so expurgated
as to give a wholly false view
of what Hitler really is or
says - The German original
would make a different story

My Battle



ADOLF HITLER

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FDR's Exchange of Letters with South Carolina Governor I. C. Blackwood March 31-April 12, 1933

As Hitler solidified his hold on power in March 1933, roving gangs of Nazi thugs beat up and arrested Jews and vandalized synagogues. Forty Jews were dead by the end of June. News of these attacks was well-publicized in the United States, and pleas for President Roosevelt to take some sort of action on behalf of Germany's Jews were sent to the White House. One of the earliest came from South Carolina's Governor, I. C. Blackwood, who wrote to FDR at the urging of Jewish friends. In his reply sent two weeks later, the President advises Gov. Blackwood that the attacks against Jews in Germany were being "very seriously considered" and "that very appropriate action has been taken." In reality, very little action was taking place. At this time, the Roosevelt Administration viewed the situation in Germany in 1933 to be a "domestic problem of its own" and would not interfere diplomatically.

President's Personal File 256: I. C. Blackwood



THE WHITE HOUSE
APR 5 1933
RECEIVED

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COLUMBIA

I. C. BLACKWOOD
GOVERNOR
CHAS. H. GERALD
SECRETARY

March 31, 1933.

*J. Early
Pres letter
ackd
4/12
wm*

Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt,
President of the United States,
Washington, D.C.

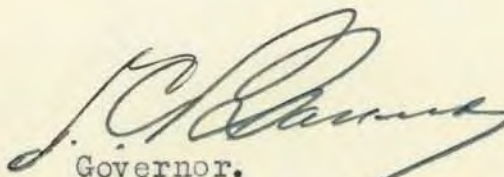
My dear Mr. President:

At the instance of my Jewish friends in South Carolina, I am joining with many others in an expression of my deep concern over the alleged outrages against the Jews living in Germany. This presents a most deplorable situation and, in my opinion, should be viewed with some degree of alarm.

This letter is written more as an evidence of my sympathy with you in your treatment of this important matter and not in the spirit of attempting to suggest what you should do. I am sure that your disposition of this problem will be as wisely performed as have been your performances of other matters of great importance since you became President. You have my hearty congratulation and best wishes in the things that you have promoted and accomplished to date.

With sentiments of esteem and best wishes, I am

Yours sincerely,


Governor.

Gov/LBB

Personal & Confidential

April 12, 1933

P.P.F.
256

My dear Governor Blackwood:

I am glad that you wrote me an expression of your deep concern over the alleged outrages against Jews living in Germany.

For your own personal information I want you to know that this matter has been very seriously considered for sometime and I think that very appropriate action has been taken.

Confidentially, I instructed the State Department recently to carefully observe the situation in Germany and to take every step that one Government can take in a situation where another Government is dealing with a domestic problem of its own.

Very sincerely yours,

Honorable I. C. Blackwood,
Governor of South Carolina,
Columbia, South Carolina.

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wlm

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FDR's Letter to New York Governor Herbert Lehman

November 13, 1935

Throughout the 1930s, President Roosevelt was kept informed of the growing refugee crisis in Europe by political leaders with ties to the American Jewish community, including New York Governor Herbert Lehman. Through these contacts, Roosevelt also learned that the strict immigration quotas in place at the time were not being fully and fairly administered by his own State Department. In this November 13, 1935 letter, the President advises Lehman of the results of his own examination of the visa issue, the legal limitations imposed by the Immigration Act of 1924, and his instruction to the State Department that German Jews applying for visas be given “the most generous and favorable treatment possible under the laws of this country.”

Official File 133: Immigration, 1933-1935

133

November 13, 1935.

My dear Governor Lehman:

I have your letter of November 1, 1935, with its enclosed letter of October 10, 1935, from Professor James G. McDonald, High Commissioner for Refugees (Jewish and Other) coming from Germany, to Mr. Felix M. Warburg with reference to the question of the immigration of German Jews into the United States.

x20
x198
x198-A

I have brought your letter to the particular attention of the Department of State in view of the responsibility placed by law upon its consular officers abroad for the issuance or refusal of immigration visas. In connection with my reference of this important matter to the competent officers of the Department of State, I am informed that the situation as regards the points you have raised is briefly as follows.

x20 miscel.
x76-6

With regard to your request that the quota for German Jews be increased from 2,500 to 5,000 per annum, there is no immigration quota fixed for persons in the class described, nor has there been any arbitrary limitation set upon the number of visas to be issued to natives of Germany other than the maximum quota fixed by law, which is 25,957. Consular

officers

The Honorable
The Governor of New York,
Albany.

x91
x1193

officers must issue immigration visas, within quota limitations, to all quota applicants who qualify under the law to receive such visas. They cannot of course issue visas to applicants who are found to be inadmissible under the public charge clause or any other restrictive limitation set by existing law.

I am informed that nearly all immigration quotas have been considerably under-issued during the past four years. Although the German quota comprises only 16.9 per cent of the total of all quotas, immigration visas issued under it now represent 26.9 of the visas issued under all quotas. While estimates on this point vary somewhat, it is understood that a very large majority of immigration visas under the German quota are issued to Jewish applicants. Since there is also a considerable number of aliens chargeable, because of their birthplace, to the Polish and other quotas who have lived in Germany and who immigrate into the United States, it is reasonable to take the number of immigration visas issued to natives of Germany as approximating numerically the total of the classes to which your letter refers.

The following figures, showing the issuance of immigration visas to natives of Germany are therefore of particular interest in relation to your inquiry.

<u>Fiscal year</u> <u>(ending June 30)</u>	<u>Immigration visas issued</u> <u>(exclusive of students</u> <u>and returning residents</u> <u>of the United States)</u>
1932	2,571
1933	1,798
1934	4,715
1935	5,117

As

As regards your wish that it be made certain that our consular representatives show sympathetic interest in permitting immigration of German Jews into this country, the Department of State has issued instructions to its consular officers, which are now in effect, that persons who are obliged to leave the country of their regular residence, and who seek to escape from the conditions in that country by coming to the United States, should receive, on the part of American consular officers, the most considerate attention and the most generous and favorable treatment possible under the laws of this country.

In addition to the above, consular officers have been instructed that in cases where it is found that an immigration visa applicant cannot obtain a supporting document normally required by the Immigration Act of 1924 without the peculiar delay and embarrassment that might attend a request of a political or religious refugee, the requirement of such document may be waived on the basis of its being not "available".

Furthermore, the principal consular officers stationed at Berlin, Hamburg and Stuttgart, which are the only three consular offices in Germany which now issue immigration visas, have all visited the Department of State during recent months and the problems in which you are interested have been discussed verbally and sympathetically with them at the time of their visits. The recently appointed Consul General at Berlin, Mr. Douglas Jenkins, who is the supervising consular officer for Germany, spent a number of days at the Department before

proceeding

proceeding to his new post, and these matters were discussed particularly with him.

I note that you have made the request to which I have referred above on the condition that these prospective immigrants "fulfill the immigration requirements in every particular". I believe that the Department of State and its consular officers abroad have had no other desire than to carry out the immigration duties placed upon them by the Immigration Act of 1924 in a considerate and humane manner, consistent with a faithful discharge of their responsibilities under the law. I understand that the percentage of immigration visa refusals in Germany has recently been considerably below the average for all countries.

I appreciate your action in bringing these matters to my attention and I can assure you that it is my earnest desire that all consideration and justice shall continue to be shown to the type of immigrants in whom you are interested.

