



CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
**FDR AND THE  
HOLocaust  
1942-1945**

TOUCH TO BEGIN

**CONFRONT THE ISSUE**  
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**HOLOCAUST**  
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America's response to the Holocaust has become the subject of intense historical interest in recent decades. Historians debate why FDR and other American decision-makers did not do more to admit Jewish refugees and undertake policies—including bombing rail lines to Auschwitz or Auschwitz itself—that might have saved lives.

In 1942, as reports of Hitler's Final Solution began to reach the Allies, it was difficult for the public and many government officials to grasp the extent and significance of the Nazis' systematic, mechanized killing. In a December 13, 1942 radio broadcast listened to by millions, popular newsman Edward R. Murrow spoke of "a horror beyond what imagination can grasp...there are no longer 'concentration camps'—we must speak now only of 'extermination camps.'"

On December 17, 1942, the United States joined ten other Allied governments in issuing a solemn public declaration condemning Nazi Germany's "bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination" of the Jews. The American Congress and the British Parliament stood in silence on that date to mourn what was happening to the Jews and pray for the strength needed to defeat the Nazis.

Roosevelt believed that the surest way to stop the killing of innocent civilians was to defeat Hitler's Germany as quickly and decisively as possible. Critics say FDR's "win the war" approach did not address the possibility that significant numbers of Jews might have been rescued. One important debate involves the potential bombing of rail lines into Auschwitz, or Auschwitz itself. The camp was within range of Allied bombers, but American military leaders were unresponsive, in part because they maintained it would divert resources needed to prosecute the war.

In January 1944, after learning from Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. that the State Department was obstructing rescue efforts, Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board to coordinate governmental and private efforts to rescue those who might still be saved. The Board is credited with saving at least 200,000 Jews. Critics argue that if FDR had acted earlier, and more boldly, even more lives could have been saved.

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

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## **Rabbi Stephen Wise's Letter to FDR and Pages from His Memo on Nazi Atrocities, December 2-8, 1942**

At the infamous Wannsee Conference held in January 1942, a group of Nazi bureaucrats met to organize “a final solution” to Europe’s so-called Jewish problem. As the plan for systematic, mechanized killing was implemented in the following months, news reports began to publicize the scope of Nazi atrocities against Jews. Rabbi Stephen Wise and other Jewish leaders collected detailed reports from their sources abroad. In this December 2, 1942 letter, Wise requests a meeting with Roosevelt to convey his group’s findings. At an Oval Office meeting on December 8, they presented FDR with a memo summarizing their information. Selected pages of the memo are also provided here. Wise appealed to Roosevelt to bring attention to the horror and to do what he could to stop it. FDR was sympathetic, but noncommittal. He confirmed that Wise’s report was consistent with information he had received from other sources. But he maintained that the Allies were fighting for the rights of all people, and could not elevate one group over another.

*Official File 76c: Church Matters-Jewish, 1942*

# AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

330 WEST 42nd STREET      NEW YORK CITY

STEPHEN S. WISE, PRESIDENT  
CARL SHERMAN, CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
NATHAN D. PERLMAN } VICE-PRESIDENTS  
LEO H. LOWITZ }  
LOUIS LIPSKY, CHAIRMAN, GOVERNING COUNCIL  
M. MALDWIN FERTIG, CHAIRMAN, ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE  
JACOB LEICHTMAN, TREASURER

CABLE ADDRESS 'CONGRESS'  
TELEPHONE LONGACRE 5-2600

Office of Dr. Wise  
40 West 68 Street,  
December 2, 1942.

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Boss:

I do not wish to add an atom to the awful burden which you are bearing with magic and, as I believe, heaven-inspired strength at this time. But you do know that the most overwhelming disaster of Jewish history has befallen Jews in the form of the Hitler mass-massacres. Hitler's decision was to exterminate the Jewish people in all Hitler-ruled lands, and it is indisputable that as many as two million civilian Jews have been slain.

I have had cables and underground advices for some months, telling of these things. I succeeded, together with the heads of other Jewish organizations, in keeping these out of the press and have been in constant communication with the State Department, particularly Under Secretary Welles. The State Department has now received what it believes to be confirmation of these unspeakable horrors and has approved of my giving the facts to the press. The organizations banded together in the Conference of which I am Chairman, feel that they wish to present to you a memorandum on this situation, so terrible that this day is being observed as a day of mourning and fasting throughout the Jewish world. We hope above all that you will speak a word which may bring solace and hope to millions of Jews who mourn, and be an expression of the conscience of the American people.

I had gathered from the State Department that you were prepared to receive a small delegation, which would include representatives of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the B'nai B'rith. It would be gravely misunderstood if, despite your overwhelming preoccupation, you did not make it possible to receive our delegation and to utter what I am sure will be your heartening and consoling reply.

As your old friend, I beg you will somehow arrange to do this.

Ever yours,

  
Stephen S. Wise  
PRESIDENT

BLUE PRINT FOR EXTERMINATION

Almost two million Jews of Nazi Europe have been exterminated through mass murder, planned starvation, deportation, slave labor and epidemic in disease-ridden ghettos, penal labor colonies and slave reservations created for their destruction by the German Government and its satellites. The five million Jews who may still be alive inside Nazi-occupied territory are threatened with total extermination under the terms of an official order by Hitler calling for the complete annihilation of the Jews of Europe by December 31, 1942.

Confirmation of the existence of this program of extermination is offered in (a) depositions made to representatives of the United States Government abroad and transmitted through the State Department to American Jewish agencies (b) official German admissions as well as confidential German reports (c) eyewitness accounts received by Jewish agencies in free countries (d) first-hand reports appearing in the underground press of Poland and other occupied lands and (e) corroborative evidence received by the Governments-in-Exile through their underground channels.

The dual process of outright slaughter and slow death began for the Jews of Germany when Hitler came to power and for Jews of other lands wherever the German army moved in or wherever countries joined the Axis. During the past six months, the organized decimation of the Jews has increased tremendously in its ruthless tempo. Propaganda Minister Goebbels signalized the drive toward total extermination when on June 12, 1942, in an article in DAS REICH, he swore that the Jews would "atone" for the R.A.F. bombings of Cologne and other German cities "with the extermination of their race in all Europe, and perhaps even beyond Europe."

Shortly after the first R.A.F. bombings of Cologne, 258 Jews were taken to the Gross Lichterfelde barracks in the Western suburbs of Berlin and shot in reprisal. This, conspicuously publicized by the Nazis, was an ominous prelude of new horrors to come.

Last June, Gestapo Chief Henrich Himmller visited the Warsaw Ghetto, then the largest single concentration center for Jews in occupied Europe, and appointed a so-called Destruction Commission headed by a notorious Nazi named Fou. The Commission was instructed that the time had come to depopulate the ghetto.

On August 14, 1942, the European offices of a reputable Jewish agency learned that the Polish ghettos were rapidly being emptied by murder, deportation and hunger. It was then reported that 100,000 Jews in Warsaw had been killed and 50,000 at Lemberg. On November 24, the worst fears on this score were confirmed when reports confirming

the mass extermination program were received here through facilities made available by the State Department. That same day, the Polish Government in London offered further corroborative evidence in the fact that in October of 1942 only 40,000 ration cards were printed for the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto, where the population in March of 1942 totalled 433,000.

Among the documents received by us through the courtesy and facilities of the State Department was one summarizing the situation in each country and indicating the sharp reduction in numbers in every land under Nazi domination. This document revealed the following facts:

Germany

Of 200,000 Jews who lived in Germany at the outbreak of the war in 1939, mass deportations, suicides and starvation have reduced their number to 40,000.

Austria

Of 75,000 Jews in Austria at the outbreak of the war, no more than 12,000 to 15,000 remain.

Bohemia and Moravia

Of the 80,000 in the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, 15,000 Jews remain. The remainder have been deported to Eastern Europe.

Poland

Of the 3,300,000 Jews living in Poland at the beginning of

the war, there were left following the German invasion 1,300,000 in the General Government and 700,000 in the Polish towns annexed by Germany, the remainder having fled or remained in the territories occupied by Russia, which were later reoccupied by Germany. The total number of Jews under German-domination in Poland, after deduction of some 500,000 refugees in Russia, therefore, should have approximated 2,800,000. At the beginning of the summer, 1942, there were still in Poland only 2,200,000, six hundred thousand having perished, but in the meantime large scale evacuations and massacres took place so that, for instance, the Ghetto of Warsaw, with a peak population of 550,000 (early 1941) harbors today less than 50,000.

Belgium

It is reported that only 5,000 Jews remain in Brussels, and 3,000 in Antwerp, of the 85,000 who resided in Belgium at the beginning of the war in 1940.

Netherlands

Sixty thousand of the 180,000 Jews of the Netherlands have already been deported.

Yugoslavia

In Yugoslavia where some 100,000 Jews lived, 400 escaped to Italy and the remainder were deported, killed or imprisoned in labor camps.

Greece

Of the 78,000 Jews in Greece, all Jews of the ages of 18-45 have been drafted for slave labor.

France

Of the 340,000 Jews of France, more than 65,000 have already been deported.

Rumania

Not more than 270,000 Jews are left of the 900,000 who lived in Rumania proper in 1939. Whole provinces are completely without Jews. And of the 185,000 deported to the prison camps at Transnistria, some 75,000 have perished.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, where 50,000 Jews have lived, 8,500 of them are already engaged in slave labor and the remaining threatened with deportation and forced labor.

Slovakia

Of the 90,000 Slovakian Jews, 70,000 have already been deported and the remainder are expected to follow soon.

Latvia

In Latvia, where 100,000 Jews formerly lived, all Jews were segregated in Ghettos. In the City of Riga, where formerly 32,000 Jews lived, 15,000 were immediately registered for slave labor. Subsequently, all Jews between the ages of 18-60 were segregated in a special Ghetto and the remainder sent to camps. Eight thousand were killed in one night. A week later, in December, 1941, the 16,000 persons in the old Ghetto were led into the woods, stripped of their valuables, including their clothes, and then machine-gunned. This action left 4,000 slave laborers in the small Ghetto of Riga and several hundred women. The places of the Riga Jews in the old Ghetto were taken by German Jews, deported from Berlin

Dusseldorf, Cologne, etc. In June of 1942, not a single trace was left of these German-Jewish deportees.

