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When the Little Camp hospital got overcrowded the doctors took the same measures. Shortly after we liberated the camp we captured two Poles who, when they realized that we had found out about it, admitted to having helped in this hospital clearance. They had disposed of a thousand patients. One held the man while the other gave him an injection of carbolic acid in the base of the brain.

At the end of their six weeks initiation period a prisoner was supposed to graduate to the Big Camp. If he was a Jew, he seldom did. And after perhaps a year in the Big Camp, if a man got sick or feeble, he was sent back to the Little Camp. After all, if he was sick he was of no more use. By the winter of 1944-45 starvation was causing one hundred deaths a day in the Little Camp.

ESSAYS

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The American Failure to Rescue European Jews

HENRY L. FEINGOLD

Rescue in Retrospect

On those occasions during the Holocaust years when mass rescue appeared possible, it required of the nations a passionate commitment to save lives. Such a commitment did not exist in the Roosevelt Administration, although there were many individuals who wanted to do more.

From Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 295-307.

compact block, five rows wide, at three hundred yards on a barbed wire fence, existed at the concentration camp—

liberated the camp. A few fled eastward. More than a thousand. No women stayed at the camp north to Bergen-Belsen. Children under fourteen kept their lives. Our first census showed: 1,000 Poles, and 2,000 Czechs; many Dutch, Poles, and Italians; some Americans.

The crematory. It was not far from the camp and stood out from the landscape. A monument visible from the camp. It was not far from the camp. Dead bodies in the sun. The crematory, however, was far from the camp. It was a monument to man's inhumanity to man. They had been dust long before they were burned, waiting to be burned, waiting there.

There had been no coal. In fact, the SS had had to throw away the coal. . . .

It can public to have been the case. This is not true. Of the

received more publicity. First, it was the press. It was very close to the camp, a few kilometers to Buchen-

They would have seen a camp at this camp, where V-2s were produced. The monthly death rate of one per cent and overwork.

Concentration camps (*Vernichtungslager*) at Majdanek at Lublin, Poland. It had its factories and workshops. They were not particularly profitable. After all, over a million were gassed,

Buchenwald to the others. It was even more significant to see

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Between 1938 and 1941 refugee-rescue advocates, most of whom were supporters of the New Deal, undoubtedly believed that the humanitarian concern which characterized Roosevelt's handling of domestic problems could be projected to the refugee crisis. That assumption was buttressed by the statements of concern which accompanied each White House announcement that visa procedures had been liberalized. Those who might have questioned the authenticity of the Administration's concern would have been hard pressed to explain other steps taken by Roosevelt in this early period. The President had, after all, taken the initiative in calling an international refugee conference to meet at Evian. The establishment of the IGC [Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees] which resulted from that conference was primarily an Administration-supported endeavor as were the Rublee-Schacht negotiations, which were designed to bring order into the refugee chaos. Moreover, a special procedure to rescue the cultural and scientific elite of Europe had been established and the Administration was busily occupied in searching for areas where the refugees might find new homes. What more could be asked?

Promise and Reality. What refugee-rescue advocates could foresee only with some difficulty at the time was that all these steps would remain largely gestures which the Roosevelt Administration would not and sometimes could not follow up. There developed a gulf between the professed good intentions of the Administration and the implementation of policy. The hope of bringing refugees to the United States was severely circumscribed by the seemingly immutable immigration law. The invitation to the nations to meet at Evian was so qualified that from the outset there seemed little hope of solving the problem of where to put the growing number of refugees. Once at the Conference the American delegation was in the embarrassing position of lacking the bargaining power to convince others to undertake a serious effort to provide for refugees or the will to do so itself. The Intergovernmental Committee for Political Refugees which grew out of the Conference became a monument to the Administration's impotence on the rescue front. The IGC remained throughout those years to clutter and confuse the effort. The attempt by [Assistant Secretary of State] Breckinridge Long to resurrect this ineffective agency after the Bermuda Conference was little more than an effort to thwart more energetic rescue activity.

The Administration's search for resettlement havens shows a similar tendency to degenerate into mere humanitarian gestures. While the President dreamed of a United States of Africa and proposed visionary schemes of nation-building, a visible manifestation of the Administration's concern, a proposal to make Alaska and the Virgin Islands available to a limited number of refugees, was ultimately rejected. When the political risk of circumventing the immigration laws was finally taken in July 1944 by the establishment of a temporary haven in Oswego, New York, it was too late to make a difference.

The struggle over the administration of the visa procedure and the special visa lists throws some light on the conflicting tendencies within the Administration. The visa system became literally an adjunct to Berlin's murderous plan for the Jews. The quotas were underissued until 1939 and after June 1940 a skillful playing on the security fear resulted in ever more drastic reduction of refugee immigrants. In the critical year of 1941 only 47 percent of the German-Austrian quota

was filled. A similar pattern is discernible in the procedure by which prominent refugees could receive special visitors' visas. Here again, the good intentions of the Administration were thwarted by the State Department and the consuls.

The calling of the Bermuda Conference in mid-1943 marks the fullest development of what might be called a politics of gestures. Held in inaccessible Bermuda, officials in London, where the initiative to hold such a conference developed, and Washington saw in the idea of holding another refugee conference the possibility of muting the growing agitation for a more active effort. The State Department confined the delegates to dealing with a group it called "political refugees," a euphemism for Jews, who bore the brunt of the Nazi liquidation program. The Conference was thereby confined to discussing ways and means of "rescuing" a handful of refugees who had found a precarious safety in Spain and other neutral havens and who were, in fact, already rescued, while those who faced death in the camps were ignored.

