

Distorting America's Response to the Holocaust

*An Analysis of the
"Americans and the Holocaust" exhibit
at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

by

Rafael Medoff * Laurel Leff * Bat-Ami Zucker
Stephen H. Norwood * Monty Noam Penkower * Paul R. Bartrop
Stuart Erdheim * Shuli Eshel * David Golinkin & Noam Sachs Zion

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Rafael Medoff

MAKING EXCUSES FOR FDR

Who is to blame for America's failure to take meaningful action to save Jews during the Holocaust?

According to the new "Americans and the Holocaust" exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, that failure is the fault of public opinion, Herbert Hoover, and a couple of bad guys in the State Department—but never President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Ironically, the president who is recalled by most Americans as a strong and decisive leader has been effectively recast, in this exhibit, as a weak, vacillating captive of the public's mood and other forces beyond his control.

Respecting Hitler's "Rights"

Proceeding chronologically, the 5,400-square foot exhibit begins by describing American media coverage of Hitler's rise to power in 1933, and the boycott of German goods that was launched by some American Jewish organizations. There is no mention of the fact that the Roosevelt administration opposed what it called "a racial or political boycott" of products from Nazi Germany. Nor does the exhibit acknowledge that the administration undermined the boycotters by permitting German goods to be labeled as having been made in a particular city or province, rather than having to be stamped "Made in Germany."¹ Similarly, the exhibit describes American Jewish opposition to U.S. participation in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, but does not acknowledge the Roosevelt administration's support for taking part in the Nazi Olympics.² The exhibit likewise makes no mention of the fact that during the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration received multiple reports from one of its diplomats in Berlin about the Nazis' systematic execution of disabled citizens, yet the administration refused to say a word about it.³

¹ Richard A. Hawkins, "Samuel Untermyer and the Boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933-1938," *American Jewish History* 93 (2007), p.34; Melvin I. Urofsky, *A Voice That Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), p.272; Morris Frommer, "The American Jewish Congress: A History, 1914-1950," Ph.D. dissertation (Ohio State University, 1978), p.372; Joseph Tenenbaum, "The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States," *Yad Vashem Studies* 3 (1959), p.153.

² Regarding the administration's position on the Olympics, see Stephen R. Wenn, "A Tale of Two Diplomats: George S. Messersmith and Charles H. Sherrill on Proposed American Participation in the 1936 Olympics," *Journal of Sport History* 16 (Spring 1989), pp.27-43.

³ Thorsten Noack, "William L. Shirer and International Awareness of the Nazi 'Euthanasia' Program," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30 (Winter 2016), pp.433-457.

This is a running theme in the exhibit: positions taken by President Roosevelt which in retrospect would be unflattering or indefensible, are in almost every instance minimized, glossed over, or omitted altogether.

In 1933, the visitor is told, some American Jews urged the Roosevelt administration to publicly criticize Germany's anti-Jewish persecution, "but the government made no official statement against the German regime at the time." That wording could leave the mistaken impression that the government might have made some unofficial statement, or protested at another time. The visitor is not told that FDR held 82 press conferences in 1933, and the subject of the persecution of the Jews arose only once—and not because Roosevelt raised it. A reporter asked him, "Have any organizations asked you to act in any way in connection with the reported persecution of the Jews over in Germany by the Hitler government?" The president replied: "I think a good many of these have come in. They were all sent over to the Secretary of State."⁴

It would be five years, and another 348 presidential press conferences, before anything about Jewish refugees would be mentioned again. Even then, when the subject came up, it did not go far. Typical was a reporter's question, on September 2, 1938, as to whether the president had any comment on Italy's order expelling 22,000 Jews. The president's reply: "No." That was it.⁵

To make matters worse, the exhibit argues that Roosevelt administration officials were right to refrain from publicly criticizing Hitler in 1933. A text panel asserts that "the accepted rules of international diplomacy obliged them to respect Germany's right to govern its own citizens and not intervene on behalf of those being targeted."

Obliged to respect Hitler's brutality? Presidents Van Buren, Buchanan, and Grant protested the mistreatment of Jews in Syria, Switzerland, and Rumania, respectively. Theodore Roosevelt protested the persecution of Jews in Rumania. The U.S. government, under President William Taft, canceled a Russo-American treaty to protest Russia's oppression of Jews. Woodrow Wilson inserted clauses protecting minorities in the Paris Peace Conference agreements. There was ample precedent for Franklin D. Roosevelt to speak out; but he chose not to.

Excuses for FDR's Immigration Policy

The exhibit focuses heavily on the antisemitism, nativism, and isolationism that were widespread in America in the 1930s. The argument it makes is that FDR could do little or nothing to aid refugees in the face of such strong public sentiment. In fact, President Roosevelt was not afraid to take on controversial issues that were important to him, even if they lacked wide public backing, such as his scheme to pack the Supreme Court. He also carefully monitored public opinion and worked to reshape it on issues that he particularly cared about.

⁴ Press Conference No. 6, March 24, 1933, p.7, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Archives, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter FDRL).

⁵ Press Conference No. 481, September 2, 1938, p.1, FDRL.

Yet for some reason, when it comes to the issue of Jewish refugees, FDR was—according to the exhibit—a hapless prisoner of forces beyond his control: public opinion, the immigration quotas enacted by Congress in the 1920s, and the visa application regulations used by Herbert Hoover’s administration.

The exhibit never acknowledges that President Roosevelt could have increased the number of refugees admitted through extra-quota loopholes. Clergy (rabbis), professors and students, for example, were not subject to the quota limitations; but the Roosevelt administration admitted only a tiny number of them. Likewise, there is no mention in the exhibit of the proposals for admitting refugees temporarily to U.S. territories such as Alaska or the Virgin Islands, which were advocated by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. No mention of the Virgin Islands governor’s offer to open its doors. No mention that Morgenthau proposed it as a haven for the passengers on the refugee ship *St. Louis*, but FDR turned it down.⁶

Remarkably, the exhibit does not mention that the Dominican Republic offered to admit 100,000 German Jews to its Sosua region. Recent scholarship has found that the Roosevelt administration played a significant role in undermining the Sosua project. Marion Kaplan concluded that the “biggest problem” that the Dominican settlement organizers encountered, after bringing in an initial batch of refugees, was the “unrelenting U.S. opposition” to bringing in more refugees and “the State Department’s hostility and obstructionism.” Allen Wells found that Roosevelt administration officials harbored paranoid fears that some German Jewish refugees would serve as spies for the Nazis and they actively pressured the Dominican haven organizers to refrain from bringing in refugees. As a result, only about 1,000 refugees made it to Sosua. The omission of Sosua is consistent with the exhibit’s theme of avoiding episodes that reflect badly on the the president and his administration.⁷

The exhibit also ignores the almost impossibly high thresholds that the Roosevelt administration utilized in assessing visa applicants, a strategy which suppressed immigration far below the levels allowed by the quota laws. FDR could have quietly allowing the existing German quota to be filled to the permissible limit. Doing so would not have involved any serious public controversy or clash with Congress. Yet President Roosevelt permitted that quota to be fully utilized in only one of his 12 years in office, and in most of those years it was less than 25% filled. More than 190,000 quota places from Germany and Axis-occupied countries were left unused from 1933 to 1945.

The exhibit acknowledges that the quotas were unfilled, but then makes excuses to absolve the Roosevelt administration of responsibility for the low levels. “The 1924 US quota law set a limit of 25,957 immigration visas for people born in Germany,” it states. “In 1933, the State Department issued visas to only 1,241 Germany. Although 82,787 people were on the German waiting list for a US visa, most did not have enough money to qualify for immigration.” So if “most” of the Jewish refugees “did not have enough money

⁶ *Morgenthau Diaries* 194, June 5, 1939, FDRL.

⁷ Marion A. Kaplan, *Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosua, 1940-1945* (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2008), pp.81, 103; Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosua* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), p.114.

to qualify for immigration” anyway, then it does not really matter that there were still unused quota places; they did not qualify, and certainly nobody can blame President Roosevelt for the fact that German Jews “did not have enough money.”

But the exhibit’s statement about not having enough money is disingenuous. Nothing in the law required a visa applicant to have a specific sum of money. The legal definition of “public charge” did not include a monetary threshold. An applicant was required to have a pledge from an American citizen of financial support in the event the applicant became impoverished; the determination as to whether that American sponsor earned a sufficient amount for the applicant to qualify for a visa, was decided by the individual consul. The consul acted on the basis of guidance from the State Department, which in turn acted in accordance with what it understood to be the desire of the president. “The prohibition of anyone likely to become a public charge was inherently ambiguous, and the Visa Division [of the State Department] explicitly informed young consuls and vice consuls that it was their job to make a personal judgment about the financial and personal soundness of a visa applicant (and his relatives),” Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut note. “[T]he system was designed to make it difficult for consular officers to approve too many visas. The consuls and vice consuls could not ignore Washington’s feelings without seriously jeopardizing their own careers. The result was that, in cases of doubt, consuls invariably leaned toward refusal.”

Breitman and Kraut cited examples of what they called “the apparent arbitrariness of the process.” In one instance, a surgeon applied for a visa with an affidavit of support from his cousin, a fur dealer in New York City; when the consul questioned that pledge, the American Friends Service Committee (the Quakers) vouched for the man. The consul rejected the application on the grounds that the Friends were not relatives of the applicant, and only relatives could serve as financial sponsors—even though the Friends were not offering financial sponsorship, but merely attesting to the credibility of the surgeon’s cousin. In another case, a German Jewish teenager provided affidavits from his American brother in law, a cousin, and a different cousin’s husband. The latter two were rejected as not being sufficiently close relatives; the brother in law’s pledge was rejected on the grounds that he did not make enough money to pay for the applicant’s tuition should he want to go to college. Neither of these examples are included in the exhibit.⁸

From Kristallnacht to Wagner-Rogers

The exhibit attempts to cast President Roosevelt’s response to the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom in the best possible light, skimming over the aspects that reflect poorly on the president. To begin with, the exhibit does not inform visitors that FDR was initially reluctant to comment at all on the pogrom. At his first press conference following the violence, on November 11, Roosevelt was asked if he had “anything to say about the Nazi

⁸ Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp.46-47. Ironically, Prof. Breitman is thanked in the exhibit as one of its advisers.

Government's extended campaign against the Jews." He replied: "No, I think not, Fred; you better handle that through the State Department."⁹

It was only at his next press conference, four days later, amid mounting public outrage and international front-page news coverage, that FDR finally issued a public comment. He read a prepared four-sentence statement about "the news from Germany," saying he "could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization." He did not mention that the victims were Jews. The exhibit seeks to portray the statement as a bold and extraordinary step. It asserts that "FDR made an exception to his practice of off-the-record press conferences by allowing newspapers to quote this statement [criticizing the pogrom] from his November 15, 1938 meeting with reporters." The exhibit's curators evidently believe Roosevelt deserves special praise for allowing himself to be quoted from a scripted statement that he himself had just delivered to reporters.

Roosevelt also announced that the U.S. ambassador in Germany was being instructed "to return at once for report and consultation." The exhibit emphasizes that the U.S. "was the only nation to make this diplomatic response." It does not acknowledge that this step was conceived not by the president, but by a State Department official, and for a cynical political reason: Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith suggested it, for fear that without such action, "we shall be much behind our public opinion in this country." Nor does the exhibit acknowledge that the president refused to say anything further about the topic. At that November 15 press conference, after the president announced the recall, a reporter asked: "Would you elaborate on that, sir?" FDR again declined the opportunity to speak further on the subject, saying his statement "speaks for itself." Another reporter asked, "Have you made any protest to Germany?" The president responded, "Nothing has gone that I know of."¹⁰

When it came to the ambassador's recall, the exhibit is quick to point out that the U.S. "was the only nation" to take such action. Yet when it comes to U.S. immigration action in the wake of Kristallnacht, the exhibit suddenly loses interest in comparing Roosevelt's response to the response of other countries. Perhaps that is because it would have revealed the fact that the British response was much better. Great Britain, despite being less than one-fortieth the size of the United States and directly threatened by Nazi Germany, admitted 20,000 children on the *kindertransports*, as well as 15,000 young German Jewish women as nannies and housekeepers.¹¹ None of that is mentioned.

The exhibit reports, erroneously, that Roosevelt "allowed 12,000 Germans on visitor's visas to stay" in the United States six months longer, after the expiration of their visas. It fails to acknowledge that Roosevelt (who emphasized that the visitors "are not all Jews by any means") said he was not certain of the number of refugees involved. He suggested to reporters that they check with the Secretary of Labor regarding the number, and then said

⁹ Press Conference No. 499, November 11, 1938, p.4, FDRL.

¹⁰ Press Conference #500, November 15, 1938, pp.2-3, FDRL.

¹¹ David Cesarani, "Great Britain," p.603, in David S. Wyman, ed., *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

he was “inclined to think that they run as high as twelve to fifteen thousand.” That figure was widely reported at the time, and repeated in many subsequent histories of the period as evidence of Roosevelt’s determination to find ways to assist Jewish refugees despite legal restrictions. The gesture was considerably less magnanimous than it seemed, however; the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, James Houghteling, soon afterwards reported that the actual number of German Jews who received extensions on their tourist visas was no more than 5,000.

It is not clear why the exhibit omits Houghteling’s correction of FDR’s estimate. This omission is particularly glaring because the first historian to publish Houghteling’s statement was none other than Barbara McDonald Stewart (1926-2015), who had a close relationship with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for many years. Her family donated to the Museum the diaries of her late father, refugee advocate James G. McDonald, and she co-edited three volumes of the diaries, which were co-published by the Museum. Yet for some reason, the designers of the exhibit skipped over Dr. Stewart’s important contribution to the historiography of America’s response to Kristallnacht. (For the exhibit’s treatment of James G. McDonald, see Chapter 8 of this report.)¹²

The exhibit’s description of U.S. immigration policy following Kristallnacht is equally flawed. In acknowledging that immigration policy did not change after the pogrom, the exhibit again tries to pin the blame on Congress. It states: “Despite the increased threat faced by German and Austrian Jews, the president chose not to ask the US Congress to reconsider the quota system that limited immigration.” There is no mention of the fact that the governor and legislative assembly of the Virgin Islands offered to open their territory to refugees following Kristallnacht. Authorizing temporary haven in the islands was a way that Roosevelt could have aided German Jewish refugees without incurring political risk or clashing with congressional opponents of immigration to the United States. But the administration opposed settling substantial numbers of Jewish refugees in any locale in proximity to the U.S. mainland.¹³

The exhibit continues with a section concerning the Wagner-Rogers bill, introduced in the aftermath of Kristallnacht, which would have admitted 20,000 refugee children from Germany outside the quota system. The exhibit presents representative quotes from supporters and opponents, with an emphasis on the First Lady’s sympathy for the bill. There is no mention of the inquiry from Congresswoman Caroline O’Day (D-New York) to the president about his position, on which Roosevelt infamously wrote “File No Action FDR.” Instead, the exhibit text states simply: “Despite Mrs. Roosevelt’s urging, President Roosevelt never officially commented on the proposal to admit refugee children.” The

¹² Press Conference No. 501, November 18, 1938, pp.3-4, FDRL; Barbara McDonald Stewart, *United States Government Policy on Refugees from Nazism 1933-1940* (New York: Garland, 1982), p.407. Breitman and Kraut, in their 1987 book, reported that Roosevelt’s response to Kristallnacht “paled beside the British response.” (p.62)

¹³ “Virgin Islands Too Offer Haven for Oppressed Jews,” *The Daily News* (St. Thomas, V.I.), November 21, 1938, p.1; David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), pp.111-115; Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U. Press, 1970), pp.155-157.

insertion of the word “officially” implies that he unofficially tried to help the bill, which he did not.¹⁴

American Rescuers

A small section of the exhibit focuses on “Americans Who Dared.” It consists of four separate panels on individual Americans who tried to directly assist refugees. One is Varian Fry, an American journalist who helped smuggle some 2,000 Jewish refugees out of Vichy France in 1940-1941. The exhibit’s description is flawed—and once again, flawed in such a way as to gloss over unflattering information about the Roosevelt administration.

In its description of why Fry’s rescue mission in Vichy France came to an end, the exhibit states: “His work angered both the US State Department and officials in France (then an ally of Nazi Germany). Fry was expelled in September 1941.”

That text is inadequate both in its failure to explain why Fry’s actions angered the State Department, and in its assertion concerning who it was that expelled him. What happened is that German and Vichy officials complained to Washington about Fry’s refugee-smuggling activities. Secretary of State Cordell Hull responded to the Nazis’ complaints by sending a telegram, in September 1940, to the American ambassador in Paris, instructing him to “inform Dr. Bohn [another rescue activist] and Mr. Fry [that] this Government can not, repeat not, countenance the activities of Dr. Bohn and Mr. Fry and other persons, however well-meaning their motives may be, in carrying on activities evading the laws of countries with which the United States maintains friendly relations.”

In other words, the Roosevelt administration wanted Fry to stop rescuing Jews in order to preserve America’s “friendly relations” with the Nazis. In early 1941, the State Department revoked Fry’s passport, forcing him to leave Europe. But no visitor will learn that from the exhibit.

News of the Holocaust

The exhibit briefly summarizes the *Einsatzgruppen* massacres of 1941, when German mobile death squads murdered more than one million Jews in eastern Europe as the German army swept into the Soviet Union. Then it reports the arrival, in Washington, of the August 1942 Riegner telegram revealing Hitler’s mass murder plan. The exhibit proceeds to describe the Allies’ December 1942 declaration verifying and condemning the mass killings.

Once again, the exhibit omits important information. It does not mention that the State Department at first resisted the British proposal for such a declaration; State feared that “the various Governments of the United Nations [as the Allies were known] would expose themselves to increased pressure from all sides to do something more specific in order to aid these people.” Eventually, the Roosevelt administration went along with the

¹⁴ Wyman, *Paper Walls*, pp.75-98; Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, pp.149-153.

declaration, but only after watering down some of the language. For example, the proposed phrase “reports from Europe which leave no doubt” (that mass murder was underway) was whittled down to just “numerous reports from Europe.” But visitors to the exhibit are not told any of this.¹⁵

At this point, the exhibit presents an entirely new excuse for FDR’s indifference to the plight of Europe’s Jews. No longer is the problem domestic public opinion or old immigration laws, as in the 1930s. Now, according to the exhibit, Roosevelt is not to blame because nobody is to blame—that is, rescue supposedly became virtually impossible. “With America at war, Jews seeking to emigrate had almost no chance to escape,” the exhibit claims. The reality was quite different. Hitler’s Europe was not hermetically sealed during the war. More than 26,000 European Jews reached Palestine during 1941-1944. Some 27,000 Jewish refugees escaped to Switzerland and were granted haven during the war years (and tens of thousands more reached the Swiss border but were turned back). More than 7,000 Danish Jews were smuggled out of Nazi-occupied Denmark to safety in Sweden in 1943. Thousands more fled to Spain and Italy. But the exhibit glosses over those escapees, preferring to pretend that escape was virtually impossible.