Lithuania

Reports have it that the Jews of Lithuania numbering some 150,000 at the outbreak of the war suffered the same fate as the Latvian Jews.

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HITLER'S EXTERMINATION ORDER

The Hitler order calling for the extermination of the Jews by December 1942 was issued in the late Summer, following the presentation of the plan by Herman Backe, Secretary of State for Economics. Under the plan, all Jews living in Germany and German occupied and controlled countries should, after deportation to certain regions of Eastern Europe be exterminated at one stroke in order to solve once and for all the Jewish question in Europe. The plan of Herman Backe was based on economic reasons in order to ease in part the difficult food situation by the annihilation of at least four million persons who would otherwise have to be fed.

The miserable remnants of Jews who are still in segregated areas and concentration camps in Western and Central Europe are being rapidly transported to the East. This technique serves a double purpose:

1. Jews are thereby removed from the half light which still filters into the streets of Paris, Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam and from the eyes of the population of Western and Central Europe, to the utter desolation and darkness of devastated Eastern Europe;

2. Here their extermination is carried out without attracting notice. For although the Germans boast of their general plans for the extermination of Jewry, they are extremely careful to shut out from the eyes of the local population, of the world, and even of the German people, the detailed horrors through which these plans are put into effect. On the other hand, Nazi propaganda reports in lavish detail the murders perpetrated by their Rumanian, Croat, Slovak and other satellites.

The method of accomplishing death by deportation is described in the November 24th report of the Polish Government in London. The report describes how masses of Jews were loaded into freight cars in batches of 150 when there were accommodations for less than one-third of that number. The floors are covered with a thick layer of lime or

chlorine, sprinkled with water. The doors are sealed. When the trains reach their destination, half the occupants are dead from suffocation and starvation. Survivors are sent to special camps in Southeastern Poland, where the mass murder of all but those capable of slave labor takes place. Of 250,000 thus "resettled" only about 4,000 reached labor gangs.

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#### EXTERMINATION CENTERS

German experiments in the scientific extermination of Jews had been going on for a long period before the recent tempo of mass annihilation was achieved. When the first large scale deportations took place, the Germans discovered that if a sufficient number of Jews were crowded into freight trains bound for the East very few would reach their destination alive. These methods have now been extended.

In February of 1942, it was reported that 1,200 Dutch Jews, deported to work in the salt and sulphur mines of Mauthausen concentration camps in Upper Austria, were sent to the pits without protection against the fumes. Within a short time, 740 had perished.

Later, large groups of Jews were rounded up in German army vans in various Polish cities, driven to the country side and asphyxiated behind locked doors by carbon monoxide from the exhaust of the army trucks.

Centers have been established in various parts of Eastern Europe for the scientific and cold blooded mass murder of Jews. Polish Christian workers, eye-witnesses, have confirmed reports that concrete buildings, on the former Russian frontiers, are used by the Germans as gas chambers in which thousands of Jews have been put to death.

The slaughter of trainloads of Jewish adults and children in great crematoriums at Oswiencim near Cracow is confirmed by eye-witnesses in reports which recently reached Jerusalem.

Between October 1941 and January 1942, the entire Jewish population of the Polish district of Konin, Kolo, Klodowa, Isbica and Kujawy, numbering several thousand, as well as thousands of Jews of the once teeming Lodz ghetto, were shipped to the extermination center of Che Imno and asphyxiated in gas trucks.

The existence of an extermination center for deported Western and Central European Jews in Kaunas (Lithuania) was confirmed by an American Lithuanian woman who arrived in the United States on the S.S. Drottingholm on June 7, 1942. This was later corroborated by the Polish Government.

The latest reported method for the scientific and low cost extermination of Jews is the injection of air bubbles into the veins. This leads to general poisoning and speedy death. German physicians have found it possible to murder 100 Jews per hour by this method.

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## Report by the Office of Strategic Services on Germany's Extermination of the Jews, March 17, 1943

Throughout the war, President Roosevelt received information about the Nazi death machine from a variety of sources, including the State Department, Treasury Department, his own personal network of informants, private relief and Jewish organizations, and the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor of the CIA). This OSS report describing a further escalation of Nazi violence against Jews was received in the White House Map Room on March 17, 1943.

*Map Room Papers; MR 203(12); Sec. 1; OSS Numbered Bulletins, March-May 1943; Box 72*

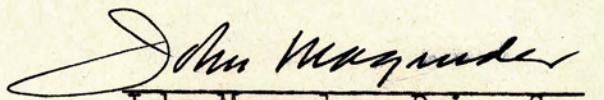
~~SECRET~~

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

March 17, 1943

TO: Chester Hammond, White House Map Room  
FROM: John Magruder, Brig. Gen.  
SUBJECT: Reports received in Office of Strategic Services, No. 3.

Submitted herewith are some additional items received from our secret sources abroad.

  
John Magruder, Brig. Gen.  
Deputy Director, OSS.,  
Intelligence Service

DECLASSIFIED  
By Authority of \_\_\_\_\_

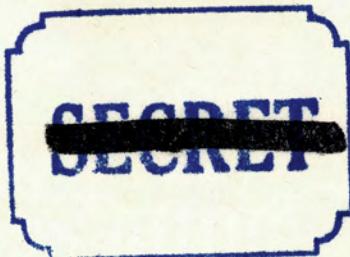
CIA 006687  
By SR Date MAR 3 1975

Germany: Extermination of Jews

From a Berlin source which our agent considers reliable, we have the following report on changes in the Nazi Jewish policy:

The new Nazi policy is to kill Jews on the spot rather than to deport them to Poland for extermination there. High officers of the SS reportedly have decided that Berlin shall be liberated of all Jews by mid-March. Accordingly, 15,000 Berlin Jews were arrested between January 26 and March 2. All closed trucks were requisitioned; several hundred children died; several hundred adults were shot. Extension of these methods to other parts of Germany in the near future is expected.

(OSS Official Dispatch, #1597, Bern, March 10, 1943)



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CIA 006687

By SR Date MAR 3 1975

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## Draft of Eleanor Roosevelt's "My Day" Column on a Postwar Jewish Homeland

### August 13, 1943

Reports of the horrors inflicted on Europe's Jews continued to reach Allied governments and appear in the American media throughout 1943. At the same time, Roosevelt and Churchill were engaged in sometimes contentious discussions over Palestine and its potential for a postwar Jewish homeland, which Roosevelt supported. In her August 13, 1943 "My Day" column—a draft of which is seen here—Eleanor Roosevelt discussed the brutality faced by Europe's Jews and the difficulty of finding a new home for them. "I do not know what we can do to save the Jews of Europe and to find them homes," Eleanor Roosevelt laments, "but I know that we will be the sufferers if we let great wrongs occur without exerting ourselves to correct them."

*Eleanor Roosevelt Papers; Speech and Article File: My Day Drafts, August 1943; Box 1435*

I talked for a little while yesterday morning with a representative ~~of~~<sup>from the</sup> group which is trying to formulate plans of to save the Jewish people in Europe. Some people think ~~that~~ the Jewish people as a race. Others think of them purely as a religious group, but in Europe the hardships and persecution which they have had to endure for the past few years, has tended to bring them together into a group which identifies itself similar with every ~~other~~ group, regardless of whether the tie is purely ~~either~~ religious or whether they consider it racial.

*The Jews are like*  
Like all the other people ~~in~~ of the world, there are able people among them, there are courageous people among them, there are people of extraordinary intellectual ability along many lines. There are people of extraordinary integrity. There are people of great beauty and great charm, and on the other hand, largely because of environment and economic condition, there are people ~~among them~~ who cringe, who are dishonest, who try to take advantage of their neighbors, who are aggressive and unattractive. In other words, they are a cross section of the human race just as you find ~~in~~ every other nationality and every other religious group. But good or bad, they have suffered in Europe as has no other group. The percentage killed among them in the past few years far exceeds the losses among any of the United Nations in the battles which have been fought throughout the world.

Many of them for generations considered Germany, Poland, France, Roumania, their countries ~~and their homes~~ <sup>peasant</sup>. Suddenly they have neither a country nor a home. This same thing might happen to any other group if enough people ganged up against it and decided <sup>to</sup> persecute <sup>them</sup>. It seems to me part of common sense for

its own  
~~against which~~ ~~the world as~~

the world as a whole to protest in ~~the interests~~ of the world as a whole, because none of us by ourselves would be strong enough to stand against a big enough group who decided to treat us in the same way. We may have our individual likes and dislikes, but this is a question which far transcends prejudices or inclinations. It means the right of survival of human beings and their right to grow and improve. You and I may be hated by our neighbors, but if we know about it we try to change the things within us which brought it about. That is the way civilized people develop. Murder and annihilation is never a satisfactory answer for the few who escape grow up more bitter against their persecutors and a day of reckoning always comes for the ~~persecutors~~ which the story of Moses in the Bulrushes was designed to teach us.

I do not know what we can do to save the Jews of Europe and find them homes, but I know that ~~if we do not do something~~ we will be the sufferers if we let great wrongs ~~occur~~ happen without exerting ourselves to correct them.

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## Memo of White House Meeting on State Department Inaction and Obstruction, January 16, 1944

A seminal moment in the Roosevelt Administration's response to the Holocaust was a January 16, 1944 White House meeting involving the President, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Treasury's general counsel Randolph Paul, and Morgenthau's assistant John W. Pehle. At this meeting, Morgenthau presented a lengthy and blunt "Personal Report" on what Morgenthau and other Treasury officials believed to be the State Department's acquiescence in Germany's mass murder of Jews. The startling evidence of State Department incompetence, delay, and even obstruction of a variety of rescue efforts convinced Roosevelt of the need to establish an independent commission to coordinate rescue and relief efforts. This memo of the meeting was written by John Pehle. Pehle became the first Director of the War Refugee Board, which FDR established by Executive order several days later.