Reasons for the Gap in Implementing Rescue Policy. The gulf which often exists between decision makers and administrators was especially wide in the case of rescue because the coterie of middle echelon career officers headed by Breckinridge Long and located primarily in the Special Problems Division of the State Department consistently opposed the professed humanitarian intentions of the Administration. The mobilization of a countervailing influence within the Administration which might have come from the Department of Interior, the Justice Department, and the Treasury Department, as well as numerous Jewish officials, did not materialize until the final months of 1943 when Henry Morgenthau, Jr., took up the cause. Before that time, Breckinridge Long, by his own account, usually had his way. He was able to capitalize on the weakness of White House leadership, so that the making and the administration of what amounted to the rescue program fell naturally in the purview of the State Department. An effective coalition of restrictionists and conservative legislators and Long's control of the flow of information to the White House abetted anti-rescue activities. After 1940, Breckinridge Long, by use of what I have called the security gambit, a playing on the fear that spies had infiltrated the refugee stream, was able to curtail the humanitarian activity of the Roosevelt Administration.

To place the responsibility for the failure of the Administration's rescue activity on Breckinridge Long alone would be to oversimplify. Roosevelt did intrude intermittently into the arena of rescue activity. We have seen that he was especially enthusiastic about the search for resettlement havens and he had some firm ideas about the form such ventures should take. Occasionally he mediated squabbles between rescue advocates and opponents within the Administration. But usually his suggestions, especially in the resettlement area, had an "above the battle" quality, being nowhere bound to the reality of the circumstances. Much of the inconsistency between the rhetoric of the Administration and the actual implementation of policy can be traced to the chief executive's uncertain mandate. Bound by a restrictive immigration law and perhaps an oversensitivity to the "Jew Deal" label which had been applied to his Administration on the one hand, and yet anxious to help the Nazi victims on the other, Roosevelt sought a balance between the opponents and advocates of a more active rescue policy. Such a middle road was never found, and to this day it is difficult for researchers to determine Roosevelt's personal role.

They must turn to the State Department for answers, and repeat the journey made by American Jewish leaders during the Holocaust.

The Role of American Jewry. . . . On the surface, few groups appeared better equipped to exert pressure on the Roosevelt Administration than American Jewry. Yet between 1938 and 1943 Jews were not notably successful in influencing the establishment on rescue ground rules and that failure proved catastrophic. In one sense the rescue battle was lost in the first round. Why they did not have more influence on the making and administration of rescue policy is only partly answered by what was happening within the American Jewish community during those terrible years.

The role that fell to American Jewry was difficult, perhaps impossible, to fill. It was called upon not only to attempt to change restrictive immigration policies which a majority of American Jews had supported in 1938, but also to challenge the State Department's administrative fiat further limiting the number which might come to these shores. They had to counteract a hysterical fear of Nazi espionage which was abetted by Congress, the State Department, the White House, and the communications media. No "hyphenate" group had ever been faced with the prospect of total annihilation of its European brethren and, while there was great urgency to use its influence, it proved to be extremely difficult to impress the urgency for action on the Administration. The rescue case concerned the disposition and treatment of a foreign minority, took place largely during the war years and, most important, required Roosevelt to tangle with powerful restrictionists in Congress and his own Administration. The kind of influence required was not available to Jewish leaders.

When catastrophe threatened, the deep fissures between its "uptown" and "downtown" elements had barely been bridged. Jews were anxious to continue their rapid movement into the mainstream of American life and did not readily accept the mantle of leadership which for centuries had been worn by European Jewry. Much of their formidable organizational resources were dissipated in internal bickering until it seemed as if Jews were more anxious to tear each other apart than to rescue their coreligionists. . . . The Jews had achieved higher positions in the New Deal than in any prior Administration, but even with such resources they could not fully mobilize.

It is, of course, easy to know by hindsight what might have been done by American Jews. Disunity and powerlessness were characteristic of Jewish communities everywhere and the United States was no exception. The political behavior of American Jewry, moreover, exacerbated the situation. American Jews . . . supported Roosevelt because they thought his program evidenced concern for the "forgotten man." Such concern was a traditional part of the Jewish belief. When the New Deal moved further to the left after the election of 1936, the Jewish "love affair" with Roosevelt, in sharp contrast with other hyphenate groups, grew more ardent. The delivery of a voting bloc, the most potent weapon in any political arsenal, was not available to Jewish leaders. They could not gain leverage by threatening a withdrawal of votes and were therefore dependent on less certain rewards for political loyalty. If American Jews detected any failing in the rescue program it was not reflected in their voting. . . .

The growth of Zionist sentiment among American Jews as the crisis deepened was an additional factor interfering with the focusing of Jewish pressure on the

White House. The new power relationship naturally gave those organizations with Zionist inclinations reason to hope that Jewry might be unified under their auspices. But other organizations stubbornly protected their organizational integrity. The crisis posed a special dilemma for the Zionists, for while it convinced many Jews of the need for a Jewish national homeland it also gave the old territorialists a new lease on life. Roosevelt was only one of many world leaders who were taken with visionary resettlement schemes. For Zionists a national homeland in Palestine was so clearly the answer that to divert money and energy to resettlement elsewhere was akin to heresy. . . .

Unfortunately, the strife between Zionists and other groups did not remain merely academic. It not only interfered with the mobilization of American Jewry but spilled over into the largely Zionist-administered operation which maintained listening posts around the periphery of occupied Europe. The bickering between agents over credit for the handful that were brought out, which could be heard in Lisbon, Ankara and Stockholm, possesses an irony all its own. While the Nazi overlords endlessly projected a picture of a well-coordinated international Jewish conspiracy, the rescuers were in continuous conflict over questions of which Jews should be saved and who should get the credit.

