

The U.S. Response to the Holocaust

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce dokumentuje reakci USA na holocaust. Nejprve je popsán původ holocaustu, nástup Adolfa Hitlera k moci, německý antisemitismus a události jako *Kristallnacht* a plavba *St. Louis*, které předcházely této genocidě. Poté se tato práce zabývá americkým přístupem k otázce židovských uprchlíků před válkou i během války, přičemž zvláštní pozornost je věnována imigračním zákonům USA, Radě pro uprchlíky a dalším organizacím poskytujícím pomoc. V neposlední řadě je popsáno, jaké kroky podnikly Spojené státy k potrestání pachatelů holocaustu. Nakonec tato práce dokazuje, že Spojené státy daly přednost záchraně Američanů a národní bezpečnosti před vojenským zásahem, ale po japonském útoku na Pearl Harbor se Amerika připojila k válce, aby porazila nacismus a zachovala demokracii. Vláda USA poté zaměřila své úsilí a národní zdroje na porážku nacistického Německa a jeho spojenců, než na pomoc uprchlíkům, a to i poté, co se dozvěděla o nacistickému plánu vyhladit evropské Židy.

Klíčová slova:

Holocaust, nacismus, Německo, Křišťálová noc, plavba *St. Louis*, imigrační zákony, Americký židovský kongres, Americká židovská komise, Společný krizový štáb, Rada pro uprchlíky, Rooseveltova administrativa, Norimberské procesy

ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the U.S. response to Holocaust. It starts by describing the origins of the Holocaust, Adolf Hitler's rise to power, German anti-Semitism and events such as *Kristallnacht* and the Voyage of the *St. Louis* that preceded this genocide. It then deals with the American approach to the Jewish refugee issue, both before and during the war, paying particular attention to U.S. immigration laws, the War Refugee Board and other aid organizations. Finally, it documents what steps the United States took to punish the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Ultimately this thesis proves that the United States gave priority to rescuing Americans and national security over military involvement, but following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, America joined the war to defeat Nazism and preserve democracy. The U.S. government then focused its efforts and national resources on defeating Nazi Germany and its allies rather than helping refugees, even after learning of the Nazi plan to annihilate European Jews.

Holocaust, Nazi, Germany, anti-Semitism, *Kristallnacht*, immigration restriction, Voyage of the *St. Louis*, American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, Joint Emergency Committee, War Refugee Board, Roosevelt administration, Nuremberg trials

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The word “holocaust” comes from the Greek words “holos” (whole) and “kaustos” (burned) and was originally applied to a sacrificial offering burned on a pedestal. Since 1945, the word has had a new and appalling meaning: the ideological and systematic state-supported pursuit and extermination of millions of European Jews (as well countless other victims, such as Roma, intellectuals, dissidents and homosexuals). This mass killing was carried out by Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945. Adolf Hitler, an anti-Semitic Nazi leader, considered Jews as an inferior race, a threat to German racial purity and the community. After years of Nazi superiority in Germany, during which Jews were frequently oppressed, Hitler's “final solution” - known as the Holocaust - took place under the guise of World War II with extermination centers built in the concentration camps of Eastern Europe.¹

Although the United States has been known to assist persecuted nations, many factors during the 1930s and '40s prevented it from doing so, among them widespread anti-Semitism, xenophobia, isolationism and a sustained economic depression. Because of the US immigration quotas established in the 1920s, which had both popular and congressional support, it was difficult for Jewish refugees to find sanctuary from Nazi persecution in the United States. This thesis examines America’s restrictive immigration measures, its reaction to reported atrocities, and its actions (and inaction) on behalf of European Jews.

During the 1930s, America had sufficient access to a significant amount of information about the threat of Nazism, but the Great Depression and U.S. promises of neutrality combined to prevent any coordinated or sustained response by the U.S. government or concerned individuals. In the course of the refugee crisis in Europe, the U.S. government tightened already strict and restrictive immigration laws. Despite such restrictions, some Americans managed to help Jewish refugees. At this time, the United States did not have a refugee policy in place but only an immigration policy. When Europe entered the war, the Americans introduced measures that gave priority to national security over military involvement, but following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, America joined the war to defeat Nazism and preserve democracy. The U.S. government then focused its efforts and national resources on defeating Nazi Germany and its allies rather than helping refugees, even after learning of the Nazi plan to annihilate European Jews. In the American mindset,

¹ Barry Trachtenberg, *The United States and the Nazi Holocaust: Race, Refuge, and Remembrance* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 5.

Europe's Jews were unfortunate casualties of war within a war that produced countless casualties. People were dying worldwide in great numbers, and the United States, its resources strained to the max, gave preferential treatment, when possible, only to Americans.

1 THE HOLOCAUST

During World War II, Nazi Germany killed about 5.7 million Jews.² These dead were not victims of war; they were killed because they were Jews. The Holocaust developed in stages, but the broader framework was evident from the beginning. In the first phase of the war, German territory was cleansed of racially alien elements, mainly Jews, but also Roma. Beginning with the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, mass executions occurred, but after the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 the executions intensified. At the end of 1941, a policy, called the “final solution,” ordered Jews to be deported and eventually killed on an industrial scale in specially adapted camps equipped with gas chambers and crematoria. All this required a massive logistics operation that was carefully prepared and carried out not only by special officers but also by officials from routine services such as railways. These factors have made the extermination of Jews an abomination that had no predecessor.³

1.1 World War I and the Defeat of Germany

On June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo a young Serbian terrorist assassinated the Austrian-Hungarian successor to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Russia mobilized against Austria-Hungary, while Germany, allied with Austria-Hungary, declared war on Russia and its ally, France. After the German invasion of Belgium, Great Britain declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1917, after Russia left the war, the United States joined it, on the side of Great Britain, France and Italy. The First World War lasted for over four years, until November 11, 1918, when Germany capitulated.

The defeat of Germany caused its monarchy to fall, and in January 1919, an era of democracy began. In the German city of Weimar, a democratic constitution was signed, free elections were proclaimed and the Weimar Republic period began, which was to last until 1933. In the summer of 1919, a peace treaty was signed in Versailles, France. In the treaty, Germany acknowledged its guilt and agreed to pay compensation to the victors. The Germans were humiliated, which triggered an increase in nationalist sentiment.⁴

² Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1945* (London: Phoenix, 2014), 5.

³ Maria van Haperen, *The Holocaust and Other Genocides: An Introduction* (Amsterdam: NIOD Inst. for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, 2012), 20.

⁴ Omer Bartov, ed., *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 2015), 35.

1.2 Adolf Hitler Comes of Age

By 1918, thirty-year-old Adolf Hitler had developed a strong sense of nationalism and had adopted anti-Semitic prejudices. He soon began to develop his “worldview”, which was formed by his exposures to Völkisch nationalist and anti-Semitic literature, widespread throughout Germany in general and Munich in particular during the immediate post-war period, as well as to lectures and interviews with leading Völkisch figures, some of whom Hitler met in person.⁵ In September 1919, Hitler joined the German Workers Party, which was known for its extreme right-wing ideas. This party soon evolved into the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, a.k.a., the Nazi Party. His experiences in this party caused him to grow increasingly frustrated with the timidity of the Völkisch nationalist leadership. This frustration resulted in Hitler leading a failed insurrection against the Weimar Republic, the so-called Beer Hall Putsch, in November 1923.⁶ It was in prison following the failed coup that Hitler first expressed his belief in the power of human will and his ability to shape the world. He saw it as his mission to restore and mobilize the will to power of the German people and to fill them with self-confidence so that they could cast off the burden of the Treaty of Versailles and restore Germany to its rightful place as world leader. To this end, however, it would be necessary to remove the intellectual poison that the Jews had for decades represented, who had interfered in German politics and, in Hitler’s opinion, were ultimately responsible for the recent defeat of Germany in the World War I.

Hitler found concepts such as liberalism, democracy, internationalism, pacifism, humanism and even Christianity “unnatural”; he said they favoured the weak and incompetent, and the Jews encouraged them to undermine the nations and make them vulnerable to Jewish control in their quest for world superiority.⁷

1.3 The Rise of Nazism

In the 1930 elections, the Nazi Party gained more than 18 percent of the votes, making them the second largest political party in Germany. In 1932, Adolf Hitler ran for president but lost. Even so, his popularity increased. In January 1933, following constant pressure from his cabinet, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor of Germany.

⁵ Dane Stone, *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 24–25.

⁶ Stone, *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, 28.

⁷ Stone, *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, 30.