Very sincerely yours,

VD:JFS:en

WE

A-G

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Memorandum for Miss LeHand from Stephen Early November 13, 1936

Because of the country's isolationism and the immigration laws in place in the mid-1930s, President Roosevelt often felt constrained in taking a more proactive stance with regard to European refugees. In this November 13, 1936 memorandum for the President's private secretary Missy LeHand, press secretary Stephen Early recommends that Roosevelt resist the temptation to issue a requested appeal on behalf of persecuted Christians in Germany. Such an appeal, in the opinion of Early and the State Department, would be an inappropriate expression of the President's preference for one group of refugees over others. FDR indicates his acceptance of Early's recommendation at the bottom of the memo.

Official File 133: Immigration, 1936-1941

133

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

File
W. J. F.

November 13, 1936

MEMORANDUM FOR MISS LE HAND:

A Mr. Clarence E. Pickett wrote Mrs. Roosevelt, asking her good offices in obtaining from the President a letter to Reverend Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Pastor of the Riverside Church in New York, endorsing an appeal which is to be made from the Christian pulpits of the United States during November in behalf of suffering Christian refugees from Germany.

x 1972

We referred the matter to the State Department and today received from Acting Secretary Moore the following memorandum:

"It is the opinion of the Department of State that it would not be appropriate for the President to support an appeal for assistance for one particular class of refugees or for refugees from one particular country. The President has, in the past, carefully refrained from taking such action in behalf of any single interested group.

"In view of these circumstances it is believed that Dr. Fosdick should be advised not to make the request which he contemplated making and that the situation should be explained to him or Mr. Pickett, preferably by telephone rather than by letter."

Done
W. J. F.

If the President approves we will handle as suggested by Acting Secretary Moore.

S. E.
STEPHEN EARLY

W. J. F.

AK
7/11

- x 20
- x 76-A
- x 76-B
- x 198-A
- x 133-A

FDR and Rabbi Stephen Wise's Letters about the Second Inaugural Address January 15-23, 1937

Rabbi Stephen Wise was an important and influential advocate for Jewish causes during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. Wise sought—often unsuccessfully—to unify various Jewish organizations and movements in the United States, and his international network of contacts sent him information about the worsening crisis facing Jews in Europe. In January 1937, just days before FDR's Second Inauguration, Wise received information that the Polish government had declared three million Polish Jews to be “superfluous.” Wise wrote this letter to the President urging him to use his inaugural address to assure the public that no one in America would be considered superfluous. As can be seen from Roosevelt's reply letter and this page from his Second Inaugural Address reading copy, FDR took Wise's advice. He used Wise's suggested language almost word-for-word in the most recognizable passage of the speech.

President's Personal File 3292: Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, President's Master Speech File

PPF
3292

STEPHEN S. WISE
FORTY WEST SIXTY-EIGHTH STREET
NEW YORK

January 15, 1937.

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Chief:

Your recent address at the Pan-American Peace Conference is sure to have an abiding effect on the life of all those who, in the South and Central Americas, are visited by or in peril of oppression.

Did you note that at a session of the Polish Parliament a few days ago, Colonel Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs, made the extraordinary, and for my people catastrophic, declaration that of the three and a half million Jews in Poland, three million are superfluous and must emigrate. If you read the statement, you must have recalled that President Wilson and our dear friend, Colonel House, did even more than Lloyd George and Clemenceau to make possible the political independence of Poland and to bring about the reconstituting of the Polish Republic.

Will you forgive me if I venture to say to you that on Wednesday just one word might be spoken by you that would bring solace and perhaps healing to the hearts of millions who have been terror-stricken by the utterance of the Polish government through its Foreign Minister.

As a result of your great leadership, our country did not forget those whom economic breakdown left without means, thirty to forty million people whom you refused to permit America to forget and to forsake. Oh! that you might say one word, dear Chief, on Wednesday, to the effect that wide as are the boundaries of our land, there is no room

STEPHEN S. WISE
FORTY WEST SIXTY-EIGHTH STREET
NEW YORK

The President

-2-

January 15, 1937.

for forgotten men. Every American citizen is the subject of his country's interest and concern. Nor will the American Democracy ever hold any faithful and law-abiding group within its borders to be superfluous.

That, after all, is your conviction and you have lived and led by virtue of that faith. I beg this of you because your word next Wednesday will, of course, be listened to by the whole world and will serve as the inaugural of what I know will be an administration of world-wide influence for justice and for peace throughout the world.

With deep-felt good wishes for the next four years and for many more,

Ever yours,

Wise

P. P. F.

3292

January 23, 1937.

Dear Stephen Wise:-

Yours of January fifteenth came just in the nick of time -- i.e., when I was going over the final draft of the Inaugural ^{xpp7-10} speech. Your sentence, as you will have noticed, was included verbatim!

As ever yours,

Reverend Stephen S. Wise,*
40 West 68th Street,
New York City,
New York.

xpp71820

I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labelled indecent by a so-called polite society half a century ago.

I see millions denied education, recreation and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children.

I see millions lacking the means to buy the products of farm and factory and by their poverty denying work and productiveness to many other millions.

I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.

It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope -- because the nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out.

We are determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country's interest and concern; and we will never regard any faithful law-abiding group within our borders as superfluous.

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

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Transcript of FDR's Press Conference at Warm Springs, Georgia March 25, 1938

On March 12, 1938, German troops marched into neighboring Austria, bringing more than 200,000 Jewish Austrians under Nazi control. Because a bill to increase immigration quotas could not pass Congress, FDR took executive action. He combined Austria's immigration quota with Germany's, thus increasing the number of Germans who could be considered for U.S. visas. The President announced the new policy at a press conference held in Warm Springs, Georgia.

President's Personal File 1-P: Press Conferences

CONFIDENTIAL

Press Conference #445,
On the road in front of Curtis Cottage,
Warm Springs Foundation, Georgia,
March 25, 1938, 11.00 A.M.

(The President was seated in his car.)

Q We non-advertising people have to refer to it (referring to the car) as a new V-8 of popular make. That is about the only way we could do it.

THE PRESIDENT: I think John O'Donnell called it a "cheap" car.

(Laughter)

Q (Mr. O'Donnell) I said, "low priced."

THE PRESIDENT: Well, what is the news?

Q That is what we are worried about.

THE PRESIDENT: So am I.

Q Did you get that railroad report? There is a story out of Washington that it has been sent to you.

THE PRESIDENT: Probably has.

Q Do you know that it is en route?

THE PRESIDENT: They said they were going to send it but how do I know whether it is en route?

Q There is nothing delaying it?

THE PRESIDENT: The last information I had was that it was being sent.

Q Mr. President, any chance of any of the Commissioners coming down to talk to you about it?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q With respect to the Secretary of State's invitation of yesterday to other powers on the plight of political refugees, from a practical point of view that means the Jews in Germany and Austria --

THE PRESIDENT: (interposing) It means a great many Christians, too, a very large number.

Q I wondered if any spokesmen of Catholic and Lutheran groups had also requested it?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know, categorically, but I think so.

Q To give practical application to it, would not legislation be required in order to relax our immigration laws?

THE PRESIDENT: No. Why?

Q For example, there are 200,000 Jews --

THE PRESIDENT: (interposing) The law says that if a country ceases to exist and is merged in another country, that the two quotas are merged into one quota.

Q Then we have the total for both Germany and Austria together? It would run up to (pausing)

THE PRESIDENT: 26,000.

