

*Anti-Semitism and American Refugee
Immigration Policy during the Holocaust:
A reassessment*

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Contents

Illustrations	1
Archival abbreviations	2
INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER ONE: Nativism on Capitol Hill	6
CHAPTER TWO: Fear and Paranoia in Foggy Bottom	32
CHAPTER THREE: Refugees in the Press	55
CONCLUSION	77
Appendix	79
Bibliography	91

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: <i>To the Conscience of America.</i>	81
Figure 2: <i>Action not pity can save millions now!</i>	82
Figure 3: <i>For sale to Humanity, 70,000 Jews.</i>	83
Figure 4: <i>What is the shocking truth about saving the lives of the European Jews?</i>	84
Figure 5: <i>To 5,000,000 Jews in the Nazi Death-Trap Bermuda was a 'Cruel Mockery'.</i>	85
Figure 6: <i>They are driven the death daily.</i>	86
Figure 7: <i>Time Races Death.</i>	87
Figure 8: <i>The Conscience of America Speaks!</i>	88
Figure 9: <i>25 Square miles or 2,000,000 lives.</i>	89
Figure 10: <i>Raise your voice to save millions from Nazi Slaughter!</i>	90
Table 1: <i>Quota–Immigration Numbers: January–June 1941 v. July–December 1941.</i>	53
Table 2: <i>Jewish organisations' advertisements: by size and publication.</i>	79
Table 3: <i>Jewish organisations' advertisements: by size and commissioning organisation.</i>	82

ARCHIVAL ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

AFSC Archives of the American Friends' Service Committee

FDR Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

NA United States National Archives

Introduction

In the 1930s and 1940s the United States was confronted with a ‘refugee question’—whether or not to permit Jewish refugee immigration and on what terms—that forced the branches of government and the public to consider carefully their attitudes to immigration and the role America ought to play in humanitarian geo-politics. The United States’ predominant position on European immigration was, at best, inaction; at worst, outright obstruction, and condemnation of these policies has been a feature of much scholarly literature in the field of Holocaust studies. Almost four decades ago, in his seminal monograph on American immigration policy and the Holocaust, David Wyman argued that the cause to reach out across the Atlantic and offer assistance and sanctuary to the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing Europe ‘foundered on the rocks of nativism, anti-Semitism and economic insecurity which in the late thirties and forties loomed in the way of all refugee’ aid measures.¹ David Wyman was the first scholar to study seriously the archival evidence of the way American officials in the Roosevelt Administration and the people’s elected representatives in Congress responded to the refugee crisis in Europe, and it was Wyman who first laid the blame for American inaction on the confluence of three elements of American socio-political life: social and economic nativism; general xenophobia; and a particularly wide-spread, insidious anti-Semitism. Wyman is central in this debate because the historiography of the American response to the refugee crisis precipitated by the programme of Nazi persecution and genocide has

1. David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the refugee crisis, 1938–1941* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968): 111.

been built on the argument and research foundations that he first presented. Richard Breitman, Alan Kraut, Henry Feingold, Deborah Lipstadt, Laurel Leff, Bat Ami-Zucker and a host of other scholars have accepted the tripartite model of ideological influences that Wyman first proposed.² While Wyman presented substantial evidence supporting his claim that economic nativism and xenophobia played an important part in the tightening of American immigration policies during the 1938–1945 period, he, and the scholars who have followed in the path he cut through the archival evidence, have persistently failed to provide substantial documentary evidence to support the claim that critical decisions on refugee immigration were influenced by anti-Semitism, latent or otherwise.³ Rather, the approach in the existing historiography has been to take the existence of anti-Semitism at the forefront of political actors' minds as a given, and this assumption has met with little substantial criticism in the existing scholarship.

This thesis is positioned in opposition to the dominant Wyman-based trend in the historiography. The aim of this thesis is not to argue that anti-Semitism was totally absent from the discourse on European refugee immigration in the United States at this time, nor does this thesis claim to present a definitive answer to the question of what forces motivated the men and women of America to take a firm stand against allowing into their country refugees fleeing some of the worst persecution of the twentieth century. What this thesis does do is to take the evidence and arguments put forward by the scholars who have argued that American immigration policy during the Holocaust was substantially motivated by anti-Semitism and to reassess them, interrogating the primary sources and evaluating the reasoning in the secondary sources. The scholars who have followed Wyman have, almost exclusively, relied on the same archival sources as he did. In the years since Wyman first

2. Comprehensive references of works scholars using Wyman in this way appear throughout this thesis.

3. Though few scholars define this 'anti-Semitism', throughout this thesis the term is taken at its broadest meaning, following the definition laid down by Ben Halpern, namely, a hostile attitude toward Jews (regarded as a threat) that develops into a tradition and becomes institutionalized: Ben Halpern, 'What is Antisemitism?', *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981): 255.

inspected the archives, a large number of the documents have been lost or destroyed, but the most significant papers are still available. This thesis examines those papers, drawn from the United States National Archives, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and the American Friends' Service Committee Archives, along with a range of other primary sources in order to substantiate the central argument of this thesis: that the evidence indicates that, far from being a primary motivator behind American immigration policy, anti-Semitism was a very minor part of an ensemble of forces led by nativism and traditional American anti-alien sentiment.

Structurally, this thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which focuses on a particular section of American society. Chapter one examines the way the United States Congress responded to calls for action on the refugee problem. From looking at the structure and logic behind the major debates over the significant pieces of legislation that were introduced into Congress, an image emerges of a legislature not concerned with the religious or cultural nature of the refugees, but primarily focussed on core domestic material concerns, such as job security and economic development. Chapter two evaluates the Roosevelt Administration's reaction to the need for leadership on the refugee issue. The complexity; seemingly fathomless depth of bureaucracy that was built around immigration policies; and the state of paranoia that appears to have surrounded all discussions about assistance to European refugees, all feature in a portrait of an inactive administration—inactive not by design, but by being caught in a web of bureaucratic complexity which the administration itself had spun. The final chapter deals with the way the refugee debate was framed in the press and how the public responded to it. The findings of key scholars in the field, most notably Deborah Lipstadt and Laurel Leff, are questioned in the light of findings from other disciplines, namely psychology and sociology, in order to explain why there was so little public action to push for a more liberal immigration policy.

CHAPTER ONE

Nativism on Capitol Hill

‘Liberalisation of the immigration laws is an idea which most politicians regard as too hot to handle, and it would take an unmistakable demonstration of public opinion to change this attitude.’¹

Despite its ultimate inaction on the problem of refugee immigration from Europe, the United States Congress was the scene for a range of proposals regarding the fate of European refugees. On the floors of both the House of Representatives and the Senate bills were debated that, if enacted, could have opened migration channels to America for many thousands of European—mostly Jewish—refugees. In congressional committees and sub-committees, interest groups, Roosevelt Administration officials and humanitarian organisations were given the opportunity to give voice officially to arguments and opinions taken not from the debate over European refugee assistance alone, but also from a wealth of associated isolationist and nativist discourses. Of all the impediments refugees faced in migrating to the United States, the central legislative measure that dominated all efforts in seeking asylum was the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1924, which established the complex quota system governing immigration.² This act—which arose from the 1920s’ reduced dependence on cheap industrial labour and ‘Red Scare’-fuelled nativism—stood as a significant hurdle not only because of the basic numerical restriction of its provisions, but,

1. ‘Editorial’, *The Nation* 147 (10 December, 1938): 10.

2. On this act, see: Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal aliens and the making of modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004): 10–20; and Kitty Calavita, *U.S. Immigration Law and the Control of Labor, 1820–1924* (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984): 15–19.

perhaps more importantly, because of the rhetorical role ‘the quota’ was to play in the discourse of refugee immigration relaxation in the immediate pre-war and wartime periods.³ This rhetorical utilisation of the quota system was a feature not merely of the administration officials’ dealings with refugee advocacy groups and the press; it was also, as a legislative creation, intensely analysed and controlled by Congress. Congressional action on the Nazi refugee problem predated the outbreak of the war in Europe—the result of the early recognition by some congressmen and women of the need for action in the face of reports of Nazi oppression and territorial aggression. But Congress vacillated and was stagnant for years, ultimately failing to determine decisively any one path of action. During this period, numerous resolutions and bills were proposed, of which only the Wagner–Rogers ‘children’s bill’ generated significant support, but all of which provide a window into the attitudes and ideological mores that influenced the Congressional response. Attitudes that, upon close inspection had more to do with prevailing nativist imperatives, labour politics and economic policies than the latent anti-Semitism that critiques of the congressional response have claimed.⁴

After the Nazi regime in Berlin violated the provisions of the Versailles Treaty by annexing Austria—the 1938 *Anschluss*—in Congress, two legislators, both Democrats proposed refugee bills for the approval of the House of Representatives. Samuel Dickstein’s proposed measure would have seen the United States combine all the remaining quota places for all countries for the year 1938 and make those quota places available for European refugees.⁵ The second proposed measure, that of Representative Emanuel Celler, differed from Dickstein’s in that it proposed empowering the President to widen quota limits for refugees, in effect, accepting a total number of refugees greater than

3. For a thorough account of the enactment context of the Johnson–Reed Act, see: Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 19–30.

4. See, for example: Naomi Cohen, ‘The Transatlantic Connection: The American Jewish Committee and the Joint Foreign Committee in defence of German Jews, 1933–1937’, *American Jewish History* 90, no. 4 (2002): 353–384.

5. United States Department of State, *Interpreter Releases* 15 (1938): 173–174; Bat-Ami Zucker, ‘Frances Perkins and the German-Jewish Refugees, 1933–1940’, *American Jewish History* 89, no. 1 (2001): 37–40.

the quota maximum.⁶ Given the legislative history of the quota system, and the general attitude of immigration restriction at the time, it is hard to conceive of a bill such as Celler's, placing even more discretionary power in the hands of the President to alter quota numbers, succeeding.⁷ Conversely, the Dickstein bill, preserving, as it would, the overall number of quota migrants ostensibly appears to have been a much more palatable option.⁸ However, congressional hearings on both the Celler and Dickstein bills, scheduled originally for late April 1938 never took place, and both bills remained on the House floor.

The decision to abandon committee hearings was precipitated by lobbying from both pro- and anti-refugee groups, wide-spread support that suggests the decision was not, as might first seem, the result of anti-Semitic (latent or otherwise) politicking or indifference.⁹ Early in April 1938, a pro-refugee conference with members from Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish backgrounds and non-denominational refugee advocacy groups met in New York and unanimously agreed to oppose committee meetings on the Celler and Dickstein bills.¹⁰ This move, by a lobby clearly interested in promoting the cause of European refugees, was probably fuelled by a suspicion that the hearings, had they eventuated, at that point in time, would certainly have been appropriated as a soapbox for immigration restrictionists, providing an opportunity to enflame anti-immigrant

6. 'New Immigration Plan', *New York Times*, 25 March 1938, p. 8.

7. Such widening of executive discretionary power, especially in matters of the admission of aliens, see: Sidney Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The transformation of the American party system since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 195–202; Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: From Roosevelt to Regan* (New York: Free Press, 1991): 24–30; John M. Blum, *The Progressive Presidents: Roosevelt, Wilson, Roosevelt, Johnson* (New York: Norton, 1980): 115–119; David R. Mayhew, *Congressional Opposition to the American Presidency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 5–11; and James A. Thurber *Divided Democracy: Co-operation and conflict between the President and Congress* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1991): 2–9.

8. See comments made in the House of Representatives by Clarence Cannon (of Missouri): *Congressional Record* 83, 75th Congress, 2nd session (1938): 1312.

9. See: 'News', *Congress Bulletin* 5 (1938): 38. The anti-Semitism claim on this point is presented by numerous scholars, see especially: David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the refugee crisis, 1938–1941* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968): 67–69; David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984): 102; Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987): 87–89, 91; and Michael N. Dobkowski, 'American Anti-Semitism: A reinterpretation', *American Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1977): 172.

10. Ruth Grueber, *Haven* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000): 4–10.

sentiment.¹¹ The White House, too, would have supported the relegation of the bills. President Roosevelt had foreshadowed that he was going to present proposals for an increase in European refugee intake at the international summit on refugees at Evian later in the year, and allowing nativist congressmen to stir up anti-alien sentiment would have adversely affected those proposals.¹² Officials in the State Department also warned of the potential risks to existing plans of American refugee action associated with hearings on the bills, and the House Immigration Committee, with the support of the bills' respective proposers, called off the hearings, stating that the proper time for such discussion was not before the Evian Conference.¹³ Despite this, or perhaps because of the negative reaction of some sections of the American public to the proposals put forward at Evian, both the Celler and Dickstein bills remained buried.¹⁴

Given the opposition to the opening of the immigration quotas, and the climate of antipathy surrounding the immigration debate as a whole, the possibility that Congress might actually have moved to *reduce* existing quotas was a real threat, and supporters of refugee entry were forced to carry on their campaign in a muted manner. The only exception to this pattern was the Jewish People's Committee that, in the wake of the Evian Conference, sent petitions to the President in favour of the Dickstein bill, but this protest group was largely sidelined as larger organisations and potential congressional patrons distanced themselves from the committee's apparent communist sympathies.¹⁵ Such

11. Such behaviour on the part of immigration restrictionsists was not uncommon, see: Donna R. Gabaccia, 'Policy, Politics and the Remaking of Immigration History' *American Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2005): 538; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 103; Charles Hirschman, 'Immigration and the American Century', *Demography* 42, no. 4 (2005): 595–620; and Walter B. Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, modernism and pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995): 2–11.

12. Eric Estorick, 'The Evian Conference and the Intergovernmental Committee', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 203 (1939): 136–141.

13. See: George Messersmith to Sumner Wells, letter, 7 April 1938, NA, State Department Records, File 150.01 Bills/34.

14. On this public reaction, see: Barbara Stewart, *United States Government Policy on Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1940* (New York: Garland, 1982): 103–116.

15. *Congress Bulletin* 6 (1939): 1. On the purported connection between the Jewish People's Committee and communism, see: Eric Caplan, 'What Does It Imply? How Does It Apply?: Holiday editorials in the *The Reconstructionist*, 1935–1955', *Shofar* 24, no. 3 (2006): 55; and Haskel Lookstein, *Were We Our Brother's Keepers? The public response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938–1944* (New York: Hartmore House, 1985): 59, 65–66.

concerns over the adverse effects of publicity did not affect the restrictionist movement, which played to popular anti-refugee feelings, underscoring their claims that refugees were a cause of unemployment, even going so far as to call not only for a halt to further immigration but also for the deportation of noncitizens already residing within the United States.¹⁶ The restrictionist support base in Congress was strong; like the public at large many members of Congress were staunchly anti-alien, and, being consummate politicians, representatives and senators were drawn to the restrictionist cause because it allowed them to ‘proclaim [their] loyalty to America. [They] can tell the unemployed man that he is out of work because some alien has his job’.¹⁷

The politics of restrictionism were on show in 1939, when many anti-alien proposals were presented to Congress, the most serious of which was a cluster of five measures presented to the Senate by North Carolinian Robert Reynolds. The Reynolds bill constituted the most virulent anti-immigrant legislative initiative, calling for a reduction to the quotas across all countries by up to ninety percent. The marks of the nativist, labour market oriented discourse out of which the Reynolds bill grew is evident in the provisions of the bill. Reynolds included a clause limiting permanent immigration indefinitely until American unemployment fell to less than three million and a deportation provision for any alien found to be receiving welfare payments or whose presence in the United States was, in the wholly discretionary judgement of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, adverse to the American public interest.¹⁸

16. Robert Reynolds, ‘Aliens and the Unemployment Problem—It’s High Time We Called a Halt!’, *Vital Speeches of the Day* 4 (1938): 363–365.

17. Alan Cranston, ‘Congress and the Alien’, *Contemporary Jewish Record* 3 (1940): 246. See also: Ann M. Nicolosi, ‘“We Do Not Want Our Girls to Marry Foreigners”: Gender, race and American citizenship’, *NWSA Journal* 13, no. 3 (2001): 15–17; Stephen Amberg, ‘Governing Labor in Modernising Texas’, *Social Science History* 28, no. 1 (2004): 171; and C. Jaret, ‘Troubled by Newcomers: Anti-immigrant attitudes and action during two eras of mass immigration to the United States’, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18, no. 3 (1999): 21. This politicisation of immigration was hardly new in the United States, see: John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955): 62; and Ira Leonard, *American Nativism, 1830–1860* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971): 23.

18. United States Senate, ‘Deportation of Aliens’, *Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration*, 76th Congress, 1st session (1939): 1–4.

The influence of labour market interests in limiting the appeal of the pro-refugee immigration cause is apparent in the testimony given by witnesses at the Senate subcommittee hearings into the Reynolds bill. The Department of Labor spoke against all five bills, but it was alone in its flat condemnation of the project: the Congress of Industrial Organisations and the American Federation of Labor both generally approved of the bills, opposing only the most draconian deportation and fingerprinting provisions.¹⁹ The absence of more serious opposition to the bills in committee may be attributed to the same reticence, on the part of pro-refugee groups, as that seen over involvement with the Celler and Dickstein bills: a fear that attendance would afford restrictionists like Senator Reynolds an opportunity to use cross-examination of witnesses as a vehicle for anti-refugee publicity.²⁰ The hearings on the bills were dominated by a succession of sizeable and influential patriotic organisations: The American Coalition of Patriotic Societies, the American Legion, the Junior Order United American Mechanics and the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, the intensely patriotic nature of which emphasises the connection between the debate over European refugee policy and the domestic political climate, whipped up as it had been since the end of the First World War by Red Scares and the economic turmoil of the Great Depression.²¹

As expected, the subcommittee hearings turned into a venue for the expression anti-refugee sentiment. Senator Reynolds, who was not formally a member of the subcommittee but merely appeared as a witness and assistant, took a leading role in stirring

19. 'Deportation of Aliens', 12–17, 27–31, 42–46. On the Labor Department and the Reynolds bill (and other measures), see: Bat-Ami Zucker, 'Frances Perkins and the German-Jewish Refugees, 1933–1940', 56; Adriana Marshall, 'Immigration, Labor Demand and the Working Class', *Politics and Society* 13, no. 4 (1984): 441–442; Alan M. Kraut, Richard Breitman and Thomas W. Imhoof, 'The State Department, the Labour Department and German Jewish Immigration, 1930–1940', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3, no. 2 (1984): 27; and Frank G. Cassell, 'Immigration and the Department of Labor', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 367 (1966): 110.