The aim of this step was to keep this charismatic leader close and thus supervised. In this respect, Hitler was grossly underestimated.⁸

1.4 Pre-war Nazi Germany

The stock market crash in the United States in 1929 increased Germany's economic problems tenfold. By 1932, unemployment in Germany had reached a record 6 million people. When the Reichstag building was set on fire on 27 February 1933, Chancellor Hitler declared a state of emergency. "The Presidential Decree for the Protection of Citizens and the State" legalized mass arrests of socialists, communists and many other opponents of Nazism, including Jews. In March 1933, only two months after Hitler's appointment, the first camp for political opponents opened.⁹

Anti-Semitism

The long history of anti-Semitism stretches back to 70 BC, when Roman Emperor Pompey forced the Jews to worship the Roman gods. After Jesus' death in 33 AD, anti-Semitism quickly spread. Jews do not share the Christian belief that Jesus was the son of God. Although the Romans, not the Jews, were the ones who condemned and sent Jesus to his death, many Christians believe that the Jews were responsible for Christ's crucifixion. This resulted in the persecution of the Jews, who were collectively accused of the death of Jesus. This hatred has led to centuries of Jewish victimization, via discriminatory regulations, especially in the Christian regions of Europe. Due to restrictions against owning land or certain types of businesses across the continent, some Jews became financiers, leading to a stereotypical view of Jews as merciless usurers.¹⁰

Hitler tried to persuade the German population that Jews were trying to usurp economic and political power in Germany and in the world. Because the Jews were a minority (they accounted for less than 1 percent of the population in Germany), their silent voices could not drown out the tumultuous anti-Semitic propaganda proclaimed by the Nazis.¹¹

Germany was not alone in its anti-Semitism. The United States also had powerful anti-Semitic voices, such as Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh and Father Coughlin.¹² The National

⁸ Judith Sandeen Bartel, *The Holocaust: Mankind's Darkest Hour* (London: TickTock Entertainment, 2005), 9.

⁹ Bartel, *The Holocaust*, 8.

¹⁰ Bartel, *The Holocaust*, 9.

¹¹ Michael Hirsh, *The Liberators: America's Witnesses to the Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 28.

¹² Susan Ronald, "Hitler's Americans," History News Network, 18 March 2018, Accessed March 16, 2020. <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/168206>.

Origins Immigration bills of 1921 and 1924, Progressive Era responses seeking order, made it virtually impossible for immigrants, including European Jews, to access America. By 1940, there were more than one hundred anti-Semitic groups in the United States, among them the Silver Shirts, the German–American Bund (American Nazis), and the Defenders of the Christian Faith. Throughout the World War II era, one-third of Americans harbored negative attitudes towards Jews. Such high levels of nativism and anti-Semitism dictated U.S. government policy towards European Jews.¹³

¹³ Hirsh, *The Liberators*, 30.

2 AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION POLICY

U.S. immigration law significantly affected people who hoped to escape Nazi Germany and sought refuge in United States. In 1900–1915, U.S. government set no definite limits on the numbers of people who could enter the United States. Before World War I, millions of Europeans immigrated to the country, averaging over 900,000 per year. Gradually, World War I made it more difficult for Europeans to emigrate to the United States, and immigration decreased by half between 1915–1924. In 1924, Congress passed immigration quotas by country and at the same time limited total immigration to 164,000 people per year. The quotas were created to “protect” the Americans by extremely restricting “unwanted” immigrants, including Jews, Asians and Africans. Immigrants from North and South America were not under any quotas. After the 1924 law came into effect, immigration rapidly dropped. After the Great Depression began in 1929, President Herbert Hoover made sure that the State Department controlled the incoming immigrants, who were viewed as an economic burden. Between 1925 and 1932, immigration dropped to approximately 125,000 per year.¹⁴

In 1933, after Adolf Hitler became German chancellor, the Nazis began to discriminate against German Jews and thousands of others who wished to escape Germany. The 1924 U.S. quota law allowed 25,957 to immigrate to the United States. In 1933, due to the Great Depression, the State Department reduced this number to 1,241. Although 83,000 expressed interest in immigrating, many of them Jewish, most did not have sufficient finances to meet the standards for immigration. Between 1934 and 1937, 80,000 to 100,000 Germans applied for a US immigration visa waiting list. Most of the applicants had Jewish roots. Even though the State Department slowly started issuing more visas, the quota for Germans went unfilled. Every year around 7,000 Germans received visas but approximately 19,000 went unissued.¹⁵

After Germany annexed Austria through the Anschluss in March 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt arrived at the decision to combine the German and Austria quotas, which made 27,370 visas accessible annually for people born in these countries. In 1938, 19,552 Germans were granted visas, but 7,818 visas went unissued, and 139,163 Germans were on the waiting list. The waiting list increased as anti-Semitic persecution spread across

¹⁴ Roger Daniels, “Immigration Policy in a Time of War: The United States, 1939–1945,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 2/3 (2006): 108.

¹⁵ Daniels, “Immigration Policy in a Time of War, 1939–1945,” 110.

Germany and beyond, as Germany claimed more territory across Europe. Even though the State Department issued in 1939 the highest number of visas accessible to people in Germany, more than ten times as many Germans remained on the waiting list. In September 1939, World War II started, and it became even more difficult for people to emigrate from Europe. The waiting list contained more than 300,000 names, and again, most of them were Jews.¹⁶

With the war in Europe, the State Department introduced new restrictions in order to protect national security and reduce immigration. U.S. consulates in the Nazi occupied territories were ordered by Nazi Germany in July 1941 to detain potential immigrants. The visas were issued only to those German refugees who had already fled from Nazi territory. The waiting list was revoked by the State Department as the war made immigration increasingly impossible, especially after the United States entered the war in December 1941. In all, between 1933 and 1945, roughly 125,000 Germans, most of whom were Jews, immigrated to the United States. In the same period, the United States accepted around 200,000 European refugees, making it the country that took in the most refugees. Again, the majority were Jews from Nazi-occupied territories. Despite this fact, U.S. quotas limited mass immigration, and millions of Jews perished at the hands of the Nazis or their cohorts.¹⁷

2.1 *Kristalnacht*

In March 1938, the Polish parliament, having received disturbing news that Germany would deport 50,000 Polish Jewish residents, passed a law stipulating that any Polish citizen who had spent five or more years in continuous residence outside Poland could be deprived of their citizenship and refused repatriation. Undeterred, on the night of October 27 and the following day, the German Gestapo arrested approximately 11,500 Polish Jewish residents of Germany, deported them to the Polish border, gave each ten marks and left them there. Poland, adhering to the law, declined to take in the refugees, about 8,000 of whom ended up in the border town of Zbaszyn. One of the refugees wrote to his son in Paris, who in turn became so angered that, on November 7, he entered the German embassy and shot Ernst vom Rath, the third secretary. The Nazis responded to this assassination with operation *Kristalnacht*, the “Night of Broken Glass,” during which they targeted Jews by burning 191

¹⁶ Daniels, “Immigration Policy in a Time of War, 1939–1945,” 111.

¹⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “How Many Refugees Came to the United States from 1933–1945?” Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/how-many-refugees-came-to-the-united-states-from-1933-1945>.

synagogues, demolishing over 7,000 of their shops and businesses, and plundering countless homes. Almost 100 Jews were murdered, thousands were beaten or tortured, while 30,000 were arrested and shipped off to Buchenwald, Dachau, or Sachsenhausen. From this moment, the lives of Jewish Germans would never be the same. Relentless laws were soon passed against them. Their money and assets were confiscated, their shops and businesses were closed, their driver's licenses were taken away, and it became illegal for Jews to own cars or to buy or sell real estate. Ultimately, they were required to live in separate areas called ghettos.¹⁸

On 7 December 1938, the events were covered by the American and Jewish press. Americans were well informed about the Night of Broken Glass and its aftermath, via newspapers, magazines and radio. On 13 December, ministers and priests expressed sadness, outrage and opposition to the Nazis, and support for the Jewish victims. The New York City Authority issued a resolution condemning the Nazi persecution of Jews, and American university students organized protests. Writers, actors, and educators pleaded collectively with Roosevelt to place economic sanctions on Germany. The president did not do so, but he did publicly express his anger over the events of Kristallnacht,¹⁹ and he recalled the American ambassador to Germany until such time that Germany made positive policy changes towards racial and religious minorities. This recall had the approval of the U.S. media and public.

This approval, however, did not accurately reflect the feelings of all Americans. While opinion polls at the time reported that 94 percent of Americans disagreed with the German treatment of Jews, the same poll showed that only 60 percent supported Roosevelt's recall of the ambassador. Due to this split in opinion over the German-Jewish refugee issue, the president needed to proceed with caution. Moreover, in November 1938, after *Kristallnacht*, 77 percent of Americans were against increasing the immigration quota for Germany. So as upset as Americans were over the German treatment of Jews, they did not see it as America's responsibility to harbor them.²⁰ As a result, the U.S. president became more skeptical about allowing Jewish refugees into the United States. In response to the question of what to do with the estimated 600,000 Jewish refugees from Germany, Great Britain came up with a plan to settle them in sub-Saharan Africa. Britain took in 500 refugee children, but

¹⁸ Haskel Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers Keepers? The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust* (New York: Hartmore House, 1985), 14.