*Diaries of Henry Morgenthau, Jr.; Book 694; Pages 190-192*

January 16, 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY'S FILES:

There was a meeting at the White House today at 12:45 attended by the President, Secretary Morgenthau, Mr. Paul, and Mr. Pehle. Secretary Morgenthau had requested the appointment to discuss the problem of saving the remaining Jews in Europe.

The conference lasted about twenty minutes. Secretary Morgenthau advised the President that he was deeply disturbed about the failure of the State Department to take any effective action to save the remaining Jews in Europe. He explained that the Treasury Department, in connection with the operation of the Foreign Funds Control, had uncovered evidence indicating that not only were the people in the State Department inefficient in dealing with this problem, but that they were actually taking action to prevent the rescue of the Jews. The Secretary then asked John Pehle to explain to the President the facts which the Treasury had uncovered. The President listened attentively and seemed to grasp the significance of the various points. He also glanced at the proposed Executive Order and suggested that perhaps the Secretary of War should be on the Board. The President inquired as to why Mr. Crowley was put on the Board and did not seem satisfied that there was any reason to put Mr. Crowley on the Board. The President asked whether Mr. Stettinius had been consulted and referred to the fact that Stettinius had recently reorganized the State Department and that nowhere in the organization chart was there any indication that any particular division was charged with this problem. The Secretary indicated that we had been dealing with Mr. Hull on the general matter and had hesitated to put Stettinius instead of Hull on the Board. Nevertheless, the President indicated that he would like to have the matter taken up with Mr. Stettinius and indicated that he thought Stettinius would be sympathetic. He said he would also like to have Judge Rosenman brought into the picture. The Secretary said he had already talked to Judge Rosenman about the matter.

During the conference the following points were brought out:

- (1) The Secretary said he was convinced that effective action could be taken and referred to the results that his father, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., had obtained when he was Ambassador to Turkey in getting the Armenians out of Turkey and saving their lives. The President said he agreed that some effective action could be taken and referred particularly to the movement of Jews through Rumania into Bulgaria.

and out through Turkey. He said he thought such channels were wide open at the present time, but that they would not be open if Turkey entered the war.

- (2) The President referred to the possibility of getting people over the Spanish and Swiss borders.
- (3) The President seemed disinclined to believe that Long wanted to stop effective action from being taken, but said that Long had been somewhat soured on the problem when Rabbi Wise got Long to approve a long list of people being brought into this country many of whom turned out to be bad people. Secretary Morgenthau reminded the President that at a Cabinet meeting Biddle had indicated that only three Jews of those entering the United States during the war had turned out to be undesirable. The President said that he had been advised that the figure was considerably larger. In any event he felt that Long was inclined to be soured on the situation.

Following the meeting with the President and while still at the White House, Secretary Morgenthau called Mr. Stettinius and Judge Rosenman and arranged a meeting at the Secretary's home at 5:30.

The 5:30 meeting was attended by the Secretary, Mr. Stettinius, Judge Rosenman, Mr. Paul, and Mr. Pehle. The Secretary told Mr. Stettinius in plain words that he was convinced that people in the State Department, particularly Breckinridge Long, were deliberately obstructing the execution of any plan to save the Jews and that forthright immediate action was necessary if this Government was not going to be placed in the same position as Hitler and share the responsibility for exterminating all the Jews of Europe. At the Secretary's request Pehle then explained in detail the facts that had been uncovered by the Treasury. Stettinius seemed shocked by these facts although he said he was not surprised about Breckinridge Long since Long had fallen down just as badly and in an equally shocking way in the handling of the exchange of prisoners. Stettinius was very frank in his views on Long's failures and pointed out that in the reorganization of the State Department

which he had worked out the only remaining function assigned to Breckinridge Long is "Congressional relations". Stettinius said that in the new reorganization Berle's responsibilities had been very much limited, but included in the area of operations under Berle's control was the Special War Problems Division, which handles the problem of the rescue of the Jews, and the Visa Division. Stettinius said he recognized that this problem could not be handled effectively by Berle and that there were grounds for believing that Berle might be even worse than Long. At this point the proposed Executive Order was discussed. Stettinius read it over and when asked for his views said: "I think it's wonderful." He then said that the Secretary of War should be on the Committee instead of Mr. Crowley who was already having considerable difficulty running FEA. This was agreed to particularly in light of the President's similar reaction. It was decided that the Executive Order should be amended accordingly, as should the memorandum to Harold Smith and the memorandum to Cordell Hull and the amended documents delivered to Judge Rosenman by 9:15 the following morning.

The Secretary suggested that the Executive Director of the Board should be John Pehle and Judge Rosenman and Mr. Stettinius indicated agreement.

JWAC

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## Draft Presidential Statement and Executive Order Establishing the War Refugee Board, January 22, 1944

President Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board by Executive order on January 22, 1944. Composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of War, the Board reported directly to the President. In this draft presidential statement, and the Executive order that follows, the Board is charged with taking all measures possible to rescue victims of enemy oppression and to take action "at once to forestall the plan of the Nazis to exterminate all the Jews and other persecuted minorities in Europe." It was authorized to coordinate with other departments of the U.S. government, Allied and neutral governments, and independent organizations to develop and implement rescue plans and establish places of safe haven. FDR's Executive order expressly ordered the State, Treasury, and War Departments to execute the plans developed by the Board and to aid in rescue efforts.

*Official File 5477: War Refugee Board, 1944-1945*

(1)

The President today, by Executive Order, set up  
a War Refugee Board consisting of the Secretary of State,  
the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of War, to  
take action for the immediate rescue <sup>from the Nazis</sup> of as many as possible  
of the persecuted minorities of Europe.

~~political~~ and other civilian victims of enemy savagery.

~~religious or political~~ — social,  
— racial, religious or  
political — all

1/2

Proposed Press Release  
for Sunday Jan 23, 1949

The President today, by Executive Order, set up a War Refugee Board consisting of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of War, to take action [for the immediate rescue and relief of as many as possible of the Jews, of Europe and the other civilian victims of enemy persecution in Europe.]

The Executive Order declares that "it is the policy of this Government to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war".

The Board is charged with direct responsibility to the President in seeing that the announced policy is carried out. The President indicated that while he would look directly to the Board for the successful execution of this policy, the Board, of course, would cooperate fully with the Intergovernmental Committee, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and other interested international organizations.

The President stated that he [was going to ask for and that he] expected <sup>to obtain</sup> the cooperation of all members of the United Nations and other foreign governments in carrying out this difficult but important task. He stated that the existing facilities of the State, Treasury and War Departments would be employed to furnish aid to Axis victims to the fullest extent possible. He stressed that it was urgent that action be taken

at once to forestall the plan of the Nazis to exterminate all the Jews and other persecuted minorities in Europe.

It will be the duty of ~~the~~ full-time Executive Director of the Board to arrange for the prompt execution of the plans and programs developed and the measures inaugurated by the Board.

The Executive Order follows:-

EXECUTIVE ORDER

ESTABLISHING A WAR REFUGEE BOARD

WHEREAS it is the policy of this Government to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war;

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, as President of the United States and as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, and in order to effectuate with all possible speed the rescue and relief of such victims of enemy oppression, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. There is established in the Executive Office of the President a War Refugee Board (hereinafter referred to as the Board). The Board shall consist of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of War. The Board may request the heads of other agencies or departments to participate in its deliberations whenever matters specially affecting such agencies or departments are under consideration.

2. The Board shall be charged with the responsibility for seeing that the policy of the Government, as stated in the Preamble, is carried out. The functions of the Board shall include without limitation the development of plans and programs and the inauguration of effective measures for (a) the rescue, transportation, maintenance and relief of the victims of enemy oppression, and (b) the establishment of havens of temporary refuge for such victims. To this end the Board, through appropriate channels, shall take the necessary steps to enlist the cooperation of foreign governments and obtain their participation in the execution of such plans and programs.

3. It shall be the duty of the State, Treasury and War Departments, within their respective spheres, to execute at the request of the Board, the plans and programs so developed and the measures so inaugurated. It shall be the duty of the heads of all agencies and departments to supply or obtain for the Board such information and to extend to the Board such supplies, shipping and other specified assistance and facilities as the Board may require in carrying out the provisions of this Order. The State Department shall appoint special attaches with diplomatic status, on the recommendation of the Board, to be stationed abroad in places where it is likely that assistance can be rendered to war refugees, the duties and responsibilities of such attaches to be defined by the Board in consultation with the State Department.

4. The Board and the State, Treasury and War Departments are authorized to accept the services or contributions of any private persons, private organizations, State agencies, or agencies of foreign governments in carrying out the purposes of this Order. The Board shall cooperate with all existing and future international organizations concerned with the problems of refugee rescue, maintenance, transportation, relief, rehabilitation, and resettlement.

5. To the extent possible the Board shall utilize the personnel, supplies, facilities and services of the State, Treasury and War Departments. In addition the Board, within the limits of funds which may be made available, may employ necessary personnel without regard for the Civil Service laws and regulations and the Classification Act of 1923, as amended, and make provisions for supplies, facilities and services necessary to discharge its responsibilities. The Board shall appoint an Executive Director who shall serve as its principal executive officer. It shall be the duty of the Executive Director to ar-

range for the prompt execution of the plans and programs developed and the measures inaugurated by the Board, to supervise the activities of the special attaches and to submit frequent reports to the Board on the steps taken for the rescue and relief of war refugees.