Perspective on the Roosevelt Administration as Holocaust Witness. To view the Administration's failure to do everything that might have been done to save Jewish lives in perspective, an appreciation of the domestic and international problems involved in mass rescue is necessary. The rescue of European Jewry, especially after the failure to act during the refugee phase (1939 to October 1941), was so severely circumscribed by Nazi determination that it would have required an inordinate passion to save lives and a huge reservoir of good will toward Jews to achieve it. Such passion to save lives and a huge reservoir of good will toward Jews to achieve it. Such passion to save lives did not exist in the potential receiving nations. In the case of the United States, one can readily see today that a projection of human concern inwards to its own domestic problems such as alleviating the misery of its own Negro minority had barely been begun by the New Deal. What hope of better treatment could be held for a foreign minority? But this was not the only reason that the energy and organization of the Administration's rescue effort, even at its apogee in January 1944, never remotely approached the effort Berlin was willing to make to see the Final Solution through to its bitter end.

There were factors on the domestic political scene that further circumscribed action on the Administration's part. We have noted the continued strength of the restrictionists who remained alert during the refugee phase to the slightest infringement of the quota system. The anti-Jewish thrust of the anti-refugee sentiment did not escape the notice of Jewish leadership, who had become sensitized to the mood in the nation in the thirties. Supported by the Depression-created tensions and the example and financial support of the Reich, Jews found it difficult to dismiss the rantings of Father Charles E. Coughlin and other spokesmen of anti-Semitism. In Congress, for example, the negative response to the Wagner-Rogers Bill to save German-Jewish refugee children as contrasted to the favorable response to the evacuation of non-Jewish British children was too apparent to escape notice. The growth of domestic anti-Semitism projected against what was happening in Europe brought out the latent insecurities of American Jewry and sharpened internal divisions. The

bitter disputes over the boycott of German goods and other "emotional" forms of agitation as well as the continued apprehension about dual loyalties in some sections of American Jewry become more understandable in the light of this insecurity.

A hidden casualty to the renewed vigor of domestic anti-Semitism may have been Roosevelt's willingness to strengthen his Administration's strong link to American Jewry. Roosevelt's appointments of Jews to high positions were a far cry from extending a helping hand to a foreign minority whose coreligionists in America were not winning medals for popularity. Such a commitment entailed a political risk which Roosevelt was not willing to take, and the Administration's response was to go through the motions of rescue without taking the political risk of implementing them. Undoubtedly this partly explains the paradox of the State Department's use of the innocuous label "political refugees," and maintaining it long after it had become apparent that the Reich meant to liquidate Jews and was converting all "enemies," including Roosevelt, to the Jewish faith. By concealing the anti-Jewish character of the Nazi depredations behind a neutral or interdenominational cover, Roosevelt may have sought to lessen the predictable outcry about favoritism towards Jews at home. For example, he expressed disappointment at the specific mention of Jews when Rublee revealed the provisions of the statement of agreement to him in February 1939. Again in October 1939 Roosevelt told Ickes about his hope to admit ten thousand refugees to Alaska on the same nationality ratio by which the quota system admitted immigrants to the mainland. That would limit entrance to one thousand Jews, a figure which Roosevelt hoped "would avoid the undoubted criticism" which would surely result "if there were an undue proportion of Jews." In May 1944 Roosevelt was still worrying about such "undue proportions" when he instructed Robert Murphy, who was to make the selection for the camp in Oswego, to make certain that he gets "reasonable proportions" of all categories of persecuted minorities. Beyond traumatizing American Jewry, the startling growth of anti-Semitism in the thirties may have alerted Roosevelt, whose sensitivity to the ethnic strain in American politics was well known, to the perils of further strengthening his ties to American Jewry.

Aside from such domestic political considerations, there were other roadblocks in the way of rescue. In the refugee and later the rescue phase, certain legal technicalities plagued the rescue effort. Admittedly there is a certain unreality in talking of legal technicalities while mass murder is being committed, but the witnesses and the perpetrators of the Holocaust were affected by such considerations. Before being deprived of their national citizenship the Jews were an "internal problem," and after they had been stripped of their national rights and citizenship they were not legally the responsibility of the nations who might have acted as rescue agents. As much as France, Britain, and the United States were directly involved in Germany's extrusion policy by having to become receiving nations, they had no power to force her to cease and desist. When there was a clear legal responsibility or an opportunity to utilize international law, the nations often did act. Thus when the Nazis threatened American Jewish property in Germany with confiscation before December 1941, the State Department did make strong representations. When Hungarian Jews in France were forced to wear the yellow star and later concentrated to be deported, Hungary did intercede in Berlin. Italian Jews were not forced to wear the yellow star. As cobelligerents Hungary and Italy maintained their sovereignty and therefore control of the fate of their Jews. A neutral like Turkey was able to protect its Jewish

nationals in France and Spain's willingness to extend citizenship to Sephardic Jews saved some lives. Often Latin-American legal papers could make the difference between life and death, for paradoxically, even in the midst of their bloody operation, Nazis observed certain legal niceties. When there was no clear-cut legal responsibility, it proved difficult to elicit from the nations a voluntary response on humanitarian or moral grounds. Nation states like the United States are man-made institutions, not man himself. They have no souls and no natural sense of morality, especially when it concerns a foreign minority which is clearly not their legal responsibility. It is difficult to separate the charge that the Roosevelt Administration did not do enough to rescue Jews during the Holocaust years from the assumption that modern nation-states can make human responses in situations like the Holocaust. One wonders if the history of the twentieth, or any other century, warrants such an assumption, especially when the nation-state feels its security threatened.