Q Would that number take care of those who would desire to leave?

THE PRESIDENT: I have no idea at all because nobody has ever listed the people that want to leave.

Q I was wondering if a further application of it would take in oppressed groups, such as in Spain, where there are oppressed religious groups under the Barcelona government. Then, in Russia, there are certainly groups. In Italy there are the anti-Fascists. This would embrace all of those?

THE PRESIDENT: In other words, it would go back to the old thing that started in 1789 when this country held itself out as a place for political refugees to come to. There was a similar situation in 1848 all over Europe, when they had all kinds of popular uprisings

against monarchies at that time. There were thousands and thousands of people at that time, or eventually, that came over here as political refugees. Of course the percentage in relation to the total population is almost negligible.

Q I was wondering if there is a separate category for those who are political refugees and those who come for ordinary economic reasons?

THE PRESIDENT: No distinction.

Q Is the United States doing, actually, any more now to provide a haven for the oppressed than would otherwise be the case?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, for this reason: They are adopting the suggestion that private money be put up in all these nations to go along with this. That means practically most of the American republics and whatever European nations accept, and those private groups will make it possible for those people to come in.

Q But, from the standpoint of numbers, no more would now come in than --

THE PRESIDENT: (interposing) Yes; no change in the law.

Q Have they not exhausted their quotas?

THE PRESIDENT: In some cases they have and in other cases they have not.

Q (Mr. Mahoney) I have a couple of questions I would like to go through with. You understand that situation? (Laughter)

THE PRESIDENT: I would do almost anything to keep you here. (Laughter)

MR. McINTYRE: He is a very good influence, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: I know he is.

Q We have got what are laughingly referred to as "newspapers" down here and they are still filing a lot of Civil War news. But we

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Anti-Jewish Flyer Sent to the White House

April 4, 1938

As the Depression wore on, reactionary groups in the United States searched for someone or something to blame for continued unemployment. Believing that new immigrants to the United States might take already scarce American jobs, these groups opposed any change to the country's restrictive immigration laws to help Jewish refugees. Because FDR had several prominent Jewish advisers, including Samuel Rosenman, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and Felix Frankfurter, anti-Semites labeled the New Deal the "Jew Deal." It was alleged that Roosevelt was subservient to Jewish interests and therefore not acting in the interests of "traditional" Christian Americans. This anti-Semitic flyer was dropped by airplane over downtown Los Angeles, California, by an unknown group. It was sent to the White House by a concerned citizen of Los Angeles.

Official File 76c: Church Matters-Jewish, 1938

J E W S ! J E W S ! **J e w s E v e r y w h e r e !**

The Roosevelt Administration is Loaded with Jews

12 Million White American Workers Jobless

**OVER 1/4 MILLION EUROPEAN JEWS ARE NOW COMING TO UNITED STATES
TO THROW WHITE AMERICAN WORKERS OUT OF JOBS**

Benjamin Franklin Said:

"Jews are a menace to this country if permitted entrance And Should Be Excluded."

Samuel Roth Said:

"We Jews are a people of vultures, living on the labor of the rest of the world."

The Jewish Talmud Says:

"Jews are human beings, Gentiles are not human beings, but beasts." (Baba Mezia, 114, 6.)

Samuel Roth Says:

"WE JEWS, who come to the Nations, PRETENDING to escape PERSECUTION, are really the MOST DEADLY PERSECUTORS OF MEN."

C o m m u n i s m i s J e w i s h

OUT WITH JEWS!!

**LET WHITE PEOPLE RUN THIS COUNTRY AS
THEY DID BEFORE THE JEWISH INVASION**

Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

Get in touch with your nearest Anti-Communist Organization

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FDR's Letter to Myron C. Taylor on the Evian Conference

April 26, 1938

Following the German Anschluss with Austria, FDR proposed an international conference to facilitate and finance “political refugee” emigration to other countries. In this letter, Roosevelt appoints Myron C. Taylor, a moderate Republican businessman, to represent the United States at the July 1938 Evian Conference. At the conference, Taylor announced that the U.S. would admit its full German/Austrian quota of 27,370 per year over the next five years—a number far lower than the 300,000 applicants on waiting lists for U.S. visas. The conference also established a new Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate with Germany on refugee matters. Ultimately, though, the Evian Conference was a failure because no country—including the United States—was willing to take in the large numbers of European Jews seeking safe haven.

Myron C. Taylor Papers; Box 8

The Representative of THE WHITE HOUSE Government will have the honorary rank of Ambassador in Washington and Plenipotentiary, and, in view of the fact that this Government has taken the initiative in suggesting the creation of the International Committee, it is probable that the other members of the Committee will select the United States representative of that body. I can further assure you that the Government will give you the technical assistance that you may find necessary.

April 26 1938

My dear Mr. Taylor,

I feel that your acceptance of this position would be much to be desired. As you know, I have requested certain other governments to cooperate with this Government in the constitution of an International Committee for the purpose of facilitating the immigration of political refugees from Germany and Austria.

I have hoped that prompt and effective action by this Committee might relieve the distressing situation which has arisen as the result of the persecution of so many thousands of individuals in those two countries. I am glad to say that all of the American republics and Great Britain, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Holland, and Switzerland, have cordially agreed to cooperate in this endeavor.

As I see the problem, the task of the International Committee would be primarily to meet the emergency which has arisen, through the coordination of efforts on the part of the several governments involved in the humanitarian endeavor, and through the expenditure of funds received from private sources within the respective nations represented on the Committee to expedite and facilitate the immigration of refugees to those countries willing to receive them within the provisions of their existing legislation. The proper objectives of the International Committee would be to undertake the formulation of long range plans for the solution in years to come of the problem represented in those European countries where there exists excess populations.

I have designated an American Committee to cooperate with the International Committee, and this American Committee, I hope, will act as the intermediary between the International Committee and the many private organizations and individuals within the United States who are willing to extend effective assistance to these political refugees. I presume that many of the other countries represented on the International Committee will take similar action.

It has seemed to me that you could represent this Government admirably as the American member of the International Committee, and I hope very much that you will be willing to serve as the official representative of the United States on that body.

The representative of this Government will have the honorary rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and, in view of the fact that this Government has taken the initiative in suggesting the creation of the International Committee, it is probable that the other members of the Committee will select the United States representative as the chairman of that body. I can further assure you that the Government will give you the technical assistance that you may find necessary.

My dear Mr. President,

I feel that your acceptance of this position would do much to insure the successful achievement of the objectives which I had in mind when I sanctioned the creation of the International Committee, and in the furtherance of which believe public opinion in this country is deeply interested.

Interview yesterday, being the appointment tendered me of honorary Ambassador Extraordinary and

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

Plenipotentiary to represent our Government in cooperating with the International Committee created for the purpose of facilitating the emigration of political refugees from Germany and Austria. I have the honor to say that I conferred with Mr. Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State, after leaving you, and have this morning informed a number of my associates of your offer.

I am pleased to accept the appointment, and trust that I may acquit myself to your satisfaction.

With much appreciation of the honor which you have done me, I am Sir,

Very respectfully yours,

(Signed) WILSON C. TAYLOR.

To the President.