Continuing this theme, a key text panel in the exhibit then asks: “Could the Allies Have Stopped the Killing?” In these three important paragraphs, the exhibit presents its multilayered rationalization for the refusal of the U.S. and its allies to provide significant aid to the Jews during the Holocaust.

The first paragraph asserts: “Allied intelligence learned about the systematic killing of Jews almost as it began in the Soviet Union, in 1942. Throughout the war, however, the Allied governments (the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and eight others) prioritized defeating Nazism. Saving Jews targeted for murder was not the Allies’ wartime aim.” The wording thus makes it appear as if there was a conflict between rescuing Jews and winning the war. Presented that way, of course, no reasonable viewer would say that that saving Jewish civilians should have taken priority over “defeating Nazism.” But the entire construct is based on a false premise. Historians have demonstrated that there were many ways Jews could have been saved without undermining the war effort. Examples of such steps are air strikes on the death camps by Allied planes that were already flying nearby; air strikes on railways and bridges leading to the camps, by Allied planes that were already hitting other nearby railways and bridges; using empty Liberty troop transport ships to bring refugees to temporary haven in the U.S. or its territories; and quietly opening British Mandatory Palestine to Jewish refugees.

The second paragraph of the panel conveys the impression that by the time the Allies reached the European continent, most Jews were already dead; hence there were not many people left to be rescued, anyway. “By D-Day (June 6, 1944), when western Allied armies landed in Normandy, France, five million Jews already had been murdered, and only two killing centers—Majdanek and Auschwitz—were still operating.” Minimizing what could have been done effectively minimizes the responsibility for doing so little. But

¹⁵ David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp.74-75.

the wording also crucially ignores the fact that 800,000 Hungarian Jews were still alive in 1944, and many of them could have been saved. The fact that they represented only a minority of the prewar European Jewish population should not obscure the fact that hundreds of thousands of lives were at stake. The fact that the Allies were unable to rescue everybody does not mean they did not need to rescue anybody.

The final paragraph of this section of the exhibit begins by misleadingly limiting the types of rescue action that the Allies could have taken. It reads: “Beyond the military goal of defeating Nazism, the United States could have publicized information about Nazi atrocities, pressured the Allies and neutral nations to help endangered Jews, and supported resistance against the Nazis.” The text here makes no reference to the most obvious way to stop the killing, that is, bombing the railways, bridges, or gas chambers. Although the bombing issue is described in later panels, it seems obvious that it should have been included here in a list of what the Allies could have done. (For a detailed analysis of the exhibit’s handling of the bombing issue, see Chapter 9 of this report.)

The text concludes: “These acts together might have reduced the death toll but would not have prevented the Holocaust.” This is a red herring; no serious commentator claims that they could have prevented the entire Holocaust. The invocation of that non-existent argument is another way to belittle the idea that President Roosevelt could have taken meaningful steps to aid the Jews.

American Jews Respond

The problem of American Jewish disunity is depicted in the exhibit in such a way as to mitigate FDR’s indifference to the plight of European Jewry. A panel reads: “When details of the Nazis’ murderous plans trickled out to the American public in 1943, American Jews remained divided about how much pressure to exert on the federal government to take action. Only once, on December 8, 1942, did a group of American Jewish leaders appeal to President Roosevelt in person.”

This language is problematic for several reasons. First, it implies that since the Jews (supposedly) only appealed to the president in person on one occasion, FDR cannot really be blamed for refusing to take the issue seriously. Second, the wording is erroneous; there were actually quite a few meetings between the president and Jewish or Zionist leaders, or Jewish members of Congress (see below). Third, the reason there were not more meetings is that Roosevelt repeatedly turned down Jewish leaders’ requests to meet him, a fact which the exhibit does not acknowledge.

A delegation of Jewish congressmen met with the president on April 1, 1943. Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann met him on June 12, 1943. Rabbi Stephen Wise met FDR on July 22, 1943 (but only after sending repeated requests over a three month-period). Rabbinical leaders asked to meet with President Roosevelt on October 5, 1943, but were turned away from the White House gates. Congressman Emanuel Celler met with FDR on February 9, 1944. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver met Roosevelt on March 9, 1944. Wise repeatedly pleaded with the president for a meeting in July 1944, preceding the Democratic convention, but Roosevelt refused. Wise and Silver requested a meeting with

FDR in October 1944; Wise alone was granted the meeting. Wise met with President Roosevelt again on January 22, 1945. Clearly, Jewish leaders' failure to sufficiently "appeal" to Roosevelt "in person" was not the cause of his inaction.

The exhibit continues with brief sections concerning Jan Karski (the Polish underground courier) and rescue activist Peter Bergson.¹⁶ The Bergson panel contains accurate information, but is strikingly incomplete. It notes that Bergson "staged *We Will Never Die*, a pageant lamenting the murder of Europe's Jews," but fails to mention the president's refusal to send a message of greeting to the event. (His advisers feared it would be too "political" to acknowledge the mass murder of the Jews.) There is no mention of how many people viewed the pageant, or the impact that it had on public opinion. One of the Bergson Group's newspaper advertisements is shown in the exhibit. But there is no reference to the fact that the group placed more than 200 such ads. The text notes that the Bergson Group persuaded members of Congress to introduce a resolution urging U.S. rescue action. But there is no mention of the many other actions the group took on Capitol Hill, and the many members of Congress who actively supported it. The Bergson Group was the first "Jewish lobby" in Washington, and its bipartisan efforts were remarkably successful—but a visitor would not know that from this exhibit.

The Bergson Group's march by over 400 rabbis to the White House is included in the exhibit, but in such an obscure way that viewers will barely notice that it took place, much less understand its impact and significance. The Bergson newspaper ad that is included in this section contains one paragraph—in tiny print—mentioning that there will be a march. There is also a very small caption with a sentence stating that there was a march, but it is physically situated so low—about belt-high—that it is easy for viewers to miss.

Even more remarkable is the absence of any reference to President Roosevelt's refusal to meet with the rabbis, and his dramatic exit through the back door of the White House. It was the president's snub which triggered angry comments by the rabbis that made the front pages and turned the march into an issue of controversy in the Jewish community. But none of that is in the exhibit. The march also helped galvanize the congressional resolution urging U.S. rescue action. That connection is not mentioned, either.¹⁷

There is another significant omission related to the march: Roosevelt's well-documented angry outburst about the rabbis. FDR's senior adviser and speechwriter,

¹⁶ For the first fifteen years of the Museum's existence, the Bergson Group was omitted from its permanent exhibit. Museum officials initially insisted that making any changes in the permanent exhibit was too complicated and expensive to undertake. However, after five years of meetings, petitions, pleas, and pressure by the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, family members of Bergson activists, and other interested parties—including Elie Wiesel—the Museum in 2008 finally added a text panel and several Bergson-related artifacts to the permanent exhibit. (Etgar Lefkovits, "US Holocaust Museum Launches Exhibit on Bergson Group," *Jerusalem Post*, July 16, 2008, p.3.)

¹⁷ The online version of the exhibit does include a small photo of the march itself. But there is no reference to President Roosevelt's snub of the rabbis, the ensuing controversy, or the connection between the march and congressional action on rescue.

Samuel Rosenman, told confidantes at the time that the president “used language [concerning the rabbis] that would have pleased Hitler himself.”¹⁸

The fact that Roosevelt’s remark was omitted from the exhibit points to a broader problem. Although the main theme of the exhibit is that there was overwhelming antisemitism in American society (which supposedly tied FDR’s hands), the antisemitism within the Roosevelt administration itself is almost completely ignored.

Henry Feingold has characterized the Roosevelt State Department as “hopelessly anti-Semitic,” and with good reason. The diaries and correspondence of senior State Department officials from the period are replete with scornful references to alleged Jewish character traits and dire warnings about Jewish war-mongering and disloyalty, even to the point of considering Nazi antisemitism “justified” to some extent, as Assistant Secretary Adolph Berle put it.¹⁹ Yet the exhibit contains just one passing reference, in a section concerning 1940, to the “State Department’s existing culture of native and antisemitism.” No specific examples of antisemitic remarks by State Department officials are cited. Nor is there any reference to the role played by that antisemitism in the obstruction of rescue opportunities in 1943-1944.

Joseph Bendersky, in his book *The Jewish Threat*,²⁰ amply documented the “vehement racial antisemitism” in the education provided at pre-World War II American military training academies and throughout the ranks of the military. He concluded that the War Department’s “indifference, refusal to seriously examine the feasibility of [rescue] proposals, and outright hostility to any kind of involvement” in helping Jewish refugees was so extreme and unreasonable as to “indicate the role of factors other than the cold military calculations necessitated by war. Generations of racial thinking and anti-Semitism in the office corps surely had an impact. The attitudes and positions of many officers right up to the outbreak of war reinforce such conclusions. The prejudice exhibited during the war by many officers, particularly in the senior ranks, likewise strongly suggests that long-standing attitudes toward Jews affected wartime decisions, sometimes consciously and even overtly, and sometimes in other ways.” Yet the

¹⁸ “Strictly Confidential” summary by Goldman of his conversation with Rosenman, z5/388, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA); Berlin to Hayter, November 11, 1943, FO371/35041, Public Record Office, London.

¹⁹ Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, p.158; Entry for October 10, 1941, in Beatrice Bishop Berle and Travis Beal Jacobs, eds., *Navigating the Rapids 1918-1971: From the Papers of Adolf A. Berle* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p.342. Berle complained that “the Jewish group will sacrifice American interests to English interests...the Nazi propaganda [is] justifying itself a little.” Assistant Secretary of State Wilbur Carr wrote of avoiding a particular Atlantic City hotel because of its “Jewish atmosphere.” Undersecretary of State William Phillips described another diplomat as “a perfect little rat of a Jew.” Jay Pierrepont Moffat, chief of the department’s Division of Western European Affairs, described a Soviet envoy as having “the malevolent look of an untidy Jew.” See Diary of Wilbur J. Carr, entry for February 23, 1934, Wilbur J. Carr Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter LOC); Robert D. Schulzinger, *The Making of the Diplomatic Mind: The Training, Outlook, and Style of United States Foreign Service Officers 1908-1931* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), p.131; Martin Weil, *A Pretty Good Club: The Founding Fathers of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p.39; and Philip J. Baram, *The State Department in the Middle East 1919-1945* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

Holocaust Museum's exhibit makes no reference to antisemitism in the War Department.²⁰

As for antisemitism in the White House, historians have documented more than a dozen bigoted statements about Jews that were made privately by Franklin Roosevelt between the 1920s and the 1940s. They include him boasting that he helped impose a quota on the admission of Jews to Harvard; claiming that Jewish domination of Poland's economy was the cause of antisemitism in that country; expressing pride that he had "no Jewish blood" in his veins; telling Winston Churchill that "the best way to settle the Jewish question...is to spread the Jews thin all over the world"; complaining (at a cabinet meeting) that there were "too many Jews among federal employees in Oregon"; and insisting (at the Casablanca conference) on quotas for Jews in professions in Allied-liberated North Africa because otherwise there would be a repeat of "the understandable complaints which the Germans bore towards the Jews in Germany." None of these statements appear in the exhibit. Evidently the curators did not feel that FDR's repeated remarks about the danger of having too many Jews could have influenced his policy of making sure that not too many Jews were allowed into the United States.²¹

FDR's Liberal Critics

The entire narrative presented in the exhibit is based on a misleading construct. It would have us believe that on one side stood the bad guys—the restrictionists, the antisemites, and the isolationists; and on the other side were the good guys, led by President Roosevelt. The visitor to the exhibit is not informed that, in fact, there many important liberal Democrats and ardent New Deal supporters who strongly criticized FDR's policies regarding Jewish refugees.

For example, famed liberal civil rights attorney Arthur Garfield Hays wrote at the time that "there is no great moral difference between the beast that drives the Jews to destruction and the supine, complacent attitude that will not let down the bars of safety." Dean Alfange, leader of the American Labor Party, testified before Congress in 1943 that the U.S. government had "aided and abetted" the mass murder of the Jews by not taking rescue action. They are not mentioned in the exhibit.²²

²⁰ Joseph W. Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. xvi, 347.

²¹ For the Harvard quota statement and the remark about federal employees in Oregon, see *Morgenthau Diaries*, November 26, 1941, FDRL. For the comment on the Polish economy, see "Report of Meeting of S.S.W. with F.D.R., Saturday morning, Jan. 22, 1938," A243/83, CZA, p.4. For the "Jewish blood" statement, see "Confidential - Memo on conference at the White House with the President---August 4, 1939," Burton K. Wheeler Papers, Box 11: File 18, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT. For the remark about "spreading the Jews thin," see John M. Blum, *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), pp.210-211. For the Casablanca statement, see *Foreign Relations of the United States - Casablanca Conference* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p.608.

²² For Alfange's statement, see p.18 of his Congressional testimony on November 19, 1943, in *Problems of World War II and Its Aftermath - Part 2* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, 1976).

Another progressive voice excluded from the exhibit is that of the feminist pioneer Mrs. Ruth Bryan Rohde. A liberal Democrat congresswoman, Owen was appointed by FDR to serve as America's ambassador to Denmark and Iceland; she was the first woman to serve as a U.S. ambassador. Rohde was so close to the Roosevelts that she was married on the Roosevelt estate at Hyde Park. Yet this same Mrs. Rohde declared in 1944 that if the U.S. and its allies failed to prevent the annihilation of Hungary's Jews, they would become "accessories before the fact" of murder.²³

Another important liberal voice against Roosevelt's policies was *The New Republic*. An editorial in February 1943 declared that if the Allies remained indifferent to the slaughter of the Jews, "they will make themselves, morally, partners in Hitler's unspeakable crimes." A subsequent editorial charged, "If the Anglo-Saxon nations continue on their present course, we shall have connived with Hitler in one of the most terrible episodes of history."²⁴

A 1940 editorial in another leading left-of-center political affairs weekly, *The Nation*, had this to say about FDR's immigration policy: "It is as if we were to examine laboriously the curriculum vitae of flood victims clinging to a piece of floating wreckage and finally to decide that no matter what their virtues, all but a few had better be allowed to drown." In a 1944 editorial, *Nation* editor Freda Kirchwey wrote: "It is untrue to say that little could have been done, once the war was started, to save the Jews of Europe. Much could have been done. At most stages Hitler was willing to permit his Jewish victims to substitute migration for deportation and death. But the other countries refused to take in refugees in sufficient numbers to reduce by more than a fraction the roll of those destined to die... [U.S.] troopships which have delivered their loads at Mediterranean ports could be diverted for a single errand of mercy. Transport planes returning from India or the Eastern Mediterranean could carry out of Hungary the 10,000 children to whom Sweden has offered shelter.... The last opportunity to save half a million more lives cannot be treated as a matter of minor concern... [W]e must hurry, hurry!"

In the pages of the liberal journal *The New Leader*, literary editor Melvin Lasky condemned the Allies' response to the Nazi genocide as "sympathetic mumbo-jumbo and do-nothingism." Millions of Jews were being murdered, and the most they could expect was "obituary notices" from "eloquent and self-righteous" Allied political leaders, who were motivated "partly out of fear and ignorance, out of weary everyday conservatism, and out of a disgraceful moral emptiness."²⁵

²³ Owen cited in *The Answer* II:3 (February 16, 1944), p.25.

²⁴ "A Challenge to the United Nations" (editorial), *The New Republic* 108 (February 2, 1943), p.236; "From Hitler to Bermuda" (editorial), *The New Republic* 108 (May 10, 1943), p.620.

²⁵ Freda Kirchwey, "State Department vs. Political Refugees," *The Nation* 151 (December 28, 1940), p.649; Melvin J. Lasky, *The New Leader*, "The Shame of a World," October 23, 1943; Freda Kirchwey, "Rescue Hungary's Jews," *The Nation* 157 (August 26, 1944), syndicated by the Independent Jewish Press Service, September 1, 1944, p.1; Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp.224-225, 227, 230-231; Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, pp.63, 109, 150.

The exhibit includes a small interactive display table titled, “How Did American News [sic] Report the Mass Killing of Jews?” A viewer can click on the covers of fifteen different American magazines from the 1930s and 1940s, to see articles inside those issues. Most of the publications are genuine news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. There are also one issue each of *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, which for some reason are included in this survey of news media coverage even though they were journals of political commentary, not news. The selected issues of *The Nation* and *The New Republic* each contain one article critical of the Roosevelt administration’s refugee policy. But a visitor to the museum would have no way of knowing that; there is no particular reason to click on them (especially when the much more visually compelling covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* are available); nor is the viewer given any clue as to the significance of *The Nation* and *The New Republic* as liberal critics of the administration’s policies regarding the Jews. The display thus enables the museum’s curators to say that *The Nation* and *The New Republic*’s criticism of FDR is included in the exhibit—which is technically correct—while in fact burying that criticism in such a way that few will see it and even fewer will understand its significance.

The War Refugee Board

The minimization of President Roosevelt in the exhibit’s narrative is particularly glaring in its description of the events leading to the creation of the War Refugee Board and in its account of the board’s activities.

The initiative to create a U.S. government rescue agency came from a congressional resolution, drafted by the Bergson Group. The Roosevelt administration sought to block the resolution, first by having Congressman Sol Bloom insist on full hearings; then by sending Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long to testify against it; and then by having Senator Tom Connally bottle it up in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The exhibit, however, omits the roles of Bloom and Connally entirely, and presents Long as if he acted on his own. There is no acknowledgment that it was the administration’s policy to stop the resolution.²⁶

The exhibit reports that at about the same time, Treasury Department officials uncovered information about the State Department’s obstruction of rescue. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. and his deputy, John Pehle “told President Roosevelt about the State Department’s obstruction. They asked Roosevelt to form an independent government agency to rescue Jews.” The next panel continues: “President Roosevelt signed an executive order on January 22, 1944, that established the War Refugee Board...”

Once again, FDR’s reputation emerges unscathed. In the exhibit’s version of events, the president somehow had nothing to do with his own administration’s policy of trying to kill the resolution. As soon as he learned from Morgenthau about the State Department’s actions, Roosevelt immediately created the rescue agency. There is nothing

²⁶ Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, p.201.

in the exhibit about the president's actual motives: the impending congressional action on the resolution that would have embarrassed him (which is what Morgenthau and his aides believed was crucial to his decision). Nothing about the danger that State's actions would be publicly exposed (which a senior Treasury Department staff member threatened). Nothing about the pressure of the upcoming presidential election (which FDR's own senior aide Ben Cohen said was a factor).²⁷

The exhibit continues with a panel containing a one-paragraph summary of the board's activities in 1944-1945. It is woefully inadequate. There is no acknowledgement that 90% of the board's budget came from private Jewish organizations, because FDR refused to give it regular funding. There is no mention of the State Department and War Department repeatedly refusing to cooperate with the board. There is no reference to the fact that the White House showed little interest in the board's work.