In those rare cases where governments are able to make human responses to catastrophes they do so at the behest of an aroused public opinion. The shipping of relief supplies to Biafra is a case in point. In the case of the Jews the Roosevelt Administration had no popular mandate for a more active rescue role. Public opinion was, in fact, opposed to the admission of refugees, because most Americans were not aware of what was happening. A Roper poll taken in December 1944 showed that the great majority of Americans, while willing to believe that Hitler had killed some Jews, could not believe that the Nazis, utilizing modern production techniques, had put millions to death. The very idea beggared the imagination. Perhaps there is such a thing as a saturation point as far as atrocity stories are concerned. In the American mind the Final Solution took its place beside the Bataan Death March and the Malmedy massacre as just another atrocity in a particularly cruel war. Not only were the victims unable to believe the unbelievable, but those who would save them found it extremely difficult to break through the "curtain of silence." The State Department's suppression of the details compounded the problem of credibility.

The Administration's reluctance to publicly acknowledge that a mass murder operation was taking place went far in keeping American public opinion ignorant and therefore unaroused while it helped convince men like Goebbels that the Allies approved or were at least indifferent to the fate of the Jews. Psychological warfare techniques such as threats of retribution and bombing did have some effect in Hungary. A statement by Washington that the massive raid on Hamburg in July 1943 was made in retribution for a Treblinka or better yet a bombing of the rail lines and crematoria would have gone far to pierce the "curtain of silence," not only in the United States but among the people of occupied Europe. Specific mention of the crime against Jews was omitted from war-crimes statements and not until March 1944 could Roosevelt be prevailed upon to make some correction in the Moscow War Crimes Declaration. That statement promised vengeance for crimes against Cretan peasants but neglected to mention the Final Solution. From that point of view the failure of John J. McCloy, then Assistant Secretary of War, to favorably consider a joint request by the World Jewish Congress and the WRB to bomb the crematoria because it would be of "doubtful efficacy" was especially tragic. It might have gone far to alert world opinion to the mass murder operation as well as disrupting the delicate strands which made it possible. Washington maintained its silence for fear, in McCloy's words, that it might "provoke even more vindictive action by the

Germans." Berlin, it was felt, was fully capable of escalating the terror. But for European Jewry, at least, it is difficult to imagine a terror greater than that of Auschwitz.

An effective rescue effort required not only inordinate energy and will but also coordination with other nations and agencies. It required the collective effort of the Vatican, the Committee of the International Red Cross (CIRC), other neutrals, the Allied governments, the governments in exile and the people of the occupied areas. While a determined effort by the Roosevelt Administration would have set a good precedent it did not mean that other nations and agencies would have automatically fallen in line. Latin America, for example, showed little propensity to follow Washington's advice regarding resettlement havens. The Taylor mission to the Vatican did not result in a change of Vatican policy and the CIRC was not fully activated until mid-1944. All maintained their own measure of commitment which they could claim fully matched that of the United States. The mere existence of separate national rescue efforts presented a problem of coordination. The IGC, which was established after the Evian Conference, might have furnished such coordination but, as we have seen, it became instead the first casualty of the lack of will. The early rescue effort was literally strangled by red tape, a reflection of the general lack of will to save lives. The State Department and Whitehall played a game which might be called "you've got the moral onus now" throughout the crisis.

The Holocaust was part of the larger insanity of World War II, and few world leaders possessed the foresight to comprehend that Auschwitz was a separate tragedy, a lethal combination of the most primitive atavism with the most advanced technology, a combination which summed up the agony of the twentieth century. Instead, there was a certain annoyance at the priority demanded by the Jews when the entire civilized world hovered on the brink of totalitarian domination. It was difficult for France to muster enthusiasm for a mass resettlement for refugees, which was suggested by Roosevelt at the meeting of the officers of the IGC in Washington in October 1939, when the existence of the French nation itself hung in the balance. Nor was Britain, while fighting for its life, anxious to accept more refugees. The priorities were for national survival and victory, and the rescue of Jews would be considered only if it could be accommodated to these priorities.

In the three years before America's entry into the war it faced no threat to its continued national existence as did France and Britain. But it acted as though it did and ordered its priorities accordingly. By June 1941 a nonbelligerent United States had more rigid screening procedures for refugees than Britain, which had been at war for almost two years. The security psychosis which was generously abetted by the State Department was the Administration's version of the national survival argument and had much the same effect on rescue activity. Once the war began the mania about spies having been infiltrated among the largely Jewish refugees could be muted in favor of the argument that the fastest road to rescue was to defeat Hitler. Nothing must be done to divert energy and resources from that goal. As it turned out, almost anything that could be done for rescue would cause such a diversion. Ships to transport refugees, which came back empty, could not be diverted because they were in short supply. Relief supplies could not be sent to camps because, according to Breckinridge Long, it would relieve the Reich from responsibility of feeding people under its control. Camps could not be bombed because aircraft could not be diverted to tasks of "doubtful efficacy." If one argued, as many

rescue advocates did, that by the time victory came all Jews in Europe would be dead, one revealed a greater concern for Jewish survival than for the survival of the United States. Breckinridge Long's diary is full of charges that the rescue advocates, in pressing for a more humanitarian visa procedure or relief shipments to the camps, were really acting as Berlin's agents and subverting the nation's war effort. Counteracting such arguments proved to be a nigh impossible task.