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Draft Statement by the President on Kristallnacht November 15, 1938

Nazi violence against German Jews escalated on November 9, 1938, when gangs of stormtroopers rampaged throughout the country destroying synagogues and breaking windows of Jewish business and homes. When the officially sanctioned violence—which became known as Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass)—finally ended, nearly 100 German Jews were dead and 30,000 men sent to concentration camps. President Roosevelt drafted this statement expressing his outrage at Kristallnacht and recalling the American ambassador to Germany. The changes and additions are in the President's handwriting. He read the statement at his November 15th press conference. Kristallnacht failed to change the politics of immigration, and no increase in quotas was proposed in Congress. But FDR did take executive action, ordering the indefinite extension of the temporary visas held by several thousand German Jews already in the United States. "If the Congress takes no action, these unfortunate people will be allowed to stay in this country," FDR declared. "I cannot, in any decent humanity, throw them out."

President's Secretary's Files; Diplomatic Correspondence; Germany, 1933-1938; Box 31

Suggested statement for the President to make
at press conference November 15,
1938

The news of the past few days from Germany
has ^{deeply} shocked public opinion in the United States.
Such news from any part of the world would in-
evitably produce a similar ^{profound} reaction among ~~the~~
American people. ^{every part of the nation} With a view to gaining a first-
hand picture of the situation in Germany I asked
the Secretary of State to ~~order~~ our Ambassador
in Berlin ^{to return at once} ~~to come home~~ for report and consultation.

I myself could scarcely believe
that such things could occur in
a twentieth century civilization.

C.H.

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FDR's Exchange of Letters with Ernest L. Klein

November 12-17, 1938

The events of Kristallnacht were widely reported in the press. But public opinion on admitting additional refugees into the United States remained divided. Mail came into the White House both calling for action and demanding restraint in dealing with Germany and the Jewish crisis. This divide in public opinion placed enormous constraints on FDR's ability to steer Congress towards more liberal immigration policies. Shortly after Kristallnacht, Ernest L. Klein from Chicago wrote this letter to the President urging him "to take such steps as may be deemed advisable to curb this madness." FDR responded a few days later and advised Klein of efforts by the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate with Germany for the orderly emigration of "the unfortunate victims" to other countries.

Official File 198: Government of Germany, 1935-1938

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198

Oct-11-12-3F
Lea-27A-

ERNEST L. KLEIN
181 East Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, Illinois

November 12, 1938

My dear Mr. President:

I stand today in my support of, and belief in, your humanitarian policies in government, as I did in 1935 when you honored me with the appointment as a member of the advisory board of the Works Progress Administration. No one knew better than the Honorable James W. Gerard, the late Colonel Edward M. House, and the late Louis McHenry Howe, with whom I have had the privilege of working in your behalf, how sincere I have always been in my profound respect and admiration for you as a statesman.

I read with horror the cable dispatches from Europe depicting the recent inhuman acts in Germany. Germany has turned the clock back to the more barbaric days than the medieval age. Human lives are being taken to satisfy the frenzy of the mob bent on exterminating human beings solely because of race and religion. Is it possible that the democracies in this so-called civilized age can stand idly by without the strongest type of protest and indignation directed to the responsible heads who permit such persecutions to take place within their borders!

Two great Presidents, William Howard Taft, and Theodore Roosevelt, during their administrations sent official protests to the Russian and Roumanian governments at the time of Jewish progroms in those countries, the protest to Russia culminating in the severance of diplomatic relations with her.

These unfortunate, oppressed and persecuted people see only one hope, the American spirit and understanding so abundantly expressed in our constitution, and portrayed in our harbor by the Statue of Liberty.

Every red blooded American, every citizen who adheres to the democratic principles and ideals upon which our country is founded, looks to you, my dear

862-4016/1827

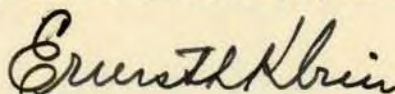
Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt - 2 - November 12, 1938

Mr. President, in this hour when civilization is on trial. It is the solemn duty of our democracy to save this civilization, to take such steps as may be deemed advisable to curb this madness which has endangered the civilization of the world.

You, my dear Mr. President, as a great leader of a cause which is humane, just and fair, can with your wisdom and great leadership render the world a service which will perpetuate the high ideals and principles of our government throughout the world. Your name will ring in every Hall of Fame, and history will record you as the greatest humanitarian of this age.

As an American citizen mindful of my responsibilities, obligations and privileges; as a man who served his country in the last World's War, I appeal to you, my dear Mr. President, to let your voice speak in this dark hour - to be heard around the world as was the first shot fired at Concord.

Cordially and faithfully yours,



ERNEST L. KLEIN

Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt
President of the United States
The White House

F.P.N.

3164

November 17, 1938

My dear Mr. Klein:

I have received your letter of November 12, 1938, concerning the most recent developments in Germany.

You have perhaps seen the statement which I made on November 15 concerning these developments, and I am sure you know my deep interest in the fate of the unfortunate victims and in doing everything possible to ameliorate their lot. The Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees which has been set up in London as a result of this Government's initiative, is actively engaged in its two-fold task of endeavoring to replace the present chaotic conditions of exodus from Germany by orderly conditions of emigration and to develop opportunities for permanent settlement in other countries. The technical difficulties involved are very great and the developments to which you refer have rendered the Committee's task far more difficult. I can nevertheless assure you that the interest of this Government in the plight of these unfortunate people has in no degree abated and that our efforts to assist them will in no way be relaxed.

x3186
x76-6

x198-A
x198

Very sincerely yours,

Mr. Ernest L. Klein, # x966
181 East Lake Shore Drive,
Chicago, Illinois.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

Telegram from “A Fed Up American Gentile” November 17, 1938

FDR's executive actions and public statements on behalf of German Jews after Kristallnacht also resulted in hateful and extreme anti-Semitic mail being sent to the White House. In this telegram, a self-declared but anonymous “Fed Up American Gentile” from New Jersey threatened FDR with revolution or impeachment for being the puppet of “International Jew War Mongers” and “Washington Jewish Minorities.” The White House did not respond to this message.

Official File 76c: Church Matters-Jewish, 1938

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

1220

(45)

SYMBOLS

- DL = Day Letter
- NL = Night Letter
- LC = Deferred Cable
- NLT = Cable Night Letter
- Ship Radiogram

R. B. WHITE
PRESIDENT

NEWCOMB CARLTON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

J. C. WILLEVER
FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

Received at 708 14th St., N. W. Washington, D. C.

NB45 75 DL=TDEX ORANGE NJ 17 1020A

1938 NOV 17 AM 10 47

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES=

WASHDC=

76-C

MR. PRESIDENT YOU ARE GOING TOO FAR. YOU SEEM TO FORGET THAT GENUINE AMERICAN GENTILES. MILLIONS OF THEM ARE COMPLETELY UNHEARD BECAUSE UNABLE TO SPEAK OVER OUR JEWISH CONTROLLED PRESS RADIO AND NEWS REEL BUT THEY DO NOT INTEND TO SIT IDLY BY WHILE THEIR COUNTRY IS GIVEN AWAY TO RED MOSCOW AND INTERNATIONAL JEW WAR MONGERS. YOU MAY FACE EITHER A REVOLUTION OR AN IMPEACHMENT IF YOU CONTINUE A CATSPA W FOR WASHINGTON JEWISH MINORITIES=

A FED UP AMERICAN GENTILE.

Charts of German American Bund Activities 1939

As the world crisis worsened, isolationist and non-interventionist organizations increasingly challenged any efforts by FDR to aid threatened democracies abroad and prepare the nation for possible war. Their isolationist rhetoric was often mixed with racial prejudice and a suspicion of foreigners. One of the most ominous of these organizations was the German American Bund, a domestic pro-Nazi group that preached fascism and anti-Semitism and had chapters across the country. The Roosevelt Administration was concerned about the potentially contagious influence of the Bund and similar organizations on public opinion. It kept close watch over their activities, as can be seen in this series of charts provided to FDR by the State Department.