20. The official published record of the hearings lists no explicitly pro-refugee group has having made a submission.

21. On the Red Scares, see, for example: David Colburn, 'Governor Alfred E. Smith and the Red Scare, 1919–20', *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (1973): 423–444. See also: Paul Murphy, 'Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s', *Journal of American History* 51, no. 1 (1964): 60–76.

up anti-alien emotion and pushing the committee discussion into nativist channels. Reynolds took the opportunity to inject a dose of xenophobic paranoia into the hearings by declaring that ships ‘overflowing with refugees’ were docking in Cuba, and that the passengers were biding their time, awaiting the opportunity to slip into the United States.²² Reynolds, in a typically nativist rhetorical flourish, suggested that these refugee-migrants from Europe via Cuba would join ‘thousands of others’ who were supposedly infiltrating the country by eluding the immigration patrol.²³ Reynolds furnished little in the way of hard evidence to support his claims, but he was joined by other restrictionist witnesses who complained that ‘refugees [were] pouring in with visitors’ visas’, that the Labor Department refused to deport aliens and that foreign citizens were depriving Americans of jobs.²⁴ This rhetoric was redolent not of the anti-Semitism that might be expected to accompany measures designed to close off the avenues of escape for Jewish refugees, but rather, of the elements of American nativism, especially the perceived threat of foreign radicalism that is a recurring rhetorical figure of that nativism.²⁵ The objections were not expressed using rhetoric designed to counter a particular, contemporaneous ‘Jewish’ threat or problem, rather, the arguments were grounded in the traditional tropes of the American restrictionist vocabulary. That the restrictionist policies affected Jewish refugee immigration specifically was the result of those ‘Jewish refugees’ in particular being a subset of ‘refugees’ in general.

The platform provided to restrictionist views when immigration legislation came up for discussion was only one concern for refugee advocates. The very existence of bills such as those proposed by Senator Reynolds deterred application of pressure to liberalise the immigration statutes, because it suggested a willingness, if not an eagerness, on the part of

22. ‘Deportation of Aliens’, 42. Refugee ‘infiltration’ fears were rife in the United States at this time, and indeed, after the war, see: Edwin Harwood, ‘American Public Opinion and U.S. Immigration Policy’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487 (1986): 209; Arthur A. Markowitz, ‘Humanitarianism versus Restrictionism: The United States and the Hungarian refugees’, *International Migration Review* 7, no. 1 (1973): 49.

23. ‘Deportation of Aliens’, 44.

24. ‘Deportation of Aliens’, 47–51.

25. See, generally, John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

Congress to review immigration quotas. If a measure to facilitate refugee entry had reached the floor of Congress, this willingness could have manifested itself in counter efforts to cut immigration drastically or to end it completely. Fear centred on the possibility that restrictionist support might have increased exponentially, resulting in the passage of very restrictive laws. There was a belief among refugee advocacy circles that such an exponential increase was likely, many agreed with liberal columnist Dorothy Thompson that raising the issue of enlarging the quotas would have been ‘political dynamite’.²⁶ Shortly after the Nazi *Kristallnacht* persecutions of 1938, a representative of the American Friends Service Committee stated in a memorandum:

[W]e are aware of the desires of particular people to see action to increase the quota and to allow greater immigration into the United States of refugees from Nazism ... [However,] to our knowledge no one is trying to change the quota. It is considered highly dangerous to attempt such a step, and might jeopardise even the present quota.²⁷

Despite the restrictionist support base rallying behind the Reynolds bill, it went no further than the subcommittee, unable to attract enough congressional support to take it to the floor of the legislature. In part, the failure of the restrictionist cause to progress beyond the committee stage can be viewed as a product of the changing international climate once details of the Nazi persecution of Jews spread during 1939, in the aftermath of the late-1938 *Kristallnacht* episode. It was in the wake of the spread of these details that the only European refugee legislative measure that attracted significant across-the-board support—the Wagner-Rodgers bill—was introduced into Congress.

26. Dorothy Thompson, ‘Escape from a Frozen World’, *Survey Geographic* 28 (1939): 168. Thompson was outspoken in her belief that the refugee issue had been too politicised, see: Loretta Stec, ‘Dorothy Thompson as “Liberal Conservative” Columnist: Gender, politics and journalistic authority’, *American Journalism* 12, no. 2 (1995): 167; and Lynn D. Gordon, ‘Political Columnists and the Press Wars of the 1930s and 1940s’, *History of Education Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1994): 299.

27. Hertha Kraus to Anne Martin, memorandum, 25 November 1938, AFSC Refugees Service File.

Following *Kristallnacht*, many in the refugee advocacy lobby hoped that the wave of public sympathy for the victims of Nazi terror could be turned into practical help. Most advocates of a more liberal refugee policy agreed that the mood of Congress, as gauged by the congressional reaction to the earlier Celler and Dickstein bills, precluded any change in the quota system in favour of *adult* refugees.²⁸ However, the circumstances of many German children led to the thought that Congress might be willing to relax the immigration requirements, allowing a limited number of children to immigrate outside the ordinary quota numbers. Responding sympathetically to this idea, Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Representative Edith Rogers of Massachusetts introduced bills allowing extra-quota migration for 20,000 German refugee children, over a single two-year period.²⁹ Attached to the bills were measures that required the proper supervision and care of the children by volunteer private refugee agencies and individuals. Thus, Wagner and Rogers insisted, their bills would provide for humanitarian assistance with a safeguard to ensure the children aided by the legislation would not turn into public nuisances, and most significantly, that the cost of their maintenance would not be borne by the American taxpayer.³⁰ These measures were politically astute inclusions, pre-emptively silencing the expected refrain from restrictionists that the children could have become a burden on the American public: under the terms of the bills the United States government would not have incurred any expense in the execution of the programme, effectively allowing the United States to perform a global humanitarian good at no cost.

The Wagner–Rogers bill entered Congress at an opportune political moment, both domestically and internationally. There was support in the Roosevelt Administration for such a measure, especially from the Secretary for Labor, Frances Perkins who, at this point

28. Marion E. Kenworthy to Clarence E. Pickett, memorandum, 7 January 1939, AFSC General File

29. Deborah Lipstadt, 'Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets: The American news media and the Holocaust from Kristallnacht to Bermuda, 1938–1943', *Modern Judaism* 2, no. 1 (1982): 53–72.

30. Deborah Lipstadt, 'Witness to the Persecution: the Allies and the Holocaust', *Modern Judaism*, 3, no. 3 (1983): 319–338.

in time, was responsible for the Immigration and Naturalisation Service.³¹ In terms of international politics, stories appeared in the press and periodicals, drawing attention to the humanitarian efforts of other nations, especially the United Kingdom's decision to accept thousands of German refugee children, and calling for the United States to follow suit.³² The Wagner–Rogers bill attracted a broad swathe of support from a variety of religious, child welfare, non-denominational and non-partisan groups as well as members of both major parties. Even the labour circles found it possible to support the proposals: Alexander Whitney, president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, joined the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organisations in support of the resolution, and at the state level, too, support was strong, with the New York State Senate passing a resolution in favour of the Wagner–Rogers bill.³³ The reaction to the proposal in the press, too, was almost unanimous in approval. It was announced in the joint committee hearings on the bills that scores of newspapers across the nation, including dozens from the South, reported the Wagner–Rogers bill in favourable light.³⁴

The widespread community and bipartisan congressional support that the Wagner–Rogers bill received suggests the political figures who saw *adult* German refugees as undesirable, did not see the same problems with *child* refugees. The apparent qualitative distinction that was being made is important: if the anti-refugee advocates opposed relaxation of immigration restriction on the basis of anti-Semitic prejudice, even in the face of reports of Jewish persecution in 1938, then surely there would not have been a

31. Zucker, 'Frances Perkins and the German-Jewish Refugees', 39.

32. See, for an example of the most persuasive agitation: 'Editorial', *Nation* 157 (10 December, 1938): 610.

33. United States Congress, *Joint Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration, United States Senate and a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalisation, House of Representatives*, 76th Congress, 1st session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939): 56–58, 61.

34. *Congressional Record* 84, 76th Congress, 1st session (1939): 1457–1458, 2338–2341. That so many Southern dailies supported the proposed measures is significant, given the uneasy position of Jews in the South and a traditional, vocal anti-Semitism in some Southern communities, see: Leonard Rogoff, 'Is the Jew White?: The racial place of the Jew in the South', *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (1997): 201; Babbie Malone, 'Directions in Southern Jewish History', *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (1997): 191–193; and, generally, Abraham D. Lavender ed., *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish subcommunities in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977): 62ff.

qualitative distinction drawn. That the distinction was made indicates that what concerned the restrictionists were the perceived (albeit probably baseless or even irrational) dangers that only adult refugees posed: threats to the American economy and national security.

Even an analysis of those groups that ultimately opposed the Wagner–Rogers bill demonstrates a qualitative shift in the criticism of the bill. Again, it was the ‘patriotic orders’ that featured most prominently in attacking the bill, with most criticism orbiting a general theme that ‘charity should begin at home’. John Trevor, head of the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies and a central figure in the enactment of the original 1924 Johnson–Reed act argued that it was a dereliction of the duty owed to the American people to support such a bill at a time when American cities and country towns were still home to millions of ‘neglected boys and girls, descendants of American pioneers, undernourished, ragged and ill’.³⁵ These patriotic organisations held, in the 1930s, considerable political clout. High-profile bodies such as the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution commanded great respect in the press and in Congress, and were thus able to wield considerable power.³⁶ Yet, the smaller groups, too, had their share of committed members, willing to support anti-immigration measures. Of these less well-known organisations, one of the most influential was the Junior Order United American Mechanics, which had fought, since its inception in the 1850s, against immigration, and which had several members of Congress on its membership lists.³⁷ In total, members of and people associated with such patriotic organisations in opposition to the bill formed a

35. Quoted in ‘Editorial’, *Contemporary Jewish Record* 2 (1939): 95. See also: Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 319–321; and William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919–1941* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1989): 350–361.

36. See: Christine K. Erickson, “‘So much for men’: Conservative women and national defence in the 1920s and 1930s”, *American Studies* 45, no. (2004): 96; and Christine K. Erickson, “‘Conservative Women and Patriotic Materialism’: The beginnings of a gendered conservative tradition in the 1920s and 1930s’ (PhD thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara 1999): 17–22.

37. Rowland Berthoff, ‘Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration’, *Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 3 (1951): 330. On the Order’s traditional anti-alienism, see the evidence presented by the Order’s members in an earlier set of immigration legislation hearings: United States House of Representatives, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalisation on an Immigration Bill* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1910): 1–8.

sizable and vocal community, all generally influenced by the ‘charity begins at home’ mantra.³⁸

These patriotic groups were vocal in their purported concern for the urban and rural poor. One witness at the joint committee hearings on the Wagner–Rogers bill exclaimed: ‘Shall we sentence these [American] slum children to crime, poverty and hopelessness while we import children from a foreign country?’³⁹ The restrictionist refrain was soon established and propagated, most clearly in one organisation’s declaration: ‘If homes are available for the adoption of alien children, Americanism demands that needy American children be adopted into them’.⁴⁰ This ‘charity begins at home’ argument was by far the most effective, and, notwithstanding the immense support for the Wagner–Rogers bill, managed to turn the tide of public opinion and congressional favour. In late March 1939, the American Friends Service Committee discussed a senate poll they had commissioned that revealed that, in response to the strong arguments of the anti-refugee immigration lobby, less than half of all senators were willing to discuss the bill and two-thirds of the Senate favoured retention of the existing quota limits.⁴¹

The structure of the arguments made by the restrictionist patriotic organisations is important in appreciating the motivation behind those organisations’ refusal to support expansion of the quota. These organisations were not ‘anti-refugee’ *per se*, that is, they did not present arguments reasoned along the lines of ‘Refugees harm *X* ... Refugees are a threat to *Y* ... Refugees a responsible for *Z*’. Rather, their main line of reasoning could be described as ‘introspective’, moving the primary focus from the refugees to ‘native born’ Americans, using the premises ‘Americans need *A* ... American children need *B*’, with a

38. On the enthusiasm of the members and membership numbers of these groups generally, see: Christy J. Snider, ‘Patriots and Pacifists: The Rhetorical Debate about Peace, Patriotism, and Internationalism, 1914–1930’, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2005): 59–62. See also, generally, John Bodnar ed., *Bonds of Affection: Americans define their patriotism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

39. *Joint Hearings*, 72.

40. From an American Immigration Conference Board handbill, ‘America’s Children are America’s Problem! Refugee Children in Europe are Europe’s Problem!’ quoted in Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 79–80.

41. ‘Minutes of the Meeting of December 17, 1939. Congressional Poll, subject: Refugee Immigration’, AFSC General File: 24 March 1939.

subsidiary argument being ‘Refugees interfere with the provision of those needs’. This introspective line of reasoning was not concerned with what the refugees represented (in the way ‘anti-Semitic’ argumentation would), but rather, it framed the debate as a domestic zero-sum game, in which personal qualities of refugees (their religion, ethnicity) were immaterial. In the zero-sum refugee debate, the only material concern was: ‘What Americans will be left unaided by offering aid to refugees?’ This introspective discursive focus calls into the question the claim that opposition to pro-refugee bills arose from anti-Semitism.

A joint subcommittee in Congress undertook final hearings on the Wagner–Rogers bill in April, hearing many pro- and anti-refugee witnesses.⁴² In an editorial analysis of the hearings into Wagner–Rogers Bill, the *Nation* claimed that, ‘while no directly anti-Semitic statements arose in the testimony against the bill, a subtle and effective argument is the *sotto voce* contention that this is a Jewish bill. The implication is that all the children are Jewish’.⁴³ This conclusion appears to be based on only a few minor statements made during the subcommittee hearings: Francis Kincutt, president of the Allied Patriotic Societies presented a table showing that the overwhelming majority of the refugees would be Jewish and the spokeswoman for the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic characterised the bill as a measure to permit entry into the United States of ‘German-Jewish’ refugee children. Conclusions about anti-Semitism based on these kinds of minor testamentary statements seem weak and appear even more unreliable when one realises that such conclusions completely ignore the clear traditions of immigration restriction and nativism that stretch back into the nineteenth century, the traditions out of which the policies of the central patriotic organisations stemmed. The *Nation’s* claim is even less credible when read in light of the rhetorical construction of the restrictionist arguments outlined above. Given

42. See, generally: *Joint Hearings*, 49–182 (for the testimony of the proponents) and 183–280 (for the testimony of the opponents).

43. ‘Wagner–Rogers Bill: Editorial’, *Nation*, 148 (1 July 1939): 3.

the limited evidence available to support it, it is unclear why the *Nation* would latch on to the anti-Semitic chord in the discussion, but, having previously flagged its support for the bill, perhaps it was thought that only an accusation of anti-Semitism could have spurred the congressmen and senators into pro-refugee action. Whatever the case may have been, the *Nation's* criticisms were not enough to turn the tide of congressional opinion back in the refugees' favour and the Wagner–Rogers bill never made it to the floor of Congress.

There is an additional point to be made in the discussion of the Wagner–Rogers bill: namely, the comparison of the reaction to the Wagner–Rogers bill and the success of a later statutory measure, the Hennings bill of 1940. Briefly, the Hennings bill allowed for a few hundred British refugee children to enter the United States outside the normal quota. Scholars have contrasted the fates of the Wagner–Rogers and Hennings bills, claiming the comparison proves an anti-Semitic prejudice in Congress.⁴⁴ David Wyman, has presented the argument most succinctly:

One need only recall the anti-Semitism of these years [1930s and 1940s] to locate [the] important explanation for the contrasting responses to the Wagner–Rogers bill and the movement to evacuate children from England: the British boys and girls were mostly Christian while the German children were mostly Jewish.⁴⁵

Yet the logic here is somewhat circular and the conclusions drawn are questionable. The picture painted of the Hennings bill's passage through Congress is misleading and the comparison between the two measures is, in many ways, a false one.

Firstly, in committee hearings and congressional debates about the Hennings bill, the same 'charity begins at home' arguments were presented by many of the same interest groups that opposed the Wagner–Rogers bill, and congressmen such as James Van Zandt, Carl Curtis and William Scholte were vocal in their fears that, if allowed into the United

44. See for example: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 168–183; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 210–230; Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987): 118–120; and Bat-Ami Zucker, *In Search of Refuge: Jews and U.S. consuls in Nazi Germany, 1933–1941* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001): 152–153.

45. Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 128.

States, the refugee children would not have left after the war.⁴⁶ The argument that the Hennings measure was not exposed to the same strong opposition as the Wagner–Rogers bill is not accurate, and ignores the anti-refugee arguments that were a common feature of the discussions surrounding both bills. The Hennings bill passed with only the barest of majorities in the Senate, but pass it did, and given the apparent similarity in the arguments against it and the unsuccessful Wagner–Rogers bill, Wyman is right to argue that the difference lay not in the aims of the bill but in the qualitative perception of the two groups of children.⁴⁷

However, where Wyman and those scholars who have followed him have assumed the difference must have been the characteristics of the children, there is an argument to be made that the individual children themselves were not the point of difference, but rather the distinguishing feature was the press coverage of the two groups' plights. The Hennings bill came at a time when the United States press was saturated with coverage of the *Blitz* attacks on London, whereas, at this time, stories of the German persecutions were still being relegated to the inside pages of the major metropolitan dailies or not reported at all.⁴⁸ The difference in the press coverage received by the two cases, and the public support for the plight of British children must surely have been a significant force in changing the minds of the few politicians whose support ensured the success of the Hennings bill, an argument that has remained undiscussed in the scholarly treatment of the child refugees bills in Congress.

46. See the report of the House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalisation presented to Congress: 'Discussions on a Bill To Provide a Temporary Haven from the Dangers or Effects of War for British Children', *Congressional Record* 86, Part 7, 76th Congress, 2nd session, 1612. See also: *Congressional Record* 86, Part 9, 76th Congress, 3rd session, 2846–2859, 10031–10042, and 10092–10098; and 'Refugee Children', *New York Times*, 9 August 1940, 1.

47. *Congressional Record* 86, Part 9, 76th Congress, 3rd session, 10039. Eleven senators are recorded as having abstained in the vote.

48. On the coverage of the *Blitz* in the American press, see: Nicholas J. Cull, *Selling the War: The British propaganda campaign against American 'neutrality' in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): chapter 4. The press treatment of the Holocaust is dealt with more fully in Chapter 3 below; but certainly in 1940 there was little public engagement with descriptions in the press of Nazi atrocities, see: Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America's most important newspaper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 20–48; cf. Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: the American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986): 112–119.

The demise of the Wagner–Rogers bill coincided with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe and this brought with it its own set of pressures on the legislature. The Roosevelt Administration was becoming increasingly concerned about the security threat posed by refugees and began to tighten the administrative processes of visa applications at a consular level. In such a climate, the Wagner–Rogers bill and proposed measures like it were always going to find congressional support difficult to muster. The discussion in America up to this point had been about refugee entry into the contiguous United States, and at this time there was clearly a growing opinion among pro-refugee circles that American territories not yet formally absorbed into the Union might provide a destination for refugees not subject to the same quota provisions as the states. And it is at this point that Alaska was seriously mentioned as a territory fit to receive European refugees.