These, then, were some of the reasons why the Roosevelt Administration responded only half-heartedly to the challenge of saving Jewish lives. But even if the problems that prevented rescue had been solved—if Breckinridge Long had been converted to the rescue cause; if the divisions within American Jewry had been magically healed; if the immigration laws had been circumvented earlier; if Alaska had been made available for resettlement; if Whitehall had abandoned its inhumanely political attitude towards Jewish immigration into Palestine; if the Pope had spoken out; if the CIRC had been more courageous; in short if there had been a will to save lives, we still have no assurance that mass rescue could have been realized, although many thousands more might have been saved. Something like such a miracle occurred in Hungary in 1944. Yet within full view of the world and when the Nazi authorities could no longer doubt that they had lost the war, the cattle cars rolled to Auschwitz as if they had a momentum of their own. Over half of Hungary's Jewry went up in smoke.

Appalling as it may sound, the saving of lives was a far more formidable task than the practice of genocide. Even a passionate will to save lives could prove insufficient, given Nazi determination to liquidate the Jews of Europe. Something more was required, something to soften the hearts of those in Berlin who were in physical control of the slaughter. Such a miracle was never in the power of the Washington policy makers. It belongs to a higher kingdom whose strange indifference has become an overriding concern of the theologians.

The Successes of American Rescue and The Limits of The Possible

WILLIAM J. VANDEN HEUVEL

It was Winston Churchill's judgment that the Holocaust "was probably the greatest and most terrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world." The Holocaust, of course, was part of a colossal struggle in which fifty-three million people were killed, where nations were decimated, where democracy's survival was in the balance. In his campaign to exterminate the Jews of Europe, Hitler and his Nazi followers murdered six million men, women, and children for no other reason than that they were Jewish. This crime is of such profound proportions that it can never be fully understood; it must continue to be analyzed from every aspect as to how and why it happened, and its memory must unite all of us.

Nine million non-Jewish civilians were also murdered by the Nazis, as were three million Soviet prisoners of war, yet the Holocaust remains a uniquely horrible

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crime, and there can be no greater indictment than to allege complicity in it. Such an accusation was made against America in general and its leader, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in particular by a recent PBS documentary entitled "America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference." The show drew on a substantial and growing body of scholarship that has caused many young American Jews to criticize and even condemn their grandparents and parents for being so absorbed in the effort to become assimilated in American society that they chose silence rather than voice outrage at the Nazi crimes and gave their overwhelming support to a President who was indifferent to the fate of Europe's Jews. Why did not the United States let the *St. Louis*, a German ship carrying Jewish refugees to Cuba in 1939, land at an American port when Cuba refused them admission? Also, perhaps the most frequently asked question of the last decade, why did the Allies not bomb Auschwitz and the railways that fed it? The people who pose these questions believe they know the answers. As one eminent spokesman for this viewpoint has written, "The Nazis were the murderers but we"—here he includes the American government, its President, and its people, Christians and Jews alike—"were the all too passive accomplices."

How much truth is there in these painful assertions? As we ask ourselves what more might have been done to save the innocent, we must frame our response in the context of the realities of World War II and the events and values of the years that preceded it.

Five weeks after Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany, in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt became President of the United States. Roosevelt's loathing for the whole Nazi regime was known the moment he took office; alone among the leaders of the world, he stood in opposition to Hitler from the very beginning. . . .

The America that elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt its President in 1932 was a deeply troubled country. Twenty-five percent of its work force was unemployed—this at a time when practically every member of that work force was the principal support of a family. The economy was paralyzed, while disillusion after the sacrifices of the First World War fomented profound isolationist sentiments.

The nation's immigration laws had been established by legislation in 1921 and 1924 under Presidents Harding and Coolidge and by a Congress that had rejected the League of Nations. A formula assigned a specific quota to countries based on the population origins of Americans living in the United States in 1890. The law was aimed at Eastern Europe, particularly Russia and Poland, which were seen as seedbeds of bolshevism. Italians were targeted, and Asians practically excluded. The total number of immigrants who could be admitted annually was set at 153,744; the two countries of origin given the highest quotas were Great Britain (65,721) and Germany (25,957). The deepening Depression encouraged an unusual coalition of liberal and conservative forces, labor unions and business leaders, to oppose any enlargement of the immigration quotas. Because of the relatively large German quota, Jewish refugees from Germany had an easier time than anticommunist refugees from the Soviet Union, not to mention Chinese victims of Japan's aggression, or Armenians. The Spanish who wanted to escape a civil war that between 1936 and 1939 killed half a million people faced an annual quota of 252.

The President and Mrs. Roosevelt were leaders in the effort to help those fleeing Nazi persecution. Eleanor Roosevelt was a founder, in 1933, of the International

Rescue Committee, which brought intellectuals, labor leaders, and political figures to sanctuary in the United States. President Roosevelt made a public point of inviting many of them to the White House. In 1936, in response to the Nazi confiscation of personal assets as a precondition to Jewish emigration, Roosevelt greatly modified President Hoover's strict interpretation of the refugee laws, thereby allowing a greater number of visas to be issued. As a result the United States accepted twice as many Jewish refugees as did all other countries put together. As the historian Gerhard L. Weinberg has shown, Roosevelt acted in the face of strong and politically damaging criticism for what was generally considered a pro-Jewish attitude.

When, in March 1938, the Anschluss put Austria's 185,000 Jews in jeopardy, Roosevelt called for an international conference "to facilitate the emigration from Germany and Austria of political refugees." There was no political advantage to FDR in this; no other major leader in any country matched his concern and involvement. The conference, which met in Evian, France, tried to open new doors in the Western Hemisphere. At first things went well; the Dominican Republic, for example, offered to give sanctuary to 100,000 refugees. Then came a devastating blow: The Polish and Romanian governments announced that they expected the same right as the Germans to expel their Jewish populations. There were fewer than 475,000 Jews left in Germany and Austria at this point—a number manageable in an emigration plan that the twenty-nine participating nations could prepare—but with the possibility of 3.5 million more from Eastern Europe, the concern now was that any offer of help would only encourage authoritarian governments to brutalize any unwanted portion of their populations, expecting their criminal acts against their own citizens to force the democracies to give them haven. National attitudes then were not very different from today's; no country allows any and every refugee to enter without limitations. Quotas are thought even now to deter unscrupulous and impoverished regimes from forcing their unwanted people on other countries. . . .