¹⁹ Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers Keepers?*, 21.

²⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "How Many Refugees Came to the United States from 1933–1945?"

that was enough. Thus, the Jews of Germany learned in the first phase of the Holocaust that sympathy did not go hand in hand with hospitality and generosity. Economic and political considerations blocked their aid.²¹

The American public knew the facts about the Holocaust; the president himself voiced a dual sense of outrage and regret. Yet, although the political, communal and religious leaders in America acknowledged the life-threatening event for German Jewry, they did little to help.

2.2 The Voyage of the *St. Louis*

On 13 May 1939, the German passenger ship *St. Louis* sailed from Hamburg to Cuba carrying 930 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. The refugees aboard the *St. Louis* were part of a stream of immigrants from Austria and Germany who fled in huge numbers after the Anschluss (Hitler's annexation of Austria on 12 March 1938),²² and because of *Kristallnacht* and the strict restrictions imposed on Jews at the end of 1938. Around 140,000 refugees left Germany and Austria within a year, but only a small segment of them were able to escape beyond the borders of Europe: South America accepted around 20,000, approximately 30,000 went to the United States, and 12,000 found safety in British Palestine. The rest ended up in the so-called transit countries of Western Europe - England, France, Holland, Belgium and Switzerland - waiting for visas to go abroad. Britain damaged their hopes by limiting immigration to Palestine to 10,000 a year between 1939 and 1944. The transit countries also began to close their borders. And then, on 5 May 1939, the president of Cuba, due to negative public opinion over the economic burden imposed on the island by its already sizeable number of Jewish refugees, revoked all landing certificates, invalidating the visas of the Jewish refugees then preparing to board the *St. Louis*, a fact of which the ship's commander was not made aware. When the refugee ship reached Havana, it was not permitted to land.²³ Even though the Chase National Bank branch in Havana offered to pay Cuba \$500 for each refugee it accepted, the Cuban government still declined entrance. The *St. Louis* departed Havana harbor on 2 June, destination unknown. Ultimately, it returned to Europe, where the refugees were divided among the Netherlands, Belgium, England, and France

²¹ Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers Keepers?*, 25.

²² "Germany Annexes Austria." History.com. A&E Television Networks. February 9, 2010. Accessed April 20, 2020 <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/germany-annexes-austria>.

²³ Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers Keepers?*, 53–57.

(with some also being sent to French Morocco). As a result, most of the refugees ultimately fell once again into Nazi clutches. The United States would have been the obvious destination for the passengers of the *St. Louis*, but anti-Semitism, immigration restrictions, and economic considerations (namely job competition) prevented this.²⁴ The Nazi journal *Der Weltkampf* found it amusing that western democracies complained about the Nazi treatment of Jews but then left them “out in the cold,” concluding, “aren’t we savages better men after all?”²⁵

²⁴ Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers Keepers?*, 63–64.

²⁵ Arthur D Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1998), 288.

3 THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The slaughter of European Jews began when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Nazis tried to keep the Holocaust secret, but in August 1942, Dr. Gerhart Riegner, a representative of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, Switzerland, learned from his informant in Germany what was really going on. Riegner asked American diplomats in Switzerland to inform Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, one of America's most important Jewish leaders, about the intention to kill all Jews. But the Foreign Ministry, being vague and influenced by anti-Semitism, decided not to inform Wise. Even so, the rabbi learned about it from British Jewish leaders. He immediately turned to Foreign Secretary Sumner Welles, who asked Wise to keep this information secret until the government could verify it. Wise agreed, and only in November 1942 did Welles allowed the publication of Riegner's report. Wise held a press conference on the topic on November 24, 1942, and the next day the *New York Times* published an article about it, but buried it on page ten. During the rest of the war, the *Times* and most other newspapers failed to cover the Holocaust. During the First World War, the American press had published false statements of German atrocities, so during World War II journalists tended to err on the side of caution.²⁶

Most Americans remained unaware of the alarming situation of European Jews. On the other hand, the American Jewish community responded with concern to Wise's reports. U.S. and British Jewish organizations put pressure on their governments to take action. As a result, the United Kingdom and the United States announced that they would hold an emergency conference in Bermuda with a view to drawing up a plan to rescue Nazi victims.

Although the events of *Kristallnacht* were described as the cruelest attack by Germany on Jews since the middle Ages, only a few American Jewish leaders were willing to respond to this situation. The General Jewish Council insisted on upholding radio silence following the pogrom's aftermath, and it prohibited Jews from participating in parades, public demonstrations, or protests. The Council also reminded American Jews that it was in their interest not to attempt to bring more Jewish refugees into the country. American Jewish leaders feared how their fellow citizens would respond to the "demands" of the Jewish community. Many Americans did not want to go to war with Hitler, and anti-Semitism was more widespread than at any other point in American history, and only increasing. Jewish advisors did push President Roosevelt to take some steps after *Kristallnacht*. Roosevelt responded by providing aid to some Jewish refugees already in the United States, but he refused to support

²⁶ Edward S. Shapiro, "World War II and American Jewish Identity," *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 1 (1990): 66.

legislation that another 20,000 German Jewish children should be given sanctuary in the country.²⁷

It would be inaccurate to say that American Jews did nothing following *Kristallnacht*. Two weeks after *Kristallnacht*, a coalition called the Boycott Committee held a three-day protest. The group, composed of members of the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee, burned swastika flags and called for rescue and relief. In the early years of Nazi rule, some American Jewish organizations supported the boycott of German goods, an attitude that was considered much less extreme than encouraging the admission of refugees into the country. Despite the general awareness of *Kristallnacht* and Hitler's well-announced plans to "destroy" European Jews, Jewish leaders made few public requests for assistance. Representative Jewish bodies acknowledged that "silence" was their strategy as the American Jewish Committee, in its post-*Kristallnacht* position paper,²⁸ stated that helping Jewish refugees "while so many Americans are out of work" would increase negative attitudes towards Jews, so it would be better if Jewish refugees were sent elsewhere.²⁹ This statement seems to explain the so-called "feeble" reaction of American Jewish leaders to increasing Nazi persecution.

3.1 Creation of the American Jewish Congress

In 1918, the American Jewish Congress (AJC) was formed by representatives of various Jewish religious, Zionist and immigrant community associations. At that time, upper-class German Jews held political power within the U.S. Jewish community. The main reason for establishing the AJC was to extend leadership beyond this elite and to introduce a united American Jewish stance at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The AJC was abolished later in 1919, but was reestablished in 1922. Under the leadership of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who remained president and chief speaker of the AJC until his death in 1949, this organization became an effective lobbying group in 1928.³⁰

During the 1930s, Rabbi Wise was strong in his warnings about the dangers of Nazism. At the instigation of the appointment of Adolf Hitler on January 30, 1933, as Chancellor of Germany, Wise held a mass protest rally in Madison Square Garden, New York, despite

²⁷ Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust, 1943–1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980): 368.

²⁸ Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust," 370.

²⁹ Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust," 369.

³⁰ Edward Pinsky, "American Jewish Unity During the Holocaust – The Joint Emergency Committee, 1943," *American Jewish History* 72, no. 4 (1983): 478.

objections by the German government, the U.S. State Department, and conservative Jewish organizations. The AJC organized protest rallies throughout the 1930s and 1940s against the Nazi abuse of Jews. In August 1933, it organized a boycott of German goods. Even so, the AJC was reluctant to publicly call on the U.S. government to accept more refugees from Germany, out of fears that doing so could lead to further restrictions on immigration and an increase in anti-Semitism in America.³¹

The AJC established a planning committee in December 1942, the main initiative of which was to support and pursue various rescue proposals. However, the committee's efforts resulted in only marginal success in mobilizing U.S. public aid for rescue. The most effective and efficient of these projects was another gathering in Madison Square Garden, which was held on March 1, 1943 and attended by around 70,000 people. Such congregations were repeated across the United States. The AJC was pro-Zionist in its starting points so their main task was the establishment of and support for a Jewish state. Its leadership intertwined with the management of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). This gave rise to an agreement between the two organizations that they would focus on different tasks during the war. The main initiative of the AJC was to save European Jews, while the ZOA devoted itself to establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. This arrangement continued after the war, although its importance diminished after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.³²

3.2 The American Jewish Committee

The American Jewish Committee was founded in 1906 by a small group of prosperous American Jews, of Central European origin. This organization's agenda included fighting against U.S. immigration limits and resisting anti-Semitism. The committee worked quietly behind the scenes, taking advantage of members' relationships with government representatives and other influential Americans. It aimed its efforts at eliminating obstacles to full Jewish participation in American society as well as securing Jewish equality in other countries.³³

³¹ Pinsky, "American Jewish Unity During the Holocaust," 479.