A L A S K A

In 1938, during the aftermath of the *Kristallnacht* atrocities, some members of Roosevelt’s cabinet began to consider ways that the strict Johnson–Reed act quota provisions might be circumvented.⁴⁹ It was in late November 1938 that the Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, publicly announced the administration’s intention to consider seriously the possibility of resettling European refugees in the undeveloped tracts of federal government land in Alaska.⁵⁰ Ickes followed this public announcement by instigating an investigation by officers of the Interior Department into the economic and social effects of a proposal to resettle tens of thousands of European refugees in Alaskan territory.⁵¹ The recommendations of the investigation were very positive. The investigative committee’s

49. While the personal recollections of Harold Ickes suggest that the press reports of the *Kristallnacht* were the catalyst for this reconsideration, evidence uncovered by Richard Breitman that the United States was in possession of detailed information about the Nazi regime’s planned programme of continued persecution of Jews raises the possibility that the Roosevelt Administration was aware of a more pressing humanitarian need to find a place for refugee resettlement, see: Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis planned, what the British and Americans knew* (London: Allen Lane, 1999): 13–27.

50. *New York Times*, 24 November 1938, 8.

51. Gruber, *Haven*, 17.

final report provided Ickes with a strong economic case for the feasibility of the proposal, especially the committee's findings that the Alaskan territory contained 'more than sufficient ... unexploited natural resources' that would sustain the development of industry fuelled by immigrant labour.⁵² The investigative committee's report argued that the quota system established by the 1924 *Immigration Restriction Act* had hindered the natural growth of the Alaskan economy, because the few immigrants who entered the United States were drawn to centres of established agricultural, industrial and commercial activity.⁵³ When combined with the demonstrated reluctance of American citizens to relocate to Alaska (other than in times of major booms in valuable resources) the report's recommendation was that allowing European refugee immigrants to settle in the territory would be an important and valuable contribution to the prosperity of the Alaskan economy, even going so far as to argue that it was inconsistent with the goals of 'national policy' not to advocate for immigrant settlement in Alaska.⁵⁴ And from this statement a subtle change in direction of tactics in the pro-refugee camp is discernable: the question ceased to be framed in terms of assistance to refugees *per se* and became, rather, a matter of assistance to the Alaskan and American economies.

The report was not finalised until late 1939, but upon receiving it, Ickes immediately asked President Roosevelt to consider the proposal.⁵⁵ Roosevelt's initial reaction to the report is unknown, but he did ask the State Department to review the plan, noting that from a domestic policy perspective the Alaska development plan ostensibly had some merit.⁵⁶ The State Department's response was drafted by the Under Secretary of

52. United States Department of the Interior, *The Problem of Alaskan Development* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939): 11.

53. Department of the Interior, *Alaskan Development*, 1–8.

54. Department of the Interior, *Alaskan Development*, 45. On the nexus between resources boom and American internal migration to Alaska, see: James H. Ducker, *Alaskans of Gold and Oil: The migrations of 1897–1900 and 1974–1976* (Anchorage, AK: Alaska Historical Commission, 1985): 9–11.

55. Harold Ickes to Franklin Roosevelt, memorandum, 17 October 1939, NA, Social and Economic Branch, Department of the Interior File 9-1-2.

56. Franklin D. Roosevelt to Cordell Hull, memorandum, 18 October 1939, NA Social and Economic Branch, Department of the Interior File 9-1-2. Though Ickes records discussing the Roosevelt's handling of

State, Sumner Welles who was concerned that the proposal, which included the suggestion that refugee immigrants to the Alaskan territory would be in addition to the statutory quota numbers, could create confusion as to the status of the Johnson–Reed act provisions.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding the concerns raised by the State Department, Roosevelt, according to Ickes, dedicated a great deal of time and effort to the consideration of the Alaskan proposal.⁵⁸ Eventually, Roosevelt endorsed a plan whereby 10,000 settlers were moved into Alaska each year from 1940 to 1944.⁵⁹ The system was to be designed to avoid the collection of any one particular ethnic group in one place, a preventative measure designed to reduce the likelihood of ‘enclaves’ by requiring that, of the total number of settlers, only half would come directly from abroad.⁶⁰

The Alaskan project met with support, primarily because of the popularity of the policy of Alaskan development and the economic benefits that were sold as a part of the project. Even the Junior Order United American Mechanics, the arch-restrictionist patriotic organisation, disavowed any concern over the potential effects of the introduction of such a large number of refugees, declaring:

Alaska is a stage set for modern pioneers ... Like the Prairies and the West, Alaska should be open to all who share the American pioneer desire to build a community in the wilderness. In Alaska there is ample opportunity for a pioneer community to thrive ... there is ample opportunity for men and women who have the frontier spirit.⁶¹

However, news in August 1939 that a refugee bill circumventing the quota limits was under preparation aroused immediate opposition. Within a few days reports surfaced

the Alaska proposals with the Vice President, John Garner, Ickes does not note whether he had been informed of Roosevelt’s personal response to the Interior Department’s report: Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953) 3: 46

57. Sumner Welles to Franklin Roosevelt, memorandum, 19 October 1939, NA, Social and Economic Branch, Department of the Interior File 9-1-2.

58. Ickes, *Secret Diary* 3: 55.

59. Ickes, *Secret Diary* 3: 56–57.

60. Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 102.

61. Department of the Interior, press release, 11 February 1940, NA, Social and Economic Branch, Department of the Interior File 9-1-2.

in the *New York Times* of numerous protests in Alaska against the possible entry of large numbers of refugees.⁶² While the *Times* noted that some of the hostility was ‘based on racial grounds’ it is unclear whether this was a particularly identifiable anti-Semitism. Indeed, in a series of editorials, a leading Alaskan newspaper, the *Fairbanks Daily News–Miner*, emphasised that its disapproval of the proposal was based ‘not as much on where these refugees come from’ but on ‘the changes to the Alaskan communities’ that such migration would have precipitated.⁶³ The lack of an identifiable ‘anti-Semitic’ tone in the *News–Miner* is significant, as the newspaper was not reticent, historically, in framing editorial commentary in ‘racial’ terms, and the decision not to do so with the 1939 refugee plans reinforces the argument that the proposals were rejected by the Alaskan community not on anti-Semitic grounds but on more generalised xenophobic and nativist concerns.⁶⁴

Despite the signs of disapproval in the Alaskan community, in February 1940 Ickes and his department finalised the preparations to present the Alaskan development proposal for the consideration of Congress, claiming that, notwithstanding the opposition in ‘isolated sections’ of the Alaskan press, there was broad support throughout the Union and the Alaskan territory to see the proposals enacted into law.⁶⁵ In Congress, the cause of the refugee settlement programme was taken up by Senator William King of Utah and Representative Frank Havenner. The provisions of the King–Havenner bill allowed for the formation of privately funded ‘development corporations’ to ensure the scheme was not reliant on government money, and to encourage the flow of capital from the contiguous United States into the Alaskan territory. This measure would have also required

62. ‘Alaskans Reject Refugee Proposal’, *New York Times*, 18 August 1939, 6; ‘News’, *Contemporary Jewish Record* 2 (1939): 83; Ickes, *Secret Diary*, Vol. 3, 56.

63. ‘Editorial’, *Fairbanks Daily News–Miner*, 20 September 1939, 11.

64. The *News–Miner* was, for example, very vocal in its support for the retention of Alaska’s segregation laws and its opposition to measures designed to improve the condition of Alaskan Native Americans, proclaiming that Alaska was ‘A white man’s country and must remain as such’, see: Terrence M. Cole, ‘Jim Crow in Alaska: The passage of the Alaska Equal Rights Act of 1945’, *Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1992): 433.

65. Department of the Interior, press release, 11 February 1940, NA, Social and Economic Branch, Department of the Interior File 9-1-2.

development corporations ensure that their activities did not interfere with the running of existing businesses in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest and was therefore clearly a measure designed to reinforce the economic stimulus nature of the bill.⁶⁶

Despite framing its provisions in terms of clear and realisable economic benefit to both Alaska and the United States at large, the King–Havenner bill, like the Wagner–Rogers bill met with fierce opposition from interest groups and restrictionist lobbies. Even groups supportive of other refugee aid measures, were unwilling to support the King–Havenner bill.⁶⁷ The periodical press that had been in favour of previous legislative attempts at refugee assistance were silent on the Alaskan measure: the *Nation* published nothing at the time and the proposal was only briefly noted in a letter to the editor of the *New Republic*.⁶⁸ The bill was quickly referred to a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs.

In subcommittee hearings on the bill, Alaskan witnesses including the mayor of Seward, Colonel John Taylor, and House of Representatives delegate Anthony Diamond opposed the bill on the grounds that it was an unreasonable interference by Washington in the affairs of the territory, especially given that the bill did not provide for independent congressional oversight and left almost all decisions to the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior.⁶⁹ Interestingly, the focus of the discussion was clearly diverted away from any critical investigation of the humanitarian aspects of the bill. Indeed, it appears from reading the transcript of the hearings that the humanitarian aspect of the proposed legislation was a minor element in comparison with the effects on the Alaskan economy and national security. Diamond argued that the proposal, by establishing separate immigration laws for

66. See: *Congressional Record* 87, Part 10, 77th Congress, 1st session, 1772.

67. Groups included the Non-Sectarian Committee, see: United States Senate, *Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs on S. 3577 A Bill to Provide for the Settlement and Development of Alaska* 76th Congress, 3rd session (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1940): 126–128.

68. Robert Marshall, 'Should We Settle Alaska?' *New Republic* 102 (8 January 1940): 49–50. On the disinterestedness of the press, see also Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 104.

69. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 119.

Alaska, would set it off from the rest of the country, unfairly affecting the standing and rights of natural-born Alaskans.⁷⁰ The only really striking criticism of the refugees themselves came from restrictionist John Trevor, who claimed and foreigners from Europe represented a security threat to the United States because of those foreigners' exposure to communist philosophies.⁷¹ Trevor's vehemently critical voice was alone in the strict condemnation of refugees. Yet even Trevor's comments suggest an attitude not of anti-Semitism *per se* but rather of orthodox xenophobia in the American nativist, anti-radical mould.⁷²

As if in some recognition that the prevailing currents of nativism and xenophobia were too great to tackle, testimony from the supporters of the bill advocated its adoption not because of its humanitarian aspect, but in spite of it.⁷³ The Department of the Interior's witnesses all followed a consistent line of the economic benefit to Alaska, and they were joined by more than a dozen other officials from a variety of agencies, including Commerce and Labor and the office of Alaskan Fisheries who all vouched for the economic practicality of the bill. Yet Senator Reynolds was one member of the subcommittee who questioned the claim that the bill was in essence an economic benefit measure. Under cross-examination Reynolds forced the witnesses to agree that the legislation was really aimed mainly at helping refugees.⁷⁴ The argumentation employed to try to secure these admissions was sophisticated: one approach was to demonstrate that the proposed plans for the development of Alaska would work just as well without immigrants.⁷⁵ Reynolds skilfully compelled many witnesses to agree that in almost all the sectors of the economy

70. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 170.

71. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 231.

72. On the development of the orthodox nativist xenophobia in the years leading up to the discussion of the King–Havenner bill, see: Walter B. Michaels, *Nativism, Discrimination and Images of Immigrants* (New York: Garland, 1991): 20–36; and David H. Bennet, *The Party of Fear: From nativist movements to the New Right in American history* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988): 56–68.

73. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 8.

74. See, for example, Reynolds examining E. J. Shaugenssey of the Department of Labor, Clarence E. Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee: *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 19 and 95 respectively.

75. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 92–94.

mentioned by the bill's proponents, 'good honest American labor would suffice' and that refugee workers were not essential to the economic success of the Alaskan development proposals.⁷⁶ The bill's opponents on the subcommittee pressed these witnesses further and used the subcommittee hearings to declare that the only change that would have been wrought by the bill was the introduction of the right of unscrupulous owners of the new 'Alaskan development corporations' to 'rob unemployed Americans of potential employment in Alaska'.⁷⁷ Ultimately, and ironically, the pro-refugee cause was harmed by their tactic of emphasising the pure economic nature of the King–Havenner bill: if the labour source was incidental to the primary industrial purpose of the bill, Reynolds reasoned, there was no inherent need to bring in refugees.⁷⁸

Reynolds' argument against the bill convinced a majority of the subcommittee members and they advised the Senate not to proceed with the bill. However, the proponents of an American territorial solution to the problem of European refugees continued to advocate for their cause. Representative Samuel Dickstein proposed in the House of Representative a similar measure, combining the unused quota places to allow one mass entry of refugees into Alaska.⁷⁹ Yet by this time the Alaskan communities were well-prepared to attack the measure, and they were vocal in their opposition to the reintroduced plan. The *New York Times* reported that motions rejecting interference by Washington in the economic development of Alaska had been passed by the Alaskan State Senate and that there was widespread disapproval among ordinary Alaskans of what they saw as the transformation of the territory into an immigrant 'holding-pen'.⁸⁰

The legislative measures such as the Wagner–Rogers and King–Havenner bills, and the later short-lived plan to settle refugees in the American Virgin Islands, failed in the

76. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 131.

77. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 97–98.

78. *Hearings before a subcommittee on S. 3577*, 150–152, 237.

79. *Congressional Record* 87, Part 10, 77th Congress, 3rd session, 1809.

80. *New York Times*, 10 December 1940, 30. The *Times* also reported unattributed references to 'refugee concentration camps' in the same article.

political climate of the late 1930s that was characterised by nativism and the lingering economic insecurity that attended reconstruction after the Great Depression.⁸¹ Critics of Congress, most notably David Wyman, whose sizeable academic output on the topic has influenced significantly most contemporary research, point to the obstructionism and reticence that faced refugee bills as evincing a general anti-Semitic undercurrent.⁸² Such critiques rely on placing the Congressional debates and the statements made at subcommittees on proposed legislation in an artificial context, in which actions are interpreted through the lenses of moral and ethical arguments and the discourse of universal human rights. This analytical context is ‘artificial’ in the sense that it requires one to emphasise retrospectively a particular set of imperatives that, at the time played a minor role in the discussion. While modern scholars, and, indeed, contemporary government and public attitudes, are attune to the ‘moral question’ that arises when responding to global tragedies, this was not necessarily the case for the key players in Congress in the 1930s and 1940s. To the extent that the Congress in pre-war America was a reflection of the population that elected it, the congressional response should be read through a lens that emphasises prevailing attitudes to refugees and immigration in general, and these attitudes were strongly anti-immigrant, but stemmed from the prevailing influence of nativist discourses rather than a popular anti-Semitic fervour.

81. The Virgin Islands proposal involved the holding of refugees on the island. There were no economic benefits associated with the measure as there had been with the Alaskan plan, and the proposal never made it pass low-level discussion in the Roosevelt Administration. See: Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 134.

82. See, for example: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 111. Wyman, provides the only lengthy published academic treatment of the Alaskan proposal, which, since the publication of *Paper Walls* in 1968 has largely been ignored in the literature. Even the Breitman and Kraut’s definitive chronicle of American refugee policy during the war mentions the Alaskan refugee plan only twice in passing: Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 66, 233. Wyman’s influence on the direction of research is evinced by the references to him in the most recent scholarship, almost four decades after *Paper Walls*, see, for example: N. Ghandnoosh and R. Waldinger, ‘Strangers at the Gates: The peculiar politics of American immigration’, *International Migration Review* 40, no. 3 (2006): 719–734; M. C. Desch, ‘The Myth of Abandonment: The use and abuse of the Holocaust analogy’, *Security Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 106–145; L. K. Kerber, ‘Toward a History of Statelessness in America’, *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 727–749; M. P. Friedman, ‘The U. S. State Department and the Failure to Rescue: Some new evidence on the missed opportunity at Bergen-Belsen’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 26–50; and C. Collomp, ‘The Jewish Labor Committee, American Labor and the Rescue of European Socialists, 1934–1941’, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 68 (2005): 112–33.

The Congressional expression of nativism as seen in the records of debates shows a popular anti-immigrant consensus. The source of this hostility, rather than being ideological, is clearly economic. Debates, for instance, on the Alaska development proposal were framed not in terms of ideological constructions of citizenship, immigration or the responsibilities of Americans as global citizens. Rather, these debates were framed by an economic dialogue that, true to the spirit of American nativism, specifically disavowed ethical concerns in favour of economic benefit. The administration's chief proponent of the Alaska bill in the congressional subcommittee, Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, encapsulated this attitude on the first day of hearings into the bill:

I know the word 'humanitarian' is in bad odor these days, and I don't suggest that this committee take any action on humanitarian grounds. I do propose that, if a proposition is good for business, and good for the national defence, and good for the American people, we ought not to turn it down merely because it has some humanitarian by-products. This, I take it, is the sum of the bill.⁸³

Ickes' testimony is couched in economics not as a consequence of any callousness on his part—as conversations he had with his personal staff reveal, he was highly sympathetic to the plight of refugees, especially Jewish ones.⁸⁴ Rather, Ickes appears to be expressing his pro-refugee position in arguments that target what he must have seen as the committee members' paramount concern: the threat to Americans' jobs and the impact on government spending and the national economy. In a recent study on the attitudinal response to immigration in the United States throughout its history, Ali Behdad explains the economic foundations of American nativism:

Many sociologists and most immigrant-rights activists consider the nation's anti-immigrant views as arising from economic conditions. Echoing the economism of the restrictionsists, they argue that hostility toward 'aliens' is an ephemeral and cyclical reaction to the

83. *Hearings before a subcommittee*, 8.

84. Grueber, *Haven*, 15–20.

nation's swelled unemployment and economic slump. These observers cite the historical tendency of periods of receptivity to alternate with periods of exclusion.⁸⁵

The cyclical nature of the anti-immigrant attitudes of the American public and its legislative representatives is an important point to note in the characterisation of the congressional response to the refugee problem. The question of the admission of European refugees arose after a period of immigration stagnation in the United States: the 1924 Johnson–Reed act had precipitated a sharp decline in immigration that lasted at least as far as the Great Depression, and the restrictionists of the Depression years were effective in Congress in advocating even further reductions in the quotas.⁸⁶ The debate on European refugee immigration was, given its timing, clearly likely to arouse the traditional anti-immigrant economic rhetoric of the nativist dialogue: the debate came at that point in the immigration cycle that, according to Behdad's analysis, naturally gave rise to such nativist responses.

The European refugee debate in Congress was highly symbolic but not only because of its place in the immigration attitudinal cycle. The debate was in many ways irrelevant to the practicalities of the admission of refugees, because, while the Congress debated the size of the quotas allocated to respective countries, the consular service in Europe was failing even to fill the quotas that were already in place. The numbers of refugees proposed by the bills would have easily fit, when spread over a number of years, into the existing quota system, because the German-Austrian quota (under which most of the refugees would have fallen) was rarely even close to being filled, as the following table illustrates.⁸⁷

85. Ali Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation: On immigration, and cultural identity in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005): 113. See also: Bennett, *Party of Fear*, 231; and Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 87.