6. The Board shall be directly responsible to the President in carrying out the policy of this Government, as stated in the Preamble, and the Board shall report to him at frequent intervals concerning the steps taken for the rescue and relief of war refugees and shall make such recommendations as the Board may deem appropriate for further action to overcome any difficulties encountered in the rescue and relief of war refugees.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

THE WHITE HOUSE,

22  
January 20, 1944.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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1942-1945**

## Statement by the President Regarding War Atrocities

### March 24, 1944

As the number and ferocity of wartime atrocities increased, President Roosevelt believed it necessary to issue a forceful statement condemning Nazi and Japanese brutalities and specifically mentioning the mass murder of European Jews. In this statement—drafted by the War Refugee Board and revised by the State and War Departments—Roosevelt makes it clear that Allied victory is inevitable and that those responsible for crimes against humanity will be brought to justice. The statement was issued on March 24, 1944. To insure its penetration into German-controlled territories, it was printed in many languages and dropped as leaflets. The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) relayed the translated statement to enemy and occupied countries. This particular draft of the statement was filed in the White House files on April 3, 1944.

*President's Personal File 1-F: Press Releases-Drafts, 1944*

file 4-3-44  
=

P.P.E.  
1/F

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The United Nations are fighting to make a world in which international tyranny and aggression can not exist; a world based upon freedom, equality, and justice; a world in which all persons regardless of race, color or creed may live in peace, honor and dignity.

In the meantime, in most of Europe and in parts of Asia the systematic torture and murder of innocent civilians -- men, women and children -- by the Nazis and the Japanese continue unabated. In areas subjugated by the aggressors, innocent Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, Dutch, Danes, French, Greeks, Russians, Chinese, Filipinos -- and many others -- are being starved or frozen to death, or murdered in cold blood in a campaign of savagery.

The slaughters of Warsaw, Lidice, Kharkov and Nanking -- the brutal torture and murder by the Japanese, not only of civilians but of our own gallant American soldiers and fliers -- these are startling examples of what goes on day by day, year in and year out, wherever the Nazis and the Japs are in military control -- free to follow their barbaric purpose.

And one of the blackest crimes in all history -- begun by the Nazis in the days of peace, and multiplied by them a hundred fold in time of war -- the wholesale systematic murder of the Jews of Europe -- goes on unabated every hour.

It is, therefore, fitting that we should again proclaim our determination that none who participate in any of these acts of savagery shall go unpunished. The United Nations have made it clear that they will pursue the guilty and deliver them up in order that justice be done.

That warning applies not only to the leaders but also to their functionaries and subordinates in Germany and in the satellite countries. All who knowingly take part in the deportation of Jews to their death in Poland, or Norwegians and French to their death in Germany, are equally guilty with the executioner. All who share the guilt shall share the punishment.

Hitler is committing these crimes against humanity in the name of the German people. I ask every German and every man everywhere under Nazi domination to show the world by his actions that in his heart he does not share these insane criminal designs. Let him hide these pursued victims, help them to

get over the borders, and do what he can to save them from the Nazi hangman. I ask him also to keep watch, and to record the evidence that will one day be used to convict the guilty.

In the meantime, and until the victory that is now assured is won, the United States will persevere in its efforts to rescue the victims of brutality of the Nazis and the Japs. In so far as the necessities of military operations permit, this Government will use all means at its command to aid the escape of all intended victims of the Nazi and Japanese executioner -- regardless of race or religion or color. We call upon the free peoples of Europe and Asia temporarily to open their frontiers to all victims of oppression. We shall find havens of refuge for them, and we shall find the means for their maintenance and support until the tyrant is driven from their homelands and they may return.

*Insert A*

In the name of justice and humanity let all freedom loving people rally to this righteous undertaking.

INSERT A

The War Refugee Board recently established by me will implement this policy with every possible resource.

CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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1942-1945**

## Exchange of Letters on Bombing Rail Lines to Auschwitz

### June 24-July 4, 1944

One of the most controversial aspects of the Roosevelt Administration's reaction to the Holocaust is the decision not to bomb rail lines used to transport prisoners to Auschwitz. As early as March 1943, requests to bomb these lines had reached various government officials from Jewish sources both at home and abroad. The Administration was reluctant to take such action, though, fearing the raids might kill the prisoners they were meant to save and divert military resources needed elsewhere to defeat Germany. In 1944, War Refugee Board Director John W. Pehle made several direct appeals to the War Department to bomb various death camps and rail lines. In this June 29 letter, he requests that the rail lines running from Hungary to the Polish death camp at Auschwitz be destroyed. Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy's response on July 4, 1944 states the military's position with regard to such suggestions and reflects Roosevelt's belief that the surest way to end the killing was to defeat Nazi Germany as quickly as possible.

*War Refugee Board Records; Measures Directed at Halting Persecutions; Hungary, Vol. 5; Box 42*

JUN 29 1944

TO: Mr. McGraw, Assistant Secretary of War  
FROM: J. W. Pehle

In connection with my recent conversation with you, I am attaching a copy of a cable just received from our representative in Bern, Switzerland. I wish to direct your attention particularly to the paragraphs concerning the railway lines being used for the deportation of Jews from Hungary to Poland and the proposal of various agencies that vital sections of these lines be bombed.

(Signed) J.W. Pehle

Attachment:

<sup>U</sup>  
<sup>O</sup>  
<sub>P</sub>  
<sub>X</sub>

PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM RECEIVED

FROM: American Legation, Bern  
TO: Secretary of State, Washington  
DATED: June 25, 1944  
NUMBER: 4041

[REDACTED]

McGiellland sends the following for the War Refugee Board.

Reference is made herewith to Legation's message dated June 17, No. 3967, paragraph three.

Now there is no doubt that the majority of the Jewish population east of the Danube especially in eastern northern, and north eastern Hungary has been deported to Poland. Further reliable information confirming this fact has come in in the course of the past two weeks from the following independent sources: (a) Swiss official employee just returned from Budapest, (b) Railway workers in Czech resistance movement, (c) other reliable secret source regard information as to sources as absolutely confidential since any publicity regarding them would endanger lives.

Prior to the deportations, there were two weeks to a month of brutal concentration during which thousands of Jews were crowded together in primitive quarters with insufficient food, clothing and water, regardless of state of health, sex or age. The Hungarian gendarmerie on Laszlo Endre's orders largely carried out this action.

Apparently the actual large scale deportations began about May 15 and lasted until the middle of June. The movement involved 12,000 persons per day: about 7,000 through sub-Carpatho-Russia and 5,000 through Slovakia. Characteristic of such actions, people were deported 60 to 70 per sealed freight wagon for a trip of two to three days without adequate water or food probably resulting in many deaths en route.

Particularly used were the following stretches of railroads:

- (1) Gago-Kaschen-resow-Lubotin-Nowyzez in direction of Osswicim; (2) Satoraljaujhaly-Leginashich Klany-Michalovce-Medzilaborce.\* Also many thousand troops to and from the Polish front were transported daily over this line; (3) Mukache-Lavocze; (4) Galanta-Sered-Leopoldstadt-Moskovce-Trenčin; (5) Vrucky-Zilina.

(\* ) Various letters in this group illegible.

It is

It is urged by all sources of this information in Slovakia and Hungary that vital sections of these lines especially bridges along ONE be bombed as the only possible means of slowing down or stopping future deportations. (This is submitted by me as a proposal of these agencies and I can venture no opinion on its utility).

At least 355,000 Jews already have been deported from the following regions according to figures received.

Approximately 130,000 in sub-Carpathia and Ruthenia mainly from the towns of Beregazest, Falzoviso, Huest, Nagyszellos, Marosaroszliget, Munkacs, Teder and Ungvar.

Approximately 90,000 in Transsylvania from Beasteres, Des, Kolozsvar, Karos Vasarhely, Nagybanya, Nagyvarad, Szaszregan, and Szilegy.

In northern Lukaschau, Gyengyos, Sator Aljauhely and Sarospatak.

Approximately 75,000 in the Tisza region from Kisvarda, Matesalka, Nagykarely, Nyirogyhaza and Szatmar Heneti.

It is also reported by one source that deportations of approximately 20,000 have taken place from certain towns in southern Hungary such as Bacs (\*)ya, Baja, Nagykaniceza, Njvidek and Szabedka and further exi (\*)tions also being made to deport Jews from towns of Dunasszardobhely, Gyoor, Komoren, Miskols, Pecs and Szombathely where persons are already concentrated.

Some 350,000 Jews have already been concentrated in Budapest and environs. This began around June 16 and on the 21st it was to be finished. In the city proper they have been settled in requisitioned blocks of houses in a chess board pattern so that they will not escape bombardment.

Some 15,000 Jews have been crowded into a ghetto in the factory zone along the Danube in Ujpest near Budapest.

The principal individuals in the Sztifay Government responsible for this persecution of Jews are as follows: Laszlo Endre, former sub-prefect of country of Pest now in Ministry of Interior; Lassle Baky, also Interior and Andre Jaross, Minister of Interior.

In an effort to check such continued deportations Ternanesszov (\*) from the United States, we recommend British and Soviet (\*) broadcasts and especially leaflets. If it is

possible,

possible, the Vatican should be prevailed upon to associate itself with such protest.

There is little doubt that many of these Hungarian Jews are being sent to the extermination camps of Auschwitz (Oswiecim) and Birke Nau (Rajska) in western upper Silesia where according to recent reports, since early summer 1942 at least 1,500,000 Jews have been killed. There is evidence that already in January 1944 preparations were being made to receive and exterminate Hungarian Jews in these camps. Soon a detailed report on these camps will be cabled.

HARRISON

(\*) apparent omissions

WAR DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

4 July 1944

*Note d  
JMC*

Mr. John W. Pehle  
Executive Director  
War Refugee Board  
Treasury Department  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Pehle:

I refer to your letter of June 29, inclosing a cable from your representative in Bern, Switzerland, proposing that certain sections of railway lines between Hungary and Poland be bombed to interrupt the transportation of Jews from Hungary.

The War Department is of the opinion that the suggested air operation is impracticable. It could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations and would in any case be of such very doubtful efficacy that it would not amount to a practical project.

The War Department fully appreciates the humanitarian motives which prompted the suggested operation but for the reasons stated above the operation suggested does not appear justified.