³² Hillel Kook, Peter Bergson and David S. Wyman, "The Bergson Group, America, and the Holocaust: A Previously Unpublished Interview with Hillel Kook/Peter Bergson," *American Jewish History*, 89, no. 1 (2001): 4.

³³ Lawrence Grossman, "Transformation Through Crisis: The American Jewish Committee and the Six-Day War," *American Jewish History* 86, no. 1 (1998): 28.

3.3 The Joint Emergency Committee

The Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs (JEC) was the greatest effort made by the Jewish organizations of the United States in rescuing Jews. Among the leaders of American Jewish organizations, there existed a need for close cooperation since the very beginning of the Nazi regime. Soon after Adolf Hitler became chancellor, members of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress (AJ Congress) and B'nai B'rith set up an organization called the Joint Consultative Council (JCC), the aim of which was to regulate and organize their defense movements in order to defeat the Nazi regime. This first attempt fell apart almost immediately, as the representatives of other organizations differed in their opinions of how to approach the Nazi threat.³⁴

The AJ Congress's main strategies consisted of mass demonstrations, public protest meetings, rallies and sabotage of products made in Germany. AJC and B'nai B'rith were more conservative, against protest and disagreed with mass demonstration. They feared that the boycotts will constitute a threat to German Jews' situation. The Committee had in their own strategy on how to deal with the situation, which involved private talks between highly positioned representatives of government and influential members of the Committee. The AJC stood firm in their opinion that the European crisis was a matter of human rights and as a result insisted on dealing with this problem via a bi-partisan liberal front of Christians and Jews. The AJ Congress, with their Zionist values, viewed the situation in Germany as an attack against all Jewry and believed that it was fundamentally the obligation and responsibility of the Jewish "nation" to band together and fight against Nazism. The Congress despised the conservative methods of the AJC, deeming them excessively cautious and worthless.³⁵

The Joint Emergency Committee on European Jewish Affairs consisted of three representatives each from the "big four" Jewish defense organizations: The AJC, the AJ Congress, B'nai B'rith and the JLC but also many other members from the American Committee on Zionist Emergency Affairs, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, the Agudath Israel of America, and the Synagogue Council of America. The representatives chosen to become leaders of the new Committee were Rabbi Stephen Wise (American Jewish Congress), Judge Joseph M. Proskauer (American Jewish Committee), Adolph Held (Jewish Labor

³⁴ Pinsky, "American Jewish Unity During the Holocaust – The Joint Emergency Committee, 1943," 481.

³⁵ Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980): 368–69.

Committee), Henry Monsky (B'nai B'rith), and Israel Goldstein (Synagogue Council of America). Despite the unified feeling of crisis, the JEC's activities were conducted with little willingness, unanimity, and, above all, efficiency, as there was increasing disagreement among representatives. From committee membership to strategy raising awareness about Nazi violence, no decision could be made simply and quickly, due to incessant conflicts.

The JEC was preparing public demonstrations and was conscientiously involved in drafting rescue proposals for the upcoming Bermuda conference. In writing such proposals, the JEC took great care not to deliberately condemn the Roosevelt administration. The proposals had to respond to the collective American war effort while noting the threat to European Jewry. Finally, a three-page document was produced and submitted by the JEC, starting with an introduction entitled "Mass Extermination of Jews." The rescue proposals called for a "Planned Program of Determined Actions," followed by an "Annex to the Program to Rescue Jews from Europe Occupied by the Nazis." The JEC and the American Jewish community were dismayed when the Bermuda Conference proved to be a "scam" designed to discuss tactically only the post-war relocation of refugees without mentioning European Jewry in particular. The U.S. delegation, led by Princeton University president Harold Willis Dodds, consisted of members who had no initiative and background in immigration policy (such as Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois), known anti-Semites (such as Robert B. Reams of the State Department) and politicians, who were merely pursuing a career at the State Department (e.g., Sol Bloom, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee). The make-up of the U.S. delegation demonstrated the strong reluctance of the United States to deal with the problem. The JEC asked to meet with Roosevelt to discuss the proposals, but this request was denied. No committee representatives were able to attend (or even observe) the Bermuda Conference, during which their rescue proposals were almost immediately rejected.³⁶

3.4 AMERICAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE HOLOCAUST

November 24, 1942 was a critical point in the history of the Holocaust, it being the day when news of Hitler's "final solution" reached the democratic world and everyone in it who cared to know.

American metropolitan newspapers did an average job in telling the public of Rabbi Wise's revelations. His press conference in Washington on November 24 was a huge event

³⁶ Shapiro, "World War II and American Jewish Identity," 66–69.

broadly reported, but only a few newspaper organizations considered it a major story. Out of nineteen important U.S. newspapers, only five placed the story on page 1, and two of them failed to report on the event. This was one of many cases when crucial news concerning the Holocaust was published on inner pages or generally ignored.³⁷

During World War II, the American media published and reported up-to-date, specific, and accurate reports of events happening to Jews in Europe. Almost every other day, the *New York Times* printed an article about what is now referred to as the Holocaust, or about 1,200 articles in total. Articles in the *Times* and other newspapers described the escalation of anti-Semitic laws in the German allied countries; depicted events such as death due to illness and starvation of hundreds of thousands of victims in ghettos and labor camps; mass executions in Nazi-occupied Russia; and mass gassing in Auschwitz, Treblinka and Maidanek. The articles also expressed that these events were not only isolated incidents but were part of a systematic extermination to wipe out all European Jews.³⁸

Despite all the publications, even at the end of the war, Americans stood strongly in their belief that they were unaware of the situation surrounding the Holocaust. One reason was that the American media in general and the *New York Times* in particular never considered the Holocaust an important news story. Throughout the war, the *Times* published Holocaust articles on its front page only 26 times out of 24,000 opportunities, and most of these stories described victims as “refugees” or “oppressed minorities.” In only six of these articles were Jews identified as primary victims. Also, the story was never the main motive of the newspaper, and it was never published in the right column, which was reserved for the most important news of the day—even when the concentration camps were liberated at the end of the war.³⁹

There were events that helped obscure the Jewish situation. One reason was skepticism, which was rooted in false reports of atrocities during the First World War. The Roosevelt administration's commitment to minimize the news also contributed to controlled coverage. However, the media had enough credible information to consider the reports of the extermination of Jews as important. The *New York Times* had a better position to highlight the situation than any other American news organization. It sacrificed advertising rather than articles describing the Jewish situation. Thanks to its considerable Jewish readership, the

³⁷ Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 65.

³⁸ Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.

³⁹ Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, 70.

Times eventually managed to gather and publish more news of what happened to the Jews than other traditional newspapers. Its deep, if not always friendly engagement with the American Jewish community also led the *Times* to seek out information about the Jewish situation. Yet, its editors deliberately reduced the impact of the Holocaust reports and reported them in isolation and inside stories. Several hundred words about the Nazi genocide, which the *Times* published every few days, were hard to find when buried in the middle of thousands of other words. As a result, readers could legitimately claim that they did not know, or at least did not understand, what had happened to the Jews. In short, the media gave them deniability.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 17.

4 AMERICA ON THE VERGE OF WAR

When Poland was attacked and occupied by the Nazis in 1939, Hitler had not yet compiled his final plans for the genocide of the Jews. Among the options considered by the Nazi hierarchy at that time was a deportation of European Jews to the African island of Madagascar or, alternatively, the concentration of all captured Jews on a large reserve in Lublin, Poland. Meanwhile, the German occupation authorities exploited Jews in occupied Poland, deprived them of their property, carried them into forced labour and used them as suitable targets for offensive German soldiers.⁴¹

In early 1940, Hitler came up with a plan to move Jews into brick ghettos. The Jewish community in Warsaw, which had 300,000 people before the war, increased to 400,000 thanks to refugees from all parts of Poland. This community was restrained in a part of the city that was soon devastated by hunger, disease and Nazi atrocities.

The Roosevelt administration was concerned about the large-scale migration of Jews from Nazi Europe, as this would put pressure on the United States to at least to some extent decrease the severity of its quotas. US officials insisted that the only way to save the Jews was to win the battlefield. “Nothing can be done to save these helpless unfortunates, with the exception of the invasion of Europe, the defeat of the German army and the breaking of German power,” assistant secretary Adolph Berle insisted. “There is no other way.”⁴²

In December 1941, the United States was officially at war with Axis power: Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan. The situation for European’s Jews extremely deteriorated and they became increasingly trapped. By the middle of 1942, information about the Nazi policy to slaughter Jews started to come across the United States public. With the persecution of Jews and enormous amount of deaths a new sense that something needs to be done was born. These events led to creation of a mood among Jewish organization to call public attention to what was happening and to urge action to save what remained of Europe’s Jewish population.