86. Bennett, *Party of Fear*, 238; Robert Divine, *American Immigration Policy, 1924–1952* (New York: Da Capo, 1972): 81–84.

87. Data sourced from Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 221.

<i>Fiscal years</i>	<i>Percent of quota filled</i>
1934–1936	19.4
1937–1939	64.1
1940–1942	53.6
1943–1945	4.6
<hr/>	
1933–1945	35.8

The quota spaces left unfilled in the years 1934–1945 can be read as an indication of the reticence of the State Department, the American consular network and the administration generally to accommodate refugees. They also reveal that the question of the adoption or rejection of legislation to provide for an influx in quota numbers was, from a practical point of view, an irrelevant question. The congressional actions were unlikely to result in greater immigration given the history of restriction at the consular level, and therefore, as debates, had a symbolic, rather than practical, importance. The question that demands attention is that of the characterisation of that symbolism. The label of ‘anti-Semitism’ might, at first sight, seem readily applicable to Congress during the war years. However, when the congressional debates are positioned within the cyclical nativist discourse—that is, when the analysis shifts from a retrospective moral-ethical focus to a gaze that emphasises contemporaneous nativist imperatives—the character of congressional objection to refugee legislation changes. It becomes apparent that, far from being an anti-Semitic aberration in an otherwise xenophilous, tolerant immigrant programme, the congressional debates regarding the admission of refugees from Europe in the 1930s and during the war fit within a well-defined cycle of economically determined anti-immigrant sentiment.

CHAPTER TWO

Fear and paranoia in Foggy Bottom

Although Congress debated the legislative framework that surrounded refugee immigration, this process was ultimately a theoretical exercise because the functioning of the refugee immigration system was largely governed by the discretion of the administration. The administration, on the urging of the State Department, made the decision to introduce complex immigration procedures that had the effect of dramatically reducing the rate of successful applications for refugee immigration. David Wyman, and scores of scholars who have followed him and based their research on his, conclude that the policies were introduced because of a latent anti-Semitism and wilful blindness on the part of key members of the Roosevelt administration, especially at the apex of the State Department.¹ However, were the actions of the State Department an example of archetypical anti-Semitism on the part of the bureaucrats at the helm?² Or were the

1. David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the refugee crisis* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968): 211–213. See also: S. Adler, ‘F. D. Roosevelt and Zionism—Wartime record’, *Judaism* 21, no. 83 (1972): 269; S. Adler, ‘United States and the Holocaust’, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1974): 20; C. Collomp, ‘The Jewish Labor Committee, American Labor, and the Rescue of European Socialists, 1934–1941’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 68 (2005): 115; J. S. Conway, ‘The Holocaust and the Historians’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 450 (1980): 159; Richard Breitman, ‘The Allied War Effort and the Jews, 1942–1943’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 1 (1985): 146–147; R. Daniels, ‘American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945’, *American Jewish Archives* 41, no. 1 (1989): 115; Henry Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration, and the Holocaust, 1938–1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970): 12–122; M. Friedman, ‘The U.S. State Department and the Failure to Rescue: New evidence on the missed opportunity at Bergen Belsen’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 34–35; Deborah Lipstadt, ‘Witness to the Persecution: The Allies and the Holocaust—a review essay’, *Modern Judaism* 3, no. 3 (1983): 331; R. Medoff, ‘New Evidence Concerning the Allies and Auschwitz (Anti-Semitism and the Politics of the American Military)’, *American Jewish History* 89, no. 1 (2001): 100; and Bat Ami Zucker, ‘Frances Perkins and the German-Jewish Refugees, 1933–1940’, *American Jewish History* 89, no. 1 (2001): 46.

2. That is, ‘anti-Semitism’ as it has been traditionally understood as being ‘a hostile attitude toward Jews (regarded as a threat) that develops into a tradition and becomes institutionalised’: Ben Halpern, ‘What is Antisemitism?’, *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981): 252–253. See also: Gary A. Tobin, *Jewish Perceptions of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988): 6–12; Roberto Finzi, *Anti-Semitism: From its European roots to the Holocaust*

depressingly low refugee intake and the slow rate of application processing the inevitable result of a large and complex bureaucracy balancing the competing demands of international humanitarian obligations and domestic political concerns? While anti-Semitic themes are identifiable in the behaviour of some officials, the executive government was an enormous organisation of specialised agencies, monolithic departments like State and Treasury, and myriad individuals in consulates dispersed across Europe. The claim that such an enormous and dispersed bureaucracy could act in such anti-Semitic accord, executing a finely planned system of refugee-exclusion, while still uniformly maintaining a façade of fairness across all agencies, is incredible. Such critiques of the administration's actions inordinately focus on the personalities such as Breckinridge Long and often too quickly dismiss national security concerns that featured in the administration's policies. An examination of the administration's reaction to the refugee problem, especially after 1940 when more and more observers started to believe war with the Axis powers likely, reveals that, far from being a cover for underlying anti-Semitic immigration policy, the fear of threats to national security was genuine—regardless of the rationality of that fear. The decisiveness of the fifth column in directing the course of modern warfare was apparent to all key members of the American administration and the public at large after the events of the Spanish Civil War. European experience worried American observers because fifth columnists were not limited to paramilitary personnel or spies, the fifth column included many 'ordinary' members of the public acting as clandestine saboteurs or grass-roots propagandists who could divide the community and undermine the government by convincing masses of people of the pointlessness of the war effort.³ Aliens, especially

(New York: Interlink Books, 1999): 21; and Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 11–13, chapter 7.

3. See: Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis fifth column and the American home front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 12–19.

refugees with no familial or employment basis in the United States were, as was the case in the years following World War I, prime suspects.⁴

An appreciation of the nature, extent and justification of the United States' anxiety over the fifth column threat should be framed in the context of the experiences in the Allied countries in Europe. France was quick to act on the threat posed by German nationals, imprisoning most adult German men in French territory almost immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, although most were released within a few months. The Germans' liberty was short-lived, however, because when the *Blitzkrieg* struck, the French government placed thousands of refugees in concentration camps as a precaution against pro-German activities.⁵ Across the Channel, Whitehall waited until mid-May 1940 before it began a policy of confining aliens from Axis powers, and by the summer of that year British authorities had transported almost 10,000 aliens to British Commonwealth nations and kept a further 20,000 in custody in the British Isles.⁶ Strong public indignation at the policy of detaining anti-Nazi refugees forced an end to Britain's general internment of aliens, but nonetheless, by late 1941, 9,000 Axis and other 'suspect' nationals remained in custody.⁷

The news of the British public's criticism of the internment policies was, interestingly, not widely reported in the mainstream American press, the most comprehensive coverage of the anti-internment sentiments of the British public actually appeared in the niche publication of the American Jewish Committee.⁸ The wide-spread

4. Stanley Cohen, 'A Study in Nativism: The American Red Scare of 1919–1920', *Political Science Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1964): 61; and William H. Siener, 'The Red Scare Revisited: Radicals and the anti-radical movement in Buffalo, 1919–1920', *New York History* 79, no. 1 (1998): 39. See also: David R. Colburn 'Governor Alfred E. Smith and the Red Scare, 1919–1920', *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (1973): 423–444; and Paul L. Murray, 'Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s', *Journal of American History* 51, no. 1 (1964): 60–76.

5. Glyn Pryor, 'The "Fifth Column" and the British Experience of Retreat', *War and History* 12, no. 4 (2005): 432.

6. Kay Saunders, "'The Stranger in Our Gates': Internment policies in the United Kingdom and Australia during the two world wars 1914–1939', *Immigrants and Minorities* 22, no. 1 (2003): 31.

7. Louise Burletson, 'The State, Internment and Public Criticism in the Second World War', *Immigrants and Minorities* 11, no. 3 (1992): 111.

8. *Contemporary Jewish Record* 2 (July 1940): 417.

publishing in America of stories from across the Atlantic of the imprisonment of suspected enemy agents without similar coverage of the winding back of the internment policies suggest a bias (though not necessarily intentional) in the press coverage that might account for American anxieties about aliens growing at a constant rate throughout 1930–1941.⁹ The pressures that resulted from this fifth column anxiety were expressed in support for two goals: the introduction of legislative controls on aliens already in the United States and a restriction of immigration policy, preventing more possible foreign agents entering the country. Nativists, unable in the Depression years to ride the unemployment argument to total success, found that the fifth column threat rapidly swept the government and the public nearer to nativists' long-standing views that foreigners should be kept under close surveillance and that immigration should end.¹⁰

After mid-1940, there was a confluence of different strands of anti-immigration argument: the employment market threat and nativist concerns were joined by a modern, fifth column fear. Increasing public acceptance and advocacy of legislation to restrict immigration, to deport aliens and to fingerprint foreigners assured restrictionists that the public was at last awakening to what the leaders of one patriotic organisation, the Junior Order United American Mechanics, decried as 'the dangers in our midst right here at home'.¹¹ That organisation was forceful in its support of the anti-immigration, nativist cause, noting in its journal: 'For years we carried on in the face of great odds and difficulties. We did not falter or quit. Now we see the fruition, the happy reaction at hand'. The fifth column fear was an important component of the rhetorical foundations of the nativist argument, all the more so since the expansion of the European conflict began to

9. Peter H. Amann, 'A "Dog in the Nighttime" Problem: American fascism in the 1930s', *The History Teacher* 19, no. 4 (1986): 559.

10. On this point, see: John M. Blum, 'Closing America', *Dimensions* 8, no. 1 (1994): 23–28.

11. William Fox, 'America's Enemy', *Junior American* 15 (June 1940): 1.

stimulate the American economy, resulting in the limited utility of unemployment arguments against immigration.¹²

The fifth column fear and the characterisation of immigrants as potential spies and saboteurs were dealt with seriously in Congress. In the earliest days of the war, senators utilised traditional nativist suspicions of foreigners as tropes to bolster their arguments for the need to protect Americans against the national danger posed by the war. One senator from North Carolina warned in the month following the outbreak of hostilities in Europe that ‘thousands of alien enemies were spying in the United States’.¹³ Later, in early 1940, the same senator declared that ‘today our country is honeycombed with saboteurs and spies’ and ‘we are surrounded by the enemy [and must] fear an attack by the enemy within’.¹⁴ In the late 1930s, especially in the mid-term elections of 1938, anti-immigrant, staunchly nativist statements such as this would have been interpreted as electioneering antialienism.¹⁵ However, by mid-1940, Senator Robert Reynolds and the nativist, anti-alien faction in Congress were increasingly part of the mainstream political position on the immigration and refugee questions.

Public opinion polling from the period reflects the extent to which suspicion of immigrants as potential fifth columnists had infiltrated the public’s perception of the threat posed by foreign agents. For example, a poll published in *Fortune* magazine in July 1940 revealed that 71 percent of those surveyed were ‘convinced that Germany had already

12. See, for example, how the unemployment argument is downplayed in ‘Editorial’, *Junior American* 15 (June 1940): 1.

13. See Senator Reynolds’ (North Carolina) remarks: *Congressional Record* 86, Part 1, 76th Congress, 3rd session, 680.

14. *Congressional Record* 86, Part 1, 76th Congress, 4th session, 367.

15. For examples of the scholarly treatment of the intersection between immigration, nativism and ethnicity in the 1938 election, see: Donald G. Sofchalk, ‘Union and Ethnic Group Influence in the 1938 Election in the Minnesota Iron Ranges’, *Journal of the West* 42, no. 3 (2003): 66–74; Jamie L. Carson, ‘Electoral and Partisan Forces in the Roosevelt Era: The U.S. Congressional elections of 1938’, *Congress and the Presidency* 28, no. 2 (2001): 161–183; and M. J. Heale, ‘The Triumph of Liberalism? Red Scare Politics in Michigan, 1938–1954’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 139, no. 1 (1995): 44–66. The press in the late 1930s clearly identified cases of adoption of and anti-alien posture for political purposes, see for example: ‘Editorial’, *The New York Times*, 27 October 1938, 25; ‘Senator is old liberal but so is his rival’ *The Washington Post*, 6 November 1938, 1; ‘The Post-impressionist’, *The Washington Post*, 15 November 1938, 10; ‘U.S. is for peace with no part in war’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 August 1939, 9.

started to organise a “Fifth Column” in [America]’ and that, in response to this supposed threat, 46 percent of respondents agreed that the United States government ought to have deported or imprisoned people suspected of being Nazi sympathisers.¹⁶ The magazine suggested that the levels of distrust in the community were dangerously high, creating a culture of suspicion not just of newly-arrived immigrants, but also of established families, part of a growing number of people eagerly ‘keeping a close eye on [neighbours] suspected of being fifth columnists.’¹⁷

The feedback system that exists between currents of public opinion and coverage of the opinion in the press served to identify and to reinforce these anti-alien and nativist fears of fifth columnists. Certain sections of the periodical press actively sought to capitalise on the dramatic and threatening aura that surrounded the fifth column issue, some magazines presented details of fifth column conspiracy theories while only a few publications sought to downplay or contextualise rationally the threat posed by immigrants and refugees.¹⁸ By mid-1940 popular magazines were running serialised ‘investigative reports’ into the threat posed by fifth column forces in ordinary American communities. Articles under such emotive titles as ‘Enemies with Our Gates’, ‘Treachery in the Air’ and ‘Hitler’s Slave Spies in America’ presented a dire picture of the threat, consolidating and undoubtedly fuelling suspicion of immigrants and anti-alien fervour among the magazines’ readership.¹⁹ In October 1940, *Fortune* magazine presented what it claimed was a comprehensive report of the ‘fifth column’ groups that were a ‘direct threat’ to the American people.²⁰ Fanning the flames of anti-alienism through a focus on subversives was not an exclusively right-wing activity: even the left-leaning *Nation* published reports presenting in extremely stark terms the threat posed by Nazi-directed fifth-column

16. ‘Danger in a time of War’ *Fortune* 22 (July, 1940) insert, 6

17. ‘Danger in a time of War’, 8.

18. MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes*, 56 and chapter 8 generally. See also: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 187.

19. These titles are drawn from: *American Magazine* 130, no. 8 (1940): 18; 130, no. 9 (1940): 44; 131, no. 2 (1941): 35; and 131, no. 4 (1941), 14. See also: ‘America faces the Fifth Column’, *Readers Digest* 37 (October 1940): 41–44.

20. ‘The Fifth Column Threat in America’, *Fortune* 22 (October 1940): 46.

activities in the United States.²¹ While historians of immigration policy have noted these press reports in the past, scholarly treatment has not extended much beyond cataloguing and dating the reports.²² Press treatment of the fifth column problem was significant in influencing public perception of the threat posed by immigrants and refugees, and there is evidence that published articles and editorials triggered concern in the minds of senior administration officials.²³ One of the clearest demonstrations of the seriousness with which the administration treated the public anxiety of fifth column threats is the publication in the *American Magazine* of an article written by J. Edgar Hoover—FBI director and, in the years following the war, a chief propagator of fifth column fear—in which he appealed to Americans to report suspicious activities to the authorities rather than to take matters into their own hands.²⁴

The Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, noted the ways in which the public fear of potential subversive elements among immigrants was influencing discussions at the highest levels of government, observing how many cabinet members were ‘plainly worried’ about the community’s anxiety and the threat of “spy-hunts”.²⁵ The Attorney General, Robert Jackson, reported to the cabinet on

The hysteria that is sweeping the country against aliens and fifth columnists ... People are breaking into other people’s houses and confronting them with a flag and demanding that they salute it. Down in Georgia, Governor Rivers has promptly declared war on all aliens ... [Jackson] indicated that it might be necessary for the Government actually to indict some prominent local or state

21. ‘Within the Gates’, *Nation* 151 (July 1940): 16.

22. See, for example: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 168–183; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 210–230; and Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987): 118–120. Some scholars do even less than acknowledge the press coverage, dismissing the issue outright, see Bat-Ami Zucker, *In Search of Refuge: Jews and U.S. consuls in Nazi Germany, 1933–1941* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001): 152–153.

23. See, for example: Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 3: 57–62; Breckinridge Long, *War Diary of Breckinridge Long: Selections from the war years, 1939–1941*, ed. Fred L. Israel (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966): 230–235, 257. See also: MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes*, chapter 8.

24. J. Edgar Hoover, ‘Big Scare’, *American Magazine* 132 (August 1941): 24.

25. Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 3: 188.

officials in order to make it known to the country that we were not being ruled by disorderly mobs.²⁶

The necessarily covert and obscure nature of subversive groups further hindered the public's ability to assess accurately the real threat posed by immigrants and political groups with immigrant membership.²⁷

Roosevelt's private papers reveal that he was acutely aware of this prevailing public anxiety about immigrant communities' potentially subversive elements, and, following the German advances in Europe during the spring of 1940, he moved to tighten controls against possible entry of Nazi agents.²⁸ On 22 May Roosevelt sent Congress a plan for the transfer of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service from the Labor Department to the Justice Department to ensure 'more effective control over aliens'.²⁹ Roosevelt explained the necessity of this transfer in terms of national defence and he explicitly stated that this was an anti-subversive measure in response to public concern over espionage and sabotage.³⁰

This reshuffle was the start of a period of increasing complication of immigration policy and procedure. It introduced into the Justice Department an additional layer of bureaucratic complexity, as new staff were brought into an organisation already busy with anti-subversive programmes. Adding to the increasingly complex web of Washington bureaucratic interactions, the removal from the Labor Department of the refugee programme was identified by many as a sign of the president's lack of confidence in the

26. Ickes, *Secret Diary*, 3: 211.

27. Immigrants were attracted in varying numbers to the philosophies of the major parties, but were often perceived to be proportionally over-represented in groups that deviated significantly from the political centre: Aihwa Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States', in *Life in America*, ed. Lee D. Baker (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004): 161–163. See also: Higham, *Send These to Me*, 230; John F. Stack, *International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians and Jews, 1935–1944* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979): 13–20; and Jonathan Reider, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985): 31–42.

28. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969) 8: 223–229. On Roosevelt's sensitivity to public opinion during the war, see esp.: Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American public opinion and the war against Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): x–xxvi; Michael A. Baum and Samuel Kernell, 'Economic Class and Popular Support for Franklin Roosevelt in War and Peace', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2001): 202; and, generally, Melvin G. Holli, *The Wizard of Washington: Emil Hurja, Franklin Roosevelt and the Birth of Public Opinion Polling* (New York: Pelgrave, 2002).