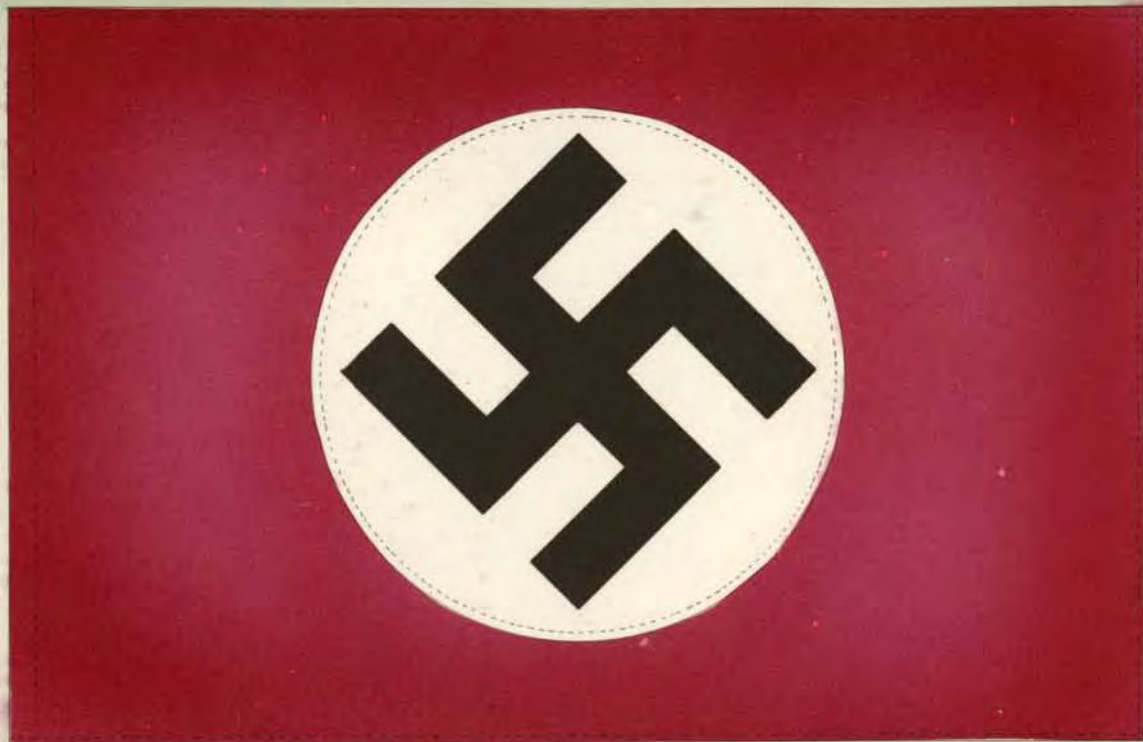
President's Secretary's Files; Departmental Files; State Department-German American Bund; Box 73



GERMAN AMERICAN BUND



AMERIKADEUTSCHER VOLKSBUND



"**A**S NATIONAL SOCIALISTS WE SEE IN OUR FLAG OUR PROGRAM. IN THE RED, WE SEE REFLECTED THE SOCIAL THOUGHTS UNDERLYING THE MOVEMENT, IN THE WHITE, WE SEE THE NATIONALISTIC IDEAS; IN THE SWASTIKA WE SEE THE MISSION OF THE STRUGGLE BY ARYANS AND AT THE SAME TIME THE VICTORY OF THE THOUGHT BEHIND CREATING LABOR, WHICH IN ITSELF WAS EVER AND ALWAYS WILL BE ANTI-SEMITIC"



ADOLF HITLER, "MEIN KAMPF"



GERMAN AMERICAN BUND

AMERIKADEUTSCHER VOLKS BUND



MEMBERSHIP 6,617 STRENGTH IN EACH GAU (DEPT.)

• EACH FIGURE REPRESENTS
100 MEMBERS

GAU MITTELWESTEN (MIDDLE WEST DEPARTMENT)

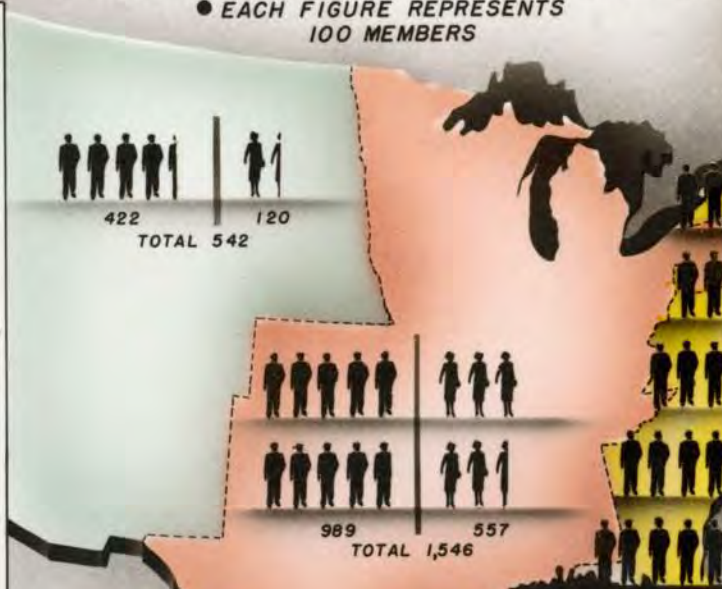
LOCAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Chicago, Ill.	192	83	275
Cincinnati, Ohio	17	16	33
Cleveland, Ohio	60	30	90
Dayton, Ohio	35	-	35
Detroit, Mich.	330	270	600
Gary, Ind.	15	-	15
Hammond, Ind.	13	2	15
Kenosha, Wis.	19	7	26
Milwaukee, Wis.	140	60	200
Pittsburgh, Pa.	53	52	105
Sheboygan, Wis.	18	5	23
South Bend, Ind.	13	12	25
St. Louis, Mo.	80	20	100
Toledo, Ohio	4	-	4
Total	989	557	1,546

GAU WEST (WESTERN DEPARTMENT)

LOCAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Los Angeles, Cal.	160	40	200
Oakland, Cal.	28	20	48
Petaluma, Cal.	23	7	30
Portland, Oreg.	50	10	60
San Diego, Cal.	12	7	19
San Francisco, Cal.	85	15	100
San Gabriel, Cal.	31	14	45
Santa Barbara, Cal.	8	7	15
Seattle, Wash.	13	-	13
Spokane, Wash.	12	-	12
Total	422	120	542

GAU OST (EASTERN DEPARTMENT)

LOCAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Astoria, L.I., N.Y.	200	50	250
Bergen Co., N. J.	30	20	50
Bronx, N. Y.	175	75	250
Brooklyn, N. Y.	308	82	390
Buffalo, N. Y.	255	45	300
Essex Co., N. J.	50	50	100
Glendale, L.I., N.Y.	30	15	45
Hudson Co., N. J.	165	50	215
Jamaica, L.I., N.Y.	125	50	175
Lindenhurst, L.I., N.Y.	50	16	66
Nassau, L.I., N.Y.	105	45	150
New Haven, Conn.	23	22	45
New Rochelle, N.Y.	175	75	250
New York, N. Y.	980	420	1,400
Passaic Co., N. J.	28	25	53
Philadelphia, Pa.	155	52	207
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.	8	2	10
Rockland Co., N. Y.	17	6	23
Schenectady, N. Y.	42	26	68
South Brooklyn, N.Y.	125	50	175
Stamford-Horwalk, Conn.	15	15	30
Staten Island, N. Y.	50	50	100
Trenton, N. J.	20	16	36
West Reading, Pa.	35	15	50
White Plains, N. Y.	40	30	70
Yonkers, N. Y.	6	15	21
Total	3,212	1,317	4,529