Sincerely,

*J. J. McCloy*

John J. McCloy



CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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## Exchange of Letters between Herbert Luft and the War Refugee Board

### August 19-September 29, 1944

When Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board on January 22, 1944, he declared it to be the policy of the United States government “to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war.” This exchange of letters between Herbert Luft of Los Angeles and War Refugee Board Director John W. Pehle reflects the type of personal appeals that were made to the Board as well as the Board’s massive efforts to help Jews suffering in enemy territory.

*War Refugee Board Records; Requests for Specific Aid; File: Luft, Herbert; Box 28*

111 South Manhattan Place  
Apartment 105  
Los Angeles 4, Calif.

August 19, 1944

Executive Office of the President  
War Refugee Board  
Washington 25, D. C.

Attention: Mr. J. W. Pehle,  
Executive Director

Dear Mr. Pehle:-

Re: 486 - 4-22-1944

I just read in a newspaper an announcement of the State Department in regard to the Hungarian Jews and I am happy to learn that the Governments of this country and Great Britain will take care of the Hungarian Jewry as far as they can be transported to Neutral- or United Nations territory. It is my desire to contribute to this aim and wish you would inform me if individuals can give Affidavits of Support for those Refugees to ease their situation or to help them in any other way possible.

At this occasion, I wish to bring to your attention that during recent years thousands of older Jewish men and women ( most of them over 70 years of age ), from Germany, Austria and Poland, were deported to the town of Theresienstadt-Czechoslovakia ( Bohemia ), among them my own parents. I would like to know if there is a way to send the few who are still alive ( most of them already have died in Theresienstadt ) through the facilities of the Red Cross to neutral territory, and if it is possible to contribute food, clothes or money to those who are without these necessities.

Thanking you again for the fine work of the War Refugee Board and trusting to hear from you soon, I remain,

Respectfully yours,

*Herbert Luft*  
HERBERT LUFT

VIA AIR MAIL

SEP 29 1944

Dear Mr. Luft:

Since my recent letter to you, the War Refugee Board, in collaboration with the Department of State, has developed a special program calculated to benefit certain categories of persons in enemy territory. These include, among others, the parents of United States citizens.

While no assurances can be given as to the success of the plan, I suggest that, if you are an American citizen you promptly file with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Department of Justice, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a petition to establish your parents as persons entitled to preference quota immigration visas as the parents of a United States citizen. Your petition should be accompanied by a letter stating that it is being filed at the suggestion of the War Refugee Board. The necessary form is enclosed for your convenience.

If you are not an American citizen, it is regretted that there is no specific action the Board can take with regard to your parents beyond its general efforts in behalf of victims of Nazi persecution. Please be assured, however, that the Board is doing and will continue to do everything in its power to rescue and protect these people.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) J. W. Pehle

J. W. Pehle  
Executive Director

Mr. Herbert Luft  
111 South Manhattan Place  
Apartment 105  
Los Angeles 4, California

Enclosure

6BT X.S.R. 201 —  
EBTowler 9-23-44

CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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## Selected Pages of the Vrba-Wetzler Report on Auschwitz-Birkenau April-October 1944

On April 7, 1944, two Slovakian Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz made a daring escape from the death camp. Having heard German guards talk about the imminent arrival of Hungarian Jews, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler sought to warn the world of the gas chambers and crematoria at the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex in an effort to halt the Hungarian deportations. Upon reaching safety, the two men dictated a detailed report about the camp, including how it functioned, an estimated number of deaths, and drawings of the grounds and gas chambers. The Vrba-Wetzler report was typed up by the Slovakian Jewish Council, but summaries of the report did not begin reaching outside Jewish organizations and Allied governments until June. A full copy of the report—selected pages of which are seen here—did not arrive at the War Refugee Board until October 1944. The report prompted Board Director John Pehle to appeal once again to the War Department to bomb the rail lines and the camp. But, once again, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy rejected the proposal, arguing that Allied bombers would have to fly unescorted over thousands of miles of enemy territory and that the mission would divert resources from military targets. By this time, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews had died at Auschwitz.

No. 1.

I.

THE EXTERMINATION CAMPS OF AUSCHWITZ (Oswiecim)

and BIRKENAU

in Upper Silesia.

-+-----+

F O R W A R D.

-+-----+

Two young Slovak Jews - whose names will not be disclosed for the time being in the interest of their own safety - have been fortunate enough to escape after spending two years in the concentration camps of BIRKENAU, AUSCHWITZ and LUBLIN-MAJDANEK, where they had been deported in 1942 from SLOVAKIA?

One of them was sent on April 13, 1942 from the assembly camp of SERED directly to AUSCHWITZ and then to BIRKENAU, while the other was sent from the camp of NOVAKY to LUBLIN on June 14, 1942 and after a short stay there, transferred to AUSCHWITZ and, later, BIRKENAU.

The following report does not contain everything these two men experienced during their captivity, but only what the one or both together underwent, heard or experienced at first hand. No individual impressions or judgments are recorded and nothing passed on from hear-say.

The report starts with the story of the young Jew who was removed from SERED. The account of his experiences in BIRKENAU begins at the time the second Jew arrived there and is therefore based on the statements of both. Then follows the individual narrative of the second Jew who was sent from NOVAKY to LUBLIN and from there to AUSCHWITZ.

The declarations tally with all the trustworthy yet fragmentary reports hitherto received and the dates given with regard to transports to various camps agree with the official records. These statements can therefore be considered as entirely credible.

—

On the 13th April 1942 our group, consisting of 1,000 men, was loaded into railroad cars at the assembly camp of SERED. The doors were shut so that nothing would reveal the direction of the journey and when they were open after a long while we realized that we had crossed the Slovak frontier and were in ZWARDON. The train had until then been guarded by Hlinka men but was now taken over by SS. guards. After a few of the cars had been uncoupled from our convoy we continued on our way arriving at night at AUSCHWITZ, where we stopped on a side-track. The reason the other cars were left behind was apparently the lack of room at AUSCHWITZ. They joined us, however, a few days later. Upon arrival we were placed in rows of five and counted. There were 643 of us. After a walk of about 20 minutes with our heavy packs (we had left Slovakia well equipped) we reached the concentration camp of AUSCHWITZ.

We were at once led into a huge barrack where on the one side we had to deposit all our luggage and on the other side completely undress, leaving our clothes and valuables behind. Naked, we then proceeded to an adjoining barrack where our heads and bodies were shaved and disinfected with lysol. At the exit every man was given a number which began with 28,600 in consecutive order. With this number in hand we were then herded to a third barrack where so-called registration took place. This consisted of tattooing the numbers we had received in the second barrack on the left side of our chest. The extreme brutality with which this was effected made many of us faint. The particulars of our identity were also recorded. Then we were led in groups of a hundred into a cellar, and later to a barrack where we were issued striped prisoners clothes and wooden clogs. This lasted until 10 a.m. In the afternoon our prisoner's outfit was taken away from us again and replaced by the ragged and dirty remains of Russian uniforms. Thus equipped we were marched off to BIRKENAU.

AUSCHWITZ is a concentration camp for political prisoners under so-called "protective custody". At the time of my arrival, that is in April of 1942, there were about 15,000 prisoners in the camp, the majority of whom were Poles, Germans and civilian Russians under protective custody. A small number of prisoners came under the categories of criminals and "work-shirkers".

AUSCHWITZ camp headquarters controls at the same time the work-camp of BIRKENAU as well as the farm labor camp of HARMENSE. All the prisoners arrive first at AUSCHWITZ where they are provided with a prisoner's immatriculation number and then are either kept there, sent to BIRKENAU or, in very small numbers, to HARMENSE. The prisoners receive consecutive numbers upon arrival. Every number is only used once so that the last number always corresponds to

the number of prisoners actually in the camp. At the time of our escape, that is to say at the beginning of April 1944, the number had risen up to 180,000. At the outset the numbers were tattooed on the left breast, but later, due to their becoming blurred, on the left forearm.

All prisoners, irrespective of category or nationality, are treated the same. However, to facilitate identification, they are distinguished by various coloured triangles sewed on the clothing on the left breast under the immatriculation number. The first letter indicates the nationality of the prisoner. This letter (for instance "P" for Poles) appears in the middle of the triangle. The coloured triangles have the following meaning :

red triangle	political prisoners under protective custody.
green "	professional criminals.
black "	"dodgers" (labor slackers), "antisocials" (mostly Russians).
pink "	homosexuals.
violet "	Members of the religious sect of "Bibelforscher".

The Jewish prisoners differ from the Aryan prisoners in that their triangle (which in the majority of cases is red) is turned into a David's star by adding yellow points.