America's reaction to *Kristallnacht* was stronger than that of any of the other democracies. Roosevelt recalled his ambassador from Germany and at his next press conference said, "I myself can scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization." He extended the visitors' visas of twenty-thousand Germans and Austrians in the United States so they would not have to return. Americans in opinion polls showed anger and disgust with the Nazis and sympathy for the Jews; nevertheless, Roosevelt remained the target of the hard-core anti-Semites in America. He fought them shrewdly and effectively, managing to isolate them from mainstream America and essentially equating their anti-Semitism with treason destructive to both the national interest and national defense. Recognizing the inertia at the State Department, he entrusted Sumner Welles, the Undersecretary of State and a man wholly sympathetic to Jewish needs, to be his instrument of action.

Immigration procedures were complicated and sometimes harshly administered. The laws and quotas were jealously guarded by Congress, supported by a strong, broad cross section of Americans who were against all immigrants, not just Jews. Of course, there were racists and anti-Semites in the Congress and in the country, as there are today, only now they dare not speak their true attitudes. The State Department, deeply protective of its administrative authority in the granting of visas, was frequently more concerned with congressional attitudes and criticisms than with reflecting American decency and generosity in helping people in despair

and panic. Roosevelt undoubtedly made a mistake in appointing as Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long, who many allege was an anti-Semite. His presence at State was an assurance to Congress that the immigration laws would be strictly enforced. On the other hand there were countless Foreign Service officers who did everything possible to help persecuted, innocent people, just as they would today. There was an attitude that many sanctuaries besides the United States existed in the world, so the department, controlled by a career elite, conservative and in large part anti-New Deal and anti-FDR, was quite prepared to make congressional attitudes rather than those of the White House the guide for their administration of immigration procedures. Yet, between 1933 and 1941, 35 percent of all immigrants to America under quota guidelines were Jewish. After *Kristallnacht*, Jewish immigrants were more than half of all immigrants admitted to the United States.

Of course there were other countries of refuge; public opinion in democracies everywhere indicated that people had been repelled by the Nazi persecution. . . .

For his part, Roosevelt, knowing that he did not have the power to change the quota system of his own country, was constantly seeking havens for the refugees in other countries. His critics severely underestimate limitations on presidential power; clearly, the President could not unilaterally command an increase in quotas. . . .

By the time the war made further emigration impossible, 72 percent of all German Jews had left the country—and 83 percent of all those under twenty-one. . . .

Given the reality of the Holocaust, all of us in every country—and certainly in America—can only wish that we had done more, that our immigration barriers had been lower, that our Congress had had a broader world view, that every public servant had shared the beliefs of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. If anyone had foreseen the Holocaust, perhaps, possibly, maybe . . . but no one did. Nevertheless, the United States, a nation remote from Europe in a way our children can hardly understand, took in double the number of Jewish refugees accepted by the rest of the world.

Among the anguishing events we read about is the fate of the ship *St. Louis* of the Hamburg-America Line, which left Germany and arrived in Cuba with 936 passengers, all but 6 of them Jewish refugees, on May 27, 1939. This was three months before the outbreak of the war and three years before the establishment of the death camps. Other ships had made the same journey, and their passengers had disembarked successfully, but on May 5 the Cuban government had issued a decree curtailing the power of the corrupt director general of immigration to issue landing certificates. New regulations requiring five-hundred-dollar bonds from each approved immigrant had been transmitted to the shipping line, but only 22 passengers of the *St. Louis* had fulfilled the requirements before leaving Hamburg on May 13. Those 22 were allowed to land; intense negotiations with the Cuban government regarding the other passengers—negotiations in which American Jewish agencies participated—broke down despite pressure from our government. It was not an unreported event. Tremendous international attention focused on the *St. Louis*, later made famous as the "Voyage of the Damned." Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and others, including Eleanor Roosevelt, worked to evade the immigration laws. . . . In the end, despite the legal inability of the United States to accept the passengers as immigrants, our diplomats were significantly helpful in resettling them. Not one was returned to Nazi Germany. They all went to democratic countries—288 in the United Kingdom, the rest

in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark. And who, in that spring of 1939, was prescient enough to foretell that in little more than a year all but one of those countries would be held by Nazi troops?

What were FDR's own attitudes toward Hitler and the Jews? Did he reflect the social anti-Semitism that was endemic in the America of that era? Contemporary Jews certainly didn't think so. Roosevelt opened the offices of government as never before to Jews. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Samuel Rosenman, Felix Frankfurter, Benjamin Cohen, David Niles, Anna Rosenberg, Sidney Hillman, and David Dubinsky were among his closest advisers in politics and government. Rabbi Stephen Wise, the pre-eminent spokesman for American Zionism, said, "No one was more genuinely free from religious prejudice and racial bigotry."

...
[After the outbreak of war, t]he Jews of Central Europe, the Jews from the occupied nations of Western Europe, the Jews of the Soviet Union—the principal victims of the Holocaust—were not refugees; they were prisoners in a vast prison from which there was no escape and no possible rescue. . . . Once Hitler's armies marched, the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe no longer had the possibility of being refugees.