One of the board's first actions was to persuade President Roosevelt to issue a statement warning civilians in German-occupied countries not to participate in atrocities against Jews. Pehle sent the draft to the White House on February 19, 1944. President Roosevelt considered it to be "too pointedly on the Jews." It took more than a month before it was approved and released, and even then only after it was significantly watered down. Three of the six references to Jews were deleted. A paragraph acknowledging that the Jews were being slaughtered "solely because they were Jews" was deleted (it was replaced with a paragraph citing the German mistreatment of "Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, Dutch, Danes, French, Greeks, Russians, Chinese Filipinos—and many others," but not Jews). The first mention of Jews in the statement was moved down to the fourth paragraph. And a pledge to give refugees temporary haven in America was neutered. The entire topic of how the White House delayed and weakened the statement is omitted from the exhibit.²⁸

(The exhibit's references to the War Refugee Board's involvement in proposals to bomb Auschwitz also are deeply flawed; see Chapter 10 of this report.)

Another egregious flaw in the exhibit concerns the War Refugee Board's proposal to the president to grant temporary haven to hundreds of thousands of refugees for the duration of the war. To test the waters of public opinion on the proposal, the White House commissioned a Gallup poll in April 1944. It found 70% of the public supported giving "temporary protection and refuge" in the U.S. to "those people in Europe who have been persecuted by the Nazis." Polls are a central part of the exhibit. They demonstrate the extent of the antisemitism and anti-immigration sentiment that the exhibit claims tied FDR's hands. Scattered through the exhibit, there are nine large, lit boxes, each featuring a poll question; the viewer turns the box around to see the results. The polls on display all show strong opposition to immigration. Yet this April 1944 poll, which found a very different result, is not mentioned in the exhibit. The board's proposal for large-scale haven is not mentioned, either.

²⁷ *Morgenthau Diaries* 694, January 15, 1944, FDRL.

²⁸ John W. Pehle, "Memorandum for the Files," March 9, 1944, *Morgenthau Diaries* 707, pp.242-243, FDRL.

The chief curator of the exhibit, Daniel Greene, spoke to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency at length about polls in the 1930s showing strong public opposition to admitting refugees. The JTA article continued: “Even until after the war ended, the percentages opposing refugee intake consistently hover in the low 70s — a substantial majority. ‘Public opinion doesn’t move,’ Greene said...”²⁹

Yet the fact is that it *did* move. Once the tide of the war had turned, and once Americans learned more about the mass killings, there was a significant shift in public opinion, as the April 1944 poll discovered. Acknowledging the wartime shift of public opinion would upset the exhibit’s major theme. Mention of the widespread public support for temporary havens would reflect poorly on President Roosevelt, who granted haven to just 982 refugees in 1944. Viewers would realize that the president’s hands were not completely tied, after all. So the curators simply whited out the 70% poll from the historical record.

There is an ironic footnote to Greene’s insistence that public opinion did not change during the war. When it is useful to push forward a particular position, Greene’s co-curator, Rebecca Erbelding, has taken exactly the opposite position. Writing at [WashingtonPost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/05/27/the-trump-administrations-refugee-and-border-policies-cruelly-ignore-the-lessons-of-the-past/?utm_term=.11bfe3a9b07a) on May 27, 2018, Erbelding strongly condemned current U.S. immigration policy, arguing that Americans were better in the 1940s, and we should emulate them today. After acknowledging that there was public opposition to immigration in the 1930s, Erbelding wrote: “But after World War II began and the Nazis invaded Western Europe, Americans changed their minds.” Maybe some day, she and Greene will get their stories straight—if it is politically convenient for them to do so.³⁰

A reporter for the *Washington Post* visited the Museum prior to its opening, interviewed Greene and Erbelding, and published a sympathetic article about the exhibit, which he characterized as a “posthumous makeover for FDR.” Erbelding was quoted as complaining that “There’s been a tendency to focus our attention and ire on the U.S.’s lack of coherent response to the Holocaust, mainly on FDR and the on the State Department. FDR and the State Department are not the entirety of the government. There hasn’t been as much attention paid to what Americans by and large were thinking and feeling about this.” Greene told the *Post* he “hopes visitors will emerge with an understanding that even the U.S. president faces constraints.”³¹ Visitors who are familiar with the events in question, however, are more likely to emerge disappointed that the U.S. Holocaust Museum has distorted the historical record in order to make excuses for inexcusable policy decisions.

Dr. Rafael Medoff is founding director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

²⁹ Ron Kampeas, “An Exhibit Shows Ordinary Americans Knew a Lot About the Holocaust as it was Happening,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 1, 2018.

³⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/05/27/the-trump-administrations-refugee-and-border-policies-cruelly-ignore-the-lessons-of-the-past/?utm_term=.11bfe3a9b07a

³¹ Menachem Wecker, “Reconsidering FDR on Refugees,” *Washington Post*, April 22, 2018, p.4.

Laurel Leff

WAS THE ROOSEVELT ADMINISTRATION A PRISONER OF PUBLIC OPINION?

It is a conundrum that often bedevils the analysis of pivotal historical events: To what extent did government officials lead, or follow, public opinion in making critical decisions? Were public attitudes so set that government leaders had no choice but to fashion policies to fit limited political realities? Or were public sentiments shaped at least in part by government actions and thus subject to the influence of skillful leaders?

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum addresses the dilemma in the 16-minute film, “Confronting the Holocaust: American Responses,” released on the museum’s website in connection with the opening of its “Americans and the Holocaust” exhibit (<https://www.ushmm.org/remember/days-of-remembrance/organizing-a-remembrance-event/commemoration-themes/american-responses>)

The film clearly takes a side. Through what it includes and, even more important excludes, from what the narration and the interviewees say, “Confronting the Holocaust” suggests that from the president on down, U.S. government officials had little choice but to follow the public in responding to the Holocaust. In doing so, the museum oversimplifies an exceedingly complex issue and dangerously distorts history.

The film centers on two episodes: the Roosevelt administration’s refusal in June 1939 to admit about 900 Jewish passengers on the German ship the *St. Louis*, which had been turned away from Cuba and thus had to return to Europe; and U.S. actions in 1944 as Hungary began the deportation of 800,000 Jews to the killing fields of Auschwitz-Birkenau. “In both instances, public opinion and government policy determined how the United States responded,” the narrator intones. Yet, in both instances the film does much to explain public opinion and next to nothing to elucidate government policy, leading to the inevitable conclusion that the former mattered far more than the latter in determining the U.S. response.

As the film chronicles, the *St. Louis* left Hamburg for Havana on May 13, 1939. When it arrived, the Cuban authorities invalidated most of the passengers’ landing certificates and refused to let the ship dock. Negotiations with representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a private relief organization, broke down. The captain of the *St. Louis* then set sail for the Florida coast, hoping that the passengers’ U.S. visas might lead government officials to show some leniency. They didn’t. Despite telegrams to President Roosevelt and State Department officials, the *St. Louis* was chased out of American waters and began its journey back to Germany.

While the ship was in transit, however, negotiations with the Joint resumed and its representatives struck a deal that allowed the passengers to be admitted to Great Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The deal “was celebrated,” Steve Luckert, curator of the museum’s permanent exhibition, says in the film. The refugees “had finally found homes.” Of course, when President Roosevelt turned them away, he had no reason to believe they were going anywhere except Nazi Germany. And “nobody knew at the time,” Luckert adds, that war would start less than three months later, eventually engulfing all four countries that accepted the refugees. Only the passengers who were admitted to Great Britain found safety. As the film states in the credits, 254 of the former passengers were murdered in the Holocaust.

“Confronting the Holocaust” describes what happened, but it does not really explain why the U.S. government refused to admit 900 obviously imperiled refugees. Scott Miller, the museum’s director of curatorial affairs, provides the film’s only explanation: “The State Department stated that though they [the *St. Louis* passengers] had waiting numbers to get into the United States, they would have to wait their turn and leave American waters.” Rather than explaining even in the most cursory way what it meant to have a waiting number, the film immediately shifts to the role of American public opinion, noting that the public’s opposition to Nazi Germany didn’t “translate into a willingness to bring in refugees.” Curator Miller states emphatically: “Even confronted with specific lives right off the coast of Miami Beach, American public opinion was so against increasing the immigration quota,” at which point the quote ends abruptly. Luckert then jumps back in to explain that competition for jobs in bad economic times led to xenophobia and antisemitism.

Miller’s and Luckert’s description of American sentiment is essentially correct. Public opinion polling at the time showed Americans did not want to admit refugees, and economic concerns explain some of that reluctance (though the racist law that limited immigration was enacted in 1924, during a period of economic prosperity). But they are wrong to imply a straight line from the public’s anti-immigrant sentiment to the Roosevelt administration’s refusal to help the *St. Louis* passengers. Miller can’t possibly know that Americans “confronted with specific lives right off the coast of Miami Beach” would have wanted to send them back to Germany—because Americans were never asked. No polls were conducted about the *St. Louis* passengers, or any other “specific lives.” Maybe Americans would have been hostile or indifferent to the *St. Louis*’ well-dressed, well-mannered passengers whom they saw in newspaper photographs and newsreels, staring mournfully at the Havana harbor or talking to relatives bobbing in small boats next to the ship. Or maybe not.

Miller, and the film’s discussion, also overlook a more critical point. Americans may have been “so against increasing the immigration quota,” as Miller says, but raising the immigration quota was not the primary immigration problem during the 12 years of the Nazi regime. Only in one year, the year the *St. Louis* tried to reach the United States, was the immigration quota for Germany filled. (The *St. Louis* passengers had been given visas but their numbers were too high to be among the 27,370 immigrants per year that could be admitted under the combined German and Austrian quota, thus their presence on a

“waiting list.”) In every other year, as another part of the museum’s online exhibit acknowledges, only from 5 percent to 71 percent of the German quota was filled.

While Americans may have been opposed to lifting the quotas, it is less clear (because it was not asked directly) that they would have been opposed to filling the quotas. This is a subtle but very important point. It is impossible to know whether an outcry would have arisen had consular officials just quietly issued visas within the quotas, rather than denying them, as they did for inconsistent and often spurious reasons. What is known is that the State Department’s goal was to minimize immigration and that it preferred to accomplish this objective through administrative means out of sight of both the public and Congress. What is also known is that had the administration just issued visas up to the quotas, several hundred thousand more refugees could have entered the United States. “Confronting the Holocaust” explains none of this. By ignoring U.S. officials’ actions before and during the *St. Louis* episode, the film suggests the only rationale for refusing to admit the ship’s passengers—and by extension other refugees during the 12-year crisis—is that the Roosevelt administration could not cross public opinion by raising immigration quotas. Of course, that does not explain why the quotas were not filled to begin with. It does not explain why other options were rebuffed, such as the Virgin Islands’ offer to let the passengers stay there while they waited for their quota numbers to come up. The incomplete telling of the tale of the *St. Louis* leaves the impression that U.S. government officials were so constrained by a hostile public that they had no choice but to turn away desperate refugees.

What the Government Did Not Do

“Confronting the Holocaust” takes a different lesson from the events leading up to the German invasion of Hungary in 1944 and the resulting deportation of its Jewish population. In this case, a sympathetic and activated public pushes government officials to try to help the Jews through the creation of the War Refugee Board. In relating this episode too, however, the film dwells on the public. By focusing on what the public did, the film avoids what government officials failed to do to try to stop the slaughter.

Mass killings of Jews began with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. “By the middle of 1942, information about the Nazi policy to murder Jews began to reach the United States public,” the film’s narrator states. The film does not describe government officials’ response to the horrifying news, skipping ahead to Luckert’s description of “a mood among Jewish organizations to call public attention to what’s happening and to urge action to save what remains of Europe’s Jewish population.” The film does not mention that the State Department tried to suppress that information, delayed confirming it, and did next to nothing to make the public aware of the facts. Nor did the president or the Office of War Information, the government’s propaganda agency. Instead, Jewish organizations’ sustained and strenuous efforts led to the information reaching the public, although it was relegated to inside stories in American newspapers.

But then, 17 months later, something of a miracle occurs. The lobbying and public protests that took place are not recounted; yet suddenly there is action. “By end of 1943

there is enough public awareness of the murder of Jews that the Senate and the House of Representatives issue what is called the rescue resolution for a U.S. government agency designed for the relief and rescue of Jews and other persecuted minorities,” a co-curator of the exhibit, Rebecca Erbelding, explains. (In fact, neither the House nor the full Senate passed such a resolution, only the Senate Foreign Relations Committee did.)

Erbelding does acknowledge that the Treasury Department, which needed to approve “licensing for relief and rescue,” fought with the State Department, which “was delaying assisting some of these Jewish aid organizations to send money into Europe.” But why the State Department would do that and what impact it had are not discussed, nor is any other action State officials took to impede rescue.

Instead, the film announces that Treasury officials “compiled a report that is placed before President Roosevelt in January of 1944 and almost immediately Roosevelt decides on the creation of the War Refugee Board.” All that viewers learn of the report is a single quote that appears on the screen: “Officials in our State Department....have been guilty... of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler.” (Ellipses in original.) Treasury’s detailed, scathing indictment of almost 11 years of State Department policy is overlooked, as is the report’s powerful original title, “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews.”

In the film’s telling, a willing Roosevelt, who seemingly just learned of these events, eagerly agrees to create a rescue agency. The administration’s lobbying against a rescue agency, including a top State Department official’s lying before Congress and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau’s concerted maneuvering for such an agency—including a staff member’s threats to resign and go to the press—play no part.

The film also leaves out key facts about the War Refugee Board. Treasury lawyer John Pehle became executive director not “largely because of the good work his group was doing,” as Erbelding suggests (though his group was doing good work), but because prominent individuals offered the position turned it down. The board did most of its relief efforts through other agencies, not to “facilitate sending millions of dollars into Europe and have a much greater impact,” but because the WRB had such limited means and authority from the government. Working through existing relief agencies was pretty much all it could do.

The WRB did indeed confront “a daunting task” because “the people it hoped to save remained far behind enemy lines.” But it is misleading to suggest the problem was that “the board could not divert vital military resources from the Allies’ goal of winning the war as soon as possible.” Neither the WRB nor Jewish organizations proposed diverting vital military resources to rescue Jews. The options they devised were with the war effort in mind. “Confronting the Holocaust” does not mention any of those options, including the one most often and most heatedly discussed: Allied bombing of the railway lines and bridges to Auschwitz and the camp itself. This is a particularly odd omission, because the possibility of bombing Auschwitz arose precisely during the time period of the film’s focus, as Hungarian Jews were being deported there. Nor does the film chronicle the ways other parts of the government—the State Department, the War Department, and the Office of War Information—continued to make the WRB’s job difficult. Nor does it

explain the very limited support it received from FDR and his advisors. Except for the heroic WRB officials (who were indeed heroic), everyone else in the administration disappears from the film's narrative.

Even on its own narrative terms—public opinion pushing for a rescue agency that, once established, had some success—“Confronting the Holocaust” is a bit of a muddle. It does not make clear how many Jews the WRB helped save, or even how many Hungarian Jews perished. The film states that 400,000 were deported to Auschwitz; 300,000 of them were dead by July, though an additional 120,000 were alive in Budapest. The WRB saved “tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest,” but that leaves over 400,000 Hungarian Jews unaccounted for. That is just sloppiness.

There is a more central confusion. Just five years after a xenophobic and antisemitic public supposedly prevented the U.S. government from admitting 900 refugees hovering in a ship off the Florida coast, that same public pressured the government to try to rescue Jews. Many historians have simply assumed anti-immigrant attitudes carried over into anti-rescue sentiments, and therefore public hostility partly explained the government's limited rescue efforts. To its credit, “Confronting the Holocaust” does not make that leap. Yet the film does not even try to explain what led to this seeming reversal in public opinion, or establish that it took place.

During the war, private pollsters never posed the question of whether Americans believed the U.S. government should attempt to rescue European Jews or even what Americans thought about the Final Solution; only a single government poll, engineered by the WRB, asked whether refugees should be temporarily admitted for the duration the war; the support for the proposal was overwhelming. Public opinion on Americans' attitudes toward possible rescue actions therefore cannot be known. There are reasons to assume public attitudes might have become more sympathetic to the Jews. Allowing foreigners in and saving them from mass murder are different (though the State Department's and British Foreign Office's main objection to rescue measures was that there was nowhere for the saved Jews to go). In addition, Americans no longer had to worry about Jews dragging the United States into a war, we were already in it.

It is also possible that what changed was not public opinion, as much as public intensity. Faced with the murder of millions, rescue advocates kicked into high gear, though it should be noted that boycotts and protests, as well as behind the scenes lobbying, occurred before the war as well. To hang so much on “public awareness of the murder of the Jews” without providing evidence or context, however, leaves the story line fundamentally incoherent. The more difficult issue of the government's role in shaping public opinion, of which FDR was a master, is not even touched. The role of public opinion both in constraining government actions and in facilitating them is far more complex than the story “Confronting the Holocaust” tells.

Obscuring Lessons About Genocide

Of course, a 16-minute video cannot possibly tell a complete story. It is inevitable that much complexity will be left out. The exhibit itself and its online version can and do

provide more depth, though with the many problems and errors discussed elsewhere in these pages. Still, the film, which may have more of an afterlife in classrooms, is revealing in terms of the lessons the U.S. Holocaust Museum wants its audience to take from America's role in the Holocaust. "Confronting the Holocaust" is explicit that its goal is to teach lessons about "American action—and inaction" that "could help us prevent future genocides." But can we possibly draw any useful lessons if the government's actions and motivations are obscured?

"The lesson" offered by Victoria Barnett, director of the museum's Programs on Ethics, Religion and the Holocaust, is nothing of the sort. "The time for the War Refugee Board would have been before the war when you would have had refugees who were still looking for visas able in some fashion to get out," Barnett says. "If you wait until in the case of the Holocaust Hitler begins to expand his Reich across Europe, it's already too late." This comment reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the history and of the government's role. First, Barnett wishes a pre-war WRB had aided "refugees who were still looking for visas," effectively arguing for a government agency that would force another government agency to do what the second government agency was already supposed to do: issue visas. Second, many agencies established before the war were trying to solve the refugee crisis, including ones in which the United States played a part. The League of Nations had a High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany. The Evian Conference, which the United States convened, created the Intergovernmental Commission on Refugees. Even President Roosevelt had a President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. The problem was not the lack of an agency; the problem was the policy pursued by government officials. We did not need a WRB before the war. We needed a less antagonistic immigration policy, one that would have admitted at least as many immigrants as the law allowed, and an international posture that encouraged other countries to do the same.

And we still would have needed a War Refugee Board. Most Jews who were murdered lived in Poland and the Soviet Union, places where massive pre-war immigration to the U.S. was not the issue. Only the German invasion directly imperiled Poland's 3.5 million Jews and, with a minuscule Polish quota of 6,524 per year, prewar immigration of a significant portion of the Jewish population to the United States was never a realistic possibility. The immigration of the Soviet Union's three million Jews was even less likely; the communist country restricted the migration of all its citizens. So as Hitler expanded his Reich into Poland and then the Soviet Union, millions of Jews would have been trapped, making their rescue and a wartime WRB necessary regardless. The real questions are why it took so long to establish one and why it was not able to do more. Those are the issues that need to be engaged in contemplating the prevention of future genocides. Those are the issues "Confronting the Holocaust" fails to confront. By focusing relentlessly on the public, the film lets the Roosevelt administration off the hook.