WE INCLUDE IN THE LEAGUE OF NATIONAL COMRADESHIP ALL THOSE WHO ARE OF GERMAN BLOOD (SIX MILLION IN U.S.). IN ADDITION TO THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE REICH, WE COUNT THE MANY MILLIONS OF TRIBAL BROTHERS WHOM FATE HAS SCATTERED ALL OVER THE WORLD"

JOSEPH HUENERFAUTH, LEADING NAZI PHILOSOPHER.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

Eleanor Roosevelt's Letter to Judge Justine Wise Polier

January 4, 1939

In early 1939, Eleanor Roosevelt publicly supported a bill that would have allowed the admission of up to 30,000 Jewish children outside the quota system. Consistent with its restrictive interpretation of immigration laws and regulations, the State Department objected to the proposal. Supporters of the bill, including Rabbi Stephen Wise's daughter Judge Justine Wise Polier, asked Mrs. Roosevelt to consult with the President on how best to proceed with the children's measure. In this letter, ER reports back to Judge Polier that FDR recommended getting bipartisan agreement on the legislation and gathering as much Catholic support as possible. This last advice—to get Catholic support—was an effort to neutralize the opposition of the popular “radio priest” Father Charles Coughlin, a vocal anti-Semitic and isolationist figure.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Series 100: Pl-Po, 1939; Box 698

100

January 4, 1939

Dear Judge Polier:

My husband says that you had better go to work at once and get two people of opposite parties in the House and in the Senate and have them jointly get agreement on the legislation which you want for bringing in children.

The State Department is only afraid of what Congress will say to them, and therefore if you remove that fear the State Department will make no objection.

He advises that you choose your people rather carefully and, if possible, get all the Catholic support you can.

Very sincerely yours,

SO

Honorable Justine Wise Polier
280 West 4th Street
NYC

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

Memorandum for the President

June 2, 1939

As the children's immigration bill worked its way through Congress in the spring of 1939, opposition to the measure intensified. Critics launched a public campaign against the bill, claiming that it would lead to unrestricted immigration. Polling showed that two-thirds of the public agreed. The bill's allies began to retreat, and by April, a private poll of Senators showed hefty opposition. As the bill languished in committee, New York Representative Caroline O'Day appealed to the White House for the President to issue a statement on behalf of the bill. Realizing the measure was doomed to failure and that fighting for it might endanger his other foreign policy priorities in Congress, FDR ordered that "no action" be taken on O'Day's request. The children's immigration bill was gutted in committee and never reached a final vote in 1939.

Official File 3186: Political Refugees, January-June 1939

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON


June 2, 1939.

3186

File
no action
HDL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Caroline O'Day asked me last
night at dinner if you would give her
an expression of your views on the bill
providing for 20,000 refugee children
being allowed into America regardless
of the quota status.


E.M.W.

x 133-A

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

State Department Memorandum of Conversation Regarding the SS St. Louis June 8, 1939

On May 13, 1939—three months before World War II—the SS St. Louis, a ship carrying 937 German Jews fleeing Nazi persecution, sailed from Hamburg for Cuba. Other ships had made the same journey, and their refugee passengers had disembarked in Havana. But the Cuban government, responding to corruption and anti-Semitic political pressure, ordered the enforcement of new visa requirements when the St. Louis arrived. Twenty-two passengers who met the new requirements were allowed to land. The remaining passengers were forced to remain on board the ship. Negotiations with the Cuban government led by the American Joint Distribution Committee—a private Jewish organization—broke down, despite pressure from the U.S. government, as can be seen in this Memorandum of Conversation written by the U.S. Ambassador to Cuba, J. Butler Wright. Tremendous public attention focused on the St. Louis. The ship's passengers even cabled the White House, but the matter was referred to the State Department. America's immigration laws did not permit their entry into the United States since they did not have U.S. visas. American diplomats were able to help resettle the refugees in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark. But many later fell into Nazi hands during the war. Contrary to popular belief, there was no specific or official order by FDR refusing entry of the St. Louis refugees.

Sumner Welles Papers; Office Correspondence; File: Wright, J. Butler, April-June 1939; Box 57

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: June 8, 1939.

SUBJECT: Refugees. Cuban attitude toward Refugee ships and

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Wright
Miss Clarkson

COPIES TO:

OFF 1-1408

MR. WRIGHT: Anticipating that Mr. Welles will be very much occupied today, I am going to give you a message to give to him:

I had previously impressed upon the Cuban Secretary of State that I had specific instructions not to intervene in this matter, therefore all of my observations were informal and based upon humanitarian considerations alone.

Yesterday at 7:30 P.M. I saw both the President and the Secretary of State. I broached the subject first to the latter and recalled to his attention the attitude which I had assumed, which he said he recollected perfectly and appreciated. I then explained my present request that he might receive the representative of the Chase Bank. He said he would; and that he would communicate with the President.

At eight o'clock in the same gathering, the President sent for me and I represented to him what I had been instructed to say. I repeated to him the reference to the position which I had assumed, which I made it clear I understood the President understood and appreciated the position taken by the Government of the United States in this matter. I then told him what the Chase Bank wanted to communicate to him. He said specifically: "Does this refer to the SS ST. LOUIS?" I said: "I understand that it does." He then said: "The ST. LOUIS matter is to be considered a closed incident in view of the fact that the provisions of the law that \$500 per person be deposited was not met. I gave notice through the press and the Secretary of the Treasury that the time limit expired on the 6th." He said: "Does the Chase Bank wish to confer on the matter of other ships." If so, I shall be very glad to discuss the matter with Mr. Finley." I then again called to mind the fact that I was speaking purely through our humanitarian interest. and he responded by saying that he had always been mindful of the situation from the humanitarian angle and that if the records were examined, it would be found that Cuba had been more generous than any other country in the matter of accepting refugees. He will see the representative of the Chase Bank as much before twelve as possible.

The FLANDERS is back in the harbor from Vera Cruz and has 100 refugees on board. The Bank did not have instructions last night, but have received instructions this morning, that the money set up is applicable to the FLANDERS. They now have some one at

the Immigration office and on the ship.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

FDR's Letter to Myron Taylor on the Rublee Plan to Aid Refugees

June 8, 1939

By early 1939, Nazi anti-Jewish laws had led to the confiscation of most Jewish assets and made it almost impossible for any applicant to meet the strict American visa requirements that refugees have sufficient financial resources to support themselves. Resettlement efforts by the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees also ground to a halt as German officials refused to negotiate for the orderly emigration of German Jews. The Committee's director, George Rublee, proposed the establishment of a private foundation that could accept donations from Jewish organizations outside Germany to cover resettlement costs. President Roosevelt hoped this plan would encourage other countries to open their doors to more Jewish refugees, since the costs would be covered by the foundation. In this letter to Myron Taylor, the American representative on the Intergovernmental Committee, the President instructs Taylor to throw his support behind the Rublee Plan. But the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, put an end to any possibility of a negotiated resettlement of German Jews.