By the end of 1943 there was enough public awareness of the murder of the Jews that the Senate and the House of Representatives issued the Rescue Resolution, which served to call for a US government agency designed for the relief and rescue of Jews and other persecuted minorities. The executive branch was in discrepancy as the State Department and

⁴¹ Rafael Medoff, *Blowing the Whistle on Genocide: Josiah E. DuBois, Jr. and the Struggle for a U.S. Response to the Holocaust* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009), 3.

⁴² Monty N. Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 330.

the Treasury Department began a war among themselves. Treasury Department needed to approve licenses for relief and rescue, realized that the State Department was delaying assisting some of these Jewish aid organizations to send money to Europe. Treasury Department officials compiled a report that was placed before President Roosevelt in January 1944 and almost immediately after this Roosevelt decided to create a War Refugee Board. The Board Refugee staff came from the Treasury Department, it was a group who worked with sending money overseas.⁴³

⁴³ *Confronting the Holocaust: American Response*. Directed by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2014. DVD.

5 THE BERMUDA CONFERENCE

In 1943, the United States and the United Kingdom held a conference in Bermuda to try to appease the Jewish communities, non-Jewish organizations, and general public opinion in their countries. This conference was set up to solve the question of what they could do as nation states to help Jewish refugees escape from Europe under Nazi rule. The conference was held from 19 to 28 April 1943 on the small island colony of Bermuda.

When the U.S. State Department received a proposal from the British government, the U.S. sat on the on the proposal for several weeks till they come up with any response. After the Jewish leaders who held a mass demonstration in Madison Square Garden, New York, the State Department started to see the public relations value the conference. Bermuda was chosen as the venue for the conference most likely because war regulations restricting access to the island were supposed to regulate restrictions on public information.⁴⁴

Jewish leaders tried to send a small delegation to the conference, but when the Foreign Ministry rejected this proposal, they agreed to send a list of rescue proposals. Others have also submitted proposals for delegates in Bermuda. An idea was formulated by Deputy Foreign Minister Adolf Berle with a proposal to establish a temporary safe haven for up to 100,000 Jews in eastern Libya. This idea was formulated into the Bermuda program, but never resulted in anything. The President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees also sent a list of proposals, including the use of the British Honduras as a refuge for Jews. The Bermuda Conference was simply organized so that it could not produce any results. The British and U.S. governments have carefully controlled what their delegates could have promised before the meeting even began. The US has instructed its representatives not to commit to shipping, funds or new humanitarian agencies. After 12 days of secret deliberations, the Bermuda conference ended with no significant results. Although the conferees decided to conceal the results of the conference, they made it clear to the press that most of the proposals put forward at the conference were rejected. Jews in America were very outraged by the outcome of reports from Bermuda. One Jewish organization published a three-quarters ad on "The New York Times" headline, "To 5,000,000 Jews in the Nazi Death-Trap Bermuda Was a Cruel Mockery."⁴⁵ Some congressmen expressed similar anger.

⁴⁴ Mark Wischnitzer, "To Dwell in Safety: The Story of Jewish Migration since 1800," *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 3 (1950): 281–283.

⁴⁵ Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "American Jews and the Holocaust," *New York Times*, April 18, 1982, Accessed March 15, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/18/magazine/american-jews-and-the-holocaust.html>.

One of them said that Bermuda was nothing more than a “diplomatic walk on the rope.” There is no way to measure how many Jews died as a result of inactivity in Bermuda.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Abraham J. Edelheit and Hershel Edelheit, *History of the Holocaust: A Handbook and Dictionary* (San Francisco: Westview, 1994), 129.

6 THE WAR REFUGEE BOARD

It was becoming progressively clear to American citizens during World War II that Nazi Germany and its allies were involved in the slaughter of European Jews. Treasury Department officials, led by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, in January 1944 persuaded President Franklin D. Roosevelt to set up a War Refugee Board.

The War Refugee Board, led by the secretaries of State, War, and Treasury, operated between January 22, 1944, and September 15, 1945. Most of the job positions in the War Refugee Board were taken by Treasury Department employees. The Refugee Board has come up with ways to streamline the work of private humanitarian agencies and has found a way to send them money and resources to neutral and hostile territory. US representatives were sent to neutral countries to oversee projects and put pressure on these countries to accept refugees. They formed a psychological warfare campaign to fend off potential perpetrators, they opened a refugee camp in the upper New York state, and let the American public know about the first details of the mass murder in Auschwitz.⁴⁷

6.1 The Bergson Group and the Emergency Committee to Save the Jews of Europe

In the United States, increased public awareness of Nazi persecution towards Jews in Europe has led various groups that were part of the government, as well as groups in the public sphere, to come up with a solution to save them. Public pressure has increased in part thanks to a campaign by a group of Palestinian Jews led by Peter Bergson. The group originally operated in the United States to gain support for the creation of an independent Jewish army under the command of the Allies. An Emergency Committee to Save Jews in Europe was created in the summer of 1943. The Bergson group, as it became later known worked to replace full-page ads in a large newspaper and instead sponsored sophisticated public programs to raise awareness of the continuing slaughter of European Jews.

The Bergson Group used the names of prominent people from entertainment, religious, intellectual, business and political communities in their advertisements and petitions, and its members criticized the inaction of the United States, especially the State Department. The

⁴⁷ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The War Refugee Board," Accessed February 20, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-war-refugee-board>.

group's fierce criticism and brazen tactics outraged many people in Congress, in the senior leadership of the Jewish community, and in Roosevelt administration.⁴⁸

In November 1943, members of Congress who supported the recommendations of the Emergency Committee sponsored identical bills in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Rescue Solution Act prompted Roosevelt's decision to set up a committee to define and adopt plans to rescue Jews in Europe. Although the non-binding resolution passed unanimously in the Senate Committee, this proposal did not pass through the House of Representatives at a time when the War Refugee Council was already set up.⁴⁹

6.2 Internal Pressures within the Roosevelt Administration

Public pressure increased rapidly both in the summer and fall of 1943, giving rise to internal conflict within the Roosevelt administration. Conflict existed between the State Department under the supervision of Cordell Hull and the Treasury under Henry Morgenthau, Jr. The proposal of the World Jewish Congress to financially support Jews in France and Romania and to evacuate Jews from Romania led to an arguments and skirmishes. Treasury officials tried to grant a financial support license, the State Department willfully delayed and resisted this plan. Their delays were the result of bureaucratic inertia, fear of creating a precedent requiring the approval of similar requirements, and continued skepticism that money could become a part of enemy's resources. A series of cables were discovered by Treasury Department employees in a period from January and February 1943, which proved that the State Department knowingly tried to hold back information about extermination of Jews from reaching the United States. Eventually by the end of 1943, Treasury Department personnel led by General Counsel Randolph Paul and head of Foreign Funds Control John Pehle collected a sufficient amount of information and knowledge to show to Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr.⁵⁰

On June 9, 1944, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced in a press conference a creation of an emergency refugee camp at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New. Around 1,000 refugees from many countries were transported from occupied Italy to Fort Ontario in August 1944. The establishment of this "sanctuary" in the United States does not indicate a

⁴⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "War Refugee Board: Background and Establishment," Accessed May 3, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/war-refugee-board-background-and-establishment>.

⁴⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "War Refugee Board: Background and Establishment."

⁵⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "War Refugee Board: Background and Establishment."

fundamental change in American immigration policy. The refugees were considered to be guests of the United States and signed documents agreeing to return to Europe after the war. These refugees lived in the camp under established security restrictions and were not allowed to work outside the camp, even though their children attended local public schools. Despite considerable opposition on December 22, 1945, President Harry Truman announced that refugees in Fort Ontario were eligible for immigration visas and were allowed entry into the United States. Fort Ontario was one of the attempts of the United States to provide sanctuary for refugees in the US during World War II.⁵¹

⁵¹ Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Nazi Holocaust," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (1980): 368-69.