Laurel Leff is Associate Professor of Journalism and Associate Director of Jewish Studies at Northeastern University.

Bat-Ami Zucker

SILENCING A WOMAN WHO SPOKE OUT

Frances C. Perkins spent much of her life shattering the glass ceiling for women. She fought to gain admission to the almost all-male Worcester Classical High School. She successfully battled in court to keep her maiden name after she married. She was New York State's first Commissioner of Labor. She was the first woman to serve in an American president's cabinet; and as secretary of labor, she was one of only two members who served in Franklin D. Roosevelt's cabinet throughout his entire twelve years in the White House. She was also the most outspoken and persistent advocate for Jewish refugees within FDR's cabinet.

How sad that in this era of dismantling gender discrimination and enabling women's voices to be heard, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has chosen to, in effect, silence Frances Perkins, by almost completely excluding her from an exhibit focusing on the very subject to which she devoted so much of her concern: America's response to the Holocaust.

During the 1930s, Perkins waged four important battles to make it possible for more German Jewish refugees to enter the United States. The three which had the most potential to help the Jews are completely ignored by the museum's new "Americans and the Holocaust" exhibit. Only the fourth, which was the least significant, is mentioned in the exhibit—but it is inadequately explained and erroneously described.

Perkins' first effort concerned the "likely to become a public charge" (LPC) provision of U.S. immigration policy. Initiated by the Hoover administration and maintained by the Roosevelt administration, the LPC clause enabled consuls in Europe to arbitrarily reject visa applicants based on their personal assessment as to whether the applicant could support himself. In practice, it became the primary administrative obstacle to approving visas.

To combat the LPC problem, Perkins turned for assistance to Harvard Law professor and presidential adviser Felix Frankfurter. At Perkins' suggestion, Frankfurter drafted two possible presidential executive orders. One would have instructed consuls to set aside the LPC requirement in cases of applicants who were targets of religious or racial persecution. Fearing the president might not be willing to go that far, Frankfurter also drew up an alternative executive order, which would maintain the LPC criterion in all cases, but would order the consuls to give priority to victims of religious or racial persecution. Perkins raised her proposal at an April 18, 1933, cabinet meeting. The State Department strongly objected. The president sided with State.

Perkins' second initiative was to permit American citizens to post a bond in place of other financial guarantees that would-be immigrants were required to secure in advance

of coming to America. This set off a battle over a legal technicality. Perkins wanted legal authority for such a bond to be posted before the immigrant arrived, in order to overcome the LPC problem. The State Department vehemently opposed the proposal, contending that consuls did not have a legal right to accept a bond before deciding whether to grant a visa. Senior State Department officials, such as the Visa Division's C. Paul Fletcher, worried that the bonds procedure would enable "Jewish aliens" to flood into the United States. "If ships begin to arrive in New York City laden with Jewish immigrants, the predominant Gentile population of the country will claim they have been betrayed through a 'sleeping' State Department," he warned.¹

Ultimately, in December 1933, the attorney general issued an opinion in support of Perkins' position. But implementation of the bonds procedure was delayed, and ultimately prevented, except in a very small number of cases, by other Roosevelt administration officials, principally Immigration Commissioner Daniel McCormack. As a result, consuls in Europe continued to follow the strict existing procedures.

A third Perkins initiative concerned the admission of German Jewish refugee children. The Labor Department already had a right to admit unaccompanied children under the age of 16 if bonds were posted on their behalf. Perkins' proposal to make substantial use of this option was strengthened by the fact that an American Jewish organization called German-Jewish Children's Aid declared it would assume responsibility for the children's travel expenses, placing the children in proper homes, caring for their education, and making sure they would not become public charges. Perkins' plan also had a significant public relations advantage over other proposals to admit Jewish immigrants: nobody could claim that children would take away jobs from American citizens, an argument frequently raised in opposition to regular immigration.

Nonetheless, State Department officials refused to cooperate with arrangements to bring the children. Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith insisted, in a 1939 memo to Perkins, that the proper procedure would be "to have the cases of the Jewish children presented to our consular officers in the same manner as that of other applicants for immigration visas." Due to the State Department's interference, and the president's disinterest, only about 400 German Jewish refugee children ever reached the United States in this manner.² The Perkins idea of bringing children was taken up in the form of the Wagner-Rogers legislation of 1939, which would have admitted 20,000 children outside the quota system. In the face of State Department opposition and presidential indifference, the bill was buried in subcommittee.

The fourth of Perkins' efforts was to expand the use of visitor's visas. The State Department resisted suggestions to issue large numbers of visitor's visas in lieu of visa applications. Perkins's Labor Department, however, had the authority to extend the visas

¹ Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.21.

² Regarding the number of unaccompanied Jewish children who came to the U.S. from various European countries, see Judith Tydor Baumel, *Unfulfilled Promise: Rescue and Resettlement of Jewish Refugee Children in the United States* (Juneau, AK: The Denali Press, 1990), p.76.

of those who German Jews who were already in the United States under that status, and it did so, but the numbers involved were modest.

As the refugee crisis intensified in 1938 and the U.S. quota for German immigrants approached capacity (for the first time in the Roosevelt administration), Perkins again raised the idea of instructing consuls to adopt a more flexible approach in granting visitor's visas to people who otherwise would be denied because they were unable to satisfy the requirement of proving they could safely return to Germany after the six-month visa expired.

Assistant Secretary Messersmith called the proposal "a loophole in the law [that] would be contrary to the spirit of our immigration laws" and contended that it "would have the effect of breaking down our whole immigration practice." In the immediate aftermath of Kristallnacht, as pressure mounted for some kind of a U.S. response, Messersmith became increasingly concerned that Perkins' "hysterical" proposal, as he called it, might gain traction. He personally called Perkins and pressed her to drop her "illegal" proposal.

President Roosevelt was not willing to go so far as to adopt Perkins' plan, but he saw advantages in accepting her much more modest suggestion of unilaterally extending the visitor's visas of those German Jews already in the United States. It would enable him to appear responsive to a humanitarian crisis without actually admitting any additional refugees. Moreover, it addressed the otherwise problematic situation caused by the German government's recent announcement that it was canceling the passports of German Jews who were in the U.S. as visitors; if the visas were not extended, the administration would find itself in the unpalatable position of having to forcibly deport thousands of stateless Jews to Nazi Germany. Undertaking what even the president acknowledged would be "cruel and inhumane" mass deportations, on the eve of an election year, would not have made political sense.

The extension decision actually represented the least significant of Perkins' refugee efforts over the years, for several reasons. First, because the Labor Department already had the authority to extend the visas, whether or not the president took action. Second, because while Roosevelt said at a press conference that "12,000 to 15,000" German Jews would be aided by his gesture, the actual number was much smaller. Soon afterwards, the commissioner of immigration said the number of people affected was not more than 5,000. The precise total number of German Jews admitted on visitors' visas between 1933 and 1940 is not known, but a reasonable estimate would be 20,000-30,000. Much larger numbers of refugees would have been granted haven if any of Perkins' other proposals had been adopted.

Third, while Perkins was hoping for a genuine change of heart and policy by the president on the refugee issue, she came away with nothing more than a gesture that affected a small number of people and would not loosen immigration procedures down the road.

Those of Perkins' efforts which FDR rejected or ignored are not mentioned in the U.S. Holocaust Museum's new exhibit. There is nothing about her effort to bring about

cancelation of the LPC clause; nor her initiative regarding posting bonds; nor her project to bring in unaccompanied children.

Despite her many years of devotion to the refugee cause and her tireless efforts to change the administration's response to the plight of the Jews, Perkins is mentioned in just a single half-sentence in the exhibit—and only in connection with the one proposal of hers that made President Roosevelt look good. Perkins endured what too many women, and too many advocates of refugee rescue, have suffered. Her proposals were ignored or shot down by President Roosevelt. Her devotion to refugees was scorned as “hysterical.” And now her voice has been almost completely silenced in an exhibit by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, an institution that should be highlighting, not ignoring, the pioneering efforts of American women who tried to help the Jews. Frances Perkins deserves better.

Bat-Ami Zucker is Professor of History at Bar-Ilan University.

Stephen H. Norwood

THE NAZI WARSHIPS THAT AMERICANS WELCOMED, AND THE EXHIBIT IGNORES

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s new exhibit, “Americans and the Holocaust,” overlooks one of the Hitler regime’s most successful efforts to spread Nazi propaganda in the United States—by means of the 6,000-ton naval cruisers, the *Karlsruhe* and the *Emden*, that it sent on tours of American ports in the mid-1930s. One of the results of the Nazi warships’ visits was the significant military cooperation between the German and American navies, openly on display. Because of the Museum’s neglect, viewers of the exhibit will not grasp the significance of the Roosevelt administration’s unconcern about, and unwillingness to take action against, Germany’s rapid rearmament. Nor will they recognize the extent of pro-appeasement sentiment in American business circles and federal, state, and local governments, and its dire consequences.

In October 1933, speaking at a farewell banquet for the *Karlsruhe* prior to its departure from the German port of Kiel on its first voyage to the United States, its captain, Freiherr Harsdorf von Enderndorf, emphasized that the warship would carry “the spirit of the New Germany” to the outside world. In American ports, the *Karlsruhe* personnel would “end once [and] for all the rumors and propaganda which had been spread abroad”— meaning the reports in the Western press about Nazi persecution of Jews and political dissidents.¹

Hitler strongly emphasized the importance of propagandizing in the United States in order to ensure its neutrality in the next European war. Having been a soldier in the German army during World War I, Hitler recognized that American intervention was highly important in breaking the long stalemate on the Western front and ensuring Allied victory. He also knew that American food and industrial supplies would significantly strengthen Allied military power and civilian morale in the next European war.²

Hitler especially underlined the critical importance of a powerful German navy, which would greatly reduce the effectiveness of any British blockade of German ports, so damaging in World War I. A strong navy could also impede French and British attempts

¹ *London Times*, October 16, 1933. The mid-1930s visits to the United States by the *Karlsruhe* and the *Emden* were part of round-the-world voyages. The American ports were the German warships’ most important stops.

Most of this article is drawn from my “Entertaining Nazi Warriors in America, 1934-1936” in Eunice G. Pollack, ed., *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: The Past & Present of a Lethal Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017), pp.148–84. It is published with permission of the editor.

² Stephen H. Norwood, “Forging Friendly Ties: American Universities and Nazi Germany” in Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, and Jana Starek, eds., *Alma Mater Antisemitica* (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016), pp.311–12.

to import colonial troops from Africa and Asia. Naval experts considered the cruiser the warship of the future, replacing the ponderous battleship, an easy target for aircraft and submarines. Swift and able to travel vast distances without refueling, cruisers would concentrate on destroying the enemy's "life blood," its merchant marine, and disrupting its communication lines.³

When the Hitler government introduced "Naval Folk Week" in June 1935, German Vice-Admiral Albrecht, chief of the Baltic station, declared that its purpose was to "impress upon all our racial comrades" that the navy, "like other parts of our armed forces," was "a visible symbol of our National Socialist Third Reich."⁴ The Nazi regime used the voyages to stimulate pride in the "New Germany" among German Americans and Germans in the United States, as it sought to bind together persons of German descent in a foreign land with those in the Reich as one "Volk."

The U.S. Navy high command and Roosevelt's State Department extended friendly welcomes to the Nazi warships, even assisting them in improving their combat readiness. Beginning with the arrival of the *Karlsruhe* in Honolulu in February 1934, U.S. Navy shore batteries fired twenty-one gun salutes to the German warships, which the latter returned. With the support of the State Department, the U.S. Navy in Hawaii assisted the Nazi warships in gunnery practice at sea. U.S. naval officers there gave *Karlsruhe* officers and cadets tours of important naval installations at America's major Pacific military base. These included the U.S. Navy Yard, the Fleet Air Base, and the Submarine Base.⁵ This was consistent with State Department policy, which was to consider Nazi Germany a "friendly nation."

American governors, mayors, business and civic groups held receptions to honor the swastika-bedecked cruisers' officers, cadets, and crewmen, lavishing praise on them. In most of the cities the Nazi cruisers visited, Lutheran and Catholic churches invited their personnel to religious services. The German warships' visits to American ports on the West, East, and Gulf coasts, and on Hawaii, provided a platform from which their officers and German diplomats in the United States disseminated Nazi propaganda. The *Karlsruhe* carried 2,000 copies of *Mein Kampf* on its 1935 voyage to the United States.⁶ The "goodwill" visits of these showpieces of the new German navy also allowed Nazi Germany the opportunity to make its case for rearmament directly to Americans.

Nazi Germany's press readily portrayed the visit by the *Karlsruhe* to Honolulu in 1934 as a public relations triumph for the Third Reich. When the *Karlsruhe* steamed into

³ Yates Stirling, Rear Admiral, USN, "Our Navy Focuses on Heavy Cruisers," *New York Times*, February 11, 1934. Rear Admiral Stirling emphasized that "the destruction of an enemy's commerce is a cardinal principle in war, underlying the strategy of war on the seas...The complete severance of lines of communication will force an enemy to end the war."

⁴ *New York Times*, June 12, 1935.

⁵ T. M. Leovy, Lt. Commander, USN, Naval Attaché's Report, March 17, 1934, Box 884, Naval Attaché Reports (hereafter NAR), Office of Naval Intelligence (hereafter ONI), RG 38, National Archives (hereafter NA), Washington DC (hereafter DC). *Karlsruhe* (and *Emden*) cadets were the equivalent of Annapolis midshipmen, and participated in the voyages as a training exercise.

⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, October 28, 1935.

port, Honolulu's leading newspaper, the *Advertiser*, printed an editorial entitled "Willkommen, Karlsruhe!" It urged that the city extend a friendly welcome to "the representatives of that great Nazi republic beyond the seas."⁷ Honolulu's *Karlsruhe* entertainment committee, which included appointees of the territorial governor and mayor, arranged a daily program of dances, parties, and concerts. Honolulu's mayor and board of supervisors sponsored a lavish hotel ball attended by 3,000 in the *Karlsruhe*'s honor. The Chamber of Commerce hosted the Nazi cruiser's captain and fifteen of his officers at a luncheon.⁸

At its next stop, Tacoma, Washington, the *Karlsruhe* received a similarly enthusiastic welcome. The Tacoma Chamber of Commerce feted the *Karlsruhe*'s officers at a hotel luncheon open to the public. Promoting fraternity between the United States and the Third Reich, the *Karlsruhe* band played the German and the American national anthems. All in attendance stood for both, and the *Karlsruhe* officers gave the Nazi salute. German national colors and the swastika flag were placed next to the Stars and Stripes. The president of the Chamber of Commerce welcomed the German officers on their "mission of peace," and then introduced the main guest speaker, the German consul for the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, Walther Reinhardt. Reinhardt criticized "the false conception and interpretations" of the Third Reich that he claimed prevailed in the United States.⁹

The *Karlsruhe*'s officers reciprocated by hosting a reception and dance aboard their warship to honor Americans who had entertained them and their crew, including U.S. naval officers. The governor of Washington and his wife were the captain's luncheon guests on the ship and stayed for the "gay afternoon festivities." The *Tacoma Daily Ledger* reported that "German national banners and symbols of the Nazi movement served as screens and decorations for those portions of the ship reserved for dancing."¹⁰

In San Diego, the next port at which the *Karlsruhe* docked, the Chamber of Commerce hosted Captain von Enderndorf and forty of his officers at a dinner dance. Seated with von Enderndorf were San Diego's mayor; U.S. Navy Rear Admiral William Tarrant, commandant of the 11th Naval District; and Georg Gyssling, German consul at Los Angeles. The *Karlsruhe* captain later reciprocated by holding a special luncheon on board the warship to honor U.S. rear admiral Alfred Johnson and U.S. captain N. H. White. They were joined by Consul Gyssling and Robert Witthoefft, German naval attaché in Washington DC.¹¹

The U.S. admirals and business leaders were pleased to fraternize with the *Karlsruhe*'s officers, even though the German cruiser brandished swastika emblems on both sides of the stern and exhibited Nazi expansionist and rearmament propaganda. A

⁷ C. H. J. Keppler, Captain, USN, Naval Attaché's Report, April 9, 1934, Box 884, NAR, ONI, RG 38, NA, DC; *Honolulu Advertiser*, February 16 and 17, 1934.

⁸ *Honolulu Advertiser*, February 24, 1934.

⁹ *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, March 17, 1934.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1934.

¹¹ *San Diego Union*, March 28, 29, and 31, 1934.

large, colored map mounted in the warship's main deck passageway showed Germany and the countries surrounding it, with Germany's pre- and post-war boundaries clearly marked. Superimposed over each neighboring country were sketches of aircraft in "V" formation headed toward Germany. This display "forcibly...indicated" Germany's vulnerability to air attack "under present treaty limitations."¹²

In Boston on May 12, 1934, Mayor Frederick Mansfield and Massachusetts governor Joseph Ely's secretary extended an official welcome to the *Karlsruhe*, precipitating a "storm of protest" from leaders of Boston's Jewish community. Jennie Loitman Barron, director of the Women's Division of the Boston American Jewish Congress, expressed shock that public officials would endorse Nazi "persecution and barbarism" by greeting the German warship, officered by men who wore the swastika on their caps.¹³

Five days later, the Associated German Societies of Massachusetts and the German and Austrian War Veterans sponsored a banquet to honor the *Karlsruhe's* personnel at the luxurious Copley Plaza Hotel at which 1,000 celebrants "rose to their feet and paid tumultuous acclaim to Adolf Hitler." When the acting chair of the Steuben Society of America, a leading German-American organization, "issued a clarion call to German sympathizers" in the United States to band together and oppose "what he termed the vicious propaganda being promoted throughout the country against Germany," he received an ovation. He urged them to mobilize against the boycott of German goods. The *Boston Post* reported that the "excitement reached its highest pitch," however, during Captain von Enderndorf's speech, "when he called upon the 1,000 men and women present for a salute to Hitler, and issued a stirring defense of the Nazi government." The Stars and Stripes hung between the Nazi swastika and German imperial flags, and a band played both the "Star-Spangled Banner" and the Nazi anthem, the Horst Wessel Lied. Mayor Mansfield sent a personal representative to the dinner.¹⁴

Ignoring the objections of the Boston Jewish community, Wellesley College, a prestigious Seven Sisters school, sponsored a dance and reception for the *Karlsruhe's* cadets. Boston rabbi Samuel Abrams denounced the *Karlsruhe* as an instrument of "hate and darkness." By contrast, the student newspaper, the *Wellesley College News*, portrayed the cadets as very appealing blond men, immaculate in their black uniforms, whose "friendly grins" made them appear "soft and sincere." Soon after the cadets' arrival, "the floor was filled with dancing couples." Everyone enjoyed the punch and cookies.¹⁵

When the *Karlsruhe* returned to Kiel from Boston, German defense minister Werner von Blomberg and Admiral Erich Raeder were there to welcome it. Speaking on Hitler's behalf, von Blomberg conveyed the regime's appreciation for the *Karlsruhe's* propaganda

¹² W. G. Child, Commanding Officer, to Office of Naval Intelligence, April 5, 1934, Box 1190, NAR, ONI, RG 38, NA, DC.