The doors had been closed not by the United States or its allies but by Hitler. On January 30, 1942, Hitler, speaking to the Reichstag, said, "This war can end in two ways—either the extermination of the Aryan peoples or the disappearance of Jewry from Europe." Since the mid-1920s Hitler had never voluntarily spoken to a Jew. He was the most determined ideologue of racial superiority and racial conflict who ever led a country. Nothing diminished his mission—not the defeat of his armies, not the destruction of his country. As Germany lay in ruins, as its dictator prepared to end his life in his bunker in Berlin, his Nazi acolytes continued his campaign, diverting even urgently needed reinforcements for his retreating armies in order to complete the Final Solution.

The prisoners of Hitler could be saved only by the total, unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany, and that was a task that required four years and the unprecedented mobilization of all the resources, human and material, of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

Some critics of American policy during these years maintain that the news of the annihilation of Europe's Jews was deliberately kept secret so that our people would not know about it and that if Americans had been aware of the Final Solution, they would have insisted on doing more than was done. The facts are otherwise. President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, General Eisenhower, General Marshall, the intelligence services of the Allied nations, every Jewish leader, the Jewish communities in America, in Britain, in Palestine, and yes, anyone who had a radio or newspaper in 1942 knew that Jews in colossal numbers were being murdered. They may have received the news with disbelief; there was, after all, no precedent for it in human history. But the general information of the genocide was broadly available to anyone who would read or listen. . . .

American Jewry was no passive observer of these events. Despite issues that bitterly divided them, primarily relating to Palestine, the Jewish community in America spoke the same words in pleading to do whatever was possible for Europe's Jews. Jewish leaders lobbied Congress. Mass rallies were held across the country with overflow crowds throughout those years, praying, pleading for action to stop

the genocide. The unremitting massacre continued because no one, no nation, no alliance of nations could do anything to close down the death camps—save, as Roosevelt said over and over again, by winning the war.

Had FDR followed the national will, Japan would have been our military priority, but understanding the Nazi threat to civilization, he ordered Germany to be the focus of our efforts. Had Roosevelt listened to General Marshall and his other military advisers, he would not have sent the few tanks we had in 1942 to help General Montgomery win at El Alamein, thereby probably saving Palestine from the same fate as Poland. Roosevelt gave frequent audience to Jewish leaders; he sent messages to rallies of Jews across the country; he listened to every plea and proposal for rescue that came to him. But he knew that the diversion of resources from the purpose of defeating the Nazi armies might palliate the anguish felt by so many, would rescue no one, and in all likelihood would kill the would-be rescuers. As Richard Lichtheim, a representative of the World Jewish Congress in Switzerland and a hero in informing the world of the genocide, said in December 1942, "You cannot divert a tiger from devouring his prey by adopting resolutions or sending cables. You have to take your gun and shoot him."

The historian Gerhard Weinberg answers those who question America's policy by suggesting that they consider how many more Jews would have survived had the war ended even a week or ten days earlier—and how many more would have died had it lasted an additional week or ten days. Given that the slaughter of the Jews went on into the final moments of the Third Reich, that every day until the surrender there were thousands of deaths by murder, starvation, and disease, the number of Jews saved by winning the war as quickly as possible was vastly greater than the total number who could have been saved by any rescue efforts proposed by anyone between 1941 and 1945.

Serious proposals for rescue and response were not disregarded. . . .

The proposal to bomb Auschwitz in 1944 has become the symbol for those who argue American indifference and complicity in the Holocaust. Some would have us believe that many American Jewish groups petitioned our government to bomb Auschwitz; in fact, there was considerable Jewish opposition in both the United States and Palestine. The focal center of the Holocaust Museum's exhibit on bombing Auschwitz is a letter from Leon Kubowitzki, head of the Rescue Department of the World Jewish Congress, in which he forwarded, without endorsement, a request from the Czech State Council (in exile in London) to the War Department, in August 1944, to bomb the camp. Much is made of the Assistant Secretary John McCloy's response to Kubowitzki explaining the War Department's decision not to undertake such a mission. What is not on display and rarely mentioned is a letter dated July 1, 1944, from the same Leon Kubowitzki to the executive director of the War Refugee Board, arguing *against* bombing Auschwitz because "the first victims would be the Jews" and because the Allied air assault would serve as "a welcome pretext for the Germans to assert that their Jewish victims have been massacred not by their killers, but by Allied bombing."

Mainstream Jewish opinion was against the whole idea. The very thought of the Allied forces' deliberately killing Jews—to open the gates of Auschwitz so the survivors could run where?—was as abhorrent then as it is now. The Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem voted, at a meeting with the future Israeli

prime minister David Ben-Gurion presiding, against even making the bombing request. Although only President Roosevelt or General Eisenhower could have ordered the bombing of Auschwitz, there is no record of any kind that indicates that either one ever heard of the proposal—even though Jewish leaders of all persuasions had clear access to both men.

A seemingly more reasonable proposal to bomb the railways to Auschwitz was made to Anthony Eden, the foreign minister of Great Britain, on July 6, 1944. Eden, with Churchill's immediate support, asked the RAF to examine the feasibility of doing so. The secretary of state for air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, replied several days later: "I entirely agree that it is our duty to consider every possible plan [to stop the murder of the Jews] but I am advised that interrupting the railways is out of our power. It is only by an enormous concentration of bomber forces that we have been able to interrupt communications in Normandy; the distance of Silesia from our bases entirely rules out doing anything of the kind." John McCloy had replied to a similar suggestion weeks earlier: "The War Department is of the opinion that the suggested air operation is impracticable for the reason that it could be executed only with the diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations." Even the severest critics of America's response to the Nazi murder of the Jews acknowledge that successful interruption of railways required close observation of the severed lines and frequent rebombing, since repairs would take only a few days. Even bridges, which were costly to hit, were often back in operation in three or four days. Postwar studies of railway bombing totally vindicated the conclusion of the military authorities. Professor Istvan Deak of Columbia University asks in a recent article: "And if the rail lines had been bombed? The inmates of the cattle cars and those at the departure points would have been allowed to die of thirst, or of the heat, or of the cold, while the lines were being repaired."

