

HOSTING SCHOLARLY LECTURES AND EXPERT TALKS

Libraries may want to engage an expert speaker or host a panel of scholars on one of the specific topics or themes in the *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition. This document provides suggestions for locating expert speakers and/or panelists as well as ideas for topics of discussion related to the themes of the exhibition.

Identifying Local Experts or Scholars

Utilizing local experts and scholars, either as an individual program or as part of a panel discussion, can help localize the history for your community and provide the opportunity for them to ask questions. Here are some tips:

- Reach out to local colleges and universities and describe your planned program. Academic librarians may have a sense of scholars (or even students) working in that area. Consider looking beyond the history department to journalism, art, political science, and other relevant disciplines.
- Utilize your volunteers or board members—do they know of local experts on a particular topic? A local historical society may also be a good place to find experts.
- Consider identifying practitioners—people who currently do the type of work that you are discussing in the program. They may provide a unique perspective on the motives, pressures, and fears that may have influenced people in the 1930s and 1940s who played a similar role.
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has connections to scholars throughout the country. If you are looking for someone with a particular expertise, contact Eric Schmalz (eschmalz@ushmm.org), who may be able to connect you with an expert in your area, or someone willing to travel.

Preparing for a Program

- Make sure to talk to your speaker or panelists in advance of the program to review the content and themes of the *Americans and the Holocaust* traveling exhibition and your goals for the program. If you are hosting a panel, allow the panelists to meet each other in advance, either virtually or in person.
- Review logistical information with all speakers and panelists.
 - What is the schedule for the program?
 - How long will speakers be expected to speak?
 - What themes or topics would you like their remarks to address?
 - Knowing your community, are there topics or issues you would like to avoid because they could distract from the goals of the program?
 - Should speakers prepare remarks in advance, or will a moderator ask questions?
 - Will speakers want to show images or video?
 - Will the program be recorded?
 - How will the audience question and answer be structured?
- Speakers and panelists should view the exhibition at the library in advance of the program. If this is not possible due to travel or time constraints, share the [online exhibition](#) with speakers.

Key Concepts and Programming Ideas:

1) Americans had information.

Americans could read, see, and hear news about Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews in their newspapers and magazines, on the radio, and in newsreels, as well as information about events of World War II as events were unfolding.

- Consider hosting a panel conversation that includes a journalism or communications professor and a local reporter to talk about the media landscape in the 1930s and 1940s. This program could showcase local coverage of Nazism, available through the [History Unfolded database](#) or historical newspapers available at your library.
- Consider inviting a media studies professor to discuss the landscape of popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s and how the ways in which Americans got their news impacted what they understood about Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews.
- Consider inviting journalists who work at different kinds of media companies—perhaps a TV anchor, a print journalist, or even a social media influencer—to discuss how the type of media and intended audience affects how information is presented. Have the audience view and the panelists reflect on how media was consumed in the 1930s, including newsreels, radio, and print journalism (and potentially the difference between coverage in Black newspapers and those intended for white audiences).

2) Americans faced many competing priorities.

Despite this information, public opinion polls show that most Americans did not want to accept more Jewish refugees into the country. Racism and antisemitism at home, war weariness from World War I, conditions during the Great Depression, fears of communism and spies, and eventually World War II all competed with the plight of endangered Jews for Americans' attention. Also, even though Americans learned about atrocities, many were skeptical of the reports.

- Consider hosting a panel including a historian of immigration and refugee studies and a professor of immigration law (or immigration lawyer) in order to discuss the historical context and legal ramifications of US immigration policy during the 1930s.
- Consider hosting a panel including a historian who studies communism, a military historian, or a historian who focuses on ethnic studies to discuss the various pressures and prejudices present in the American public in the 1930s and 1940s and how these may have influenced Americans' response.
- Consider hosting a panel with a historian who studies the presidency and a political scientist to discuss the ways in which politicians are often influenced by public opinion—or seek to influence it—using examples from the exhibition.

3) Americans debated.

Some Americans reacted when they learned about the Nazi threat to European Jews. They took action as individuals, members of institutions, or government officials. These efforts were shaped by the time period and the resources they had available.

- Consider inviting a representative from a local humanitarian aid organization, preferably one that sends aid overseas (like the American Red Cross or Doctors Without Borders), along with a historian of the 1930s and 1940s, to discuss what factors influence Americans' interest and willingness to address overseas crises.
- Consider inviting experts on immigration policy to discuss the role that United States immigration policy played in the refugee crisis affecting European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s and the similarities and differences between those challenges and the experiences of immigrants and refugees today.
- Consider inviting a sports journalist and a 20th century historian to discuss the intersection of politics and sports, particularly focusing on the debate in the United States in the 1930s over whether to boycott the 1936 Olympic Games.

4) Americans focused on winning the war.

The United States and other Allied forces prioritized military victory over humanitarian aid during World War II. Although the United States could have done more to aid the victims of Nazi Germany and its collaborators, large-scale rescue was impossible by the time the United States entered the war.

- Consider inviting a US military historian to provide context about the Allied military possibilities and limitations in the 1940s.
- Consider creating a panel to discuss how World War II impacted your local community. This panel could utilize voices from the local historical society, local historians, and members of the community who may remember that time. The program could include discussion of major local news stories from the time, the ways in which local businesses participated in the war effort, the experiences of local soldiers who fought, and discussion of how the community changed during the war.