¹³ *Boston Herald*, May 12, 1934; *Boston Post*, May 12, 1934.

¹⁴ *Boston Post*, May 18, 1934; *Boston Globe*, May 18, 1934.

¹⁵ *Boston Herald*, May 12, 1934; *Wellesley College News*, May 24, 1934, cited in Stephen H. Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.117.

mission.¹⁶ The *Karlsruhe*'s engineering officer, Lt. Commander Schreiner, in a speech to the Society of German Naval Architects convention five months later, lamented that the warship had arrived in mainland U.S. ports "at the height of an anti-German Press campaign by which they were greatly surprised and not a little hurt." Schreiner insisted, however, that this was more than offset by the "graciousness of their reception by various federal and local officials and by the friendship manifested by...Americans of all stations."¹⁷

When the *Karlsruhe* returned to the United States in 1935, it was once again warmly welcomed by the U.S. Navy high command, city officials, business leaders, and German-American organizations. During this second extended Nazi propaganda campaign, the warship made stops of a week or more in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Oakland, Houston, and Charleston, South Carolina.

As the *Karlsruhe* approached Los Angeles in February 1935, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that U.S. Navy vessels would aid it in day-and-night "battle practice firing." Roosevelt's State Department arranged for the U.S. Navy to provide vessels, personnel, and equipment to assist the Nazi warship in these exercises, in what the *Los Angeles Times* called an "extraordinary example of international naval courtesy." U.S. Navy mine sweepers and tugboats towed target rafts to the Navy's San Clemente Island drill grounds for gunnery practice. It noted that this collaboration between the U.S. and German navies was "unique in international naval annals."¹⁸

Admiral Joseph Reeves, commander-in-chief of the U.S. fleet, and captains Wilbur van Auken and George Baum of the battleships *Oklahoma* and *Arizona*, respectively, received the *Karlsruhe*'s new captain, Guenther Luetjens, in formal calls. The *Oklahoma* was paired with the *Karlsruhe* for "social contacts." Captain Baum of the *Arizona*, formerly U.S. naval attaché in Berlin, was an old friend of Captain Luetjens. The acting mayor of Los Angeles received Luetjens at city hall.¹⁹ Germany's ally, Japan, sank both battleships in its attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The *Karlsruhe* next stopped for ten days in the San Francisco Bay area, where the San Francisco city government; high U.S. Navy, Army, and Marine Corps officers, and local business leaders honored the Nazi warship's officers, cadets, and crewmen with a reception at city hall. For the occasion, the rotunda was decorated with the swastika, German imperial, and American flags. San Francisco's mayor gave a welcoming speech. Admiral Thomas Senn, commanding the U.S. 12th Naval District; a U.S. Marine Corps general; Nazi Germany's consul for San Francisco, Gustav Heuser; and a Chamber of Commerce representative were present.²⁰

¹⁶ *New York Times*, June 19, 1934; H. D. Bode, June 25, 1934, Box 1191, NAR, ONI, RG 38, NA, DC.

¹⁷ H. D. Bode, November 26, 1934, Box 884, NAR, ONI, RG 38, NA, DC.

¹⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, February 26 and March 1, 1935.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, February 27 and March 1, 1935.

²⁰ *Oakland Tribune*, March 2, 1935; *New York Times*, March 2, 1935; *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 3, 1935; *San Francisco Examiner*, March 3, 1935.

The Stanford University newspaper, the *Daily*, interviewed Captain Luetjens's public relations officer, Lt. Karald Grosse, who enthusiastically praised Hitler for ending political chaos in Germany and uniting the people behind a great ideal. He claimed that Hitler's goal was "peace" and "a respected place in the family of nations."²¹

The German warship received very friendly receptions at the final two U.S. cities it visited on its 1935 voyage, Houston, Texas and Charleston, South Carolina. The mayors of Houston and nearby Galveston were on hand to welcome the *Karlsruhe* to port in Houston. The officers of a U.S. destroyer serving as a training vessel for naval reserves there took a "prominent part" in "entertaining the *Karlsruhe*'s personnel and honoring its officers."²²

At the invitation of the Texas state legislature, Captain Luetjens delivered an address to it in Austin. Luetjens emphasized to the legislators that Nazi Germany and the United States shared the same ideals. He expressed the hope that the *Karlsruhe*'s visit would strengthen American understanding of German aspirations. In Austin, Luetjens also made an official call on Governor James Allred.²³

In June 1935, shortly after the *Karlsruhe* returned to the Reich, the Hitler government signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, which allowed Germany to greatly accelerate its naval rearmament. The historian Martin Gilbert called the Agreement "appeasement's most dramatic success," and a herald of the Munich Pact to come. William L. Shirer maintained that the agreement gave Nazi Germany "free rein to build up a navy as fast as was physically possible....It was not a limitation on German rearmament but an encouragement to expand it."

The Agreement, which the Roosevelt administration favored, divided Britain from its wartime ally France, whom it had not consulted. It swept aside the Versailles Treaty limitations on German naval construction, permitting Germany to build a navy with 35 percent of the tonnage of Britain's. It also allowed Germany to resume submarine construction, which the Versailles Treaty had prohibited. The Agreement significantly reduced the Royal Navy's advantage, because Britain required many more vessels to defend its far-flung colonies, stretched across the oceans. In addition, many of the Royal Navy's vessels were antiquated; Germany would now be equipped with a large number of modern warships. The Agreement weakened the prospects of a successful blockade of German ports, and gave the German navy the capability of seriously threatening both British and American shipping in the Atlantic.²⁴

²¹ *Stanford Daily*, March 4, 1935.

²² *Houston Post*, April 25, 26, and 30, and May 1, 1935.

²³ *Ibid.*, April 30 and May 1, 1935.

²⁴ Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (New York: New American Library, 1966), 150; J. C. White, counselor of [U.S.] Embassy, to Hon. Secretary of State. Subject: Anglo-German Naval Agreement, June 26, 1935 and Lord Lloyd, "Naval and Military Situation," June 26, Norman Davis Papers, Library of Congress [hereafter, LC], Washington D.C.; William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), pp.287-89.

In 1936, shortly after Hitler's seizure on March 7 of the demilitarized Rhineland, a violation of the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Pact, two German cruisers, the *Karlsruhe* and the *Emden*, arrived on American shores. By taking the Rhineland, Hitler had now positioned his army to invade Western Europe. The Roosevelt administration remained silent. Secretary of State Cordell Hull declined to discuss "any phase" of the Rhineland situation with the press, saying only that the United States was "not involved in any way."²⁵

The U.S. Navy, business, civic, and church groups accorded both warships the same enthusiastic welcome as the *Karlsruhe* had received in 1934 and 1935. U.S. vice admiral H. V. Butler hosted a luncheon on a U.S. naval vessel for the *Karlsruhe*'s new captain Leopold Siemens and German naval attaché Witthoefft. U.S. rear admiral C. H. Woodward (Commander of Destroyers, Battle Force) held still another luncheon for them on board ship. Witthoefft visited the U.S. Naval Training Station, where he was received "with full honors," and made an official call at the local U.S. Marine Corps base. The city and county of San Diego and the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a dinner for Captain Siemens and his officers and a dance for the *Karlsruhe*'s crew. At a Chamber of Commerce luncheon, San Diego's mayor extended "felicitations" to Witthoefft and the cruiser's officers, cadets, and crew.²⁶

Flying the swastika flag from bow and stern, the second cruiser, the *Emden*, made its principal stop in Baltimore, for twelve days. The U.S. Navy Department in Washington DC, U.S. Navy admirals, state and municipal officials, and the Chamber of Commerce all used the visit to proclaim their determination to forge even friendlier relations between the United States and the Third Reich.

Secretary of State Hull ignored the pleas of Emanuel Gorfine, speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, and four other House members to rescind the permission he had granted for the *Emden* to dock in Baltimore. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that "thousands of [their] constituents had expressed deep resentment" that Secretary Hull had allowed the German warship to visit the city.²⁷

In Baltimore, German consul Frederick Schneider hosted a dinner for the *Emden*'s captain, Hans Bachmann, and his officers, attended by the presidents of the city's major German-American organizations, at which the mayor made an appearance. The pastor at Baltimore's Zion Lutheran Church gave the invocation, and Adolf Hitler was toasted.²⁸

Captain Bachmann, several of his officers, and 150 *Emden* cadets visited the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis as guests of its superintendent, Rear Admiral David Sellers. Sellers had been the guest of German ambassador Hans Luther in Washington a few days earlier. Sellers hosted a luncheon at the Naval Academy for the *Emden* officers, at which

²⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 1936; *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1936; *Washington Post*, March 8, 1936.

²⁶ Commandant, 11th Naval District, San Diego, to Chief of Naval Operations (Director of Naval Intelligence), April 22, 1936, Box 884, NAR, ONI, RG 38, NA, DC; *San Diego Union*, April 7 and 10, 1936.

²⁷ *Baltimore Sun*, April 21, 1936.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1936.

they were joined by Luther and Witthoefft. The Naval Academy greeted Luther's arrival with a nineteen-gun salute.²⁹ In July, Sellers embarked on a trip to Europe that included more than two weeks in Nazi Germany.³⁰

Conclusion

The "goodwill" voyages of the swastika-bedecked cruisers *Karlsruhe* and *Emden* helped to legitimize Hitler's rearmament program in the United States at a critical time, as Germany was reemerging as a major military power. The U.S. Navy, with the cooperation of the State Department, even assisted German cruisers in carrying out ocean maneuvers and target practice. U.S. Navy and Army officers had no qualms about fraternizing with the officers and cadets of these Nazi warships, even after the American press reported in December 1935 that the Hitler government was systematically evicting Jewish widows of German soldiers killed in World War I from low-rent municipal apartments built specifically for war widows.³¹

The German naval visits to American ports were part of a concerted strategy to achieve respectability in the West, which also included university student exchanges.³² The failure of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's "Americans and the Holocaust" exhibit to address either of these subjects represents a very serious omission, impeding viewers' understanding of Americans' ultimate responses to the Holocaust. The friendly reception accorded the Nazi warships by the U.S. Navy and business and civic leaders reflected widespread insensitivity toward Jews among mainstream Americans and many federal, state, and local officials.

Stephen H. Norwood is Professor of History and Judaic Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

²⁹ Ibid., April 18, 1936; *Washington Post*, April 26, 1936; *New York Times*, April 26, 1936; Hans Luther to David Foote Sellers, "To Meet the Captain of the Cruiser 'Emden,'" April 23, 1936, Box 19, David Foote Sellers Papers, LC.

³⁰ "Itinerary of Rear Admiral D. F. Sellers, U.S. Navy—1936," Box 4, Sellers Papers, LC.

³¹ *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 1935; *Washington Post*, January 5, 1936.

³² Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp. 37, 59-60, 82, 105-18, 122-32, 158-59, 201.

Paul R. Bartrop

THE EVIAN CONFERENCE: RESCUE OR VIRTUE SIGNALING?

Between July 6 and July 15, 1938, delegates from 32 countries met in the resort town of Evian, France. Those present were there at the invitation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who convened the meeting with the intention of discussing, in depth, the nature of the immigration policies of the invited nations, and, in accordance with those, what the options were for accepting refugees from Nazi Germany.¹

The countries attending were not expected in any way to depart from their existing immigration regulations. When the meeting's final recommendations were made, no definite action on behalf of the refugees was proposed—only that the deliberations should continue, and that a subsequent meeting would take place in London.

An examination of the Evian Conference offers an extremely rich and insightful glimpse into a collective international mindset during a specific period of emergency in world history, a time after which all previous certainties would be altered forever. It is astounding that the exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum entitled “Americans and the Holocaust” should have barely mentioned the conference, which was called specifically by the U.S. president as a direct response to the growing Nazi threat.

President Roosevelt's motives in convening the conference proceeded from his desire to deflect certain sectors of American public opinion which had, since as early as 1933, been pushing him for a liberalization of immigration procedures. By taking the initiative globally, he could show that the United States was playing a leading role in trying to find a holistic solution to the refugee issue, and that the problem was not to be deposited onto the U.S. This deflection would take the form of a new organization that would discuss the best ways to manage refugee resettlement.

United States policy had hitherto already been under considerable strain just dealing with refugees from Germany, but with the German annexation of Austria in March 1938—and thus an additional 181,882 Austrian Jews to consider—the potential for a humanitarian disaster loomed large. The *Anschluss* thus forced Roosevelt's hand, aggravating an issue that was already unwieldy.

Strong evidence exists to the effect that the initiative did not actually originate with Roosevelt himself, but with senior members in the State Department—in particular, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Under Secretary Sumner Welles, and Assistant Secretary George S. Messersmith. David S. Wyman concluded as early as 1968 that these officials

¹ For a detailed analysis of the conference, see Paul R. Bartrop, *The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

saw it was far preferable for the United States to be proactive in the matter—in the words of Cordell Hull, “to get out in front and attempt to guide” the direction in which discussions would lead—than in being forced into a situation that could be to America’s detriment. Hull was quite explicit: in his words, it would forestall “attempts to have [America’s] immigration laws liberalized.” Roosevelt, far from being motivated by sympathy, adopted a position based on considerations of what he understood to be hard political reality.

Indeed, when it came to addressing that political reality, the unspoken assumption on the conference agenda was that the people to be discussed were not to be officially mentioned as Jews, but, rather, as “refugees.” To ensure sufficient control over the agenda, moreover, it was set by the U.S. government rather than by an international planning committee. Roosevelt’s invitation emphasized that the countries attending were not expected to depart from their existing immigration regulations, and that only an exchange of information would take place. Contrary to what has become post-Holocaust popular wisdom, the intention of the conference was not to discuss how to open doors for refugee Jews, or to force certain countries to ease their restrictions, or to save Jews from the Holocaust. In 1938, there was no Holocaust from which Jews needed saving—yet.

There was, however, a refugee crisis, and consequently the various nations of the world were confronted with questions that have parallels to our own time. Should an open-door policy be permitted for anyone claiming refugee status? Should quotas be imposed, and, if so, how were decisions to be made as to numbers and eligibility? Should refugees be permitted entry on a short-term, long-term, or permanent basis? Should refugees be allowed in, regardless of the prevailing economic situation? Should refugees of a different religious or ethnic background be given the opportunity to arrive? And, if they were to be allowed in, should they be permitted to stay, thereby transforming the country’s existing social fabric?

Roosevelt’s initiative in calling the meeting was not intended to compromise the existing policy of any country. No ethnic, political, or religious group was to be identified with the refugee problem or the calling of the conference; nothing should be done to interfere with the operations of existing relief organizations; all assistance for refugee work was to be drawn from purely voluntary sources; and no attending nation would be required to amend its current immigration laws to accommodate the refugees.

Once set, the agenda directed that the committee would meet to consider what steps could be taken to facilitate the settlement “of political refugees from Germany (including Austria);” what steps could be taken to assist the most urgent cases “within the existing immigration laws and regulations of the receiving countries;” reflection on “a system of documentation, acceptable to the participating States, for those refugees who are unable to obtain requisite documents from other sources;” whether there should be established a more permanent body to continue the work begun at the meeting; and preparation of a resolution to make recommendations with regard to the other agenda items.

The conference was dominated by three men: Myron Taylor from the United States, a favorite of FDR; Edward Turnour (Lord Winterton), an aspiring politician from Britain; and Henry Bérenger, a professional diplomat, from France. Each stated that their country

was not prepared to do anything to expand Jewish refugee immigration. The United States would not commit to any expansion of its immigration quotas (which included refugees), only a merging of the existing German and Austrian allocations (nor would it consider settling refugees in U.S. territories such as the Virgin Islands or Alaska, which some refugee advocates would soon propose). Britain said it would not attend if there was any mention of Palestine or the colonial Empire. The French argued that since 1918, France had taken in more “aliens” than any other European country and was now “saturated.” This, then, gave a lead to all the other countries, as they lined up to make their presentations.

Collectively, the European countries—Denmark, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom—expressed hesitation over the possibility of supplanting the League of Nations High Commission on Refugees. They hoped that the United States and other countries outside Europe would accept a greater share of the burden and stated that they would only accept refugees for temporary asylum in a short-term transit capacity.

The largest group of states, the countries of Latin America, was comprised of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. They commended Roosevelt for his initiative in calling the meeting and recognized that the refugee crisis was a humanitarian disaster; but at the same time, they expressed a preference for farmers over “urban-dwelling professionals and intellectuals.” They held, moreover that the United States and the European nations should pick up the slack in solving the refugee issue.

The self-governing British Dominions informed the conference that they had no interest in resolving the refugee problem. Canada said it only wanted farmers, and New Zealand did not want foreigners. South Africa, though invited, did not attend, but Ireland, which had not been invited but went anyway, declared that it was not an immigrant-receiving country. The Australian position, expressed by the Minister for Trade and Customs, Sir Thomas White, was that “as we have no real racial problems, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration.”

While many at Evian spoke of a “refugee crisis,” the various nations formed policies in accordance with their existing priorities. Every country in the world formulated and administered an immigration policy—not a rescue-from-the-Holocaust policy. Nobody holding senior office during the 1930s, in any major country, envisaged the Final Solution that would emerge less than two years after the outbreak of war.

When measured against the standards of 1938, there were several areas in which the meeting was clearly deficient. Even if the Holocaust could not have been foreseen, nonetheless the possibility of war could be, but at Evian there was no discussion of what might happen to the Jews of Eastern Europe should Germany embark on a war of conquest and thereby vastly increase the number of Jews under Nazi rule. The conference never managed to resolve the points of crossover between the League of Nations High Commission, other refugee bodies, and the conference, and it failed to suggest any sort of financial arrangements for the refugees. Nor, shamefully, did the delegates even agree to

condemn the Nazi antisemitic persecution that led to the refugee crisis in the first place, with the issue not even raised. These were all within the conference's remit as targets that could have been met, but none of them were.

There was, however, one person who saw through the meeting's rhetoric; indeed, he had from the very beginning. At an official level, nobody else, it seems, was as insightful as Adolf Hitler, who (arguably) assessed Evian more accurately than anyone else at the time. The Nazis realized that the conference was focused more on looking good than on doing anything of a definite and lasting nature, and saw that it was not about saving Jews but about saving the reputation of the attending countries. In his closing speech at the Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg on September 12, 1938, Hitler made a direct connection between Roosevelt's calling of the conference and his attempt to deflect attention away from an otherwise unhelpful American policy.