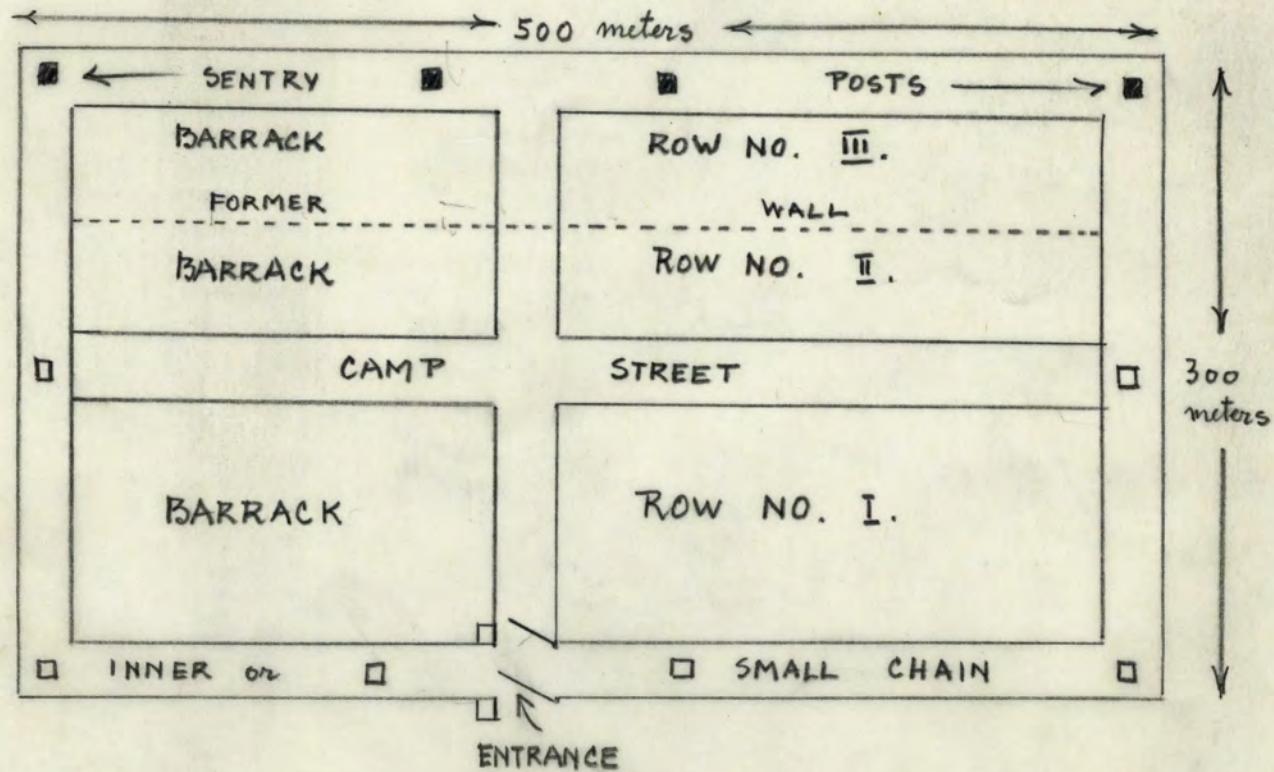
Within the enclosure of the camp of AUSCHWITZ there are several factories : a war production plant, Deutscher Aufrüstungswerk (DAW), a factory belonging to the KRUPP works and one to the SIEMENS concern. Outside the boundary of the camp is a tremendous plant covering several square kilometers named "BUNA". The prisoners work in all the aforementioned factories.

The prisoners' actual living quarters, if such a term may at all be used, inside the camp proper cover an area of approximately 500 by 300 meters surrounded by a double row of concrete posts about 3 meters high which are connected (both inside and outside) to one another by a dense netting of high-tension wires fixed into the posts by insulators. Between these two rows of posts, at intervals of 150 meters, there are 5 meters high watch-towers, equipped with machine-guns and searchlights. In front of the inner high-tension circle there is further an ordinary wire fence. Merely touching this fence is answered by a stream of bullets from the watch-towers. This system is called "the small or inner chain of sentry posts". The camp itself is composed of three rows of houses. Between the first and second row is the camp street and between the second and third there used to be a wall. The Jewish girls deported from Slovakia in March and April 1942, over 7,000 of them, lived in the houses separated by this wall up to the middle

of August 1942. After these girls had been removed to BIRKENAU the wall between the second and third row of houses was removed. The camp entry road cuts across the row of houses while over the entrance gate, which is of course always heavily guarded, stands the ironic inscription : "Work brings freedom".

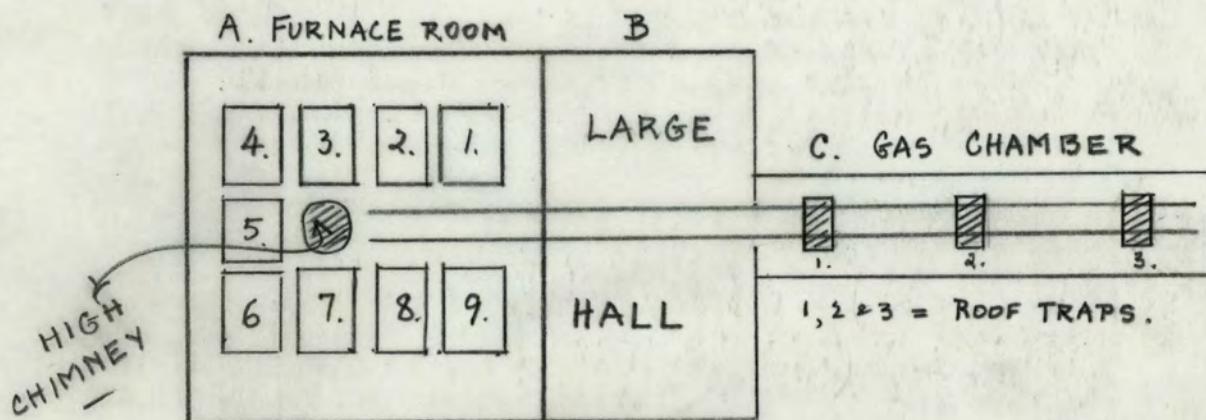
At a radius of some 2,000 meters the whole camp is encircled by a second line called "The big or outer chain of sentry posts" also with watch-towers every 150 meters. Between the inner and outer chain of sentry posts are the factories and other workshops. The towers of the inner chain are only manned at night when the high-tension current is switched into the double row of wires. During day-time the garrison of the inner chain of sentry posts is withdrawn, and the men take up duty in the outer chain. Escape through these sentry posts - and many attempts have been made - is practically impossible. Getting through the inner circle of posts at night is completely impossible, and the towers of the outer chain are so close to one another (one every 150 meters, i.e. giving each tower a sector with a 75 meters radius to watch), that approaching unnoticed is out of the question. The guards shoot without warning. The garrison of the outer chain is withdrawn at twilight, but only after it has been ascertained that all the prisoners are within the inner circle. If the roll-call reveals that a prisoner is missing, sirens immediately sound the alarm.

### ROUGH GROUND PLAN OF AUSCHWITZ



During the month of February 1943, 2 contingents arrived daily. They included Polish, French and Dutch Jews who, in the main, were sent to the gas chambers. The number gassed during this month can well be estimated at 90,000.

At the end of February 1943 a new modern crematorium and gassing plant was inaugurated at BIRKENAU. The gassing and burning of the bodies in the Birch forest was discontinued, the whole job being taken over by the four specially built crematoria. The large ditch was filled in, the ground levelled and the ashes used as before for fertilizer at the farm labour camp of HERMENSE, so that to-day it is almost impossible to find traces of the dreadful mass murder which took place here.



At present there are four crematoria in operation at BIRKENAU, two large ones, I and II, and two smaller ones, III and IV. Those of type I and II consist of 3 parts, i.e. : a) the furnace room; b) the large hall; and c) the gas chamber. A huge chimney rises from the furnace room around which are grouped nine furnaces, each having four openings. Each opening can take three normal corpses at once and after an hour and a half the bodies are completely burnt. This corresponds to a daily capacity of about 3,000 bodies. Next to this is a large "reception hall" which is arranged so as to give the impression of the anti-chamber of a bathing establishment. It holds 2,000 people and apparently there is a similar waiting room on the floor below. From there a door and a few steps lead down into the very long and narrow gas chamber. The walls of this chamber are also camouflaged with simulated entries to shower rooms in order to mislead the victims. The roof is fitted with 3 traps which can be hermetically closed from the outside. A track leads from the gas chamber towards the furnace room. The gassing takes place as follows: the unfortunate victims are brought into hall (b) where they are told to undress. To complete the fiction that they are going to bathe, each person receives a towel and a small piece of soap issued by two men clad in white coats.

Then they are crowded into the gas chamber (c) in such numbers that there is of course only standing room. To compress this crowd into the narrow space shots are often fired to induce those already at the far end to huddle still closer together. When everybody is inside the heavy doors are closed. Then there is a short pause, presumably to allow the room temperature to rise to a certain level, after which SS. men with gas masks climb on the roof, open the traps and shake down a preparation in powder form out of tin cans labelled "CYKLON" "For use against vermin" which are manufactured by a Hamburg concern. It is presumed that this is a "CYANIDE" mixture of some sort which turns into gas at a certain temprature. After 3 minutes everyone in the chamber is dead. No one is known to have survived this ordeal, although it was not uncommon to discover signs of life after the primitive measures employed in the Birch wood. The chamber is then opened, aired and the "special squad" carts the bodies on flat trucks to the furnace rooms where the burning takes place. Crematoria III and IV work on nearly the same principle but their capacity is only half as large. Thus the total capacity of the four cremating and gassing plants at BIRKENAU amounts to about 6,000 daily.

On principle only Jews are gassed; Aryans very seldom, as they are usually given "special treatment" by shooting. Before the crematoria were put into service, the shooting took place in the Birch wood and the bodies were burnt in the long trench; later, however, executions took place in the large hall of one of the crematoria which has been provided with a special installation for this purpose.

Prominent guests from Berlin were present at the inauguration of the first crematorium in March 1943. The "program" consisted of the gassing and burning of 8,000 Cracow Jews. The guests, both officers and civilians, were extremely satisfied with the results and the special peep-hole fitted into the door of the gas chamber was in constant use. They were lavish in their praise of this newly erected installation.

• • •

109,000 - 119,000 At the beginning of March 1943, 45,000 Jews arrived from Saloniki. 10,000 of them came to the camp including a small percentage of the women; some 30,000 however went straight to the cremating establishment. Of the 10,000 nearly all died a short time later from a contagious illness resembling malaria. They also died of typhus due to the general conditions prevailing in the camp.

Malaria among the Jews and typhus took such toll among the prisoners in general that the "selections" were

Careful estimate of the number of Jews gassed  
in BIRKENAU between April 1942 and April 1944 (according  
to countries of origin).

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Poland (transported by truck) .....	approximately	300,000
" " " train .....	"	600,000
Holland .....	"	100,000
Greece .....	"	45,000
France .....	"	150,000
Belgium .....	"	50,000
Germany .....	"	60,000
Yougoslavia, Italy and Norway .....	"	50,000
Lithuania .....	"	50,000
Bohemia, Moravia and Austria .....	"	30,000
Slovakia .....	"	30,000
Various camps for foreign Jews in Poland	"	300,000
<hr/>		
approximately 1,765,000		

### III.

On August 6, 1944, a report was received in Switzerland covering the happenings in Birkenau during the period between April 7 and May 27. This second report was drawn-up by two other young Jews who succeeded in escaping from this camp and reaching Slovakia. Their declarations complete the first report, particularly as regards the arrival of the Hungarian Jews in Birkenau, as well as adding certain new details not contained in the previous accounts. It has not been possible, however, to check the origin of this "second report" as closely as it was the first.