7 HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

With the rapidly deteriorating conditions in Hungary, the leadership of the Council of War Refugees decided that the propaganda campaign would be most effective in fighting the Nazis and their accomplices in Hungary. As the establishment of the WRB shortly preceded the Hungarian turnover, this new agency was in March largely inexperienced. The WRB has only begun to build an administrative structure and devise rescue and assistance plans, which included: protecting refugees from persecution and death by evacuating them, hiding them or securing foreign citizenship status; an attempt to obtain better conditions for people on their way to and in concentration camps; the establishment of temporary shelters for refugees; and the use of psychological approaches, including propaganda pressure.⁵²

While facing the Holocaust challenges in Hungary, WRB officials strongly – and rather naively – believed in the power of propaganda, especially the threat of post-war punishment, partly because this method required the least time to carry out. Since there was a state of war since December 1941 and therefore no direct contact between Hungary and the United States as a result of Hungarian executives recalling its delegate from Washington a few days after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, the United States issued an official declaration of war against that country only on July 17, 1942. The Board had to use the channels of neutral governments, the International Red Cross, the Vatican and foreign and US private organizations during their work in Hungary.⁵³

7.1 The Refugee Board Propaganda

The War Refugee Board confronted a frightening task. The people it hope to save remained far behind enemy territory and the Board could not divert a vital military resources from the Allies' goal of winning the war as soon as possible. In the spring 1944, the War Refugee Board was faced with one of its greatest dilemmas, which involved the question what to do with the Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian government made secret negotiations to leave the Axis, when the Germany found out about this pact they sent armed forces into the country, and along with the troops came Adolf Eichmann's team of deportation specialists. Hungary did not have access to the sea, so the refugees were limited to fleeing slow and dangerous land transport. These difficult circumstances for the escape of Jews from

⁵² William O'Dwyer, *Final Summary Report of the Executive Director, War Refugee Board* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1945).

⁵³ Halász, Dorottya. "Propaganda Versus Genocide: The United States War Refugee Board and the Hungarian Holocaust," *AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association* 5 (2012): 5.

Hungary gave rise to the idea of the WRB that psychological pressure would be the fastest and most effective weapon in protecting Jews, and this policy became dominant during the first phase of the Hungarian Holocaust between the German takeover in March and the end of massive deportations in July. During the German invasion in March 1944, Hungary was considered to be one of the largest refuge for Jewish community left in Europe. This community consisted approximately of 800, 000 Jews. Germany sent a command to Hungarian authorities to deport Jews only two months after the invasion to Aushwitz-Bitkenau. President Roosevelt spoke in a news conference in which he appealed to Hungarian government not to cooperate with Germany in its persecution.⁵⁴

The WRB's first critical statements about the Hungarian government's Jewish policy were made almost as soon as the occupying forces arrived on March 19, and only after the July report on the increase of deportations and favourable military developments did the number of such statements significantly dropped. WRB used a variety of channels, including American and neutral, especially Swiss, newspapers to maximize the publicity of its propaganda, but they tried to get the propaganda directly to Hungary through US diplomats and broadcasting the Washington Office of War Information (OWI). The Board asked for cooperation from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Radio Algiers and the Hungarian secret station Kossuth Radio, and also sent messages to Hungary in the form of leaflets through underground channels.⁵⁵

As far as their content is concerned, the WRB's propaganda materials threatened the perpetrators of post-war trials and at the same time demanded the preservation of evidence against war criminals and in support of the oppressed. They were also against the confiscation of Jewish property by local Christians and occasionally highlighted the activities of the French and Czech resistance, the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto inhabitants, and the bravery of the citizens of foreign countries who carried out exceptional actions to save the Jews. The aim of American propaganda was to influence ordinary Christians, Jews, as well as authors and executors of anti-Jewish measures, but these efforts were unsuccessful in all three groups. There were largely no response and help from the Christian citizens to hide Jews and support them in their escape from the oppressed community. Reports for the Jewish population have left an even smaller effect. Based on previous experience in German-

⁵⁴ Halász, "Propaganda Versus Genocide," 6.

⁵⁵ Herbert Druks, *The Failure to Rescue* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1977); *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers*, 1944. Vol. 1. General (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1966).

controlled territories, WRB CEO John Pehle asked the Director of the War Information Office on April 22 to warn Hungarian Jews not to seek refuge in big cities, to avoid wearing a yellow star, and to destroy community lists, but all these steps were already belated efforts. One of the first decrees that followed the German occupation prohibited Jews from holding radio, which made it impossible to warn the oppressed through radio communication. This psychological warfare might have achieved better results if the Board improved the quality of broadcasting, for example by addressing perpetrators by their names.⁵⁶

In 1944, the WRB sought the last major prominent propaganda initiative, which was an effort to jointly protest the Allied army. In the meantime, the West has heard of the latest massacre of thousands of Hungarian workers in forced labor and concentration camps and Jews in Budapest. Once again, the Board was unable to achieve complete success. Although on November 7, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Expeditionary Commander in Europe, issued a statement prepared by the WRB, he was reluctant to refer specifically to Jews in concentration camps, and the original proposal, which mentioned the Jews had to be adjusted appropriately.⁵⁷

The psychological warfare of the WRB in Hungary was slowed down by a number of circumstances, but there is another factor that has hampered this situation. The driving force behind the board's campaign was the threat put forward by President Roosevelt himself that all anti-Jewish acts would be severely punished after the war. However, in August 1944 such a guarantee of retribution could be interrupted because Pehle's office was informed somewhat late, due to the fact that no precedent under international law was defined as acts of war crimes committed by the enemy nation and their members against their own or against each other. This left the United Nations War Crimes Commission without a plan to punish those guilty of atrocities against Axis and stateless Jews. In the second half of 1944, the WRB often asked the state ministry to declare government policy in an effort to counter this deficiency and give more weight to US warnings so that it was clear that the United States actually considered such crimes as war crimes. However, their efforts proved to be futile. Only in August 1945, after the defeat of the German coalition, the victorious powers finally agreed to discuss cases of anti-Jewish acts that were among the crimes against humanity.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ William O'Dwyer, *Final Summary Report of the Executive Director, War Refugee Board* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1945).

⁵⁷ David S. Wyman, *America and the Holocaust: A Thirteen-Volume Set Documenting the Editor's Book The Abandonment of the Jews. Vol. 9. War Refugee Board: Special Problems* (New York: Garland, 1990), 28.

⁵⁸ David S. Wayman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 258.

Evaluating the mission of American propaganda in influencing events in Hungary is not an easy task. The overall consequences are limited and difficult to trace. Most likely, the number saved by these efforts would not be significantly higher, even if the War Refugee Board could push through its proposals on the focus, style, and rhetoric of the campaign material. Also, it was naive of the WRB to assume that this instrument of psychological warfare would lead to substantial changes in the behavior of a large mass of people, as ordinary Christians, Jews or perpetrators and collaborators. In early 1944, the United States and the WRB had no other way to influence the outcome in Hungary. The only direct means of intervention would be the bombing of deportation routes and destruction facilities in Auschwitz-Birkenau, but the agency did not have powers in this area, and there was no support from the Roosevelt Administration and the War Department, whose views played an indispensable role in this situation. Allied armies' policy saw the end of genocide only as a result of military victory, and this policy eventually prevailed over other humanitarian aid options.

Rescue efforts made by the Refugee Board have been unsuccessful in many respects and have failed, but this organization has made efforts to help Jewish prisoners in other ways, unfortunately their efforts have been met with a struggle over and over again. The Board alone could not only enter into a Europe occupied by the Nazis and rescue people in need. Many other support groups and countries had to be involved in this process and were forced to provide assistance and support to change things. In July 1944 the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, Switzerland received a report on the atrocities carried out in the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps. This organization asked the United States for help calling on Pope Pius XII to condemn Nazi acts. Both the World Jewish Congress and the Board for War Refugees were convinced that this step would have a huge impact on the Catholic population across Europe, but despite the Board's continued efforts to convince the Vatican hierarchy to condemn the Nazi acts their request was rejected. Another major complication for the Refugee Board was blockade policy. This policy was developed by Britain and prevented any allied movement of supplies to Nazi-occupied Europe. The intention of this tactic was imaginative. This strategy prevented all possible supplies delivered to Nazi possession, an important step in achieving the end of the war. This plan did not take into account the suffering people in the concentration camps and complicated the efforts of the Allies to supply any supplies to the Nazi victims of war. To solve this problem, the Refugee Board provided the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC) with \$ 100,000 for supplies in January 1944. The ICRC could buy supplies from places in Europe for this money so they

gladly accepted them, but at the same time, it was difficult for the organization to find sufficient supplies for suffering people in concentration camps in Europe, which caused significant problems. The United States could not participate in the supply delivery because of the blockage policy and the ICRC had trouble finding supplies in Europe they could purchase.⁵⁹ After some time, the ICRC finally found a country with sufficient supplies - Hungary, and was granted authorization to use the money provided by the Refugee Council. In March 1944, Germany began the occupation of Hungary, so it was not possible to make any purchases of supplies. At this point, the plan for the prevalence of food and supplies was severely affected. Both the United States and the United Kingdom were very slow to make approvals regarding the purchase of aid from other locations, and the blockade policy did not ease their situation.