One final, key question needs to be asked: could the Evian Conference have made a difference to the events that were to follow? The best answer is only: perhaps. Evian *could* have served as an occasion for caring administrations to voluntarily announce that they would agree to an increase in their refugee or immigration intakes. Led by the United States, Britain, and France, however, questions of *realpolitik*, racial and population preferences, antisemitism, economic priorities, and other factors led to a collective rejection of any liberalization in favor of Nazi Germany's unwanted Jews. No other outcome was ever likely at the meeting, and the hopes of many were consequently both misplaced and unrealizable.

After Evian, but prior to the German attack on Poland precipitating World War II, a series of events further reduced options for Jews to remain in Germany. These included the establishment of a Nazi Office of Jewish Emigration to speed up the pace of Jewish emigration from Germany (August 1, 1938); the requirement that Jewish women add "Sarah" and men add "Israel" to their names on all legal documents (August 17); the closure of Switzerland's borders to Austrian Jews seeking sanctuary (August 19); the Munich Conference in which Britain and France surrendered the Sudetenland regions of Czechoslovakia to Germany by negotiation (September 29-30); the compulsory stamping of passports belonging to German Jews with the letter "J" to indicate their identity (October 5); the *Kristallnacht* pogrom throughout Germany and Austria (November 9-10); the German invasion of what remained of Czechoslovakia (March 15, 1939); and the return to Europe of the *St. Louis*, a ship carrying some 900 Jewish passengers, after being denied entry into Cuba and the United States (June 17, 1939). Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939; Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later.

Is it legitimate to refer to Evian, as many have done when considering the Holocaust, as a "failed" conference? Probably not. After all, it lived up to the terms of Roosevelt's original invitation—which was to talk, and do nothing. As a result, delegate after delegate lined up to say that what they were doing for refugees was actually quite a lot, while at the same time demonstrating that they could do no more and were not prepared to try. The immediate results of the conference amounted to nothing of any lasting worth, which was exactly what was anticipated. In what was a classic case of "virtue signaling," the

assembled countries used the opportunity presented to look good, but the refugees got nothing for it.

The stakes for the Jews of Germany in 1938 were frighteningly high, confronting a regime that cared nothing for the standard conventions of international behavior and a community of states that cared little for the fate of the people they had come together to discuss. If there was any failure, it was a failure of imagination—not only on the part of the countries attending, but also on the part of those hoping that some other outcome would be possible. Evian must be viewed through the lens of its initiation in March 1938, and its execution in July that year, rather than the horrors of World War II or the Holocaust.

It is therefore heartbreaking that ever since Evian, there has been a long and constant narrative that begins with “the failure of the Evian Conference.” Evian did not fail. It achieved precisely what it set out to achieve, as anticipated by the Roosevelt administration when it sent out the invitations in late March of 1938: Nothing.

The U.S. Holocaust Museum’s new exhibition, “Americans and the Holocaust,” contains only one small text panel regarding the Evian Conference, in which the claim is made that some of the states “spoke bluntly about not wanting to admit Jews.” In fact, none, except for Australia, ever mentioned Jews as such. The exhibit casts no aspersions on Roosevelt’s motives in calling the meeting, nor does it offer an explanation as to why it was convened. The panel is accompanied by a thoroughly misleading contemporary newsreel in which Evian is mentioned. This does not support the Museum’s claim, made on the exhibition’s home page, that it “asks how US institutions and individuals reacted to Nazism during the 1930s and 1940s.” Where the Evian Conference is concerned, the question, sadly, is not even raised.

Paul R. Bartrop is Professor of History and Director of the Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Monty Noam Penkower

THE BERMUDA CONFERENCE ON REFUGEES: A MUCH-NEEDED CONTEXT IS ABSENT

The curators of the “Americans and the Holocaust” exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum assert that it “chronicles what the U.S. government—from President Roosevelt to Congress and government agencies—did and did not do to respond to Nazism and the persecution and mass murder of Europe’s Jews.” They say that the exhibit is “based upon extensive new research.”

At the same time, under the banner “Never Stop Asking Why,” the museum is marking its twenty-fifth anniversary by such an effort in order “to inspire people to reflect on the questions raised by the Holocaust and our responsibility in society today.” The Museum’s publicity release quotes the declaration of the 1979 President’s Commission, chaired by the museum’s founding chairman, the late Elie Wiesel, that the American experience “must...be explored thoroughly and honestly....The decision to face the issue constitutes an act of moral courage worthy of our nation.”

How does the new exhibit’s coverage of the Bermuda Conference on Refugees measure up to that standard?

The full text of the exhibit’s section on the Bermuda Conference reads as follows:

In the months following the public release of news about the “Final Solution” in 1942, State Department officials instructed colleagues in Switzerland not to transfer further reports about the mass murder of Jews either to the US government or to private citizens. They hoped that blocking such reports would suppress pressure to aid Jews.

Meanwhile, in April 1943, representatives of the United States and Great Britain met in Bermuda to discuss the ongoing refugee crisis. Neither country, however, intended to open doors to Jewish refugees or [to] undertake any rescue action. US Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long appointed delegates to the conference who would not challenge his commitment to restrictive immigration policies. At the conference, the British government reaffirmed its 1939 decision to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Just days after the Bermuda Conference ended, activist Peter Bergson called it a ‘mockery and a cruel jest.’

C'est tout. Does this brief text explore “thoroughly and honestly” one of the most significant topics in any study of how the U.S. government, beginning with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, responded during the *Shoah*? Were only the State Department and the Foreign Office culpable? Does it reflect any “extensive new research” on the subject? Does it face the issue squarely, inspiring visitors sufficiently to “reflect on the questions raised by the Holocaust and our responsibility in society today?” Is this summary “an act of moral courage worthy of our nation”?

Unfortunately, the answer to each of these fundamental questions must be given in one word: No. As someone who, more than thirty years ago, served as an early consultant to the museum on the entire topic of American responses during the Holocaust, I am disappointed and greatly troubled by the exhibit’s treatment of the Bermuda Conference, and the even shorter text about Bermuda in its online version.

If we are enjoined by the museum’s banner to “never stop asking why,” the foremost query that arises in this connection is straightforward: why is the decisive American voice, Roosevelt himself, not accorded any mention here? Well before Rabbi Stephen S. Wise’s press statement on November 24, 1942, that half of the estimated four million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had been slain in an “extermination campaign,” and that Hitler had ordered the murder of the entire number by the end of the year, the Chief Executive had information on the Holocaust. Yet, as with the creation of an Allied War Crimes Commission, he allowed the issue to come to a head before making a move of, in fact, no immediate consequence. He turned down Polish Prime Minister Wladislaw Sikorki’s private appeal for large-scale bombing in retaliation for Germany savagery, arguing that “the victims” could be “entirely safe from these recurring cruelties only when the military might of the Axis powers has been thoroughly crushed.” He also proved unwilling to ask Congress about admitting thousands of Polish women and children, currently released from Soviet camps, fearing “anti-semitic agitation” upon the inclusion of many Jews.¹

The administration’s silence—and this from the master of the “Fireside Chats”—kept the American public ignorant and therefore unaroused. When British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in March 1943 advised the U.S. Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, in FDR’s presence that a current offer of taking all the 60,000-70,000 threatened Bulgarian Jews would have the Jews of the world wanting the Allies to make similar offers in Poland and Germany, and though Hitler “may well take us up on any such offer,” there were simply not enough ships and means of transportation to “handle them,” his listeners kept silent. The occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue chose not to press State and Whitehall for a dramatic shift to unequivocal rescue action, and he refused to consider any compromise on the Allies’ grand strategy of “Unconditional Surrender” as agreed upon with Churchill at the Casablanca Conference of January 1943. Such a decision was considerably easier than grappling with the vexing and urgent problem at hand. Rather, FDR looked to the future. He openly pledged punishment for some Nazi leaders after V-E day, and

¹ Monty Noam Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p.95.

considered himself a “sadist” in appointing Herbert Lehman, a Jew, to handle postwar relief for Germany. Roosevelt preferred to speak to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. of later Jewish settlement in Palestine, Ecuador, some virgin territory west of the Colombian Andes, and elsewhere on the globe.²

In not according Hitler’s prime enemy a distinct national entity, the administration, together with British officialdom, could conveniently relegate the difficult “Jewish question” to the postwar period. To shift a congressional focus on Palestine as the logical Jewish haven, Secretary Hull, echoing Roosevelt’s views, called for a world in which Jews should be as free as others “to abide in peace and honor.” Even as the Bermuda Conference met, Bundist leader Szmul Zygielbojm appealed to Roosevelt and Churchill in a final note to intervene at the twelfth hour. His suicide in London, even as fellow Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto were engaged in a heroic revolt against the German *Wehrmacht*, went unacknowledged. Three months after the Bermuda meeting had resolved not to fundamentally aid the one people marked for death in World War II, Roosevelt, with Churchill’s approval, agreed to a projected joint Anglo-American statement which would have silenced all public discussion of Palestine during the global conflict. In October, the two leaders joined with Stalin at the Moscow Conference to issue a long declaration against German barbarities—with Jewry conspicuously absent. Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill, in the course of their secret correspondence with one another, raised the possibility of rescuing the particular targets of Hitler’s obsessive hatred; Stalin ignored the entire matter.³

The U.S. Holocaust Museum’s statement on the Bermuda Conference is correct as to the response of State and of Whitehall, but it presents no “new research,” “extensive” or otherwise, as to the Anglo-American stance before and during that April 1943 meeting, a position already described in chapter four of my volume *The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust* (1983). Yet this statement, maintaining silence on FDR’s important role and lacking proper historical context, errs in another significant way. In mentioning only the reaction of Peter Bergson in understandably calling the conference “a mockery and a cruel jest,” it omits the detailed program for possible relief and rescue that had been submitted to the two governments by the umbrella Joint Emergency Committee of American Jewish organizations.⁴

Unspecified military and shipping difficulties served as the convenient foil to the Jewish Agency for Palestine’s urgent appeal that close to 100,000 Jews be taken immediately into Palestine, as well as to the charge from ORT leader George Backer (the only outsider permitted to wait outside the conference doors) that negotiations be undertaken with the Vatican and the neutral governments for removal of at least 125,000 Jews from eastern Europe. The conference’s failure to aid European Jewry sparked the attendees four months later at the American Jewish Conference, then representing half of

² Ibid., pp.85, 156.

³ Ibid., pp.113, 121; Monty Noam Penkower, *Decision on Palestine Deferred: America, Britain, and Wartime Diplomacy 1939-1945* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2002), pp.225-231.

⁴ Penkower, *The Jews Were Expendable*, p.109.

the country's five million Jews, to champion a Jewish state with unrestricted immigration to the biblically covenanted Eretz Israel. That alone, the overwhelming majority concluded, would put an end to the tragedy of bi-millennial homelessness and attendant antisemitism. The imminent expression of this community's collective will affirmed the compelling bond between Jewish catastrophe and Jewish sovereignty.⁵

Following the Bermuda Conference, which chief British delegate Richard Law justifiably later called this "façade for inaction," Roosevelt approved Hull's recommendation on May 14, 1943, that North Africa serve as a "depot" for the 20,000 refugees presently in Spain, but not on a permanent basis without full approval of all authorities concerned: "I know, in fact, that there is plenty of room for them in North Africa, but I raise the question of sending large numbers of Jews there. That would be extremely unwise." His view echoed the judgment at that same moment of the U.S. War Department's Military Intelligence Division (G-2) Middle East section, embracing a totally pro-Arab position for Palestine, which advised that the Cameroons in central Africa should be the place of shelter for those European Jews who survived the war.⁶

When one week later Churchill expressed interest at a White House meeting in settling Jews in the former Italian colonies of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, to serve as "satellites" of a future Jewish state in Palestine, FDR repeated the warnings of his foremost adviser on postwar settlement, Johns Hopkins University president Isaiah Bowman, of a violent reaction in the Arab world, repeated in the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff's strong objections to even the British proposal of a small center somewhere in North Africa. Following Bowman's suggestion, Roosevelt proposed instead that Jews be spread out thin throughout the world to avoid gentile antagonism, much as he had experimented with four or five families in Marietta County, Georgia, and at Hyde Park, New York. This view accorded fully with the president's earlier comment to the French resident in Rabat, Morocco, that the number of North African Jews in the white-collar professions should be "definitely limited" to their percentage in the total native population. Taking such a step, he had then declared, would "further eliminate the specific and understandable complaints (*sic!*) which the Germans bore toward the Jews in Germany, namely, that while they represented a small part of the population, over 50 percent of the lawyers, doctors, schoolteachers, college professors, etc. in Germany were Jews." In the end, and after a full year had passed, a mere 432 Sephardic Jews arrived at a U.S. camp ten miles north of Casablanca. As to rescuing Jews seeking escape in 1944 from the Holocaust in the Balkans to Italy, U.S. political advisor Robert Murphy saw to it that help would not be tendered Marshal Tito's willing partisans in evacuating Jews then in Yugoslavia by Allied ships returning to Italy.⁷

The Jews' identity would be masked in the very title "Bermuda Conference on Refugees," as it had been in the July 1938 Evian Conference which created the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, and as it would be when Roosevelt

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.110, 114.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.114-115, 118.

reluctantly approved a U.S. “War Refugee Board” in January 1944. He had fled from a march in the nation’s capital three months earlier by 400 Orthodox rabbis who sought an Anglo-American governmental agency for rescue, choosing to dedicate a few bombers to the Free Yugoslav forces instead. While FDR’s hand was forced in a presidential election year to create the Board, he assigned to it only \$1 million from his emergency funds; private rescue agencies would have to cover all expenses thereafter. He would resort to that instrument but once again—to admit 918 Jews and 66 other refugees to Fort Oswego, New York, where they were interred for the rest of the war. Roosevelt spent much time on planning postwar settlement for Jews who would not live to see the memoranda of this secretive “M Project” when Hitler’s *Götterdämmerung* sounded.⁸

“Deeds commensurate with the gravity of the hour,” called for in a last cable from the doomed fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising while the Bermuda Conference’s delegates basked in the sun of a Caribbean island, purposely chosen for its isolation from public scrutiny, had not followed. When food reached Greece and Guernsey in the Channel Islands through the Allied blockade, exchange of prisoners took place via the International Red Cross, Allied boats returned empty from theaters of war, and Churchill threatened to retaliate in kind if the Germans used poison gas on the Russian front, a mantle of callous indifference covered Washington, London, and Moscow. The Jews could not wait for the Allied victory. Adolf Hitler would not let them wait. His grim executioners, working day and night, reaped a bloody harvest.

*Monty Noam Penkower is Emeritus Professor of Modern Jewish History,
Machon Lander Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.136, 142.

Stephen H. Norwood

THE EXHIBIT'S NEGLECT OF U.S. UNIVERSITIES' COLLABORATION WITH THE THIRD REICH

The failure of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's "Americans and the Holocaust" exhibit to address American higher education's forging of friendly ties with the Third Reich's Nazified universities is a glaring—and troubling—omission. During the 1930s, American college and university administrations were highly important in shaping public opinion on world affairs. Higher education leaders traveled frequently to Europe, often violating the boycott of German goods and services by sailing on German liners, and the American press reported their views on political developments there. The Hitler regime was determined to convince Americans that it was a responsible government with just grievances against the former Allied powers. It hoped thereby to offset American press coverage of Nazi atrocities and ensure United States neutrality in the next European war. Reaching out to American universities was a major priority of the Nazi propaganda effort.

Prominent American university administrators were complicit in helping the Nazi government improve its image in the West, as it intensified its persecution of Jews and rapidly rearmed. American higher education leaders warmly welcomed high Nazi officials to campus, where they delivered speeches justifying Hitler's policies. On many occasions, American university administrators undermined anti-Nazi campus protests, even imposing draconian punishment on those who challenged their efforts to maintain friendly relations with Nazi officials. American colleges and universities participated avidly in student exchange programs with Germany's Nazified universities. They engaged in such cooperation fully aware that German universities had discharged their Jewish faculty members and become instruments for disseminating Nazi propaganda. In May 1933, the American press had provided extensive coverage of the mass burnings of Jewish and other "un-German" books at universities across the Reich, in which many of the world's leading works of scholarship and literature were destroyed. The colleges and universities ignored repeated pleas from Jewish organizations to terminate student exchanges with German universities, which violated the boycott against travel to the Third Reich.¹

¹ Only Williams College ended student exchanges with Nazi Germany's universities, in 1936. A survey taken by the student newspaper disclosed that a majority of the Williams College student body opposed terminating the exchanges. Stephen H. Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59; Stephen H. Norwood, "Forging Friendly Ties: American Universities and Nazi Germany" in Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, and Jana Starek, eds., *Alma Mater Antisemitica: Akademisches Milieu, Juden, und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939* (Vienna, Austria: New Academic Press, 2016), pp.319–20.

The exhibit curators' unwillingness to confront American colleges' and universities' role in helping Nazi Germany gain greater respectability in this country prevents museum visitors from understanding the extent of antisemitism, pro-appeasement sentiment, and support for collaborating with the Third Reich among well-educated Americans. When he was a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers in the early 1920s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself supported measures to reduce Jewish enrollment.² Many officials in his State Department who blocked Jewish refugees' entry into the United States were products of universities such as Harvard and Yale, which had spearheaded the implementation of Jewish quotas.³

Antisemitism in American Interwar Academia

Antisemitism pervaded American higher education during the 1930s. American universities maintained quotas that severely restricted the admission of Jewish students well beyond the Holocaust. Many of the most prominent university presidents expressed hostility toward Jews in their correspondence, and few were willing to consider anti-Nazi refugee academics for permanent faculty positions. There were very few Jews on American university faculties during the interwar period.⁴ In September 1933, when the Du Pont Corporation asked Harvard president James Bryant Conant his opinion of Max Bergmann, an outstanding German Jewish refugee chemist, Conant responded that Bergmann was "very definitely of the Jewish type" and recommended that he not be hired. Informed in 1933 that more than a third of Yale's Jewish students came from three Connecticut cities, Yale president James Rowland Angell "joked" that "an Armenian massacre" in those localities might be desirable to protect the university's "Nordic stock."⁵ Fritz Stern, the eminent historian of Germany who was a Columbia student in the 1940s, described Nicholas Murray Butler, Columbia's president from 1902 to 1945, as a "closet anti-Semite."⁶ President Isaiah Bowman of Johns Hopkins University declared in 1921 that Jews' "exclusive devotion to trade and personal gain" was a principal cause of antisemitism. In 1938, in declining to sign a petition against Polish universities'

² Rafael Medoff, "Antisemitism in the White House" in Eunice G. Pollack, ed., *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: The Past & Present of a Lethal Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017), p.102.

³ Martin Weil, *A Pretty Good Club: The Founding Fathers of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

⁴ Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), pp.197, 207–11; Dan A. Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.54, 62–63; Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp.266–69, 272–73; Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.88.

⁵ E. K. Bolton to Dr. James B. Conant, September 8, 1933, and James B. Conant to Dr. E. K. Bolton, September 13, 1933, Box 31, James B. Conant Presidential Papers (hereafter JBCPP), Harvard University Archives (hereafter HUA), Pusey Library (hereafter, PL), Harvard University (hereafter HU), Cambridge, MA, cited in Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.38–39; Oren, *Joining the Club*, pp.62–63.