\*  
\* \*

After the flight of the two Slovak Jews from Birkenau on April 7, 1944 great excitement reigned in the camp. The "Political Division" of the Gestapo instituted a thorough-going investigation, and the friends and superiors of the two escapees were closely questioned, although in vain. Since the two had held posts as "Block Recorders" all Jews exercising such functions, by way of punishment and also as

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## War Refugee Board Report on Number of Persons Rescued February 19, 1945

In February 1945, after its first full year in operation, the War Refugee Board sought to quantify its success in rescuing Jews. As can be seen in this report, the Board facilitated the rescue and relocation of over 126,000 Jews to neutral or Allied nations. This figure does not include an additional 75,000 Jews that were not relocated but that were saved as a result of other Board efforts. But these successes by the Roosevelt Administration in rescuing Jews between 1944 and 1945 pale in comparison to the tragic figures on the pages that follow that estimate the total number of Jews killed and the overall reduction of Jewish populations throughout Europe. These figures also raise the question of how many more lives could have been saved had the War Refugee Board been established earlier.

*War Refugee Board; General Correspondence: War Refugee Board, Vol. 3; Box 33*

War Refugee Board

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
WAR REFUGEE BOARD

INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE February 19, 1945

TO : The Executive Director

FROM : P. J. McCormack

Re : Number of Persons Rescued Since the Establishment of the War Refugee Board.

I. Movements to Neutral and Allied Areas

Roumania to Turkey	6,527
Bulgaria to Turkey	448
To North Africa	906 (Fedhala)
	400 (Phillipville)
To Middle East	45,000
To Palestine	10,000
Italy to United States	985 (Ft. Ontario)
Within Yugoslavia	4,840
To Switzerland	9,172 plus several thousand in early 1944
Hungary to Roumania	2,000
Occupied to liberated Slovakia	250
Greece via Turkey to Middle East	900
Transnistria to Roumania	48,000
Spain to Portugal	1,532
France to Spain	2,638
Norway, Finland, and Baltic Areas	
to Sweden	4,770
Yugoslavia to Italy	11,229
Protective Documents in Hungary	14,000
Latin American Passport Recognition	1,000
Spanish Sephardic Recognition	555
Portuguese Sephardic Recognition	400
Restoration Turkish Citizenship	
certain Jews	700
Exchange (actual and/or lot improved)	1,000
United States Visas	4,350
	<hr/>
	126,604

II. Situation in Liberated Areas

(See Attachments 1, 2, and 3.)

DM

Attachment 1

Source: Bern's 7616, November 18, 1944

(Cable from Lichtheim and Reigner, WJC Representatives in Switzerland,  
to Nahum Goldman, New York.)

I.

Estimated  
Deported, Killed, Starved

150,000	France	337
27,000	Belgium	404
140,000	Holland	413
2,000	Denmark	
10,000	Italy	
160,000	Germany	
80,000	Austria	
70,000	Protectorate	
80,000	Slovakia	
65,000	Yugoslavia	
450,000	Hungary	
200,000	Rumania (Bukovina, Bessarabia)	
55,000	Greece (mainly Salonika)	
220,000	Baltic States	
<u>2,800,000</u>	Poland	
<u>4,509,000</u>	TOTAL*	

\* To this must be added 1,000,000 (probably more) killed in Russia during German occupation of Ukraine and White Russia.

II A. Estimated Living

(Exclusive of Concentration Camps)

120,000	France
20,000	Belgium
15,000	Holland
25,000	Italy
15,000	Sweden*
43,000	Switzerland**
3,000	Spain and Portugal
10,000	Germany and Austria
2,000	Czechoslovakia
250,000	Hungary
300,000	Rumania
45,000	Bulgaria
12,000	Greece
50,000	Poland
<u>910,000</u>	TOTAL

II B. Labor and Concentration  
Camp Estimate

36,000	Theresienstadt
20,000	Bergen Belsen and similar camps
200,000	Various labor camps in Poland, Silesia, Germany and Austria
<u>256,000</u>	TOTAL

Total Estimated Living: 1,166,000

\* Including 5,000 refugees from Denmark and Norway

\*\* Including 26,000 refugees

Attachment 2

Source: New York Times 2/11/45 Edition (Palestine 2/6/45 delayed)

by Julian Louis Meltzer

Eliahu Dobkin, Immigration Department Head, Jewish Agency, estimates 1,200,000 Jews survive of Europe's 6,000,000 pre-war population.

Of these survivors 300,000 are in German control, and 900,000 are in liberated, allied and neutral territory.

<u>Pre-war (1939) Estimate</u>		<u>Present Population Estimate</u>
360,000	France	180,000
900,000	Roumania	300,000
3,500,000	Poland	350,000*
	Bulgaria	45,000
	Greece	10,000
	Belgium	18,000
	Italy (liberated)	30,000
	Switzerland	27,000 refugees
	Hungary	100,000
	Middle East (exclusive of Palestine)	800,000
	Norway	**
	Denmark	***

\* Of above figure 50,000 are in liberated portions of Poland, while 200,000 are in Russia.

\*\* Except for those resident in Sweden, balance are in Theresienstadt.

\*\*\* Idem.

Attachment 3

Source: New York Times 2/17/45 Edition (Paris, Feb. 16)

Quoting Dr. Jos. Schwartz, JDC.

Estimated 500,000 of Europe's (not including Russia, but including Russian-controlled Europe) 6,000,000 Jews had escaped destruction by emigration.

Estimated 1,000,000 (same sectors) - 1,500,000 were left on the continent as follows:

<u>Pre-war (1939) Estimate</u>		<u>Present Population Estimate</u>
340,000	France	170,000
3,500,000	Poland (Incomplete)	100,000 - 200,000
600,000	Germany	Almost no German Jews left
50,000	Italy	20,000
90,000	Belgium	20 - 30,000
140,000	Netherlands	10 - 15,000
360,000	Czechoslovakia	45 - 50,000*
180,000	Austria	200

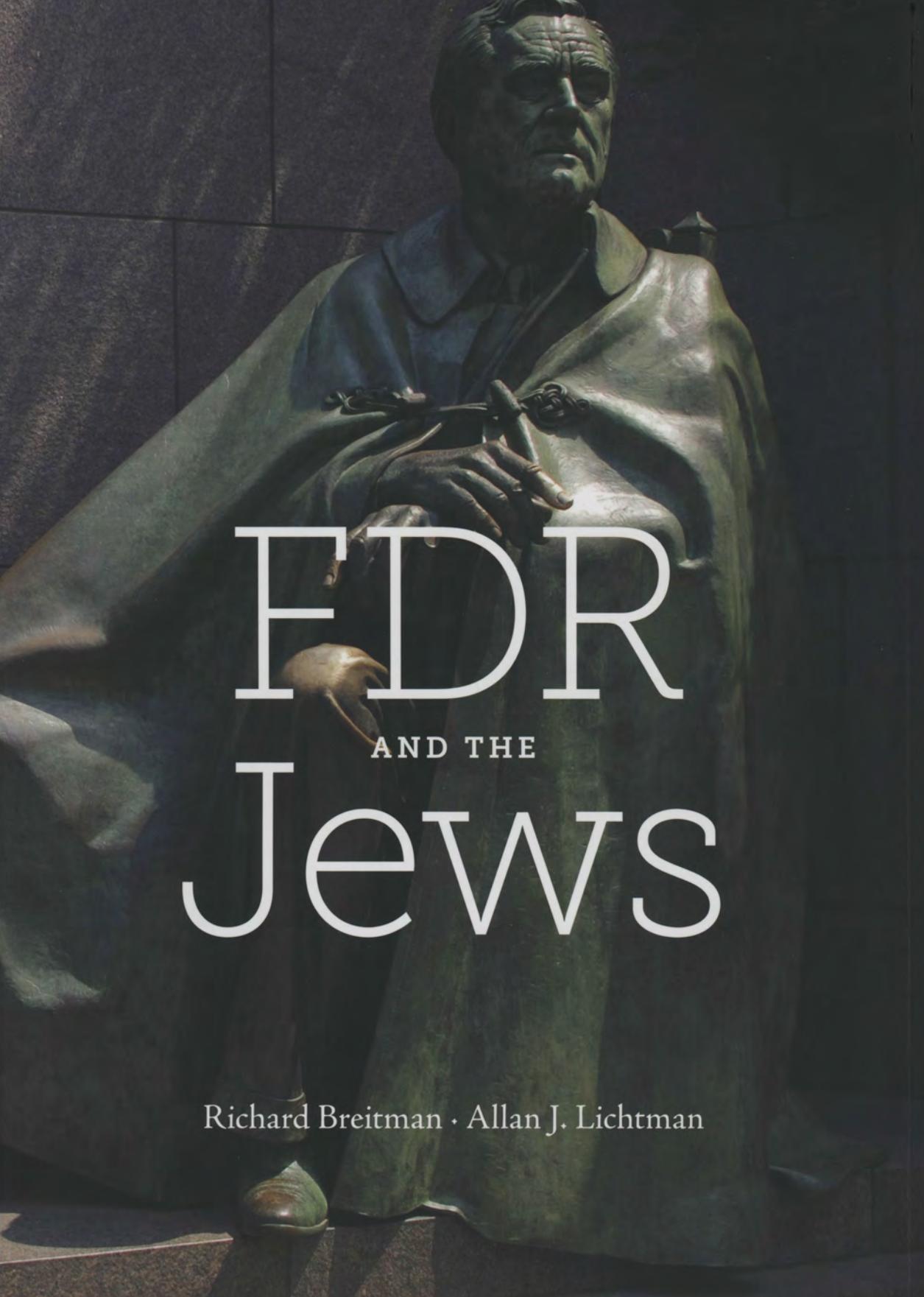
\* Includes Theresienstadt population made up of Jews from all or many continental European countries.