7.2 Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest

While the Allies denied making any attempt in large-scale rescue actions, they made requests from neutral nations. Their requests usually had to be discussed for some time, but in this case, the Swedes abided. Raoul Wallenberg was a business man from neutral Sweden who came to Budapest under the pretext of a diplomatic task entrusted by the Swedish Legation and the War Refugee Board to help rescue and relieve the Jews in Budapest. By the time Wallenberg arrived in Budapest, the Germans had already deported almost 440,000 Jews from Hungary. Nearly 200,000 Jews remained for deportation in Budapest. Wallenberg issued Swedish protective passes and moved the Jews to houses under Swedish protection. In November 1944, when the Germans started the death march of Jews from Budapest to the labour camps in Austria, Wallenberg chased the march and granted Jews protective papers and later helped them to return to safe houses in Budapest. By the end of 1944, over 70,000 Jews had gathered in the ghetto in Budapest. Wallenberg and his staff have successfully averted the threats of the German and Hungarian authorities who were trying to destroy the ghetto and its occupants. Rescuers joined diplomats from other neutral countries. In January 1945, Raoul Wallenberg was arrested by Soviet leaders. He was jailed for almost two years. The exact date and circumstances of Wallenberg's death have never been clarified. In October 2016, 71 years after his disappearance, Swedish officials formally issued a declaration of Wallenberg's death.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ronald W. Zweig, "Feeding the Camps: Allied Blockade Policy and the Relief of Concentration Camps in Germany, 1944-1945," *Historical Journal* 41, no. 3 (1998): 832

⁶⁰ Halász, "Propaganda Versus Genocide," 8.

7.3 Death March from Budapest

On November 8, 1944, more than 70,000 Jews of men, women, and children were gathered by the Hungarians at Ulalak Bricks in Obuda. From this place were forced to march to camps in Austria. During this death march, thousands of people were shot dead and thousands more died as a result of starvation or exposure to catastrophic temperature conditions. The prisoners who survived the death march arrived in Austria at the end of December 1944. The Germans took them to various concentration camps, especially Dachau in southern Germany and Mauthausen in northern Austria and Vienna, where they were forced to build fortifications around the city.⁶¹

7.4 The Schleifer Children

While major relief operations could not be carried out, the Board dealt with some individualized relief missions. In May 1944, a member of the Refugee Board learned of Mrs. Ida Schleifer's ongoing request to the State Department. Mrs. Schleifer and her husband were Jews who came from Romania and came to New York at the beginning of the war while leaving their children in their homeland with relatives. They tried to get their children into the country once they settled in, but once the United States entered the war all their attempts to get children from fascist Romania were futile. The War Refugee Board decided to accept this request for help as a "test case." The Schleifers were not the only family members of persecuted people abroad seeking asylum for their loved ones, but this family had the advantage of being established in the United States and very able to secure their children. This meant that these children did not impose any financial burden on the state and therefore could not fall under the category of "public charges." In other words, it meant that if this test case had a successful end there was a little risk for the government.⁶²

The Board had to take several steps and negotiate with other countries and agencies to carry out this rescue operation. The British authorities approved six certificates, which went against the measures introduced in the 1939 White Paper to allow the children, together with their two guardians, to emigrate to Palestine, which was currently under British control. The British did not offer a safe passage in this regard, and the children had to go on their own with the help of illegal agencies. Before they could try to move them out of Romania, they

⁶¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The War Refugee Board," Accessed February 20, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-war-refugee-board>.

⁶² Alexis P. Rubin, "The Schleifer Children: A Special Holocaust Rescue Case," *American Jewish History* 84, no. 1 (1996): 1

also had to have permission and transit visa permits from neutral Turkey, which was supposed to be the middle point of this family journey to Palestine. Turkey protested that it was against other refugees passing through their country based on their prior agreement, so they decided to refuse this request. The War Refugee Board appealed to the Turkish government with strong demands to change its position and Turkey eventually reluctantly complied.⁶³

Shortly before the children could leave Romania and move to Turkey, Operation Overlord came into force, a success for the Allies. Turkey broke its neutral commitments with Germany and expected retribution from Nazi Germany. This step led the Turkish government to close their ports, which resulted in the captivity of Schleifer's children in Romania and the inability of the children to reach Turkey. After a few days, Turkey finally allowed three refugee ships in Romania to enter Turkey. Only one boat left room for two of Schleifer's children, two girls aged eleven and seven, so their two older brothers had to stay with their guardians in Romania. The day after the ship sailed with both girls, the ship was attacked by a Nazi submarine. After the attack, the crew left the ship leaving almost three hundred refugees under the deck, most of them children. The ship flared and most people aboard burned to death. Only five refugees survived, and these two girls were not one of them. After Romania surrendered to the Soviet Union at the end of August, further difficulties followed. Finally, the other children were granted permission to pass to Turkey and then to Palestine in October 1944. It is believed that the children met with their parents later, but there is no official documentation of the Refugee Council on what ultimately happened to the children and their parents.⁶⁴ The Schleifer child case was the only specialized case involving the Refugee board, and while the Board worked tirelessly to save children, the process was long, outstretched, erroneous and mostly unsuccessful as half of the children died. This was further evidence for the US and Great Britain that saving thousands in full scale would be a catastrophe.

⁶³ Rubin, "The Schleifer Children," 4.

⁶⁴ Rubin, "The Schleifer Children," 5–6.

8 AMERICAN INVOLVMENT IN THE NUREMBERG WAR CRIMES TRIAL PROCESS

The total destruction of Germany at the end of World War II is considered a rare event in the world. There was an urgent question about what to do with captured German officials and how to prevent such an event from happening again in the future, which required a distinctive solution and international cooperation. From the beginning, the United States has taken the lead in creating the post-war world, especially when it came to war crimes. After defeating the Nazi regime and liberating the concentration camps and occupied nations, the Allies wanted to punish all who were involved and were responsible for these nasty crimes. America's involvement in the Nuremberg trial was critical all the time, and the trial would never have taken place if America had not shown enough effort. The American role in the Nuremberg trials has set the course for America's involvement in the post-war world. The International Military Tribunal consisted mainly of the Allies, which included the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union.

On October 18, 1945, twenty-two political, military and economic leaders of Nazi Germany were tried in Nuremberg for crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. For the first time in history, an international tribunal composed of allied countries and representatives of the Nazi-occupied countries would punish the regime's leaders and the army responsible for the crimes committed. The International Military Tribunal (IMT) sentenced the Nazi leaders on September 30 and October 1, 1946. Twelve defendants were sentenced to death, three to life imprisonment, four to 10 to 20 years in prison, and three were set free. Once the IMT established the criminality of aggressive war, war crimes and crimes against humanity, subsequent processes could determine the guilt of other Nazi officials and military leaders accused of these crimes. In these cases, later known as the subsequent Nuremberg proceedings, the defendants came from many parts of German society, from lawyers and politicians to doctors, businessmen, co-workers and military officers.⁶⁵

Already in 1942, the Allied nations had reached a broad consensus on the possibility to act against German political and military leaders if the Allies could win the war. The Inter-Allied Commission, consisted of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Greece and Yugoslavia, issued in London in January

⁶⁵ Michael Marrus. *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-1946* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 20.

1942 the declaration of St. James, to whom the signatories committed themselves through the union of organized justice to all who prove guilty or responsible for the crimes committed against them. Later in 1942, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union issued a separate statement of their intention to punish war criminals. However, both statements were extremely vague and did not lead to any real policy. The Moscow Declaration of November 1943 was similarly vague and ambiguous, but at the same time introduced the possibility of a separate tribunal for the main criminals whose offenses had no particular geographical location. Until the Tehran Conference, which was held in November that year, the Allies' position was still not united about the nature of the measures to be taken. British opinion favored "purposeful political action" or the collective executions of leading Nazi perpetrators, while the Soviet mindset leaned toward a court or an international tribunal. Similarly, American policy, which was still in its developmental stages and was not determined by mid-1945.⁶⁶

In early September 1944, Finance Minister Henry Morgenthau Jr. came up with a draft action plan, which was later referred to as the Morgenthau Plan. This plan called for harsh post-war treatment of Germany and German leaders. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had already launched a debate on the postwar war crime policy in August 1944, but Morgenthau's proposal for President and Henry Stimson modified the occupation plan submitted four days later and created a major administrative debate and prevented JCS from developing rational and systematic war crimes policy until mid-1945. However, in October 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff created the War Crimes Office as a division of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (JAG), Army to act as a regulating and leading agency for all State, War and Navy Departments in the field of war atrocities.⁶⁷

In January 1945, the President accepted Henry Stimson's proposal to create a large international tribunal, and on May 2, 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established an office and Chief of Prosecution for Axis Crime (OCCPAC). Supreme Court Judge Robert was on a same day appointed Chief of Counsel by H. Jackson. At the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco on May 3, 1945, US representatives presented a draft trial proposal to the representatives of France, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, who complied with the proposal. In June 1945, Justice Jackson reported to the President outlining allegations of conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and further

⁶⁶ Marrus *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945–1946*, 21.