29. Roosevelt, *Papers and Addresses*, 8: 227. See also, Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 66.

30. 'Press Conference No. 645, 21 May 1940', *The Press Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 15.

ability of that department to handle the task of immigration—an interpretation that may have fuelled inter-departmental rivalry.³¹ During Roosevelt’s reorganisation, Congress had doubled the size of the Border Patrol, and had introduced legislative measures that outlawed advocacy of the overthrow of any government in the United States; affiliation with a group advocating forcible overthrow the government; and required the fingerprinting and registration of all adult aliens.³² The Attorney General, in an appearance before a congressional committee, announced that yet a further layer of administrative procedure was to be introduced in the form of the ‘Third Visa Policy’. This policy, the Attorney General proclaimed, would ensure that ‘none shall be admitted unless it affirmatively appears to be for American interest’.³³

The fifth column threat became firmly associated with European refugees in 1940, when the War Department announced that 81 foreign agents had been captured in Panama.³⁴ This announcement coincided with remarks made by the former American ambassador to France, William C. Baulitt, who repeatedly addressed groups of ‘concerned citizens’, focussing on the potential danger posed by European immigrants. For example, Baulitt declared:

The French had been more hospitable than even we Americans are to refugees from Germany. More than one half of the spies captured doing actual military spy work against the French government were refugees from Germany. Do you believe that there are no Nazi and Communist spies of this sort in America?³⁵

Further cementing the impression that refugees were serving as Nazi agents were reports that Belgian, Dutch, Spanish and Swiss authorities had all intercepted dozens of

31. On the inter-departmental rivalry on the immigration issue see: Norman L. Zucker and Naomi F. Zucker, ‘From Immigration to Refugee Redefinition: A history of refugee and asylum policy in the United States’, *Journal of Policy History* 4, no. 1 (1992): 56; Alan M. Kraut, Richard Breitman and Thomas W. Imhoof, ‘The State Department, the Labor Department and German Jewish Immigration, 1930–1940’, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3, no. 2 (1984): 21. See also: Bat-Ami Zucker, ‘Frances Perkins and the German Jewish Refugees, 1933–1940’, *American Jewish History* 89, no. 1 (2001): 35–59.

32. *Congressional Record* 87, Part 10, 76th Congress, 1st Session, 10455–10456.

33. ‘New Immigration Bill’, *New York Times*, 15 June 1940, 9.

34. ‘Army of 4,000,000 top defense need’, *New York Times*, 21 August 1940, 1. MORE!

35. ‘Europe’s Refugee Crisis’, *New York Times*, 2 August 1940, 1 and 19 August 1940, 4.

Nazi spies ‘camouflaged as Jewish refugees’ or recruited into Nazi service from the Jewish communities themselves.³⁶ On Capitol Hill, Senator Robert Reynolds repeatedly warned the Senate that ‘with every 25 or 50 refugees who come here there are agents of Hitler and Stalin’.³⁷ Commentator Samuel Lubell reported that ‘disguised as refugees, Nazi agents have penetrated all over the world, as spies, fifth columnists, propagandists and secret commercial agents’, and other periodicals claimed they had confirmed that ‘Vichy-Nazi’ agents had been identified in immigrant communities in the United States.³⁸ In the *American Magazine* and other periodicals, articles purported to confirm that the German government was ‘constructing a complex web of spies and saboteurs’ by extorting refugees’ assistance by threatening those refugees’ families in Nazi-held territory.³⁹ These reports, while they may have overstated the threat posed by immigrant fifth columnists and even, in extreme cases, bordered on the irrational, cannot be disregarded merely because of their rational flaws, as many scholars have done.⁴⁰ Rather the coverage of fifth column anxiety in the press should be seen as reflecting a genuinely held fear in certain sections of the community and, paradoxically, through that coverage, spreading that anxiety further. It should be stressed here that the fear was of *immigrant* fifth columnists generally, and while ‘Jewish’ fifth columnists were seen as a threat, the newspaper coverage and most of the public addresses cited above suggest that these suspected Jewish subversive groups were feared because they were subgroups of the larger *refugee* group, not because of their specific Jewish character.

36. A. Vission, ‘“Fifth Columnists” Tricks and Treacheries’, *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 October 1940, 24. See also: Richard Breitman, ‘American Inaction During the Holocaust’, *Dimensions* 8, no. 2 (1994): 3–8; and Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 78.

37. *Congressional Record* 87, Part 3 77th Congress, 1st Session, 3069.

38. Samuel Lubell, ‘War by Refugee’, *Saturday Evening Post*, 29 March 1941, 12, 89.

39. Donald Keyhoe and John Daly, ‘Hitler’s Slave Spies in America’, *American Magazine* 87 (1941): 14, 120.

40. See: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 168–183; Wyman, *Abandonment*, 210–230; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 118–120; Feingold, *Politics of Rescue*, 79; and Zucker, *In Search of Refuge*, 152–153.

THE FOURTH VISA POLICY

The administration quickly began to reflect the rising tide of subversive refugee anxiety, and policy was increasingly influenced by these anti-alien suspicions. Such suspicion was not limited to refugees from Axis territories. The American ambassador in Moscow, Laurence Steinhardt cabled the State Department claiming that there was credible evidence that the Soviet government was refusing to issue permits to travel to the United States unless those refugees agreed to serve as Soviet agents.⁴¹ Steinhardt noted that the Soviet regime had considerable leverage in its dealings with people intent on immigrating because of the threats Moscow could make on the lives of family members remaining in Soviet-controlled territory.⁴² The potential threat from Soviet fifth columnists provoked Steinhardt to declare emphatically that it would have been ‘dangerous not to say reckless, to continue to grant American visas indiscriminately to applicants recently residing in or who are now residing in the Soviet Union or Soviet-occupied territories’.⁴³

The press coverage and consular reports of the threat posed by Axis and Soviet agents, and the public’s perception of that threat, motivated the State Department to advise the president that ‘in view of reports indicating Nazi and other totalitarian agents are endeavouring to enter the United States in the guise of refugees, it has been considered essential in the national interest to scrutinise all applicants carefully’.⁴⁴ Subsequently, the bureaucratic process for obtaining a visa to enter the United States became stricter and more complex with American consuls asking refugees and their sponsors to swear

41. *State Department Bulletin* 4 (21 June 1941): 748.

42. United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1972) 3: 234–235. See also: *State Department Bulletin* 4 (21 June 1941): 752.

43. *Foreign Relations of the United States* 1, 598, 691. See also: Norman J. W. Goda, ‘Tracking the Red Orchestra: Allied intelligence, Soviet spies, Nazi criminals’ in *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis* ed. Richard Breitman, Norman J. W. Goda, Timothy Naftali and Robert Wolfe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 293–298; Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989): 106–110; Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 185–191; J. Edgar Hoover, *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* ed. Athan Theoharis (Chicago: IR Dee, 1991): 160–164.

44. Letter from Breckinridge Long to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 6 January 1941, FDR Official File 3186

affidavits confirming that visa applicants were ‘persons of high character and integrity who would not engage in subversive activities’.⁴⁵

Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, in April 1941, began discussions with various interest groups and government agencies in order to craft a comprehensive visa policy. In his discussions with representatives from the American Friends Service Committee, Long explained the necessity of the increasingly complex visa process in terms of appeasing the public’s genuine fear of Soviet and Nazi policies of compelling refugees to operate as spies in the United States.⁴⁶ In response to reports of foreign agents entering the United States, Long took the drastic step of directing that all visa applications be vetted by the State Department in Washington before the diplomatic posts in Europe made their final decisions.⁴⁷ The change, announced in March of 1941 but not implemented until later that year, was designed to take advantage of the department’s Washington-based infrastructure, filling the intelligence holes in the consular network that, in the past, had allowed the ‘entrance of spies or saboteurs into the country’.⁴⁸ Under Long’s new structure, he, as head of the department’s Visa Division, oversaw the initial processing of all immigration applicants. Long was called before the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee to account for the budget increases that his restructure entailed.⁴⁹ While Long emphasised that his bureaucratic expansion was necessary to weed-out applicants ‘engaged in activities inimical to the Government’, the lines of questioning

45. Letter from Breckinridge Long to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 6 January 1941, FDR Official File 3186.

46. Memorandum regarding discussion between Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long and Clarence Pickett’, 28 April 1941 AFSC GF. See also: Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet espionage in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999): 168.

47. Graham H. Stuart, ‘Wartime Visa-Control Procedures’, *Department of State Bulletin* 9 (10 September 1944): 273.

48. *New York Times*, 12 March 1941, 5.

49. United States House of Representatives, *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, 77th Congress, 1st session* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printer, 1941): 132.

from some committee members including Representative Edward T. Taylor suggest a suspicion that Long's actions were primarily driven by bureaucratic empire building.⁵⁰

It is not possible to conclude with any certainty whether Long's actions were the result of egoism or ambition, but there are two assessments that can be made about Long's Visa Plan. First, the formation of interdepartmental committees featuring senior representatives from the FBI to oversee the Washington-based vetting procedure, and the role military intelligence organisations were asked to play in determining the recommendations on individual applications, are consistent with the administration's stated 'national security' reasons for tightening immigration procedures.⁵¹ Second, the clerical and committee structure that Long's Fourth Visa Policy introduced resulted in yet more administrative procedure complicating the already complex immigration system as greater number of affidavits and documentary evidence were joined by more official reports and consular briefings in files that were being transmitted between multiple agencies and back and forth between diplomatic missions and Washington.

Scholars of American immigration policy in their analyses of the Fourth Visa Policy have persistently treated the complexities of the policy's administrative restructure only briefly, if at all. These scholars have paid too little attention to the natural constricting and retarding effects such increased bureaucratisation must surely have had on the progress of individual applications, instead insisting that the process must be seen as a mere façade hiding anti-Semitic attitudes.⁵² The most persuasive argument of the policy's hidden anti-

50. United States House of Representatives, *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations*: 137–146. Evidence of such bureaucratic 'empires' exerting tight control over information and resource access is also found later in the war, see: Virginia M. Mannon, 'Memorandum to the Files regarding Mr Elmer Davis' questioning of the War Refugee Board's release of German atrocity stories', 22 November 1944, FDR War Refugee Board 6. See also: Kraut, Breitman and Imhoof, 'German Jewish Immigration', 6–9; Breitman and Kraut *American Refugee Policy*, 126–130; and Richard Breitman, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis planned, what the British and Americans knew* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998): 50–61.

51. See: *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives*, 77th Congress, 1st session (1 May 1941): 137–146.

52. See, for example: Breitman, 'Allied War Effort', 140–146; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 80–81, 105–106, 224–225; Adler, 'United States and the Holocaust', 16–19; Daniels, 'American Refugee Policy', 114; Michael N. Dobkowski, 'American Anti-Semitism: A reinterpretation', *American Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1977): 166–181; Friedman, 'U.S. State Department and the Failure to Rescue', 30–40; Kraut, Breitman and

Semitic character is made by Wyman, but his point rests on one question in a list of ‘national security threat’ questions posed by one of the policy’s interdepartmental committees, the Review Committee, asking the applicant whether he or she was a Jew.⁵³ Ostensibly this piece of evidence does appear to cast the policy, or at least the Review Committee, in an anti-Semitic discriminatory hue. However, it is difficult to assess the real nature of that question as the source Wyman cites for it, a *State Department Bulletin* article, contains no reference at all to any such question, making it impossible to ascertain precisely the context of the question.⁵⁴ This deficiency in the evidence used to support the characterisation of the Fourth Visa Policy’s substance and implementation as anti-Semitic is a major flaw in the arguments put forward by Wyman and the scholars who have followed in his wake.⁵⁵ Without knowing the context of Wyman’s original source, it is difficult to determine conclusively whether the set of questions to which the ‘Jewish faith question’ demonstrates anti-Semitism in the policy. However, notwithstanding this, Wyman himself suggests that the question was presented as just one part of a much broader inquiry into an extensive range of individual applicants’ personal histories, a broadness that would suggest the purpose of the interrogation was to elicit an holistic portrait of an applicant and the potential threat he or she might have posed to American national security, not merely to determine whether he or she was Jewish.⁵⁶

In tandem with the State Department’s manoeuvres to tighten immigration procedures to guard against the potential entry of Soviet and Axis agents, Congress took an

Imhoof, ‘German-Jewish Immigration’, 35–38; Lipstadt, ‘Witness to the Persecution’, 333–338; Deborah Lipstadt, ‘America and the Holocaust’, *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 3 (1990): 289; Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 201–203; A. R. Zolberg, ‘The Roots of American Refugee Policy’, *Social Research* 55, no. 4 (1988): 451; and Zucker, ‘German-Jewish Refugees’, 56–59.

53. Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 202.

54. Wyman claims the source was Stuart, ‘Wartime Visa-Control Procedure’, 276. See Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 202, 271.

55. Wyman’s work established the basis on which most of the latter scholarship on this issue built. The ‘Fourth Visa Policy’ section of *Paper Walls* is referenced by almost all the scholars cited above in this chapter.

56. This suggestion is implicit in the other questions Wyman includes from the same document: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 202.

enthusiastic approach to providing the administration with the legislative backing for the Fourth Visa Policy.⁵⁷ In June 1941 the State Department, in collaboration with the Justice Department and the White House, sought and won the support of Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, who fiercely advocated the cause of the administration's immigration policy on the floor of the Senate. Russell spearheaded the passage of a bill supporting the administration's immigration bureaucracy expansion through the Senate Committee on Immigration. The committee was swift to approve the bill unanimously, noting in its report to the Senate the committee's recognition of the national security interests the administration was endeavouring to protect.⁵⁸ Transcripts of the debates on the Senate floor record that the senators were passionate in their conviction that the increasing size of the immigration administrative structure was necessary to protect Americans from those aliens who would 'endanger the public safety of the United States'.⁵⁹ The House of Representative was equally fervent in supporting the administration's new policies.⁶⁰

In addition to approving the expansion of the structure of the visa issuing network, Congress passed a range of measures that expanded the discretionary powers vested in the executive, allocating to Roosevelt—and, by extension, Cordell Hull and Breckinridge Long in the State Department and the Attorney General, Robert H. Jackson—sweeping powers controlling the admission and control of aliens which, following the World War I, had been restricted to wartime states of emergency.⁶¹

57. For examples of the proactive attitude of congressmen in this matter, see: *Congressional Record* 87, Part 5, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 4757–4780.

58. *Congressional Record* 87, Part 5, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 4762.

59. *Congressional Record* 87, Part 5, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 5084.

60. *Congressional Record* 87, Part 5, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 5047–5053, 5385–5389.

61. 'New Immigration Bill', *New York Times*, 20 July 1941, 4. See also: *Congressional Record* 87, Part 5, 77th Congress, 1st Session, 4757, 5133; and *Department of State Bulletin* 5, (15 November 1941), 318–382.

RESPONSES TO THE FOURTH VISA POLICY

Throughout the reorganisation of the State Department the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and Breckinridge Long participated in lengthy meetings with President Roosevelt and myriad refugee advocacy organisations, including Jewish and Christian interest groups. One of the principal bodies, the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees (PAC), which had been specially formed by Roosevelt to advise on refugee immigration policy, asked the administration to review the Fourth Visa Policy.⁶² In response, Hull dispatched a lengthy memorandum to the president advising that despite the calls for review from lobby groups, Long's policies had been vindicated by the revelations that 'some foreign agents posing as refugees' had recently been 'apprehended in the United States with yet others apprehended after they left Europe but before they reached the United States', news that had already forced the closure of American consulates in Germany.⁶³ Despite the firm stance the State Department was taking on the policy, Roosevelt agreed to meet with a delegation from the refugee interest groups.

The meetings between the president and the PAC took place throughout September and October 1941. The PAC admitted that it understood the national security imperatives that motivated the changes to the immigration policy, but noted, 'experience with refugees has convinced us that it is unnecessary, illogical, ill adapted to the purposes claimed for it, and cruelly burdensome on the refugees affected by it'.⁶⁴ However, the PAC also suggested that the complexity of the new structure could be rendered less severe with some slight changes, including a streamlining of the interdepartmental committee system

62. The PAC included representatives from most of the peak Jewish and non-Jewish organisations, including the American Jewish Committee and the World Jewish Congress. Influential Jewish leader Rabbi Stephen Wise sat on the PAC, see: Stephen Wise, *Stephen S. Wise: Servant of the people; Selected Letters*, ed. Carl Hermann (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969): 250–260; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 128, 276; and Wesley P. Greear, 'American Immigration Policies and Public Opinion on European Jews from 1933 to 1945' (PhD thesis, Tennessee State University, 2002): 67–39.

63. Long, *Diary*, 100. The American consular service in Germany was closed progressively throughout June–July 1941, see: *New York Times*, 17 June 1941, 1.

64. Telegram James G. McDonald to Edwin M. Watson, 2 September 1941, FDR Official File 3186.

by reducing the number of representatives from each agency, and removing the Army and Navy Intelligence representatives.⁶⁵ The most crucial suggestion made by the PAC was the establishment of more boards of review to hear appeals about committee, departmental and consular decisions.⁶⁶ The hostility between the PAC and Long must have been clearly apparent; Long was certainly very candid in his characterisation of his standing among the advocacy groups:

Each one of these men hate me ... The exclusion of any person is objectionable to these eminent gentlemen and my system of selection is anathema to them. They ... will try in the future as they have in the past to ruin [me].⁶⁷

Yet it is a sign of the receptiveness of Long arguments of the refugee advocacy groups that he was prepared to agree to the most important changes, including, crucially, the devolution of ultimate State Department discretion over applications to an independent Review Board, as proposed by the PAC.⁶⁸

Ironically, the moves by the PAC and the American Committee for Christian Refugees and the American Friends Service Committee, which joined the PAC in lobbying the administration, hindered rather than facilitated the processing of applications. These groups' recommendations simplified, rather than abolished, the layers of bureaucracy established by the visa policy changes, and to this existing system added yet another level of red tape in the form of the Review Boards. The complexity of this system as it stood in September–October 1941 had almost immediate effects on the number of refugees entering the United States. The new Washington-based system, with the Review Board process, could handle fewer than 100 cases per day and by late October 1941 the system

65. Long, *Diary*, 103. See also: Efraim Zuroff, 'Rabbis' Relief and Rescue: A case study of the Vaad Ha-Hatzala of the American Orthodox Rabbis', *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 3 (1986): 121–138.

66. Telegram James G. McDonald to Edwin M. Watson, 2 September 1941, FDR Official File 3186. See also: Letter from James G. MacDonald to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 8 October 1941, FDR Official File 3186.

67. Long, *Diary*, 110.

68. Long, *Diary*, 125, 127, 136. See also: Memorandum from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Undersecretary of State, 2 October 1941, FDR Official File 3186; and Memorandum from Breckinridge Long to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 3 October 1941, FDR Official File 3186.

had a backlog of more than 5,000 applications.⁶⁹ This figure is far in excess of the waiting list number projected by some observers in response to the original visa policy without the refugee groups' amendments, and serves to demonstrate the natural attrition of the processing rate caused by cutting the personnel numbers of the visa processing system while simultaneously installing an additional layer of bureaucracy.⁷⁰

In the left-leaning periodical press there were exclamations of shock at the severity of the new policy and the effect it was having in reducing the numbers of refugees able to enter the United States. This press reaction is often cited as evidence that, at the time, the administration's policy was interpreted as anti-Semitic.⁷¹ Articles appeared in niche publications such as *Congress Weekly* suggesting that the new visa policies were 'much too severe for this time', rationalising the fifth column threat by arguing that the policy brought suffering to 'large numbers of innocent people ... in order to ensure safety against a single involuntary criminal that *may* be among them'.⁷² More widely-read publications such as *New Republic* and the *Nation* argued that the administration's perception of the threat was misguided. An editorial in the *New Republic* claimed Hitler did not need to resort to compelling refugees to spy for him because he already had a large number of recently-arrived German migrants in the United States, further commenting:

There will be many people all over the world who will believe that the motive for this action comes not from genuine concern about Nazi spies but from ... anti-democrats in the State Department

69. Malcom Rossman, 'Bermuda Conference: Recourse to Rescue' M.A. thesis, City College of the City University of New York, 1971, 17; and Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 203.