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## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Roosevelt lived during the war and the Holocaust, but he inhabited a pre-Holocaust world. Few of his contemporaries recognized the political or moral significance of the events we now scrutinize carefully. Ironically, our work suggests that American Jews of Roosevelt's own time came close to a balanced and accurate assessment of their president. Although most American Jews—both leaders and ordinary folk—revered the president, they were not blind to the limitations or the constraints under which he operated. Even Jewish advocates close to FDR recognized that he often failed to turn humanitarian principles into action to benefit Jewish victims of Nazism, especially during his first term and the period from the outbreak of World War II through the formation of the War Refugee Board. They understood, however, that he was the first president to intervene part of the time on behalf of their oppressed brethren abroad—and during world crises of unparalleled scope and gravity. They also knew that without his leadership, the resistance to Nazi aggression would have been much weaker than it was, perhaps even fatally so. For Jews, he posed a far better choice than the political opponents of his era, not just in his response to Jewish peril, but also in his domestic and foreign policies, and his integration of Jews into American government.

*Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, FDR and the Jews (Belknap Press, 2013), 328-329*



# FDR AND THE Jews

Richard Breitman · Allan J. Lichtman

**CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

America's response to the Holocaust was the result of action and inaction on the part of many people. In the forefront was Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose steps to aid Europe's Jews were very limited. If he had wanted to, he could have aroused substantial public backing for a vital rescue effort by speaking out on the issue. If nothing else, a few forceful statements by the President would have brought the extermination news out of obscurity and into the headlines. But he had little to say about the problem and gave no priority at all to rescue....It appears that Roosevelt's overall response to the Holocaust was deeply affected by political expediency. Most Jews supported him unwaveringly, so an active rescue policy offered little political advantage. A pro-Jewish stance, however, could lose votes. American Jewry's great loyalty to the President thus weakened the leverage it might have exerted on him to save European Jews. The main justification for Roosevelt's conduct in the face of the Holocaust is that he was absorbed in waging a global war. He lived in a maelstrom of overpowering events that gripped his attention, to the exclusion of most other matters....Roosevelt's personal feelings about the Holocaust cannot be determined. He seldom committed his inner thoughts to paper....There are indications that he was concerned about Jewish problems. But he gave little attention to them, did not keep informed about them, and instructed his staff to divert Jewish questions to the State Department....In the end, the era's most prominent symbol of humanitarianism turned away from one of history's most compelling moral challenges.

*David S. Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945  
(Pantheon Books, 1984), 311-313*

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T H E

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# ABANDONMENT OF THE JEWS

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A M E R I C A

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H O L O C A U S T

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DAVID S. WYMAN

**CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

No one of us, including scholars and historians, can review the bestial crimes of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi thugs and all those who carried out their orders to kill innocent men, women, and children, without hanging our heads in sorrow. But we must never forget that it was the Nazis who committed this most terrible crime led by a psychopath, Adolf Hitler....How ironic that our greatest president of [the twentieth] century—the man Hitler hated most, the leader constantly derided by the anti-Semites, vilified by Goebbels as a “mentally ill cripple” and as “that Jew Rosenfeld,” violently attacked by the isolationist press—how ironic that he 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 it is the killers who bear the responsibility for their deeds. To say that “we are all guilty” allows the truly guilty to avoid that responsibility. We must remember for all the days of our lives that it was Hitler who imagined the Holocaust and the Nazis who carried it out. We were not their accomplices. We destroyed them. Winston Churchill once said that Franklin Roosevelt was the greatest man he had ever known. President Roosevelt’s life, he said, “must be regarded as one of the commanding events of human destiny.” Franklin Delano Roosevelt, more than any other American, is entitled to the historical credit for mobilizing and leading the forces that destroyed the Nazi barbarians and so saved western civilization.

*William J. vanden Heuvel, “America and the Holocaust,” American Heritage Magazine, July/August 1999*

The United States and FDR watched the extermination of the Jews with such total indifference that they were actually accomplices—or so says a growing number of historians. Is this true?

# America and the Holocaust



*Above left, part of a crowd of more than one hundred thousand assembled at Madison Square Park in New York City in the spring of 1944 to protest the Nazi massacre of Jews; above, prisoners at Ebensee Concentration Camp, in the Austrian Alps, liberated by the 80th Division, U.S. 3d Army, May 7, 1945.*

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 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. In a book published in 1937, Winston Churchill—to whom free humanity everywhere must be eternally indebted and without whose courage and strength the defeat of Nazi Germany could never have been achieved—described Hitler's treatment of the Jews, stating that "concentration camps pock-mark the German soil . . ." and concluding his essay by writing that "the world lives on hopes that the worst is over and that we may live to see Hitler a gentler figure in a happier age." Roosevelt had no such hopes. Thomas Mann, the most famous of the non-Jewish refugees from

# America and the Holocaust

BY WILLIAM J. VANDEN HEUVEL

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## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

With almost sixty years of hindsight, Roosevelt's silence seems a strange lapse in the record of a President who normally spoke to Americans on grave world issues with courage, candor and foresight. That lapse is underscored by Roosevelt's lateness in pushing his officials to save Jewish refugees and his reluctance to seriously entertain whether bombing Auschwitz might save some of Hitler's intended victims without postponing victory in Europe. Roosevelt's tendency to shunt Hitler's war against the Jews to a separate compartment of his mind compromised his planning for postwar Germany. Today, any scholar trying to explain why Hitlerite Germany was uniquely evil would naturally start with Hitler's zeal, shared by many Germans, to murder an entire people. Instead, when Roosevelt privately spoke of the problem with Germany, he indulged in silly rants about Prussians, military uniforms and marching and did not mention genocide at all—even though he had privately learned more about the Holocaust than most Americans of the time. No one should expect a President to understand such a problem with the sophistication of a scholar who has twenty-twenty hindsight. But Roosevelt's failure to note the biggest thing wrong with Hitler's Germany had serious consequences.

*Michael Beschloss, The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1941-1945*  
(Simon & Schuster, 2002) 284-285

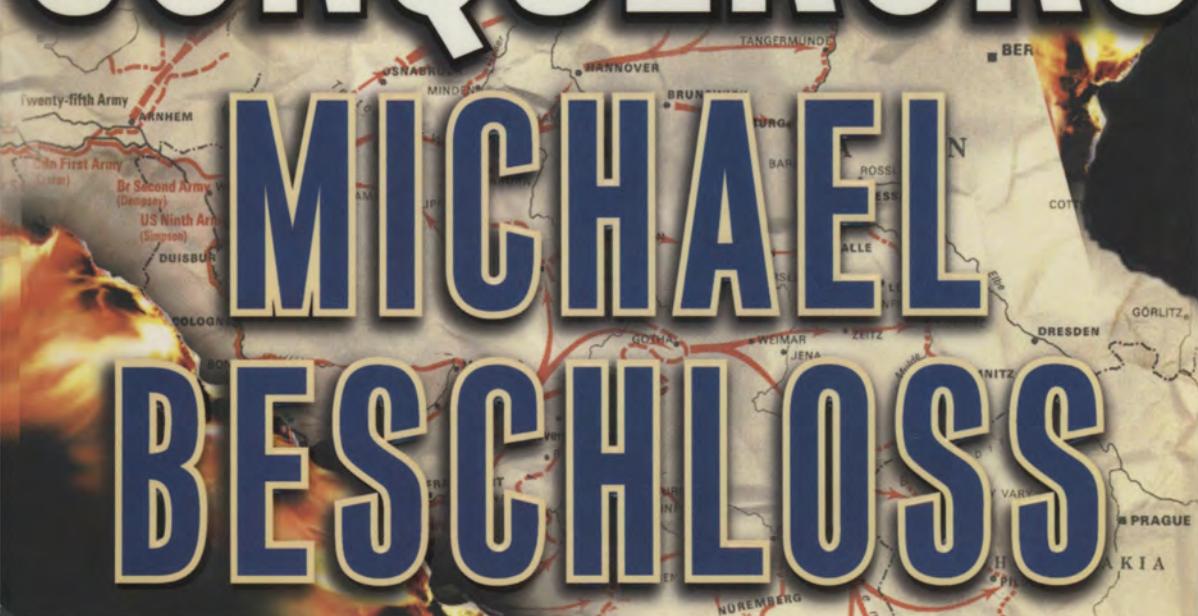


Roosevelt,  
Truman  
and the  
Destruction  
of Hitler's  
Germany

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1941-1945

# THE CONQUERORS



MICHAEL  
BESCHLOSS

**CONFRONT THE ISSUE  
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1942-1945**

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

The War Refugee Board represented a small gesture of atonement by a nation whose apathy and inaction were exploited by Adolf Hitler. As he moved systematically toward the total destruction of the Jews, the government and the people of the United States remained bystanders. Oblivious to the evidence which poured from official and unofficial sources, Americans went about their business unmoved and unconcerned. Those who tried to awaken the nation were dismissed as alarmists, cranks or Zionists. Many Jews were as disinterested as their Christian countrymen. The bystanders to cruelty became bystanders to genocide. The holocaust has ended. The six million lie in nameless graves. But what of the future? Is genocide now unthinkable, or are the potential victims somewhere in the world going about their business, devoted to their children, aspiring to a better life, unaware of a gathering threat? Who are the potential victims? Who the bystanders?

*Arthur D. Morse, While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy (Random House, 1968), 383-384*



# While Six Million Died

## A CHRONICLE OF AMERICAN APATHY

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ARTHUR D. MORSE

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In January 1944 President Roosevelt was shown the startling conclusions of a secret memorandum. Its title:

**Acquiescence of this Government in  
the Murder of the Jews.** The untold and  
shocking story behind

[CONTINUED ON FRONT FLAP]