⁶ Fritz Stern, *Five Germans I Have Known* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), p.162.

confinement of Jewish students to segregated “ghetto benches,” Bowman complained that it was time to “protest against the protests.”⁷

Many American university administrators not only shared German academics’ contempt for Jews but justified key Nazi policies. In 1935, for example, Nicholas Murray Butler and Virginia Gildersleeve, Dean of Barnard College, both voiced support in the American press for Hitler’s expansionism, agreeing with him that Germany was a “have-not” nation deprived of necessary land and resources by well-satiated Western democracies. In the spring of 1934, President Walter Hüllihen of the University of Delaware expressed annoyance with the “continually rising tide of condemnation” of the Hitler government in the United States.⁸ Some university heads, such as President Homer LeRoy Shantz of the University of Arizona in 1934 and Chancellor Joseph Gray of American University in 1936, even explicitly “sang the praises of Hitler and Nazism” after returning from trips to the Third Reich.⁹

Welcoming High Nazi Officials to Campus

The Columbia University administration’s invitation to Nazi Germany’s ambassador Hans Luther to deliver a speech in 1933, in which he praised Hitler’s “peaceful” foreign policy, precipitated the first major American campus confrontation over university leaders’ extending warm welcomes to high Nazi officials. Brushing aside student criticism of the invitation, President Butler declared that he held Ambassador Luther in high esteem. He was a “gentleman” representing “the government of a friendly people” and deserved the “greatest courtesy and respect.” Butler ignored the fact that the Nazis had burned the books of one of Columbia’s own professors, the world-renowned anthropologist Franz Boas. Many Jewish students at Columbia strongly disagreed with their president’s assessment of the Nazi ambassador. The day of Luther’s speech, the Columbia student newspaper, the *Spectator*, whose editor-in-chief, Arnold Beichman, was Jewish, denounced Butler’s refusal to take a stand against the Hitler regime. Citing the Nazis’ persecution of Jews, destruction of democracy, and book burnings, the *Spectator* declared: “This is the government which President Butler by his silence has given the impression he condones.” In his speech, Luther insisted that the Nazi government was not oppressive, and that Germany “exhibited the most peaceful attitude of any nation.” One thousand demonstrators, many of them Jewish students from New

⁷ Joseph Bendersky, *The “Jewish Threat”: Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p.183. In refusing petition organizer Stephen Duggan’s request, Bowman asked him if in circulating it he was “responding to the pressure of Jews in New York.” Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, 221–23.

⁸ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.93, 104; Norwood, “Forging Friendly Ties” in Fritz, Rossolinski-Liebe, and Starek, eds., *Alma Mater Antisemitica*, p.314. Butler’s views on foreign policy carried considerable weight, because he won the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize and headed the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was arguably America’s most famous university president during the 1930s.

⁹ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, 38, 120. On Chancellor Gray, see also Norwood, “Forging Friendly Ties: American Universities and Nazi Germany” in Fritz, Rossolinski-Liebe, and Starek, eds., *Alma Mater Antisemitica*, p.316.

York City colleges, determined to express their opposition to Nazism, picketed outside the auditorium in which Luther spoke.¹⁰

In March 1934, the Columbia administration discharged talented fine arts instructor Jerome Klein, believing that he had initiated a petition, signed by seven Columbia faculty members, protesting the administration's invitation to Luther. It was too late for Klein to secure employment in higher education for the coming year. The dismissal permanently ended his academic career.¹¹

A year later, Butler refused the invitation from a Columbia student group to join anti-Nazi refugee Gerhart Seger, formerly a Social Democratic member of the German Reichstag, on the speaker's platform and present his views on Nazism. Seger had made a daring escape from the Oranienburg concentration camp in December 1933. Butler could have used this opportunity to express opposition to Nazism and show support for a courageous adversary of Hitler, but declined.¹²

Harvard's administration helped to legitimize the Hitler regime by publicly defending the Class of 1909's invitation to Ernst Hanfstaengl, Hitler's foreign press chief and an early financial backer of the Nazi party, to attend his twenty-fifth reunion in June 1934. Hanfstaengl was a fanatical antisemite, who, invoking the medieval blood libel, denounced Jews as "the vampire sucking German blood."¹³ The Harvard student newspaper, the *Crimson*, called on the university to award Hanfstaengl an honorary degree, as a mark "of honor appropriate to his high position in the government of a friendly country."¹⁴ As commencement approached, the administration emphasized that Hanfstaengl would be "warmly welcomed." Campus police tore down stickers protesters had placed in Harvard Yard that suggested the administration award Hanfstaengl the degree of "Doctor of Pogroms."¹⁵

¹⁰ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.76–77, 84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.83–87. Klein had taught at Columbia for seven years, and was the only member of the fine arts department who specialized in modern painting. His courses, open to both Barnard and Columbia students, had already been listed in the Barnard catalogue. When Klein was notified of his discharge, it was too late to secure other academic employment for the coming year. Klein's son informed me that his father told him that signatures on the petition protesting the administration's invitation to Luther to speak had been "arranged in a large circle, so none would be first." The purpose was to prevent the administration from singling out any signer as the protest leader. However, "through a student's careless error," Klein's campus mailbox appeared as "the return address for the petition." Klein's son stated that his father believed President Butler held him responsible for the petition and retaliated by firing him. George Klein to Stephen H. Norwood, November 10, 2006.

¹² Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.77–78.

¹³ Richard Breitman, Barbara McDonald Stewart, and Severin Hochberg, eds., *Advocate for the Doomed: The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald, 1932-1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p.28.

¹⁴ *Harvard Crimson*, June 13, 1934; Peter Conradi, *Hitler's Piano Player: The Rise and Fall of Ernst Hanfstaengl, Confidant of Hitler, Ally of FDR* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004), p.149, Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, p.50.

¹⁵ Secretary to Dr. William L. Holt, April 3, 1934, Box 32, JBCPP, HUA, PL, HU; *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 18, 1934; *Boston Evening Globe*, June 18, 1934; *The Day*, June 24, 1934, cited in Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.49–50, 52.

The Boston press highlighted how Hanfstaengl entranced his fellow classmates at a reunion party with stories of the days and nights he and Hitler had spent talking of “the day” the Nazis would assume power, and exclaimed excitedly to his rapt listeners that “the day” had arrived. The *Boston Globe* reported that he was the most popular person at the party, continuously surrounded by classmates and their family members asking to pose for a photograph with him or seeking his autograph. These classmates included some of America’s most powerful industrialists, financiers, educators, and corporate attorneys.¹⁶

Harvard’s friendly welcome to Hanfstaengl precipitated fierce anti-Nazi protests during the commencement ceremony in Harvard Yard and in Harvard Square, which President Conant denounced as “ridiculous.” By contrast, Zionist leader Samuel Margoshes, editor of the Yiddish newspaper *Der Tog (The Day)*, praised the “magnificent and undying courage” of the young women arrested for shouting denunciations of Nazism during Conant’s commencement address.¹⁷

In September 1934, Harvard Law School dean Roscoe Pound personally accepted an honorary degree from the Nazified University of Berlin, presented to him by Ambassador Hans Luther in a ceremony at Harvard. Horrified, Harvard Law School professor Felix Frankfurter pleaded with President Conant not to allow the ceremony to be held at Harvard. Pound had violated the boycott of travel to the Reich, where he attended the virulently antisemitic Oberammergau Passion Play, pronouncing it “wonderful.” Conant not only refused to heed Frankfurter’s plea, but insisted on attending the ceremony so as not to insult a “friendly government.”¹⁸

Many other American university administrations warmly received Nazi Germany’s ambassador. In November 1935, shortly after the Hitler regime enacted the Nuremberg Laws, President Glenn Frank welcomed Hans Luther to the University of Wisconsin. Frank dined with the Nazi ambassador shortly after Luther had explained at a campus press conference that Jews did not possess citizenship rights in Germany because they could not belong to the German nation. Luther then proceeded to the University of Minnesota, where the administration, alarmed by Wisconsin student picketing against the Nazi ambassador’s visit there, ensured that he would not have to answer any questions about the policies of the Hitler regime. It arranged for Luther to speak at an invitation-only reception sponsored by the German department. The presidents of the University of Maryland, the University of Texas, and American University held luncheons or dinners for Luther in 1934 and 1935, as did the rector of the Catholic University of America.¹⁹

¹⁶ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.50–51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.53–55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.56–57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.160–64; Norwood, “Forging Friendly Ties” in Fritz, Rossolinski-Liebe, and Starek, eds., *Alma Mater Antisemitica*, p.316.

American Universities Join in a Major Nazi Propaganda Festival

Many of America's most prestigious colleges and universities accepted the Nazis' invitation to send delegates to Germany to celebrate the 550th anniversary of the University of Heidelberg, scheduled for June 27-30, 1936. By contrast, the British universities declined their invitations. The twenty American schools represented at Heidelberg included Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Vassar, Cornell, and Michigan. Assembling a large group of American academic dignitaries in Heidelberg to fraternize with prominent Nazi officials would ensure the elevation of the Hitler regime's prestige in the West. The festival was carefully orchestrated by Josef Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister.

Schools accepting the invitation were confronted by a storm of protest from the Jewish community, and from some students and faculty members, especially at New York City-area institutions. At Columbia, one thousand people signed a petition demanding that the administration rescind its acceptance of the invitation. About 200 students held a mock book-burning, and then proceeded to President Butler's mansion for a peaceful anti-Nazi rally, one of the largest campus demonstrations ever staged against the Hitler regime. The administration retaliated by expelling one of the rally leaders, Robert Burke, ensuring that he could never enroll at another college or university. The *New York Post*, in an editorial published on the last day of the Heidelberg festival, commented bitterly that Burke's expulsion "will draw cheers from every Hitler functionary at today's exercises." It added that "Herr Goebbels...could not have met a difference of opinion more efficiently."²⁰

Burke's expulsion exposes the willful blindness of the American higher education elite to Nazi antisemitic atrocities during the 1930s. It precipitated a wave of strikes and demonstrations at New York City-area colleges and universities lasting well into the fall semester of 1936. These protests constituted the most sustained student free speech fight ever waged until the 1960s.

American and British press coverage of the Heidelberg festival described it as a massive Nazi propaganda event, held in a city "smothered in Swastika flags." The streets were full of marching storm troopers. Hitler's education minister, Bernhard Rust, delivered a speech in which he denounced Jews as an "alien race" that did not belong in German universities. Columbia's delegate, Arthur Remy, noted that Goebbels was "very much in evidence" throughout the entire festival. Remy found the welcoming reception and dinner for foreign delegates that Goebbels hosted "very enjoyable." Afterward, none of the American university presidents who sent delegates to Heidelberg publicly expressed any regret that they had done so.

²⁰ Stephen H. Norwood, "The Expulsion of Robert Burke: Suppressing Campus Anti-Nazi Protest in the 1930s," *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 4 (2012), pp.301–26. The quotes are from the *New York Post*, June 30, 1936. On the furor surrounding the Heidelberg festival, see also Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.93–98.

Transmitting Nazi Propaganda to Americans through Student Exchanges

The Hitler regime effectively used student exchange programs between American and German universities to transmit Nazi propaganda to a sizable number of Americans. The elite Seven Sisters colleges were especially involved in these exchanges because of their emphasis on foreign language instruction, and the desire to impart social polish to their students. Many American collegians who studied in the Third Reich became its passionate advocates upon returning to their campuses. The Hitler government arranged for them to room and board with specially selected Nazi families. The American students attended classes taught by Nazi professors. At the same time, the German government carefully screened the exchange students enrolled in American schools, selecting youth strongly committed to Nazism and training them as propagandists. They were sent to the United States as “political soldiers” for the Reich. At college forums and in campus newspaper articles and interviews, German exchange students enthusiastically praised Hitler’s goals and accomplishments and denigrated Jews. College administrators did not challenge this Nazi propaganda when it appeared in the campus press.²¹

Seven Sisters colleges encouraged their students to attend performances of the Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria, one of the most pernicious pieces of antisemitic propaganda in theater history. American colleges sponsored student tours to Oberammergau both times it was performed during the 1930s, in 1930 and in 1934, when the Hitler regime staged special tercentenary performances. Long condemned by Jewish groups, the Passion Play linked the Nazis closely to Christianity. It charged all Jews from Jesus’s time to the present with deicide. In the London *Jewish Chronicle* in August 1930, J. Hodess reported that every day the Passion Play audience saw the “Jews of ancient Judaea...presented as savages of the worst kind... ‘fighting like a horde of vultures demanding their prey [Jesus].’” In the play, the Jewish priests wore horned hats to identify them with Satan. Jesus was depicted as “Nordic” in appearance and the Jews as swarthy, emphasizing racial difference. Pontius Pilate, the brutal, crucifixion- happy governor of Judaea, was portrayed as “wise and merciful.”²²

In 1930, the student newspaper at Quaker-sponsored Bryn Mawr College extolled the Oberammergau Passion Play as a “stirring pageant” and praised its “solemn beauty” and “powerful emotional effect.” It explained that the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist group with which many Bryn Mawr administrators were associated, would administer an

²¹ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.59, 103-32; Norwood, “Forging Friendly Ties” in Fritz, Rossolinski-Liebe, and Starek, eds., *Alma Mater Antisemitica*, p.319. As early as June 1933, the Anti-Defamation League’s director of special activities sent a circular letter to prominent American Jews warning that German exchange students were making speeches on U.S. campuses “justifying the anti-Semitic methods of Hitler.” Cited in Norwood, “Forging Friendly Ties,” p.319.

²² Saul S. Friedman, *The Oberammergau Passion Play: A Lance Against Civilization* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp.86–88 119–20, 122; James S. Shapiro, *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World’s Most Famous Passion Play* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), p.88; J. Hodess, “Oberammergau: ‘An Evil Play,’” *London Jewish Chronicle*, August 24, 1930; *New York Times*, May 19, 1930 and March 8, 1960; Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.121–22.

encampment at Oberammergau during that summer's performances to allow persons unable to afford the village's steep lodging and dining expenses to attend the Passion Play. In 1934 Mount Holyoke College arranged a student tour to Oberammergau to see the performances.²³ Almost all the leading players in that year's cast were or soon became Nazi party members.²⁴

American colleges and universities continued student exchanges with Germany's Nazified universities from the time Hitler assumed power in early 1933 until the beginning of World War II in Europe. Even the Kristallnacht pogroms of November 9-10, 1938, did not result in their cancellation. Students at some schools did prod their administrations to create scholarships for refugees from Germany, but they were limited in number and often encountered stiff alumni opposition. Invariably, participating administrations provided only tuition scholarships, and required students to provide the funds for the refugees' living and transportation expenses. The Jewish community, including campus Hillel and Jewish fraternities and sororities, raised much of this money. And on the very eve of the Holocaust, American higher education institutions sharply limited the number of refugee scholarships awarded to Jews. In addition, Roosevelt's State Department would not encourage U.S. consulates in Europe to be more flexible in granting visas for refugee students.²⁵

America's Most Prestigious International Affairs Symposium Lent Respectability to the Third Reich

American academia's most prestigious international affairs symposium, the University of Virginia Institute of Public Affairs, helped convince many Americans that Nazi Germany was a nation with legitimate grievances against the western democracies and reasonable objectives. Meeting every summer from 1927 until the United States entered World War II, the Institute's roundtables often invited representatives of the Third Reich, and academics sympathetic to it, to present Hitler's case to the American public. These speakers often launched into antisemitic harangues. The German embassy in Washington DC assisted the Institute in selecting speakers on European affairs. The Institute's invitations to Hitler's supporters implied that their point of view was as deserving of a hearing as that of Nazism's critics.

Papers by apologists for the Third Reich presented at Institute roundtables in 1934 and 1935 received considerable attention in the American press. At the 1934 roundtable on "Dictatorship and Democracy," Professor Karl Geiser of Oberlin College "portrayed Hitler as Germany's savior, 'a Siegfried slaying the dragon of Communism.'" He admired how the Fuehrer had ended Germany's "bondage" during the Weimar era and replaced republican "chaos" with unity under one-party dictatorship. The sizable audience applauded Geiser's presentation.

²³ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, p.122.

²⁴ Shapiro, *Oberammergau*, p.149; *New York Times*, March 8, 1960.

²⁵ Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, pp.233-42.

At the next year's conference on "American-German Relations," its chair, Professor Friedrich Auhagen of Columbia University's Seth Low College, forcefully defended the Third Reich. He dismissed Nazi persecution of Jews as insignificant. Professor Frederick Krueger of Wittenberg College delivered a vicious antisemitic diatribe in which he accused Jews of controlling the American press and the movie and radio industries, and using this power to defame Nazi Germany. Another panelist, Professor H. F. Simon of Northwestern University, argued that the "vindictive" Versailles Treaty had forced Germans to "close ranks" behind their "trusted and beloved leader, Adolf Hitler." The western democracies, "rich in space," were in no position to deny Germany its right to expand.²⁶

Even in 1939, the Institute "balanced" critics of Nazism with champions of Hitler like Auhagen and Manfred Zapp, of the Transocean News Service, a front for Josef Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry. Zapp's presentation contained a considerable amount of antisemitic invective. He praised the Nazi movement for liberating Germany from Jewish-induced decay. By overthrowing the "Jewish-controlled" Weimar Republic, Hitler had restored harmony and prosperity to Germany. In early 1941, the federal government arrested both Auhagen and Zapp as German propagandists.²⁷

Conclusion

By pursuing friendly relations with high officials of the Hitler regime and with the Third Reich's universities, American academia helped enhance Nazi Germany's image during critical years, as it intensified its persecution of Jews and greatly strengthened its military power. The participation of leading American colleges and universities in the 550th anniversary celebration of the University of Heidelberg in 1936, a spectacular Nazi festival that drew international press coverage, was a major propaganda triumph for the Hitler government. American university administrators invited and warmly welcomed Nazi leaders to campus, often dining with them. They ignored, ridiculed, and sometimes severely punished those who protested against their consorting with Nazis. American Jews at the grassroots initiated the movement to boycott German goods and services, and travel to Germany, almost as soon as Hitler assumed power. By contrast, American institutions of higher education energetically recruited German exchange students to their campuses, and sent their own students to the Reich's Nazified universities, a clear violation of the boycott. These young German guests aggressively championed Hitler's programs and spread antisemitic vitriol in the United States. American exchange students frequently returned from Germany eager to celebrate Hitler's "achievements." America's most prestigious university foreign policy symposium provided Hitler's emissaries and American sympathizers with a highly visible forum for disseminating Nazi propaganda. Neither the symposium's directors, nor the administrators of other American universities hosting Nazi officials and exchange students, made any effort to challenge their pro-

²⁶ Ibid., pp.140-44.

²⁷ Ibid., 150-51, 154-55.