70. On the earlier estimates, see: 'New Visa Arrangements', *New York Times*, 25 June 1941, 3; 'Plans to Tighten Visa System', *New York Times*, 17 June 1941, 1; and 'Memorandum: Explanation of New Regulations Affecting Immigration to the United States', 23 July 1941, AFSC Refugee Service File.

71. For example: Breitman, 'Allied War Effort', 140–146; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 117–118; Adler, 'United States and the Holocaust', 20; Dobkowski, 'American Anti-Semitism', 172–175; Kraut, Breitman and Imhoof, 'German-Jewish Immigration', 35–38; Haim Genizi, 'The American Jewish Committee and the Admission of Nazi Collaborators into the United States', *Yad Vashem Studies* 30 (2002): 369–404; Lipstadt, 'Witness to the Persecution', 333–338; Lipstadt, 'America and the Holocaust', 283–296; Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 199–206; Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews*, 158–163; Zucker, 'German-Jewish Refugees', 60; and Robert G. Drake, 'Manipulating the News: The U.S. press and the Holocaust, 1933–1945' (Ph.D. thesis, New York State University, Albany 2003): 77–83.

72. *Congress Weekly* 8 (27 June 1941): 3. Emphasis in original.

who have in the past done so much to muddy the waters of our democratic efforts.⁷³

The *Nation*, too, questioned the reliability of the administration's claims, with one author going so far as to accuse administration officials of deception, suggesting that the fifth column threat was an 'excuse concocted by the Visa Division' and 'a good story with which to win popular support for a brutal and unjust restriction'.⁷⁴

Both *The New Republic* and the *Nation*'s criticisms lacked a firm evidential basis, and were essentially polemics born out of a frustration with the administration. Both magazines failed to grasp that in times of 'national emergencies' bureaucratic and government actors' decisions often do not give rise to questions of rationality, and even the most irrational position might be seen to be necessary to guard against a greater evil. Certainly, there is nothing approaching the tenor of the *Congress Weekly*, *New Republic* and *Nation*'s criticism of the administration in the mainstream press. The use of articles such as those cited above in arguing for an interpretation of the Roosevelt Administration's policies as driven by anti-Semitism repeats the same failure to recognise that the irrationality in the assessment of and response to the fifth column threat does not necessarily indicate a deliberately anti-Semitic policy.

The final stage in the complication of the refugee immigration system began in November 1941. In a gesture designed to indicate the sincerity with which Roosevelt was treating the refugee advocacy groups' calls for action, he issued executive regulations in late November giving legal weight to the agreed changes to the interdepartmental committees ('Review Committees') and Board of Appeals.⁷⁵ The Review Committees operated in effect parallel to the original departmental committees, rather than replacing them, and the same departments (State, Treasury, Justice, Defence, Labor) were represented on the new Review Committees. In practice, the executive order indicated that the original interdepartmental

73. Editorial, *New Republic* 54 (30 June 1941): 873.

74. Freda Kirchwey, 'A scandal in the State Department', *Nation* 153 (19 July 1941): 45.

75. 'Executive Order', *Federal Register* 6 (22 November 1941): 5915–5920.

committees (now called the ‘Preliminary Committees’) were to assume the role of an additional filter, meaning that the Washington-based process that under Long’s original plan consisted of one committee board, had now trebled in size. The State Department was still retained to prepare an advisory opinion on each case, and reports were also prepared by the intelligence services. In total, counting reports and committee representation, each application for asylum in the United States was processed by as many as nine agencies, some of them seeing the same application more than once before being presented to the Board of Review and then, finally, being sent to the individual consulates in Europe for final processing.⁷⁶

Within each stage of the visa application process, too, there were small systemic elements that were introduced at the urging of refugee advocacy groups with aim of making the procedure fairer, but which themselves also hindered progress through the system. At the stage of the Review Committees, applications were further slowed down by the legal requirement that the committees were to hear testimony from the applicant’s American sponsors, answering ‘any material interrogatories [sic] from committee members’.⁷⁷ Time delays were increased as cases rejected by the Board of Appeals were eligible for reconsideration six months after the decision. Some groups identified at the time that the appeals process tended to work against the interests of applicants because the Primary Committees were more likely to reject every doubtful case because they knew there was the safety net of the Review Committees.⁷⁸

76. The Review Committee in practice saw not only those rejected applications in which the applicant demanded review, but all applications given a negative advisory opinion by the State Department. In effect, the Review Committee was dealing with the majority of applications: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 203; Breitman and Kraut *American Refugee Policy* 210–216. See also: Meredith Hindley, ‘Negotiating the Boundary of Unconditional Surrender: The War Refugee Board in Sweden and Nazi proposals to ransom Jews, 1944–1945’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10, no. 1 (1996): 57–77; Tony Kushner, ‘The Western Allies and the Holocaust: Rules of the game in Britain, America and the Holocaust in 1944’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 4 (1990): 381–402; and Timothy P. Maga, ‘The United States, France and the European Refugee Problem, 1933–1941’, *Historian* 46, no. 4 (1984): 503–519.

77. *Federal Register* 6 (22 November 1941): 5917–5918.

78. Clarence E. Pickett, Memorandum, 30 November 1941, AFSC RS. On the Quaker and Unitarian attitude to the policy generally, see: Haim Genizi, ‘Christian Charity: The Unitarian Service Committee’s relief activities on behalf of refugees from Nazism, 1940–1945’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2, no. 2 (1987): 261–

At the end of 1941, the final element in the complication of the visa application process came into play with the United States formally entering the war. If the suspicion of refugees as potential fifth columnists was reasonably prominent before the outbreak of American-German hostilities, then after December 1941 that suspicion was firmly entrenched at all levels of the immigration process. The approach taken by the Board of Appeals from December 1941 illustrates this change in attitude: two board members, former Senator Robert Bulkley and Dr Frederick Keppel, asked Roosevelt for greater powers and tighter screening measures.⁷⁹ The president agreed and issued executive orders stating that applications from people born in Axis territory to be approved unanimously by all the screening committees and the State Department, whether or not those applicants were resident in Axis territory.⁸⁰ The second effect of the executive orders was to require all applicants prove, through affidavits from American sponsors not merely that the applicant would not be a burden to the United States (the old test) but that he or she would be a benefit to the community.⁸¹

Once active participation in the war became the United States government's priority there was little effort made to address the crippling effects on refugee admission that had resulted from the intricate mesh of policies implemented over the 1939–1941 period. By the end of 1941 the need for passenger ships for immigrants was so low that shipping lines were leaving the Continent half-empty or foregoing the transatlantic service altogether.⁸² The table below illustrates the sharp decline in the raw numbers of refugees from selected Axis territories. A comparison of the six-month period from the first

276; Roger Carter, 'The Quaker International Centre in Berlin, 1920–1942', *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society* 56, no. 1 (1990): 29; and Hiam Genizi, 'New York is Big—America is Bigger: The resettlement of refugees from Nazism, 1936–1945', *Jewish Social Studies* 46, no. 1 (1984): 68; and Wallace T. Collett, "'Let us try what Love will do': The story of the American Friends Service Committee', *Menonite Life* 38, no. 1 (1983): 15.

79. Robert Bulkely, Fredrick Keppel and F. D. G. Ribbe, *Report to the President: Board of Appeals on Visa Cases November 9, 1942* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printer, 1942): 4–5.

80. Bulkely, Keppel and Ribbe, *Report to the President*, 12–13.

81. Bulkely, Keppel and Ribbe, *Report to the President*, 19.

82. 'Shipping Down', *New York Times*, 3 September 1941, 18.

changes under the Fourth Visa Policy to the entry of the United States into the war (July–December 1941) with the preceding six, months reveals a drop of between 41 and 67 percent across selected applicant groups and a total decrease of 51 percent.

TABLE 1: Quota immigrants January–June 1941 v. July–December 1941.⁸³

Origin	January–June 1941	July–December 1941	Difference
<i>Germany</i>	7,000	4,150	– 41 %
<i>Poland</i>	2,700	1,050	– 61 %
<i>Czechoslovakia</i>	1,200	400	– 67 %
TOTAL (<i>all European states</i>)	18,734	9,158	– 51 %

Scholars have pointed to figures such those above as consistent with the claim that, at its heart, the policies instituted in the years leading up to the United States’ entry into the war were motivated by anti-Semitic sentiment at both an individual and institutional level. Such arguments generally rely on logic that epistemologists would characterise as arguments *cum hoc ergo propter hoc*, reasoning that the shockingly negative impact the immigration policies had on Jewish migration must have been caused by individuals’ anti-Semitism in the administration and consular service. Studies of the immigration policies of the Roosevelt administration by David Wyman, Richard Breitman, Alan Kraut and the others who have followed in their wake, routinely dedicate great space to explaining the intricacies of these policies, yet spend no time considering the possibility that that complexity and the negative effects that flowed from the policies were the result of anything other than deliberate design. Yet, the extensive administrative apparatus of a large modern state has a natural tendency to confuse seemingly simple policy ambitions and turn them into a ‘morass of bureaucratic complexity’.⁸⁴ And while fears of fifth columnists and national security

83. Sources: Bulkely, Keppel and Ribbe, *Report to the President and Immigration and Naturalization Service, Interpreter Releases* 19 (27 February 1942): 83. Note: the ‘Total’ figures are for all origin territories, not only for those three specific territories listed.

84. This was the observation of the former Chief Justice of the United States, Warren Burger, on the complicating tendencies of the American administrative system in relation to another ostensibly beneficial public policy initiative, the Medicare–Medicaid programme: *Hervig v. Ray* 455 US 265. On the point of this ‘natural tendency’ see also: Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, trans. Laetitia C. Clough (Stanford, CA:

concerns that precipitated the introduction of this complex immigration procedure may have been irrational and misplaced, and while they may have led to callousness in the treatment of individual cases, callousness and irrationality are not anti-Semitism. The evidence presented above does not categorically exclude the possibility of anti-Semitism operating at a specific individual level with respect to particular actors in the administration, but it does suggest that the same evidence on which previous scholars have rested their assessments of the State Department, and the Roosevelt Administration as a whole, is open to a different interpretation, an interpretation that acknowledges the role genuinely-held fears and bureaucratic structure had in the determination and implementation of American immigration policy.

Stanford University Press, 1996): 336–340; W. Gomberg, ‘The Trouble with Democratic Management’ in *American Bureaucracy*, ed. Warren G. Bennis (Chicago: Aldine, 1970): 40; William A. Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government* (Chicago: Atherton, 1971): 121; Francis E. Rourke, *Bureaucracy and Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972): 19; and, generally, Randall B. Ripley, *Bureaucracy and Policy Implementation* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1982).

CHAPTER THREE
Refugees in the Press

‘Journalists share the insensitivities of their culture.’¹

In states governed by systems of popular democracy, the executive and legislative branches of government—the subjects of the preceding chapters—are necessarily engaged in a process of interpreting, responding to and, in many ways, being shaped by currents of public opinion. Since the industrialisation of news media and the technological revolution that resulted in modern, mass-circulation daily newspapers and broadcast media, the democratic duo of *public* and *politician* has been moderated by a third group, what in the 1930s and 1940s would have been called the *press* and what today would be described by the more general term, the news media. An analysis of the anti-Semitism or otherwise behind American refugee policy during the Holocaust, policy that was formulated and executed at the level of the administration and Congress, must also therefore examine the attitudes of the press in reporting events that played (or could have or even should have played) a role in the formulation of public opinion on refugee policy. This chapter examines the press and public opinion, in general terms, critiquing the dominant lines of argumentation in the existing historiography. This chapter will present substantially new evidence that confirms the claims of the two leading scholars, Deborah Lipstadt and Laurel Leff, that there was enough material available to the American people to fully appreciate the dire need for refugee policy change. However, this chapter will then challenge the

1. Richard Steele, ‘Review of *Beyond Belief*, *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1289.

argument that the presence of such information in the press and the resultant failure of action to effect policy change should be read as an expression of anti-Semitism in the American public. Finally, this chapter provides a critical reinterpretation of public opinion polling evidence that has in the past been used to demonstrate the claimed prevalence of anti-Semitic prejudice in the American population.

CONFLICTING NEWS: POLICY AND THE PRESS

The relationship between the public desire to assist refugees on the one hand and the public's ability and willingness to influence American policy was influenced by two distinct forces.² Immigration was perceived by the American public as a domestic policy issue—something that affected their way of life materially—but the plight of Jews abroad was perceived as a matter of foreign policy, and therefore not of immediate concern.³ The two competing forces met in the 1938, and the years following, as news of German atrocities began to appear in the American press. At this point, the public's strongly formed and long-lasting predispositions on immigration—opinions that had crystallised over decades and were rooted in genuine, though perhaps misplaced, concern about the social, cultural and economic effects immigration might have—were brought into conflict with calls to assist refugees from foreign territories.⁴ In the cognitive battle between strong, long-held

2. There is evidence that the public—in the sense of the general populations of the major metropolises—were willing to rise up in vocal support of the refugees. Ruth Gruber, a witness of many of the rallies held between 1941 and 1943, notes, for example, that a rally at Madison Square Garden on 1 March 1943 attracted 96,000 New Yorkers, of all cultural backgrounds: Ruth Gruber, *Haven: The dramatic story of 1,000 World War II refugees and how they came to America* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000): 19. Gruber's description is confirmed by accounts sent to President Roosevelt: 'Resolution adopted at "Stop Hitler Now" Demonstration', 1 March 1943, FDR Official File 5029; and Letter from Rabbi Stephen Wise to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 4 March 1943, FDR Official File 5029. See also: Rafael Medoff, "'Our Leaders Cannot Be Moved': A Zionist emissary's reports on American Responses to the Holocaust in the Summer of 1943', *American Jewish History* 88, no. 1 (2000): 115; and Stephen J. Whitfield, 'The Politics of Pageantry, 1936–1946', *American Jewish History* 84, no. 3 (1996): 239.

3. On this distinction see: Anne Demo, 'Policy and Media in Immigration Studies', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2004): 221; William S. Bernard, 'Immigration: History of U.S. policy', *The Immigration Reader: America in a multidisciplinary perspective*, ed. David Jacobson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998): 48–71.

4. These public opinions on immigrants were the result of America's history of 'recurring apprehension—if not outright fear—of immigrants': Leroy G. Dorsey and Richard M. Harlow, "'We want Americans pure and simple': Theodore Roosevelt and the Myth of Americanism", *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6,

predispositions on immigration generally, and weakly, newly constructed opinions on European Jews, the former triumphed. Change in this attitude would have required a major shift in public opinion, especially after the fifth column scares that made Europe's Jews potential invaders (and thus a foreign *and* domestic threat) on the eve of the American entrance into the war. In the end, public opinion only began to shift only after the revelation of the catastrophic events of the Final Solution.

For the American government, the public's silence while millions of Jews were being murdered conveyed tacit approval of Roosevelt's 'win the war' strategy of rescue.⁵ Discussions among the higher levels of the administration at the time reveal that the central focus of much foreign policy, and especially policies to assist European refugees, was ensuring that official policy was in accord with the mood of the American electorate.⁶ In the discussions on refugee reaction, what was missing was a vocal statement from the American public that it was dissatisfied with the administration's policy. The only thing that could have produced an aggressive and immediate administration's reaction would have been the American public demanding immediate action on a large scale. To have any chance of this occurring, the press and other opinion leaders needed to set a positive agenda for rescue. On this issue, there are two points on which most scholars agree: first,

no. 1 (2003): 55. See also: Sean D. Cashman, *America in the Age of the Titans: The Progressive Era and World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 1988): 185–187; Roger Daniels, *Not Like Us: Immigrants and minorities in America, 1890–1924* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1997): 74–75; and Marion T. Bennett, *American Immigration Policies: A history* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs, 1963): 25.

5. See for example the comments in: Harvey Asher, 'The Soviet Union, the Holocaust and Auschwitz', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 4 (2003): 894–897; Max Friedman, 'The U.S. State Department and the Failure to Rescue: New evidence on the missed opportunity at Bergen-Belsen', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 34; and Refael Medoff, "'A foolish encroachment on the High Command'?" American Jewish Perspectives on Requesting U.S. Military Intervention Against the Holocaust', *Modern Judaism* 20, no. 3 (2000): 308.

6. See Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948) 2: 579–586; Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, ed. Peter Balakian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003): xx–xxv; Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: Viking, 1946): 49–53; and Robert H. Jackson, *That Man: An insider's portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, ed. John Barrett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 152. Hull, Morgenthau, Perkins and Jackson were Secretaries for State, the Treasury, Labor and Attorney-General respectively.

stronger public opinion was needed to push for a more effective and timely rescue action and, secondly, the press could have done a better job informing the American public.⁷

Of all the published treatments of the press and Holocaust, few quantitative studies approach depth of its research is Laurel Leff's study of the *New York Times*.⁸ Leff identifies the placement of reports dealing with news of Nazi persecution of Jews in the *Times* deep in the inside pages and the presentation of those reports in a staid and often overly brief style as the key reasons that the American public did not fully appreciate the gravity of the situation. As a result of these placement decisions, Leff reasons, the American public did not agitate for changes in refugee policy—even when people were presented with reported factual accounts of the persecutions in Europe. In other words, the problem with the press (which, in Leff's account is metonymically represented by the *New York Times*) was not that they failed to report the details of the Nazi terror (the traditional criticism of the press) but that they made editorial decisions to relegate reporting of the events to the inside pages of the newspaper and thus failed to accord the stories the attention and prominence they deserved.⁹

There is, clearly, little credible evidence to challenge Leff's conclusions about the patterns of placement of news and other editorial content dealing with the Holocaust in the *Times*. However, there is a body of evidence drawn from other newspaper content that has remained unstudied in the historiography of the Holocaust and American press in general and the *Times* in particular. This evidence is the advertisements, large display

7. See, for example: Graham White, *FDR and the News Media* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990): 56; Barbara Stewart, *United States Government Policy on Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1982): 25; Richard Steele, 'The Pulse of the People: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Gauging of American Public Opinion', *Journal of Contemporary History* 9 (1974): 208–209; and Richard Steele, 'The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the media and the coming of the war, 1940–1941', *Journal of American History* 71, no. 1 (1985): 86.

