

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF NEW RESEARCH INCLUDED IN *AMERICANS AND THE HOLOCAUST*

The *Americans and the Holocaust* exhibition includes new scholarly research. This overview is meant to assist librarians in answering questions related to the Museum's research and to identify resources to answer questions related to specific topics covered in the exhibit.

### INTRODUCTION PANEL

The text on this panel introduces the exhibit, noting that the overall exhibit examines “the motives, pressures, and fears that shaped Americans’ responses to Nazism, war, and genocide.”

The looping silent film provides context, illuminating some of the challenges facing Americans in the fifteen years between the end of World War I (1918) and 1932, the year before Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany and Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated as president of the United States.

### Recommended reading related to the interwar period:

Blom, Philipp. *Fracture: Life and Culture in the West, 1918-1938*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

Katznelson, Ira. *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*. New York: Liveright, 2013.

Okrent, Daniel. *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics, and the Law that Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and other European Immigrants Out of America*. New York: Scribner, 2019.

### WHAT DID AMERICANS KNOW?

This section explores what Americans could have read and known about the Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews.

Much of this section of the exhibition--particularly the interactive newspaper map located on the tablet--stem from the Museum's History Unfolded newspaper collection project. Many of the newspapers included were discovered by “citizen historians”--teachers, students, librarians, and history buffs who voluntarily searched local newspapers and submitted articles to the Holocaust Museum's online database.

### Recommended reading related to “What Did Americans Know?”:

Larsen, Erik. *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin*. New York: Crown, 2011.

Lipstadt, Deborah E. *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945*. New York: Free Press, 1986.

Nagorski, Andrew. *Hitlerland: American Eyewitnesses to the Nazis Rise to Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

*Race*. Directed by Stephen Hopkins. Forecast Pictures, 2016.

## DID AMERICANS HELP JEWISH REFUGEES?

This section explores the American immigration process in the 1930s-1940s, the challenges faced by Jews attempting to emigrate from Europe and immigrate to the United States, and the stories of a few Americans who made the effort to assist refugees.

The immigration process, as displayed on the panel “Obstacles to Immigration,” includes most of the steps potential immigrants had to complete to obtain a US immigration visa. It is not comprehensive, as the process varied by location, date, and the particular circumstances of each refugee.

The chart on the “Immigration Restricted” panel was compiled from reports submitted to the State Department from the US consulate in Berlin. Each month, the US consulate sent raw data of the number and types of visas that had been issued to immigrants born in Germany. Although there were no special visas for Jews, US diplomats reported that by the late 1930s, the vast majority of immigrants were Jewish. (And, in fact, Jewish immigrants made up more than 50% of all immigration to the United States in 1939.) These reports are available in the State Department records at the National Archives in College Park, MD.

Visitors may believe that the infamous ship, the MS *St. Louis*, which was turned away from Cuba and not welcomed into the United States, was the only ship carrying Jewish refugees trying to immigrate to the United States. In fact, the *St. Louis* is an anomaly: the United States did not turn away Jewish refugees carrying US immigration visas. This data animation displays the ships carrying Jewish immigrants to the United States between March 1938-October 1941. This data was collected by making a list of all the ships traveling from Europe to New York harbor, as reported in the daily *New York Times* “Shipping and Mails” column. The Museum historian then searched the passenger manifests for all of these ships on ancestry.com and counted the number of Jewish refugees. (Until 1943, “Hebrew” was a self-identified “racial category” immigrants could choose on US shipping manifests.)

## Recommended reading related to “Did Americans Help Jewish Refugees?”:

*50 Children: The Rescue Mission of Mr. and Mrs. Kraus*. Directed by Steven Pressman. HBO Documentary Films and PerlePress Productions, 2013.

Breitman, Richard. *The Berlin Mission: The American Who Resisted Nazi Germany from Within*. New York: Public Affairs, 2019.

Dobbs, Michael. *The Unwanted: America, Auschwitz, and a Village Caught in Between*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.

Ogilvie, Sarah A, and Scott Miller. *Refuge Denied: the St. Louis Passengers and the Holocaust*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.

Pressman, Steven. *50 Children: One Ordinary American Couple's Extraordinary Rescue Mission Into the Heart of Nazi Germany*. New York: Harper, 2014.

## WHY DID AMERICANS GO TO WAR?

This section of the exhibition explores the debates in American society over whether to proactively enter World War II, aid Great Britain and France, or stay out of the war entirely.

### Recommended reading related to “Why Did Americans Go to War?”:

Berg, A. Scott. *Lindbergh*. New York: G.P Putnam's Sons, 2013.

Breitman, Richard, and Allan J Lichtman. *FDR and the Jews*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013.

Miner, Richard H., and Mandeville Special Collections Library. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. New York: New Press, 1999.

Olson, Lynne. *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight over World War II, 1939-1941*. New York: Random House, 2013.

Reeves, Richard. *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2015.

## HOW DID AMERICANS RESPOND TO THE HOLOCAUST?

Americans first learned of the plan by Nazi Germany and its collaborators to murder all European Jews in November 1942. Often, the history of the Holocaust is told separately from the history of World War II. This exhibition--particularly the film in this section of the exhibition--seeks to put the timeline of these two events together (as they were experienced at the same time by people who lived through this period).

### Recommended reading related to “How did Americans Respond to the Holocaust?”:

Erbelding, Rebecca. *Rescue Board: The Untold Story of America's Efforts to Save the Jews of Europe*. New York: Doubleday, 2018.

Henderson, Bruce. *Sons and Soldiers: The Jews Who Escaped the Nazis and Returned for Retribution*. New York: William Morrow, 2017.

Laqueur, Walter, and Richard Breitman. *Breaking the Silence: Secret Mission of Eduard Schulte, Who Brought the World News of the Final Solution*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Wyman, David S. *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.