Hitler propaganda and denigration of Jews in the campus press, or in statements to the university community.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum exhibit, which purports to seriously address American reaction to Nazism during the 1930s, entirely neglects a wide range of important subjects, among them American higher education's complicity in helping the Third Reich gain greater respectability in the West. The exhibit also overlooks the significant grassroots challenges to the collaboration of American university administrators with the Hitler regime as they facilitated its efforts to improve its image in the West. It is startling that the Museum chose to ignore the colleges' and universities' critical impact on shaping American responses to Nazism.

Stephen H. Norwood is Professor of History and Judaic Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

Shuli Eshel

THE INEXPLICABLE OMISSION OF JAMES G. McDONALD

One of the most important Americans to speak out against the Holocaust has been omitted from the U.S. Holocaust Museum's new exhibit on "Americans and the Holocaust." How could this have happened?

James G. McDonald (1886-1964) was an unlikely figure to end up playing a prominent role in Jewish affairs. A Catholic from the Midwest—born in Ohio, raised in Indiana—McDonald in 1918 became the chairman of the New York based Foreign Policy Association. Anxious to learn more about the new Nazi regime, McDonald traveled to Germany and was able to secure a private meeting with the new chancellor, Adolf Hitler, in 1933. He was the first American to hear the Nazi leader explicitly vow to annihilate the Jews.

That shocking experience changed McDonald's life. He met repeatedly with world leaders, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Cardinal Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, to warn them of Hitler's threats against the Jews. But McDonald's warnings were largely ignored.

McDonald ran into similar obstacles during his two years as the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Coming from Germany, between 1933 and 1935. During that early phase of the Nazi regime, Hitler was willing to let the Jews leave. The problem, as McDonald discovered, was that except for Palestine, no other country was willing to receive them. He resigned as commissioner in 1935 as a protest against the failure of the international community to open its doors.

Nonetheless, McDonald refused to be deterred. In 1938, he became chairman of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. Although his hands were largely tied by the Roosevelt administration's harsh immigration policy, McDonald acted as adviser at the Evian Conference to deal particularly with the problem of German Jewish refugees. Although the conference was a failure, McDonald and his colleagues did manage to help bring more than 2,000 Jewish refugees to the United States on the eve of the Holocaust. He later served as America's first ambassador to Israel.

For many years, McDonald's efforts during the Holocaust were known only to a handful of scholars. But the discovery of McDonald's diaries in 2003 led McDonald's daughters, Barbara McDonald Stewart and Janet McDonald Barrett,

to donate all 10,000 pages of the diaries to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. That's when I became acquainted with McDonald's life and began work on my film, *A Voice Among the Silent: The Legacy of James G. McDonald*.

“A Landmark Acquisition”

The museum's leaders always treated the diaries as significant. The museum co-published four volumes of them, and made a major effort to convince the news media to report on them. The museum published a James McDonald 2005 Calendar, highlighting his accomplishments month-by-month, and even created a glossy brochure featuring McDonald's reasons for “becoming a champion for Jewish aspirations and equal human rights.” The brochure hailed the diaries as “a landmark acquisition” and “part of the Museum's urgent efforts to rescue the evidence of the Holocaust before it is lost forever.”

When I learned, last year, that the museum was preparing to open a new exhibit on “Americans and the Holocaust,” I urged the chief curator, Professor Daniel Greene, to include a description of McDonald's efforts to save Jews. When I met Greene in person at an event in Chicago on March 14, 2018, he assured me that McDonald would be included. But when the exhibit opened last month, McDonald was not to be found in its panels, displays or film segments. Nowhere. Not a single mention.

Professor Greene and his colleagues have not given me any plausible explanation for their outrageous decision to exclude McDonald. I hope the reason doesn't have anything to do with political partisanship. I know that scholars have criticized the new exhibit because it claims there was little President Franklin D. Roosevelt could have done to rescue Jews from the Nazis, and McDonald's story suggests exactly the opposite.

President Roosevelt did nothing to help McDonald's refugee work for the League of Nations. In fact, the president promised a \$10,000 contribution, but never came through with it. In 1935, McDonald asked the president to publicly criticize Hitler's persecution of the Jews. FDR ignored his plea. In 1939, President Roosevelt gave McDonald the impression he would ask Congress to allocate \$150 million to help resettle Jewish refugees in various countries. That promise never materialized, either.

Later, during the Holocaust, McDonald wrote a number of articles and gave speeches in which he directly challenged the Roosevelt administration's failure to help the Jews in Europe. In one speech, to a Bnai Brith conference in Buffalo in May 1944, McDonald declared that the administration had “paid only lip service” to the persecution of Jews before the war, and now had “declined to make these [Nazi] crimes a major issue.”

Could this be the reason the museum excluded the man they once championed as an American hero? Have they dumped McDonald because telling his story would reflect poorly on FDR?

The U.S. Holocaust Museum has some explaining to do!

Shuli Eshel is an Israeli-American filmmaker. This essay originally appeared under the title “Why Did the Holocaust Museum Omit a Key Advocate for Jews?” in The Forward, May 17, 2018.

Postscript:

In email correspondence in early May 2018, Shuli Eshel repeatedly asked curator Daniel Greene to explain the reason behind the exclusion of McDonald from the exhibit. His vague and implausible replies led Ms. Eshel, together with several colleagues, to send the following letter:

May 23, 2018

*Sara J. Bloomfield, Director
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
sbloomfield@ushmm.org*

Dear Ms. Bloomfield,

We are surprised and deeply dismayed by the decision to exclude James G. McDonald from the new “Americans and the Holocaust” exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In the past, the Museum recognized McDonald as a figure of great importance. You and your colleagues called the diaries, which the McDonald family donated to you, “a landmark acquisition.” You co-published four volumes of the diaries. In many other publications and venues, you presented McDonald as “an American hero” for his efforts to rescue Jews from the Holocaust. How could a man whose importance you recognized, who worked tirelessly to find safe havens for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany, be left out on an exhibit focusing on Americans and the Holocaust?

We are disappointed by Prof. Daniel Greene’s explanations for the exclusion. His suggestion (in his email to Shuli Eshel) that including McDonald would somehow conflict with “the need to illustrate each segment of that narrative arc with materials that are visually compelling...” is puzzling, since there is no shortage of “visually compelling materials” regarding McDonald. Surely you have not forgotten the images contained in the 2005 Calendar that the Museum published, or the six foot-high portrait of McDonald that the family donated to the museum.

Likewise, it makes no sense for Prof. Greene to assert that including McDonald in the exhibit would conflict with the curators’ need “to present the refugee crisis through the stories of individual refugees seeking to escape Nazism and the stories of individual Americans who tried to help them.” McDonald certainly qualifies as an individual American who tried to help them; as you know he helped rescue over 2,000 Jews before and during the Holocaust.

Finally, Prof. Greene’s statement, “We prioritized these personal refugee stories and US-government related stories,” is equally unsatisfactory. McDonald chaired a US

government agency, the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees.

In short, by every criterion, James McDonald should have been included in the exhibit. His omission is unreasonable and unfortunate.

Sincerely,

Shuli Eshel

Producer/Director,

"A Voice Among the Silent: The Legacy of James G. McDonald"

Shlomo Slonim

James G. McDonald Professor of American History, Emeritus

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Haim Genizi

Professor of History, Emeritus, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Author of the first published scholarship on James G. McDonald (Wiener Library Bulletin, 1977)

Ayalah Rottenberg

Translator for Ambassador McDonald in his 1949 tour of religious kibbutzim; and wrote about McDonald in her 2003 book, Echoes of Yesteryear

Editor's note: Ms. Bloomfield replied, on May 24: "Danny answered your question in his previous email to you...I believe this explains why we did not include this story in our exhibit."

Stuart Erdheim

THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MUSEUM AND THE FAILURE TO BOMB AUSCHWITZ

It has been 40 years since the beginning of significant public discussions concerning the Allies' failure to bomb Auschwitz, ignited by the publication of David S. Wyman's landmark essay in *Commentary* magazine, "Why Wasn't Auschwitz Bombed?"

Wyman's revelations, and subsequent findings by other historians, have been discussed and debated more than any other issued related to America's response to the Holocaust. They have been the subject of symposia, scholarly essays, and entire books, not to mention my own documentary film, *They Looked Away*.

Yet, incredibly, despite the availability of so much research and eyewitness testimony, over so many years, and despite the many resources at its disposal, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for some reason is still unable to accurately communicate the story to the public.

Consider the public statements on the bombing issue made by Rebecca Erbelding, an archivist and historian at the Museum, who is one of the curators of the Museum's newest exhibit, "Americans and the Holocaust." She told the *Times of Israel* on April 14, 2018, that bombing Auschwitz "would have killed a lot of people. There were about 100,000 people in Auschwitz [at this time]. And so if the [Allies] had carpet bombed the camp, most of the camp would have died."¹

Erbelding assumes, erroneously, that the only way the Allies could have effectively attacked the camp was to "carpet bomb" it, thus potentially killing many of the inmates. One would expect a staff historian at the museum to be familiar with the contents of the museum's own journal. Yet Erbelding seems completely unaware of my essay, "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?," published in the museum's journal, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, in which I demonstrated that the Allied air forces were capable of precision bombing when necessary.²

A good example was the highly accurate Allied air raid at the Gustloff Armaments factory adjacent to the Buchenwald concentration camp in August 1944. The commander of that attack told me in an interview that he and his crew were briefed to avoid hitting the concentration camp, in order to avoid killing the inmates.

¹ In response to criticism of those remarks, Erbelding subsequently wrote: "These statements are true and I stand by them." (Letters column, *Jerusalem Post*, April 29, 2018)

² Stuart G. Erdheim, "Could the Allies Have Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau?," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11 (October 1997), pp.129-170.

Post-raid aerial reconnaissance showed the destruction of the factory with no damage to the adjacent camp. Carpet bombing was often utilized during the war, but as the Buchenwald attack shows, precision bombing was possible when necessary.

Interrupting Mass Murder

Erbelding's hyperbole notwithstanding, the fact is that bombing the camp was not the only action suggested by rescue activists to disrupt the Holocaust. As the mass deportations of Jews from Hungary began in the spring of 1944, Jewish leaders urged the Allies to bomb the railway lines leading to Auschwitz, over which cattle cars packed with Jews were deported to their deaths.

Concerning that proposal, Erbelding said: "Had the [Allies] bombed the rail lines, they certainly could have stopped the gassing for a day or two. But prison labor was repairing train lines fairly quickly. So it would have had to be a continuous bombing of rail lines for it to be successful."

I guess it depends on how one defines "successful." Since the war could have ended at any time, or military developments could have affected the mass murder process in unforeseen ways, stopping the gassing for even "a day or two" could have saved many lives. That, in my mind, certainly would have been a "success." Oddly, Erbelding seems to think that a bombing mission would not have been "successful" unless all the killing was brought to a halt. That's an absurdly high bar to set, given the circumstances.

There was a third type of bombing that was proposed, which for some reason Erbelding does not discuss at all: bombing the bridges along those railway routes.

Roswell McClelland, the U.S. War Refugee Board's representative in Switzerland, wrote to the board's leaders on June 24, 1944: "It is urged by all sources of this information in Slovakia and Hungary that vital sections of these [rail] lines, especially bridges along ONE [the Csap, Kosice, Presov route] be bombed as the only possible means of slowing down or stopping future deportations."

By emphasizing the bombing of rail bridges, McClelland understood what the Allied Bomber Command already knew: the best way to effectively interrupt rail traffic was to destroy targets such bridges and viaducts, which were considerably more difficult to rebuild than rail lines.

I had the opportunity to interview Allied pilots who flew near Auschwitz in 1944, as well as photo intelligence officers who worked in that theater of operations, for my film, *They Looked Away*. They, too, pointed out that it took the Germans much longer to repair bridges than railway lines, so hitting the bridges would have caused a greater disruption to the deportations of hundreds of thousands of Jews to Auschwitz.

Whether by precision bombing of the gas chambers, or knocking out railway lines or bridges, Allied air power could have been used to cause significant interruptions of the mass murder process. Rebecca Erbelding's attempt to belittle these viable bombing options—in the name of the U.S. Holocaust Museum—does a disservice to the institution that she represents, and suggests she is not fully familiar with some of the issues on which she purports to speak with expertise.

A Misleading Exhibit

The exhibit that Erbeling helped curate makes some of these same errors, and adds others. There is one section of the exhibit that addresses the issue. The text begins by noting that in the spring of 1944, a number of American Jewish organizations sent the War Refugee Board “pleas for the Allies to bomb either the rail lines that transported Jews to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center in occupied Poland, its gas chambers, or the entire camp.” The text makes no reference to the requests to bomb the bridges.

The panel continues: “In June, board officials forwarded these requests to the US War Department, which, in response, declared the bombing ‘impracticable’ and a ‘diversion’ from operations ‘essential to the success of the war.’”

This wording is highly misleading. One of the most important revelations of David Wyman’s 1978 article was that the War Department falsely claimed that it had undertaken a “study” of the feasibility of such bombing. In fact, no evidence has ever been found to indicate that there was such a study. It is no small matter that senior officials of a federal government agency would tell such a blatant falsehood. Moreover, the very fact that the War Department officials concocted that falsehood further illustrates the disingenuousness of their rejection of the bombing requests. Yet the Holocaust Museum’s exhibit makes no mention of this important information.

From the panel’s wording, the viewer also would be misled into thinking that the bombing requests were all handled by lower level or at most mid-level bureaucrats, not senior officials such as presidential cabinet members. The Museum chose not to mention that the request to bomb the railways was also discussed directly with Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, in June 1944, by an official of the Agudath Israel organization.

How is it that, after all these years and with all the resources at its disposal, the Museum could so badly misrepresent the bombing issue? Why would the Museum staff choose to withhold important basic facts about the issue? And what could possibly motivate a representative of the Museum to promote the notion that it would have been a bad idea for the Allies to bomb Auschwitz? The public awaits the answers to these troubling questions.

Stuart Erdheim is a filmmaker and independent scholar.

David Golinkin & Noam Sachs Zion

IGNORING THE STUDENTS WHO SPOKE OUT

Seventy-five years ago this month, a handful of rabbinical students in New York City helped mobilize hundreds of churches and synagogues nationwide to cry out against the Nazis' mass murder of European Jewry.

That remarkable interfaith protest is omitted from the U.S. Holocaust Museum's new exhibit on "Americans and the Holocaust," which explores how much Americans knew about the Nazis' persecution of the Jews and how early they knew it. The students' actions were a significant part of that story and deserve to be told.

Students Lead the Way

Our fathers, the late Noah Golinkin and Buddy Sachs, together with their friend Jerome Lipnick, were students at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) in late 1942, when news about the slaughter of Europe's Jews was publicly confirmed by the Allies. The students were shocked—not only by the news of the mass killings, but by the refusal of the Roosevelt administration to do anything beyond verbally condemn the Nazis, and by the timidity of ultra-cautious American Jewish leaders.

So the JTS students took matters into their own hands. They organized an extraordinary Jewish-Christian inter-seminary conference to raise public awareness about the Holocaust. Hundreds of students and faculty from 13 Christian and Jewish seminaries attended, with sessions alternating between JTS and its Protestant counterpart, the nearby Union Theological Seminary. The speakers and panel participants included prominent Jewish and Christian leaders and an array of refugee and relief experts.

The conference was an important first step. But the students didn't stop there. Next they turned to the Synagogue Council of America, the national umbrella group for Orthodox, Conservative and Reform synagogues. At the students' behest, the council launched a seven-week publicity campaign to coincide with the traditional period of semi-mourning between Pesach and Shavuot.

Seventy-five years ago this month, synagogues throughout the country adopted the Committee's proposals to recite special prayers for European Jewry; limit their "occasions of amusement"; observe partial fast days and moments of silence; and write letters to political officials and Christian religious leaders.

They also held memorial protest rallies, in which congregants wore black armbands that were designed by Noah Golinkin—three decades before Vietnam War protesters would adopt a similar badge of mourning.

The rallies, which took place on May 2, 1943, were in many instances jointly led by Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis—an uncommon display of unity. Equally significant, the Federal Council of Churches (whose Foreign Secretary had addressed the students' inter-seminary conference earlier that year) agreed to organize memorial assemblies at churches in numerous cities on the same day. Many of the assemblies featured speeches by both rabbis and Christian clergymen, as well as prominent political figures. Prayer services and rallies were held all across the United States, in cities such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Hartford, Providence, Chattanooga, Kansas City and Nebraska.

The gatherings received significant coverage in newspapers and on radio. “Milwaukee Churches Call on U.S., Allies to Open Doors to Refugees,” read one headline. “Nazi Barbarism Condemned by Pastor at Temple Service,” another declared.

A Jewish-Christian Alliance

This important Jewish-Christian alliance helped raise American public awareness about the Nazi slaughter of European Jewry, and increased the interest of Congress and the media in the possibility of rescuing Jews from Hitler—which, in turn, increased the pressure on the White House to take action.

At a time when the prevailing assumption was that nobody cared and nothing could be done to save Jews from Hitler, three rabbinical students managed to mobilize Christian sympathy for Hitler's victims and convince a major Jewish organization to undertake a nationwide protest campaign.

Last year, when staffers at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum began designing the “Americans and the Holocaust” exhibit, Holocaust historian Dr. Rafael Medoff and David Golinkin met with two senior museum officials. We presented them with a copy of the book we coauthored, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust*. We explained the significance of the students' actions, and reiterated those points in correspondence with the curators of the exhibit in the months to follow. Actually, the staffers already had all the documentation in their own files before we approached them.

We were surprised and saddened to discover this week that the interfaith protest campaign by synagogues and churches throughout the United States in the spring of 1943 is not mentioned anywhere in the exhibit. Likewise, there is no mention of the remarkable conference of Christian and Jewish seminary students. One article that our fathers wrote is buried in an interactive display about media coverage of the Holocaust—and there is no mention of the conference or the campaign.

Obviously we felt it is important to honor our fathers (in keeping with the fifth of the Ten Commandments), but the issue has broader significance, which is why we are publishing this article. These student protests by clergy are a vital chapter in the history of American responses to the Holocaust because they were forerunners of the mass

interfaith protests by students and clergy for human rights and human lives since the 1960s that shook American politics then, but failed to do so in the 1940s.

The running theme of the U.S. Holocaust Museum's new exhibit is that antisemitism and anti-immigrant sentiment were extremely strong among the American public in those days. That point comfortably fits the exhibit's argument that it was impossible for FDR to do very much to help Jewish refugees.

But sometimes history is not so black and white. While there were many bigots in those days, there were many good people, too. While many Jews were afraid to protest against an otherwise friendly administration then, our fathers showed something bolder could still be envisioned and attempted when they helped mobilize thousands of good people, of all faiths, to speak out. That is an important part of the story, and it should have been included in this major new exhibit.

Rabbi Prof. David Golinkin is President of the Schechter Institutes, Inc. Jerusalem. Noam Sachs Zion is a senior researcher at the Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem. This essay was originally published under the title "When Jewish Students in America Raised Alarms About the Holocaust," by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 7, 2018.