8. Laurel Leff, 'When the Facts didn't Speak for Themselves: The Holocaust in the *New York Times*, 1939–1945', *The Harvard International Journal of Press Politics* 5, no. 2 (2000): 52–72; this original article has been expanded to the length of a monograph, although the evidence and conclusions are much the same, Laurel Leff, *Buried by The Times: The Holocaust and America's most important newspaper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

9. This is also a theme that Leff picks up on in her assessment of the personal politics of the *New York Times*' management: Laurel Leff, 'A Tragic "Fight in the Family": *The New York Times*, Reform Judaism and the Holocaust', *American Jewish History* 88, no. 1 (2000): 49.

advertisements, placed in the *Times* by a range of Jewish interest groups sporadically throughout the immediate pre-war years and then far more frequently and regularly during the middle-stages of the war.¹⁰ Deborah Lipstandt does not consider advertisements at all and Laurel Leff only notes a series of advertisements in the *Times*, and then only briefly and in a discussion of the internal politics of the *Times*.¹¹ David Wyman does not mention the advertisements in his major works *Paper Walls* and *Abandonment of the Jews*, and while he does reproduce two advertisements in his collection of primary sources on the United States and the Holocaust, he does not discuss them.¹²

A study of these advertisements reveals that they ranged in size and appeared in a variety of newspapers including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*. Table 2 in the Appendix below breaks down the advertisements by publication and size, and from the data it is clear that 55 percent of all the advertisements published were sizeable, occupying more than a fifth of the total page area and almost twenty percent of all the advertisements published in the newspapers listed above occupied more than half a page. In the *New York Times* in particular, full-page or near full-page advertisements appeared with great frequency. In the period June 1942–July 1943 alone, there were upwards of thirty such advertisements, with full-page, near-full page or half-page advertisements appearing on average once a fortnight. This frequency increased during the December 1942–February 1943 period, that is, in the aftermath of Rabbi Steven Wise’s public confirmation in Washington of the reports of the systematic killing of Jews under the Nazi regime and the lead-up to the Bermuda Conference in April 1943.¹³

These advertisements were, like the news reports Leff studied in her analysis, predominantly found after page ten of the *Times* and the other newspapers, though they

10. For a comprehensive listing of the organisations, see Table 2 in the Appendix below.

11. Leff, ‘Fight in the Family’, 47.

12. David Wyman ed., *America and the Holocaust* (New York: Garland, 1990) 2: 168.

13. On Rabbi Wise’s declaration, see: Rafael Medoff, “‘Our Leaders Cannot be Moved’: A Zionist emissary’s reports on American Jewish responses to the Holocaust in the Summer of 1943”, *American Jewish History* 88, no. 1 (2000): 126.

were all still in the front news section. What the advertisements may have lacked in placement they more than made up for in the sheer impact of their presentation and content. A small selection of the most striking advertisements is reproduced in the Appendix to this thesis (Figures 1–10), and even a brief survey of their design and content suggests their impact. Most of the advertisements are written in the form of campaign flyers, or ‘advertorials’, detailing in persuasive language and a clipped, documentary reportage style ‘the shocking TRUTH about saving the lives of the European Jews’.¹⁴ A common theme was the reporting of the ‘Nazi death-trap’, ‘Hitler’s extermination of a whole people’ in explicit and confronting language, a sharp foil to the neutral tone taken by the reporting of the events in the news sections of the *Times*.¹⁵

Not only did many advertisements appeal to Jews to rise up to fight the Nazi regime—a natural object of an advertisement placed in the leading newspaper of the American city with the largest Jewish population—but these advertisements’ appeals to fight were phrased in a rousing, ‘appeal to humanity’ tone that also would have engaged the attention of non-Jewish readers. In this vein, Figure 2 in the Appendix with its banner headline: ‘ACTION—NOT PITY CAN SAVE MILLIONS NOW!’ and its detailed and persuasive content not only outlined the crisis for readers in explicit language, but also framed a potential solution in achievable terms, all in the manner of an archetypical, patriotic call to arms.¹⁶

Probably one of the most poignant and striking full-page advertisements placed in the *Times* over the entire period appeared on 16 February 1943. This particular

14. *New York Times*, 13 April 1943, 19. Reproduced below: see Figure 4 in the Appendix. Emphasis in original.

15. *New York Times*, 4 May 1943, 17. Reproduced below: see Figure 5 in the Appendix. Even those advertisements that were clearly motivated out of organisations’ Zionist agendas, advertisements whose principal call was for a Jewish state, asked the American public to push for the establishment of refugee camps in the United States.

16. *New York Times*, 8 February 1943, 8. Reproduced below: see Figure 2 in the Appendix. Emphasis in original. This advertisement also appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1943, 5.

advertisement took as its model the design and phraseology of an American slave auction handbill, leading with the confronting headline:

FOR SALE to Humanity

70,000 Jews

Guaranteed Human Beings at \$50 a Piece.¹⁷

This advertisement was designed to highlight the apparent ease with which thousands of Jews could have been rescued from Romania, if Jewish organisations in Europe and the United States could raise the funds required to transport the refugees to Palestine. A notice such as this in the leading newspaper of the most populous city in the United States, harkening back to the days of the American slave trade and equating the inaction in the early 1940s on the question of Jewish refugees with the moral obloquy of slavery was a bold move. The contrast with the hesitant editorial policy of the *Times* in reporting the Holocaust, and the tenor of at least one of the advertisements was enough to spark the concern of the *Times'* publisher, Arthur Hayes Sulzberger, that the material was too dramatic.¹⁸

What is the effect of this evidence on the debate? Ostensibly, it confirms Leff's comments about the placement of material dealing with the question of Jewish refugee immigration and rescue in the inside pages of the major metropolitan daily newspapers—although, the placement of the advertisements was undoubtedly limited by the size of the Jewish organisations' budgets.¹⁹ However, the tone, style and general impact of these advertisements undermines Leff's argument that the *New York Times* (and, the other major

17. *New York Times*, 16 February 1943, 11. Reproduced below: see Figure 3 in the Appendix.

18. See Leff, 'Fight in the Family', 49, quoting Sulzberger. Interestingly, although there is a direct reference here to one of the advertisements, Leff does not investigate the issue further, leaving the advertising evidence undisclosed.

19. On these budgetary limits, see: Rafael Medoff, 'Conflicts Between American Jewish Leaders and Dissidents Over Responding to News of the Holocaust: Three episodes from 1942 to 1943', *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 3 (2003): 475ff; Yitzhak Mualem, 'The World Jewish Congress: Influence without power', *Jewish Culture and History* 5, no. 2 (2002): 100–101; and Naomi Cohen, 'The Transatlantic Connection: The American Jewish Committee and the Joint Foreign Committee in defense of German Jews, 1933–1939', *American Jewish History* 90, no. 4 (2002): 372.

newspapers in the United States) contained no material dealing with the Jewish refugee question in a passionate, emotive and, above all, explicit way.

There is a final comment to be made about this evidence. This thesis is concerned with questioning the assumptions of anti-Semitism in the American public's attitudes toward the dire problems facing European Jewry. Yet, the presence of these advertisements in the major daily newspapers directly contradicts those assumptions. Assuming that there was a wide-spread anti-Semitism, whether latent or manifest, in the American community at the time, then those groups best placed and most likely to discern the intensity of that anti-Semitism were the Jewish interest groups, being composed of Jewish individuals who, in their daily lives, would have been confronted with the 'facial expression[s] or other subtle communications of anti-Semitism'.²⁰ If the anti-Semitic prejudice in the American community was as wide spread and as significant a force in decisions on refugee policy as scholars have claimed, then deciding to spend large sums of money on national advertising campaigns appealing to the American public to 'save Jews' would have been an absurd decision. Yet this is precisely what these Jewish organisations did: they drew attention to the plight of Jews in Europe—not merely generalised, 'persecuted victims of Nazism', but Jews, explicitly—and urged America to act. There is evidence that far from expecting to be confronted with a wall of anti-Semitic indifference, the major Jewish organisations were enthusiastic in their belief that these advertisements would make a substantial impact on the American people. In a document marked 'Strictly Confidential' the World Jewish Congress listed the decision to adopt the advertising policy as an 'accomplishment' and a 'major departure [from previous policy] and one which should be supported'.²¹

20. Gary A. Tobin, *Jewish Perceptions of anti-Semitism* (New York: Plenum, 1988): 10.

21. World Jewish Congress, 'Activities of the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress with Respect to the Hitler Program of Exterminating the Jews', reproduced in full in Wyman, *America and the Holocaust* 2, 133. The advertisements were also mentioned in a similarly hopeful way in correspondence between the leadership of these influential organizations and the Roosevelt Administration, see: Rabbi Steven Wise to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 2 December 1942 FDR Official File 76-C; 'Minutes of a meeting between the President and Mr Welles [Under Secretary of State]', 4 December 1942, FDR Official File 76-C.

However, despite these Jewish organisations' high hopes for action on the part of the American people, no pro-refugee mass movement agitated for change. In this way, it must be said, the advertisement evidence presented here would appear actually to confirm one arm of the 'anti-Semitic population' argument, namely, that when the consumers of American media were presented with material outlining the terrors facing the Jews of Europe, Americans, turned away. This brings into the discussion an important point about the interaction of the public with the media, consideration of which has been all but non-existent in the published historical treatments of American refugee policy and the press. While these advertisements are shocking in the stark and explicit image of mass murder they paint, these advertisements like all the newspaper and media evidence must be understood in terms not just of content but also how this content was processed by the American public. Below are outlined considerations, influences independent of anti-Semitism and primarily cognitive in nature that explain how and why material even as explicit as these advertisements could still have failed to alter the public's opinions.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION CONSIDERATIONS

Where Leff has employed a quantitative methodological approach, the issue of the American press and the Holocaust has also been examined in detail using a qualitative historical approach. Of these works, Deborah Lipstadt's *Beyond Belief* (published before Leff's work and in many ways prefiguring it) is the most important and most widely acclaimed.²² In a study based on press clippings by the U.S. government's Press Intelligence Bulletin, Lipstadt utilises articles that appeared in over 400 of America's highest-circulating daily newspapers. Ultimately, Lipstadt concludes that there was enough news for the American public to be adequately informed, if only poorly. She contends that the news was

22. See Lawrence Baron, 'The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945–1960', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 75.

not believed because of the *way* it was presented (with scepticism) rather than the *frequency* of presentation. As a result, Lipstadt argues, the American public did not demand the rescue of European Jews. For Lipstadt, the United States ‘could have saved thousands and maybe hundreds of thousands of Jews but it did not do so’.²³ Curiously, in a seemingly contradictory move, despite placing responsibility for the failure to act on the role the press played in presenting the news, Lipstadt still argues for the existence in the American population of a ‘rising tide of anti-Semitism’, suggesting that even if the enormity of the Nazi atrocities had got through to the American people, there would have been no guarantee of decisive action.²⁴

The importance of Lipstadt and Leff is that, in the historiography of the press and the Holocaust in the United States, they have laid the foundations on which almost all research has been conducted.²⁵ However, both the analyses provided by Leff and Lipstadt are undermined by two points independent of anti-Semitism that both account for the failure of press coverage to impact on public attitudes. The first point is relatively minor, specific and affects Leff more than it affects Lipstadt. It is the assumption that the *New York Times*, while clearly just as much the doyen of American newspaper publishing in the 1940s as it is today, was a newspaper with the ability to affect public opinion at a nationwide level. The *Times* of the early 1940s cannot be assumed to have the same national

23. Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: the American press and the coming of the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1986): 272.

24. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 2–3, 127–131, 277. Lipstadt’s evidence for this anti-Semitism follows the same lines that have been expressed in the secondary sources discussed in earlier chapters, and is subject to the same criticisms.

25. Leff’s key work, *Buried By the Times*, published only very recently has had little opportunity to be incorporated into published pieces, yet it has already met with scholarly acclaim, see: Daniel Johnson, ‘Review of *Buried by the Times*’, *Commentary* 119, no. 5 (2005): 90–92; and Ron Hollander, ‘Review of *Buried by the Times*’, *American Jewish History* 92, no. 3 (2004): 379–381. Lipstadt’s centrality in the scholarship of the American press’ responses to the Holocaust has been clear since *Beyond Belief* was published in the late 1980s, and her analysis has formed the basis of many scholars’ research, see, for example: J. T. Baumel, ‘The Jewish Refugee Children from Europe in the Eyes of the American Press and Public Opinion, 1934–1945’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 3 (1990): 239–312; J. D. Sarna, ‘American Jewish History’, *Modern Judaism* 10, no. 3 (1990): 343–365; Rafael Medoff, “‘Retribution is not enough’: The 1943 campaign by Jewish students to raise American public awareness of the Nazi genocide”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 2 (1997): 171–189; D. Stola, ‘Early News of the Holocaust from Poland’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 11, no. 1 (1997): 1–27; and H. Brackman, “‘A calamity almost beyond comprehension’: Nazi anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the thought of W. E. B. Dubois”, *American Jewish History* 88, no. 1 (2000): 53–93.

impact and presence as the *Times* of today; circulation outside the major cities of the northeast was minimal, and the paper was most certainly not available in today's plethora of regional editions in every newsstand across the country.²⁶ Furthermore, media were not conglomerated to the extent that they are today; rather, there was a profusion of independent press outlets, relying on the wire services to get their stories. Given this, it is hard to draw out conclusions about the nature and effect on public opinion at a national level from the study of one newspaper. Certainly the *Times* was critical in shaping the views of the financial and political elites in New York and Washington, DC, but it does not necessarily follow from this that the *Times* was central to opinion-crafting nation-wide, in the way Leff (and, to a lesser extent, Lipstadt) suggests.

Secondly, and far more critically, there is a cognitive and psychological consideration that needs to be borne in mind in examining the Leff and Lipstadt arguments. It is not enough to try to determine if there was sufficient news, or even sufficiently believable news about Nazi persecutions, without trying to ascertain how the news might have been processed by the public. There has been little attention paid in the historiography to this important question of the cognitive element of the public's interaction with the press, but socio-psychologist John Zaller has addressed this tripartite 'relationship between information, predisposition and opinion'.²⁷ Zaller answers questions critical to an understanding of the public's engagement with the press during the Holocaust and the war, namely: how do people form political preferences? How do news and political arguments diffuse through large segments of the population? How do individuals evaluate this material and, how does the public convert this information into value judgements and vote decisions?

26. In fact, outside of the New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Boston, circulation was very small: Leo Bogart, *Preserving the Press: How daily newspapers mobilized to keep their readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 122.

27. John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 6.

The answers to Zaller's questions explain why, even when presented information about the Nazi persecutions, the American people, on the whole, did not act. According to Zaller, not only are people ill informed on most issues, their attention to and knowledge of politics can vary greatly.²⁸ Since people only react critically to arguments about which they are already knowledgeable, they need to be *taught* about most issues before they can fully process the information they receive from the media.²⁹ Notwithstanding this, ignorance of an issue, according to Zaller does not necessarily prevent an individual from thinking he or she has the requisite expertise and knowledge to make informed decisions.³⁰ As such, Zaller concludes that mass opinion change has its roots in elite discourse or those whom the public rely upon for information and recommendations—who, in the case of immigration policy in pre-war and wartime America, were usually politicians, high government officials, journalists, experts and policy specialists. This discourse is then dispersed throughout the media in short, simple and thematic streams, that is, through the operation of what journalism scholars call 'media bites'.³¹

These small pieces of information require media consumers to possess a cache of additional information, assumed knowledge, both specific and general, about a given event or issue before the small 'media bite' can be fully comprehended.³² In the context of American consumers of media, this need to have a broader awareness and knowledge of an issue in general can be a problem. Scholars in the field have concluded that patterns of media consumption by the American public indicate that Americans' average level of

28. Zaller, *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 61–62.

29. Zaller, *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 29.

30. Zaller, *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 46.

31. Yin Chun, 'Elite Opinion and Media Diffusion: Exploring Environmental Attitudes', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 4, no. 3 (1999): 69.

32. On these points, Zaller's conclusions have been reinforced by additional research in more recent studies, see, for example: Kevin Arceneaux, 'Do campaigns help voters learn? A cross national analysis', *British Journal of Political Science*, 36 (2006): 159–173; Edward Carter, 'Political Structures and Right-Wing Extremist Party Success', *European Journal of Political Research* 45, no. 3 (2006): 419–443; Maxwell McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The mass media and public opinion* (Oxford: Polity, 2004): 57; and Arthur Klinghoffer, *International Citizens' Tribunals: Mobilizing public opinion to advance human rights* (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 64.

knowledge on any given issue is normally quite low.³³ Applying these conclusions to the American public's interaction with news reports of the Holocaust and advertisements dealing with the Nazi persecutions, a possible explanation of the failure of the public to react to the published accounts of atrocities is that, in isolation, without more general knowledge about the political climate in Europe, many Americans simply did not know how to use the information supplied to form strong opinions.

Ole Holsti adds another dimension to the press-public relationship, arguing that, notwithstanding the predispositions of the media consumers, attitudes can change as a result of directed, disproportionate coverage in the media, though the issue must be given high priority by the press over a sustained period of time.³⁴ Major public issues, especially those that involve war and peace have shifted the focus of public opinion and created long lasting ideological change in much of the American public.³⁵ In the case of the United States and refugees from Nazi Europe, there would have had to have been a shift of profound magnitude in the coverage of the events in Nazi occupied Europe if Americans were to embrace the numbers of refugees who wanted to immigrate. Coverage of the persecutions in Germany in 1938 may have been a good starting point toward this end, but coverage of the events that followed did not work to reinforce the media coverage change that was needed. In fact, as the country braced for war, opinion leaders inadvertently presented additional 'national security' reasons as to why immigrants and Jewish refugees had to be kept out of the United States in the 1930s and 1940s.

33. Zaller, *Nature and Origins*, 83–84. See also: J. Koch, 'Political Rhetoric and Political Persuasion: The changing structure of citizens preferences', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1998): 209–229; Willem Saris ed., *Studies in Public Opinion: Attitudes, nonattitudes, measurement error and change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004): ii–ix; and Stuart Oskamp, *Attitudes and Opinions* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, 2005): 160–165.

34. Ole Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 183–190.

35. Holsti, *Public Opinion*, 178. Holsti's conclusions have been supported by other scholars' research, see, for example: Brandice Canes-Wrone, *Who Leads Whom?: Presidents, policy and the public* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 97–103; James A. Stimson, *Tides of Consent: How public opinion shapes American politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 46; and Michael Alvarez, *Hard Choices, Easy Answers: Values, information and American Public Opinion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002): 179.