Official File 3186: Political Refugees, January-June, 1939

3186

June 8, 1939

My dear Mr. Taylor:

I wish to set forth certain considerations and suggestions for your guidance in connection with the forthcoming meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee; *(on Political Refugees)*

(1) The refugee problem continues and will undoubtedly continue for a long time to come. It may at any time be greatly aggravated by a new wave of persecution in Germany. In the normal course of events it may be expected gradually to diminish quantitatively in Germany, but to increase quantitatively in Eastern Europe.

(2) This Government's interest in efforts to bring about a solution of the problem is strong. This Government was primarily responsible for the creation of the Intergovernmental Committee. As and when direct action by this Government is required in connection with the refugee problem, this Government has naturally preferred to take such action through the Intergovernmental Committee rather than through any other agency.

International
(3) At the same time, the imminent establishment of the Refugee Foundation and the opening up by the Committee of opportunities in various parts of the world for mass settlement have created a new situation, requiring a new integration of private and governmental effort.

x
(4) The Foundation, which was envisaged in the Rublee plan and is being set up in accordance with that plan, is designed to be in a position to negotiate more effectively with the German authorities concerning financial, and perhaps other, questions than could the Committee. I assume that the Foundation will be ably directed and wholeheartedly supported by the private interests most deeply concerned. Without such support governmental effort can be of little avail.

(5) The financing and administration of settlement projects

Original sent to Mr. Sumner Welles, 6/9/39
for forwarding to Mr. Taylor.
Sum

projects must be undertaken by private corporations specifically organized for the purpose in cooperation with the Foundation.

(6) The terms of reference of the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees permit him to negotiate with governments of countries of immigration for the further development of opportunities for settlement.

(7) It must reluctantly be admitted that this Government's efforts to stimulate concrete action by other governments to meet the problem have been met at best by a lukewarm attitude. In view of the attitude of other governments, and the reluctance which many of them have shown to contribute toward the Committee's expenses during its first year, it is apparent that few governments are willing to contribute on the present basis to the Committee's support for another year.

(8) In the absence of drastic changes in governments and attitudes, if not of human nature, in Europe, the problem in its larger aspects appears almost insoluble except through a basic solution such as the development of a suitable area to which refugees could be admitted in almost unlimited numbers. Whether the Committee could best contribute toward the attaining of such a solution or whether it should be sought through other means is open to question. I am convinced, nevertheless, that every effort must continue to be made to attain a practicable solution along those lines.

In view of the foregoing considerations I envisage that the nature of the Committee in the future should be along the following lines:

x184
Subject to general approval, the Intergovernmental Committee should take steps to turn over its function of negotiating with the governments of countries of settlement to the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. ~~If this is done, this Government is disposed to contribute to the expenses of the High Commission~~

for

for this purpose. It should turn over its function of negotiating with the authorities of the country of origin to the Foundation. In making this change every effort must be exerted to minimize the risk of unfavorable reaction in Germany.

The Intergovernmental Committee should continue in existence though in an inactive form. It might well be composed of the diplomatic representatives in London of the member governments. If this idea is adopted, the Committee will need at most only a nominal staff and no permanent offices. It should be in a position to meet at short notice if circumstances make its revival necessary. Contributions toward its support should be purely voluntary and in such amounts as the member governments might consider appropriate.

I wish again to emphasize that this Government's interest in practical efforts to solve the problem continues strong and unabated. It will be prepared to exert its influence, through the Committee and through diplomatic channels, to assist the High Commissioner, the Foundation and the settlement corporations in the carrying out of their tasks.

Very sincerely yours,

x198
x198-A

The Honorable
Myron C. Taylor, xPP7-423
71 Broadway, xJcen.
New York, New York.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

Eleanor Roosevelt's Correspondence in Aid of Refugee Fritz Becker July 26-August 1, 1939

Because of her well-known sympathies, Eleanor Roosevelt received many requests to assist refugees seeking visas to come to the United States. A Dutchess County neighbor, Mr. Hardy Steeholm, contacted ER and asked her to aid a German Jewish refugee in Yugoslavia named Fritz Becker. In this July 26, 1939 letter, Mrs. Roosevelt's secretary forwarded Becker's information to Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles and asked his assistance in securing a visa for the young man. Welles wrote to Eleanor on August 1, 1939—one month before the beginning of World War II—and advised her that Becker's visa application would not “be reached for final consideration for a protracted period of time.” Welles returned to Mrs. Roosevelt the photograph of Fritz Becker that she had provided him. Fritz Becker's fate is not known.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Series 70: Sumner Welles, 1939; Box 335

70

July 26, 1939

My dear Mr. Welles:

Kalovice 11s

Mrs. Roosevelt asks me to send you the enclosed memorandum on Fritz Becker, Sarajevo, Jugoslavia, who is applying for a visa. She asks if there is any way in which the boy can be helped to get into the United States. She understands that all necessary papers are filed and that Mr. Hardy Steeholm guarantees his care.

Very sincerely yours,

Secretary to
Mrs. Roosevelt

The Honorable Sumner Welles
Under Secretary of State
Washington, D.C.

+

Mr. Hardy Steeholm
Salt Point, N.Y.

0

*original sent to
Mr. Stechholm 2/5*

August 1, 1939

Dear Eleanor:

Mrs. Thompson in a recent communication forwarded to me the enclosed memorandum, together with photograph, pertaining to the case of Fritz Becker of Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, who is desirous of immigrating into the United States.

I find that a telegraphic report was obtained on this case some weeks ago from our Consul at Belgrade, at the instance of Miss Cecilia Razovsky of the National Refugee Service, Inc., New York City. The report indicates that Mr. Becker was registered at the Consulate at Belgrade on January 27, 1939 as a prospective applicant for a nonpreference immigration visa under the German quota and that on the basis of such registration it is not anticipated that his case will be reached for final consideration for a protracted period of time.

I

Mrs. Roosevelt,
The White House.

I should be more than happy to render any possible assistance in effecting Mr. Becker's early admission into this country but I know of no way under the existing laws and regulations whereby action on his case may be expedited. Mr. Becker, as a nonpreference immigrant, must await his turn under the quota until consideration is given to the cases of aliens entitled to preference and others in the nonpreference category whose registrations are of prior record. You will appreciate that to advance his name on the waiting list would not only have the effect of according him an illegal preference but also would be unfair to prior registrants who are anxiously awaiting final consideration of their cases. The only classes of immigrants entitled to preference under the law are enumerated in paragraph 5 of the enclosed leaflet.

I regret exceedingly that I am unable to furnish more favorable information regarding this case, but I assure you that our Consul at Belgrade will notify Mr. Becker as soon as his turn is reached on the quota waiting list and will accord his case the most considerate attention possible.

My kindest regards to you, and believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

Summer Welles

Enclosures:

1. Memorandum
2. Photograph
3. VD-General

Name and address of applicant for visa:

FRITZ BECKER
Kulovics 11a, Sarajevo
Jugoslavia

Name and address of sponsor in the United States:

Mr. and Mrs. Hardy Steeholm
Salt Point, New York



CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Despite his occasional expressions of sympathy for the Jewish victims of Nazism, President Roosevelt subscribed to a vision of America that had room for only a very small number of them. Permitting any significant increase in Jewish immigration, even within existing laws and even if it would not have attracted public notice, was anathema to FDR because it would have conflicted with his concept of how American society should look. Imposing cumbersome visa requirements that disqualified large numbers of would-be Jewish immigrants during the 1930s and 1940s advanced his vision of America. Although he presented himself to the public as the champion of “the forgotten man,” a leader of liberal and humane values who cared about the downtrodden, FDR in fact privately embraced a vision of America that was far from inclusive or welcoming when it came to certain minority groups. Roosevelt’s perception of Jews and their place in American life helps explain why, as Prof. David S. Wyman has written, “the era’s most prominent symbol of humanitarianism turned away from one of history’s most compelling moral challenges.”