⁶⁷ Taylor Telford, *Nuremberg War Crimes Trials: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 2.

formulated and made public American policy. This stance became the ground for a formal statement by the International Tribunal at the London Conference in late June and early August 1945. The indictments of German war criminals were received on October 6, 1945 and the Nuremberg trials began on November 20, 1945.⁶⁸

Nuremberg trials have left a permanent legacy, especially in the sphere of international law. Many believed in the idea that the trials were an abominable abuse of justice, while others praised the precedents that they set. Responses to the trials also differed between different nations and groups of people. The main point of interest was the reaction of the Jewish population to the Nuremberg trials and ideas about them. For the duration of the trials, Jews throughout Europe began to rebuild and reorganize what remained of their lives after the terrible events caused by the Nazis. For some, the Nuremberg Trials have become an opportunity to finally confront their past and confront the future that awaits them. For others, however, the court has become a critical point and further disappointment in the way the world has treated the Jewish people.

There has been a lot of debate about whether the Nuremberg Trials have actually achieved justice, especially the War Criminal Trials. Several Nazi officials were brought before the Nuremberg Trials, who admitted that what they had done was punishable and their confession made it possible to punish individuals and groups of people who were responsible for atrocities committed during the Nazi regime. The International Military Tribunal indicted twenty-four individuals along with the Reich's Cabinet, the Nazi Party's leading corps, the SS, the SD, the Gestapo, the SA and the General Staff and the High Command of the German Armed Forces for major war crimes. The indictment consisted of four major charges against the defendants, which were a joint plan or conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Each accusation consisted of a subcategory that specified the hideous crimes committed by individuals and Nazi groups. Accusing groups with individuals was very important because it made it possible to blame Nazi crimes for both institutions and many other people, not just a few individuals. The effects of the crimes described in the accusation not only confirmed the victims of these crimes but also gave the world the first opportunity to see the atrocities committed during the Nazi regime.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Telford, *Nuremberg War Crimes Trials*, 4.

⁶⁹ Telford, *Nuremberg War Crimes Trials*, 5.

Regardless of the progress made by the trials and the symbolism they represented, the Nuremberg trials were not without deficiencies and errors. Their procedures are widely regarded as justified and fair in the literature, but there are also those who oppose the *ex post facto* nature of offenses against defendants. The principle of this criticism is justified by the fact that, since the International Military Court has made its own crimes after the acts have already been committed, this has violated the factual nature of the *ex post* law. In addition, these individuals and groups should not be punished after their deeds then, if their actions were not even criminalized until after they were completed. Another criticism is that the trials were highly hypocritical because the Allies never assumed responsibility for their own war crimes. The term “victory justice” was created to depict this paradox. This means that the Allies as winners could avoid prosecution or punishment for their war crimes simply because they won the war. Some argue that by ignoring the abominable actions of Stalin or Churchill or Truman, the “moral power” of the courts has been reduced overall and has been somewhat invalidated. Many people who were brought to justice claimed that they had only followed orders, but the International Military Court did not take into account the argument that individuals who stood before trials had no individual responsibility for their crimes.⁷⁰

8.1 Jewish Reaction to Nuremberg Trials

The response of the Jewish population to the Nuremberg trials was contradictory in several respects. The trials were favorably accepted by many Jews and considered them to be the final act of achieving punishment for Nazi oppressors. The Holocaust was accepted as an event that took place under the Nazi regime and was recognized as a crime against humanity according to a new standard set by the International Military Tribunal. In the course of an investigation conducted by the International Military Tribunal, which later led to trial, documents were found that depicted the ruthless and brutal acts of the Nazis and their systematic approach in mass killing. This enabled the Jewish people a platform where they could share their story. However, the majority of the Jewish population perceived the trials rather unfavorably, and in particular, complained about the main problem which was the lack of represented Jews and the presence of the Holocaust in the Nuremberg Trials. All of the Allies were represented in the trials by one representative plus one alternate. However, there was no Jewish representative in the War Crimes Tribunal. Jews played a role in the trials, but especially behind the scenes. During the war crimes trial of nearly one year, only

⁷⁰ David Luban, “The Legacies of Nuremberg,” *Social Research*, 54, no. 4 (1987): 797.

three Jewish Holocaust survivors stood as a witness. For many Jews, the court emphasized the Nazi act of aggressive war rather than the real atrocities of the Holocaust. Although the International Military Tribunal established the concept of crimes against humanity, the stories of survivors and Holocaust victims in the trial did not receive as much attention as they deserved.⁷¹

The Jewish population remaining in Europe after World War II had expectations and demands regarding the course of the Nuremberg trials. These expectations were first expressed through the World Jewish Congress. The World Jewish Congress was founded in 1936 as one of the ways of representing Jewish goals in the world affairs. As information began to spread about the terrible acts of the Nazis against Jews in and around Germany, the World Jewish Congress decided to establish an Institute of Jewish Affairs, whose main aim was to gather information that could possibly be used as evidence of these crimes. In 1944, the World Jewish Congress collected enough evidence and created the “Statement and Resolution on the Punishment of War Criminals.” The basis of this document was the demand that the Nazis will be charged with war crimes but also with humanitarian crimes. In addition, the World Jewish Congress demanded Jewish representation in the prosecution of the Nazis and that sufficient attention be paid to crimes against Jews. Finally, the document insisted that the United Nations assess crimes against Jewish nationals instead of courts in Germany. In the end, most of their requirements were not met. The International Military Tribunal dealt with the prosecution of Nazi crimes against Jews and established the idea of crimes against humanity, but apparently the representation of Jewish interests and sufficient attention to the Holocaust and other terrible deeds against the Jewish people were lacking.⁷²

⁷¹ Taylor Telford, “The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 23, no. 3 (1949): 21.

⁷² Laura Jockush, “Justice at Nuremberg? Jewish Responses to Nazi War-Crime Trials in Allied-10 Occupied Germany,” *Jewish Social Studies* 19, no.1 (2012): 109.

9 CONCLUSION

This work analyzes the U.S. response to the Holocaust. Information of the existence of a system for the organized genocide of European Jews reached the United States in August 1942. This news travelled from Switzerland to American Jewish leaders. They believed in the truthfulness of this news, but State Department officials were rather skeptical. They gave Jews an order not to go to public with this information until its authenticity could be proven. The news was released to the press, together with evidence, late in November. Delays in relaying the news, as well as not paying the news adequate attention, greatly hurt the Jews. Critical time which could have been used to save the Jews was wasted by bureaucratic inaction and divergence in the minds of political and government leaders. The Roosevelt administration was pressured by the Foreign Ministry and State Department into inertia towards the Jewish situation, and highly restrictive immigration quotas made it hard for European Jews to find safe harbor in the United States. It was not until the end of the war that the president finally transferred authority over refugee policy to the independent War Refugee Board (WRB). Established in January 1944, the WRB was also entrusted with the important task of rescuing the suffering Jewish population in Europe.

The second important issue involving the U.S. response to the Holocaust concerns the official refusal of the military to destroy the extermination camps in Eastern Europe and the railways on which victims were transported to the camps. America's unwillingness to take direct steps to halt the Holocaust calls the historiography of the war and President Roosevelt into question. Some historians say that the defeat of Hitler and his troops was a primary task and little could be done to stop the Holocaust before the destruction of the Nazi regime. Others suggest that America's refusal to bomb or otherwise destroy the extermination camps in the 1940s merely reinforces the idea rooted in the U.S. immigration policy of the 1930s that the tragic fate of European Jews was not an important problem for American politicians.

There is also an issue concerning the Nuremberg Trials, more precisely mistakes made by the International Military Tribunal which involved the lack of Jewish representation at the trials and the incompetent recognition of the Holocaust. Perhaps it would have been appropriate to have a trial only for crimes against Jews. Although this work deals in part with the Jewish reaction to the Nuremberg trials, it is important not to forget what the trials did for others. For those in the defeated countries, the trials cleared the air and provided the opportunity to start over with a clean slate, even if they would have to live with their

complicity in the Holocaust. The trials gave people in the victorious Allied countries a sense of closure and allowed them to have tangible evidence of their hard work and sacrifice.

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