The discourse of the nation's opinion leaders is very important to an individual's discovery and evaluation process.³⁶ It was this group that could have helped to create heightened 'political awareness' about the plight of Europe's Jews. Foremost among those with sufficient knowledge to do so were the president and the administration, the mass media and the many business, religious and intellectual leaders. Yet, for many of the people in these groups, the plight of Europe's Jews had to be weighed against other considerations, such as the economy and the suspicion of potential foreign spies that, at the time, were accorded greater importance.

LIPSTADT AND OPINION POLLS

Deborah Lipstadt, as noted above, is one of the clear leaders in the scholarship of the relationship between the American press, public and policy. Her most significant conclusions about American press coverage in the 1930s are that in the first years of reporting on the persecutions in Germany and the occupied territories, the press expressed a 'grudging belief [in the accuracy of reports], sometimes bordering on disbelief'.³⁷ Secondly, Lipstadt concludes that the press chose to explain (incorrectly) and rationalise the Nazi race laws and the introduction of other discriminatory and degrading policies by the Nazi regime in 1935, thereby distancing Hitler and the Nazis from the Berlin riots and the Nuremberg Decrees, while at the same time assisting, via the selective and positive coverage of the Berlin Olympics in 1936, the Nazi regime combat its negative image in the United States.³⁸ There was strong and revealing coverage of the plight of Austrian Jews during the *Anschluss* and press coverage in the United States over *Kristallnacht* 'hardened American's feelings about Germany and its programme of persecution', yet still, claims

36. Jack E. Holmes, *The Mood/Interest Theory of American Foreign Policy* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985): vi–xi, 46–49; and Michael Leigh, *Mobilizing Consent: Public opinion and American foreign policy, 1937–1947* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976): 57.

37. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 38.

38. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 49, 63.

Lipstadt, the press supported the argument that the United States keep a safe distance from European affairs.³⁹

Lipstadt's conclusions regarding press coverage *during* the war are fewer in number but much broader in scope. She criticises the press as a whole for its failure to adequately focus its readers' attention on the persecution of European Jews and its failure to identify the unique status of the plight of the Jews (and presumably, though she does not explicitly say so, other persecuted refugees fleeing Europe). She further concludes that this was because reporters, editors and publishers, as a group, found reports of the Final Solution too fantastical and diabolical to be real.⁴⁰

The claim that some parts of the American press explained and rationalised important events in the reporting of Nazi actions in the 1930s is not entirely true. As Lipstadt states, there were explanations of Nazi policies printed in some of the press, but in these cases they were merely reporting what the State Department had said, or what the official German position was.⁴¹ By way of an example of this process Lipstadt finds fault with the press coverage of the Nuremberg Decrees, claiming that the press inadvertently downplayed the decrees' significance when the newspapers 'explained' that the decrees were 'Hitler's reply' to the insult of protesters tearing down the swastika flag from the German cruise liner *Bremen* while she was anchored in New York harbour.⁴² When Lipstadt states that 'the presentation of the [the decrees] as a *quid pro quo* for the *Bremen* incident and the stress on the swastika obscured the fact that the laws represented the embodiment of Nazi ideology' she is clearly correct. However, by Lipstadt's own admission, it was not the

39. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 87, 110–111. See also: Baumel, 'Jewish Refugee Children', 250; Sarna, 'American Jewish History', 355; and Medoff, 'Retribution is not enough', 172.

40. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 245. Lipstadt's conclusions on this point have become a recurring element in the historiography, see, for example: Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 338, 349; Leff, 'Fight in the Family', 42–43; Sarna, 'American Jewish History', 347; and H. C. Shulman, 'The Voice of America, US Propaganda and the Holocaust: "I would have remembered"', *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television* 17, no. 1 (1997): 98.

41. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 129–130.

42. 'Hitler's Reply to Insult', *New York Times*, 16 September 1935, 2.

press that formulated this explanation, it was the official line of the Nazi regime and an argument that was not rebutted by the State Department.⁴³

In other words rather than actively rationalising the actions of the Nazi regime, the press predominantly reported information received from German officials in the same matter-of-fact way in which it reported stories that came over the Associated Press wire service. This does not excuse the press entirely, since a responsible journalistic attitude surely would have been to subject these announcements to rigorous criticism and interrogation to determine their veracity. However, the editors and subeditors had to conduct this assaying process in an environment in which the State Department was not providing clear guidance on the status of the reports of Nazi atrocities.⁴⁴ Lipstadt is too critical of the press in her condemnation of it as complicit in rationalising the actions of the Nazi regime because such condemnation assumes a press had a working environment in which the information being received by newspapers from their reporters could have been judged against clear, confirmed, government positions. In the case of the reports of the Nazi persecutions the positions did not exist.⁴⁵

Lipstadt's most damning charge against the American press of the 1930s and early 1940s is that 'the US press was unable to depict the true nature of Nazi anti-Semitism'.⁴⁶ While it must be admitted that the press did report the Nazi line without much question, and, indeed, the line of the State Department when it supported Nazi claims, it should be equally noted that Nazi anti-Semitism was clearly depicted even though it was often

43. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 60.

44. State Department's failure to highlight the enormity of the atrocities in Europe is evident in the way it confirmed to the press of the veracity of the reports from Europe, a small, brief notice on one of the inside pages of the department's official bulletin in the edition just before Christmas: 'German Policy of Extermination of the Jewish Race', *State Department Bulletin*, 19 December 1942.

45. The administration appears to have been more concerned with assuring the press and public that American national security was not being threatened by the war in Europe, either by direct military attack or fifth column subversion. See: Sumner Welles to Franklin D. Roosevelt, memorandum, 'Report of meeting with Mr Sulzberger [publisher of the *New York Times*]', 18 April 1943, FDR Official File 5029; see also Roosevelt's press conference on 21 May 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969): 197.

46. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 38.

subordinated or combined with other news. The most important event in which Nazi anti-Semitism was expressed before the war (at least as far as was determinable from abroad) was during the *Kristallnacht* rampage. In this instance, the American public did pick up on these tragic events and were interested, even sympathetic, as foreign observers. One poll found the persecutions were the second most compelling event of the year and another, taken during coverage of *Kristallnacht* found that 94 percent of the respondents ‘disapproved of the Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany’.⁴⁷ Interestingly, the six percent of respondents who did ‘approve’ of the Nazi persecution of the Jews during the *Kristallnacht* pogroms was similar to the five percent of respondents to the same survey who stated that they ‘approved of the Nazi treatment of Catholics in Germany’.⁴⁸

However, merely because many Americans embraced the issue of Jewish persecution in Germany as important does not mean that there was great demand for immediate action, at least if that action included increasing the number of refugee immigrants from Germany. Providing a haven for significant numbers of persecuted Jews conflicted with other older and more strongly formed predispositions carried by most Americans. New information encountered by individuals on the immigration of German Jews would come up against long-standing and well-developed nativist and isolationist opinions. These connections would have resisted any newly formed opinions that might have favoured assisting German Jews to become Americans and would explain the conflict between the polls mentioned above and the more often cited poll, taken at the same time in which 77 percent of respondents answered ‘no’ to the question: ‘Should we allow a larger number of Jewish exiles from Germany to come to the United States to live?’⁴⁹

47. Gallup Poll survey no. 139, question 1(a), first published 9 December 1938: George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public opinion 1935–1971* (New York: Random House, 1972) 1: 128.

48. Gallup Poll survey no. 139, question 1(b): Gallup, *Gallup Poll*, 128.

49. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 387. This poll is also cited in Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 54, 121; Charles Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1966): 27; and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2000): 270–272. For ease of reference, this poll question is referred to as the ‘Jewish exiles’ question hereafter.

This negative answer has often been cited as evidence of the underlying anti-Semitism of the American people.⁵⁰ Such an assessment requires the focus of the analysis to be on the word 'Jewish' in the question, because the anti-Semitic explanation is dependent on accepting that when respondents answered the pollsters' question, the key term in their minds was 'Jewish' and that their answer was determined by their attitudes toward Jews. Yet, the flaw in this analysis should be clearly apparent: there is not one, but at least three or four key, even loaded, terms in the question, any one or combination of which could have formed the fulcrum that determined the respondents' answers. The question was not merely asking about attitudes toward Jews, it was asking applicants about 'Jewish exiles', in other words, refugees who had been forced to leave their homeland and who were not seeking to migrate to America out of choice, and sympathy with American 'values', but rather out of necessity. The question speaks of 'large numbers', a phrase that would have roused understandable fears of the effect of a large immigrant population on the economy in a country where the scars of the Great Depression were still healing. And finally, the question reinforces the fact that these migrants would be arriving in the United States 'to live', a reminder that the proposal was not a temporary measure, but a permanent change to the demographic composition of the locations in which these immigrant communities would be settled.

These other considerations, drawn from the other key terms in the question all tapped into the traditional current of immigrant suspicion that attended American nativism, suspicion that operated independently of anti-Semitism, and which more than could account for the 'no' responses to the pollsters' question. To take the 'Jewish exiles' poll question above as synonymous with a simple plebiscite on the public's dislike of Jews in general, ignores these other, arguably equally important, loaded terms. Clearly this is not to say that anti-Semitism did not feature anywhere in the attitudes of some people, but to

50. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 387; Breitman and Kraut, *American Refugee Policy*, 54, 121; Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America*, 27–28; Novick, *Holocaust in American Life* 133, 270–272.

claim that responses to this single poll question reveal a general anti-Semitic undercurrent in the population is misleading. The evidence in this case does not support the definitive conclusions that have been drawn from it.

However, there is further evidence that suggests the competing interpretation of the responses to the 'Jewish exiles' question, that is, the notion that respondents to the poll were influenced by forces *other* than anti-Semitism. Another question from the same poll read: 'Should our government contribute money to help Jewish exiles from Germany settle in lands like Africa and South America?'⁵¹ The affirmative response to this question stood at 43 percent, almost twice as great as the 'yes' response to the previous question. This suggests that even though the outlay of funds would have been considerable, Americans were willing to support resettlement of Jewish (and non-Jewish) refugees when such resettlement didn't challenge traditional fears of the effects of sizeable increases in immigrant populations in American towns.

A second additional piece of evidence further questioning the reliability of the 'anti-Semitic' interpretation of the 'Jewish exiles' question is found in a poll taken in the immediate post-war years. As noted above, traditional predispositions can be challenged and reformed by the presentation of dramatic, cataclysmic counter arguments and evidence in the press. Temporarily assuming that the primary motivator behind the negative responses to the 'Jewish exiles' question had been anti-Semitism, this anti-Semitism must surely have been decimated by 1946, when the full details of the horror of the Holocaust had been reported to the American people after the liberation of the concentration camps and the proceedings of the of the International Military Tribunal, a point with which key anti-Semitism scholars agree.⁵² Yet, in August 1946, the following poll question was posed:

President Truman plans to ask Congress to allow more Jewish and other refugees to come to the United States to live than are

51. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 385.

52. See for example, Tobin, *Jewish Perceptions of anti-Semitism*. 7–13.

allowed under the law now. Would you approve or disapprove of this idea?

Almost three-quarters of respondents, 72 percent, answered that they disapproved.⁵³ In other words, even after the terror of the Holocaust became known to the whole world, the number of people in opposition to extraordinary immigration of Jewish refugees to the United States was still almost as high as it had been when the ‘Jewish exiles’ question was asked.

Does this response suggest that the American people were so callous in their anti-Semitism that not even the grotesqueness of the Holocaust could change their opinion? Such is the inevitable conclusion if one assumes the validity of the ‘anti-Semitic’ critique of the responses to the ‘Jewish exiles’ question. Yet this conclusion is not supported in the scholarship and is so disturbing as to be patently absurd. The alternative conclusion to draw from this 1946 poll result is that the levels of resistance to Jewish refugee immigration were overwhelmingly the result of imperatives other than anti-Semitism, imperatives that had more to do with traditional American economic-cultural nativism and suspicion of refugees and immigrants as a potential source of fifth columnists, imperatives that, while perhaps challenged on the fringes by the global mass soul-searching that followed the war, were not fundamentally shaken by the revelations of Holocaust.⁵⁴

For the war years, the charge that the press as a whole failed to focus adequately readers’ attention on the destruction of European Jewry is clearly well-founded. At this

53. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 385.

54. Arguments have been made that the American people still did not fully appreciate the enormity of the Nazi persecutions in the immediate post war years: Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 64–69; Deborah Lipstadt, ‘America and the Memory of the Holocaust’, *Modern Judaism* 16, no. 3 (1996): 195; Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust, From Auschwitz to Schindler: How history is bought, packaged, and sold* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 23–40; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, MA: 1981): 4–19; Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the exploitation of Jewish suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000): 11–30; and Lipstadt, ‘America and the Memory of the Holocaust,’ 207. However, there is a growing body of the scholarship that rejects this interpretation, using analyses of the graphic details of the liberation of the concentration camps at the end of the war published in the American press, see especially: Lawrence Baron, ‘The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945–1960’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 62–88; and M. Rothberg, ‘The Work of Testimony in the Age of Decolonisation: “Chronicle of a Summer”, cinema verite and the emergence of the Holocaust survivor’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 119, no. 5 (2004): 1231–1246.

time, editors and publishers had many responsibilities, and the resultant coverage reflected those issues that editors took most seriously. There was the responsibility of reporting on the war effort at home; of reporting the ‘verifiable’ truth; and of juggling and fitting all of this into but a few pages of newsprint. If anything, the press of the day may have suffered from being too responsible, rather than the opposite. Given the lack of space required to accomplish all their responsibilities, editors and publishers were forced to make value judgments based on their perception of the importance of any given report, as well as their perception of what their reader would find most important. In the process, the plight of European Jews was left out of the news or relegated to short, detail-free articles deep in the larger papers.

The relationship between the American press, the American public and America’s politicians in the matter of providing assistance to refugees from Europe was a complex one. While the legislators and administrators in Washington DC responded to public opinion as presented by the press, the public relied on the press and the political elite for leadership in crafting opinion on the reports of the atrocities. For its part, the press was caught in this feed-back loop, taking its cues about the importance of reportage on the refugee crisis from both political leaders and the public, ultimately failing to provide either party with the information each required to make the decisive moves needed in the European refugee problem. Where scholars in the past have pointed to this failure as the inevitable result of the prevailing anti-Semitism in America that permeated all decisions concerning responses to the refugee crisis, the available evidence indicates that other interpretations, such as the influence of nativist, restrictionist predispositions, are just as likely. The public-press-politics feed-back loop was highly complex and when traditional anti-alien prejudices started to effect one part of that loop, the entire system was affected. In the 1940s, on the question of immigration of European refugees, of Jews fleeing the

Nazi terror, this feed-back loop demonstrated its weaknesses, and failed to give the plight of European refugees the attention it, in retrospect, deserved.

Conclusion

That the United States could, and indeed should, have done more to assist refugees from Nazi persecution is self-evident. What has concerned historians over the past four decades is the question of why there was such a failure to act. The existing historiography has been too quick to focus on the anti-Semitic current of the debate. This pattern in the historiography is the product of particular structural forces. The source analysis first proposed by David Wyman, has been so widely accepted by historians that it has been absorbed into the fabric of the scholarship in such a way that the question, 'Did anti-Semitism function as the primary motivator in the moves at a congressional, executive and general-public level against refugee immigration?' has been made irrelevant: the existing scholarship takes an emphatically affirmative answer to be a given. The reticence on the part of historians to question the assumptions of anti-Semitism at the base of the key works of scholarship in the field reflects the wide-spread acceptance of the legitimacy of these assumptions. This thesis has not sought to tear down one set of assumptions merely to erect in its place a set of new ones. That it, this thesis does not argue that anti-Semitism was completely absent from the workings of Congress, the policies of the Roosevelt Administration or the discussions in the press and public at large. Further research into the primary sources will be required before any such definitive statement can be made, and it is likely that the nebulous nature of attitudes such as anti-Semitism means that the issue will probably not be conclusively determined. What this thesis has done is demonstrate that the evidence that has been held up by historians as evincing anti-Semitism as the driving force

behind legislation, policy and attitudes is, in fact, open to competing interpretations. From the evidence emerges a portrait of America that is neither unsullied nor noble, but somewhere in between. The failure of America to be more decisive in providing assistance to the refugees fleeing Nazism was the product of the confluence of a range of discourses, each of which has a long history in the United States. That anti-Semitism featured somewhere among those discourses is probable, but the claim that such prejudice was the driving force behind the decisions to limit refugee entry is inconsistent with the evidence, which suggests that, in the debate over American immigration policy during the Holocaust, the central forces were nativism, xenophobia and immigration restrictionism, all of which arose not in response to the qualities of the refugees, but from the American character itself.

Appendix

Almost all the advertisements reproduced in this appendix occupied an entire page in the newspapers in which they were originally published (publications details accompany each advertisement). Only two advertisements occupied less than a full-page: Figure 1, which occupied half a page; and Figure 2, which was two-thirds of a page in size. The following tables detail the numbers of advertisements found in a search of major metropolitan daily newspapers over the period covered by this thesis.

TABLE 2: Jewish organisations' advertisements in major American daily newspapers placed during the period November 1983–May 1943, by publication and advertisement size.

Publication	Size ^a		Total ^d
	Large ^b	Medium ^c	
<i>The New York Times</i>	57	103	270
<i>The Washington Post</i>	42	84	198
<i>The Chicago Tribune</i>	26	50	160
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	29	60	98
TOTAL	154	297	826

(Explanatory notes follow Table 3.)

TABLE 3: Jewish organisations' advertisements in major American daily newspapers placed during the period November 1938–May 1943, by commissioning organisation.

Organisation	Size ^a		Total ^d
	Large ^b	Medium ^c	
American Council for Judaism	6	4	50
American Joint Distribution Committee	49	30	101
B'nai Brith	8	10	78
Conference of American Rabbis	8	13	91
Committee for a Jewish Army	21	36	86
United Jewish Campaign	19	46	92
World Jewish Congress	36	26	106
Other ^e	7	132	383
TOTAL	154	297	826

Notes to tables

- a.* Small-sized advertisements—that is, advertisements occupying less than 20 percent of the printed page area—have not been included in these figures.
- b.* 'Large' = advertisements occupying 50 percent or more of the printed page area.
- c.* 'Medium' = advertisements occupying 20–49 percent of the printed page area.
- d.* 'Total' includes all advertisements, not only the 'Large' and 'Medium' sizes.
- e.* Other groups—that is, those placing fewer than 20 advertisements.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 1: *New York Times*, 5 December 1942, 16.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 2: *New York Times*, 8 February 1943, 8.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 3: *New York Times*, 16 February 1943, 11.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 4: *New York Times*, 13 April 1943, 19.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 5: *New York Times*, 4 May 1943, 17

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 6: *New York Times*, 12 August 1943, 10.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 7: *New York Times*, 17 December 1943, 31.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 8: *Washington Post*, 3 March 1943, 11.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 9: *Washington Post*, 29 May 1943, 10.

[Image subject to copyright restrictions]

FIGURE 10: *Chicago Tribune*, 14 April 1943, 10.

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