It is often noted that American bombers were carrying out raids in the summer of 1944 on industrial targets only a few miles away from Auschwitz, suggesting how easy it would have been to bomb the gas chambers. They do not mention that preparation for the D-day invasion left only 12 percent of the U.S. Army Air Force available for the destruction of German fuel supplies, the primary mission as defined by Gen. Carl Spaatz. They point to the huge blowups of reconnaissance photographs at the Holocaust Museum that show not only the Farben synthetic-fuel plant, the target of the raids, but the outlines of Auschwitz and columns of prisoners. Yet the aerial photographs of Auschwitz on display were not developed until 1978, and their details were readable then only because advanced technology, developed by the CIA more than twenty years after the end of World War II, made it possible. *All* such strategic raids on military-industrial bases proceeded only after months of preparatory intelligence work, entailing the creation of a target folder with specific information about the size, hardness, structure placement, and defenses of the target and detailed aerial photography. These were costly, dangerous raids against heavily protected, frequently remote targets; the losses in men and planes were tragically heavy. The Allied air forces simply lacked the intelligence base necessary to plan and execute a bombing raid against the Auschwitz extermination camp. It would have been a nonmilitary mission. Only Roosevelt or Eisenhower could have ordered it, and as we have seen, no one proposed it to them.

Yet many insist that anti-Semitism alone spared Auschwitz the wrath of the Army Air Force. With this in mind, it is worth considering the plight of northern Holland, where during the last seven months of the war more than eighty thousand citizens starved to death because the German occupiers wanted to punish the Dutch for insurrection and strikes following the failed assault on Arnhem. The Allies knew what was happening. Allied armies were everywhere around this occupied segment of the Netherlands; air rescue, or at least the capacity for organizing food drops, was minutes away. Still, eighty thousand men, women, and children died while the forces that could have saved them remained intent on their objective of a military engagement with the Germans that would lead to victory in the shortest possible time. Perhaps these military decisions were wrong, but they were not made because of any bias against the Dutch—or, regarding Auschwitz, because of anti-Semitism.

And what of those who managed to escape the Nazis once the war had started? President Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board in January 1944, immediately upon Henry Morgenthau's presenting the case for doing so. There were thousands of refugees stranded on the outer peripheries of Nazi Europe. With the invasion of Italy in 1943, thousands more had sought safety in camps in the south. Tito's success in Yugoslavia had enabled many to escape from Croat fascism and Serb hatred. But those were refugees who were already saved. They were not escapees from the death camps. Under pressure from Roosevelt and Churchill, Spain kept open its frontiers, stating as its policy that "all refugees without exception would be allowed to enter and remain." Probably more than forty thousand, many of them Jewish, found safe sanctuary in Spain. Makeshift transit camps there and in Portugal, Italy, and North Africa housed them in abysmal conditions. Those who fought for these people to come to America were right to do so; then, as now, refugees are generally powerless and voiceless. Governments have to be reminded constantly of their humanitarian responsibilities. But perhaps the Allied nations can be forgiven, in the midst of a war for survival, for not doing more for refugees whose lives had already been saved. Perhaps not. In remembering what we did not do, maybe we can measure our response to today's tragedies and ask whether we—now the richest, most powerful nation in history—have responded adequately to the "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia, to the genocide in Rwanda, to the Killing Fields of Cambodia. We might question the adequacy of our response to the catalogue of horrors visible to all of us in Sierra Leone, where thousands of children as young as seven years old are forced to become soldiers, human shields, sex slaves, and instruments of torture and killing, having already witnessed the slaughter of their parents and the hacking off of the hands and feet of countless innocent civilians.

Roosevelt's intervention with the government of Hungary, which by then understood that Nazi defeat was inevitable; the actions of the War Refugee Board, such as retaining the heroic Raoul Wallenberg; the bombing of the Budapest area—all played a role in the rescue of half the Jewish community in Hungary. President Roosevelt was deeply and personally involved in this effort. . . .

On April 12, 1945, General Eisenhower visited Ohrdruf Nord, the first concentration camp liberated by the American Army. "The things I saw beggar description," he wrote General Marshall. According to his biographer Stephen Ambrose, "Eisenhower had heard ominous rumors about the camps, of course, but never in his worst nightmares had he dreamed they could be so bad." He sent immediately for a

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delegation of congressional leaders and newspaper editors; he wanted to make sure Americans would never forget this. Five months later he dismissed his close friend and brilliant army commander Gen. George Patton for using former Nazi officials in his occupation structure and publicly likening “the Nazi thing” to differences between the Republicans and Democrats. (Patton had visited the Ohrdruf camp with Eisenhower and become physically ill from what he saw.)

Eisenhower got his first glimpse into the worst horrors at the heart of the Third Reich on the day death claimed the American who had done more than any other to bring them to an end. How ironic that Franklin Roosevelt—the man Hitler hated most, the leader constantly attacked by the isolationist press and derided by the anti-Semites, vilified by Goebbels as a “mentally ill cripple” and as “that Jew Rosenfeld”—should be faulted for being indifferent to the genocide. For all of us the shadow of doubt that enough was not done will always remain, even if there was little more that could have been done. But to say that “we are all guilty” allows the truly guilty to avoid that responsibility. It was Hitler who imagined the Holocaust and the Nazis who carried it out. We were not their accomplices. We destroyed them.



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