Rafael Medoff, FDR and the Holocaust: A Breach of Faith (David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, 2013), 32

"AN IMPORTANT BOOK ON AN URGENT TOPIC."

-Rabbi Dr. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, Past Chairman
United States Holocaust Memorial Council



FDR AND THE HOLOCAUST

A BREACH OF FAITH



Rafael Medoff

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

America's disregard for what was happening inside Nazi Germany was caused by more than unthinking prejudice. The easiest, most charitable explanation lay in America's preoccupation with itself. Adolf Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, virtually coincided with Franklin Roosevelt's swearing in as the thirty-second president of the United States, and the chaos that confronted Roosevelt as he took office dwarfed consideration of what was occurring elsewhere in the world. America was paralyzed financially: nearly thirteen million people—one-fourth of the labor force—were unemployed; national income was half what it had been in 1928; every bank in the country had closed its doors; and the republic was at or near the nadir of the gravest economic depression in its history. With good reason, many thoughtful citizens believed that revolution was at hand. Americans were understandably obsessed with the woes that afflicted themselves and their families....In the face of preoccupation with questions like these, it was little wonder if the average American was largely unaware, initially at least, of the terrifying brutality that had been unloosed in Germany....Compounding the political problems fueled by unemployment and depression were two other factors: flagrant anti-Semitism and a nativism no less virulent than the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant forces...of the 1840s and 50s. What this meant to the beleaguered Jews in Germany was that the leader of the world's most powerful democracy—the man they counted on to offer them support and relief—was in a very touchy position [with] many of this country's political conservatives, who were the last people likely to do much to assist the Jews.

Richard M. Ketchum, The Borrowed Years, 1938-1941: American on the Way to War (Random House, 1989) 108-110

THE BORROWED YEARS

1938-1941

AMERICA ON THE
WAY TO WAR

RICHARD M. KETCHUM



CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
CRISIS**

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Roosevelt knew that no exercise of personal charm could bring a change to the immigration law and no Administration attempt to do so was ever hinted at. Instead the Administration directed its attention to liberalizing the implementation of the law, especially the visa procedure....Roosevelt ordered the State Department to extend to the refugees crowding the understaffed consulates “the most humane treatment possible under the law.” Despite such exhortations the visa procedure caused much anguish within the Jewish community and much strife within the Administration....Complaints regarding the visa procedure continued to flow into the White House and it soon became apparent that the Administration’s good intentions remained largely rhetorical. They were being thwarted by the recalcitrance of the consular officials who legally held the final responsibility for determining whether visa applicants qualified. By late 1938 and early 1939 the reaction pattern of the Administration seemed clear. It was carefully attempting to pick its way between two forces at minimal political risk. On the one hand there existed strong restrictionist sentiment generated by the Depression, and on the other a particularly loyal Jewish community allied with other liberal elements which was urging that the tradition of asylum for the persecuted of Europe be at least nominally maintained....Generally Roosevelt was content to let the State Department handle the refugee matter. He preferred to remain above the battle although he might occasionally make an inquiry or a suggestion. Such a procedure, Roosevelt had discovered in other areas, offered certain advantages, especially if the issue proved nettlesome. It allowed the agency involved to absorb much of the pressure and ire that might otherwise be directed at the White House.

Henry L. Feingold, The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945 (Rutgers University Press, 1970) 16-18

THE POLITICS OF RESCUE

Henry L. Feingold

**The Roosevelt Administration
and the Holocaust, 1938-1945**

CONFRONT THE ISSUE
**FDR AND THE
PREWAR
REFUGEE
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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Mindful of the political difficulties at home, in the spring of 1938 FDR called for an international conference on the refugee problem and pressed for a new international organization. Meanwhile, the president considered the possibility of settling refugees on a broad scale in sparsely settled territories throughout the world. Settlement abroad, of course, posed fewer political problems than immigration at home....But the Evian (France) Conference and then the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees accomplished little. For refugee diplomacy to work, other countries or colonies had to accept more Jewish refugees. While more and more German Jewish refugees were entering the United States during 1938, it was a fact that the immigration quota for Germany had not changed. In this sense, the United States set a poor example....The president might have reversed the impression that the United States was willing to do little itself if he had sought and won congressional approval for funding of refugee resettlement. Meanwhile, the State Department, perhaps more concerned about American relations with other countries than with the refugee problem, did not pressure other countries to change their existing immigration laws....The situation in Berlin was cloudy, and, even in retrospect, it is hard to determine whether Nazi Germany in fact wanted a negotiated settlement of its "Jewish problem."... All in all, the West could have and should have conducted refugee negotiations with Germany in 1938-1939 more aggressively, if only because there was some chance of saving substantial numbers of lives.

Richard Breitman, "The Failure to Provide a Safe Haven for European Jewry," in FDR and the Holocaust, ed. Verne W. Newton (St. Martin's Press, 1996) 134-135

The Failure to Provide a Safe Haven for European Jewry

Richard Breitman

Writing several years later, however, Breitman seems to render a harsher judgment in this chapter on "The Failure to Provide a Safe Haven for European Jews." However, he also admonishes historians who are critical of the Roosevelt administration that they must "present evidence that alternative policies were logistically and politically possible."

During the Hyde Park Conference, Breitman also reminded participants that historians eager to issue moral judgments about policymakers of the 1930s and 1940s must remember there was no conception then of a Holocaust. Yet Breitman also demonstrates how difficult it is to view the past without imposing the knowledge of the present. He argues the West "should have conducted refugee negotiations with Germany in 1938-1939 more aggressively, if only because there was some chance of saving substantial numbers of lives." But of course at the time, no one had any notion that substantial numbers of lives were at risk.

Virtually all of the specialists on American reaction to the Holocaust agree that America collectively paid little attention to Nazi persecution of the Jews and failed to offer refuge to most of those Jews who might have escaped a Nazi-dominated continent. These conclusions have both moral and political dimensions: Government policies that saved lives would have served U.S.

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In the immediate aftermath of Kristallnacht, [Roosevelt] proceeded with caution. He did not comment on events in Germany and he told reporters to take their questions to the State Department. Five days later, public response pushed Roosevelt to act. He extended the tourist visas of nearly fifteen thousand German-Jews who were here in the United States. He recalled the American Ambassador from Germany. During a press conference, he issued a statement. "The news of the past few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the U.S. Such news from any part of the world would inevitably produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation. I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization...." His outrage was clear. How far did the indignation go? Time magazine believed that due to public opinion the President had been given a "mandate" which he could "translate into foreign policy." Shockingly, nothing changed in foreign policy. No move was made to liberalize the quota system. Nor did the President instigate an intervention-based coalition of nations. And so, without any serious international interference, Hitler's government continued along its chosen path.

Robert L. Beir with Brian Josepher, Roosevelt and the Holocaust: A Rooseveltian Examines the Policies and Remembers the Times (Barricade, 2006) 127



ROOSEVELT AND THE HOLOCAUST

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