

National Days of Remembrance

SELECTED READINGS: AMERICAN RESPONSES

A US Perspective

Senator Robert Taft

Letter to Mr. Allan Tarlish, Jewish War Veterans of the United States, May 10, 1939:

Dear Mr. Tarlish:

I have received your recent communication with regard to the Wagner-Rogers Bill, providing for the admission of 20,000 German children in addition to the regular immigration quota.

I have not found it easy to decide what is the right thing to do with reference to this bill. I have the utmost sympathy with the terrible position of the German refugees, and the appeal for assistance to helpless children is hard to resist.

On the other hand it proposes a substantial modification of the immigration policy which the United States adopted after an unfortunate experience with immigration, and I am loath to vote for any modification of that policy.... Particularly at the present time, I think it unwise to encourage immigration. Nearly 20 million people are dependent on the federal government for relief. Among them are millions of children unable to obtain a sufficient amount of food, clothing, and housing. It is said that the refugee children will be provided with homes, but if homes are available in America for 20,000 children, then certainly there are at least 20,000 American children whose condition could be tremendously benefited.... I believe that we are doing more than our share to relieve the situation. We cannot cure it in any event.... There are practically a million and a half refugees and no country is willing to receive more than a few....

Finally, the plan of admitting 20,000 children, and separating them from their parents, does not seem desirable to me. It inevitably suggests a reunion, and a request for the admission of the children's families at a later time, which it will be hard for any humane person to resist.

I have tried to consider all the arguments that have been urged, and to weigh them carefully, and I have come to the conclusion that I shall vote against the bill.

Sincerely yours, Robert Taft

Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents, vol. 2, *American Friends Service Committee*, Jack Sutters, ed. (New York: Garland Press, 1990), 482–83.

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Newspaper Headlines

The following *New York Times* headlines provide a snapshot of what the US public would have read in the news about the sailing of the ocean liner *St. Louis*:

FEAR SUICIDE WAVE ON REFUGEES' SHIP

Officers See Mutiny if *St. Louis* Sails for Germany with 907 Barred from Cuba
—*New York Times*, June 1, 1939, p. 1

HAVANA'S ATTITUDE FIRM

Cabinet Refuses to Reconsider Ban on Jews who Fail to Meet New Requirements
—*New York Times*, June 1, 1939, p. 1

CUBA ORDERS REFUGEES AND LINER TO GO

Navy to Escort *St. Louis* with 917 Aboard Unless She Obeys—Compromise Reported
—*New York Times*, June 2, 1939, p. 16

CUBA AGAIN ASKED TO ADMIT EMIGRES

—*New York Times*, June 8, 1939, p. 1

HAVEN STILL SOUGHT FOR 907 ON ST. LOUIS

Ship Will Be Too Far Away for Recall after This Morning
—*New York Times*, June 10, 1939, p. 9

REFUGE IS ASSURED FOR ALL ON LINER

Belgium, Britain, France, and Netherlands to Admit 907 on Temporary Basis, Bond of \$500 Each Deposited, Organizations of Many Creeds Aid Joint Distribution Committee in Solution
—*New York Times*, June 14, 1939, p. 11

907 REFUGEES END VOYAGE IN ANTWERP

272 to Remain in Belgium—City Authorities Severe in Dealing with Them
—*New York Times*, June 18, 1939, p. 1

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The following *New York Times* headlines provide a snapshot of what the US public would have read about the persecution of Hungarian Jews:

HUNGARIAN NAZIS RAID JEWISH HOMES IN HUNGARY

—*New York Times*, November 8, 1937, p. 9

BUDAPEST ANNOUNCES OUSTING OF FOREIGN JEWS

—*New York Times*, August 3, 1941, p. 5

SLAIN POLISH JEWS PUT AT A MILLION

One-third of Number in Whole Country Said to Have Been Put to Death by Nazis
—*New York Times*, November 26, 1942, p. 16

SAVE DOOMED JEWS, HUGE RALLY PLEADS

United Nations Must Halt Nazi Murders Now, Leaders Tell 21,000 at the Garden
—*New York Times*, March 2, 1943, p. 1

JEWS IN HUNGARY FEAR ANNIHILATION

Gas-Chamber ‘Baths’ on Nazi Model Reported Prepared by Puppet Regime
—*New York Times*, May 10, 1944, p. 10

SENATORS APPEAL ON HUNGARIAN JEWS

Foreign Relations Committee Pleads with People to Stop ‘Cold-Blooded Murder’
—*New York Times*, June 4, 1944, p. 4

US AND BRITAIN AID JEWS OF HUNGARY

Accept Budapest Proposals to Offer ‘Temporary’ Haven to Persecuted People
—*New York Times*, August 18, 1944, p. 5

JEWS’ DEATH MARCH IN HUNGARY BARED

100,000 Driven from Budapest, 75,000 Reached Austria, a Witness Reports
—*New York Times*, December 29, 1944, p. 5

JEWS IN HUNGARY HELPED BY SWEDE

Raoul Wallenberg, Architect, Credited with Leading Rescue of 20,000 from Nazis
—*New York Times*, April 26, 1945, p. 12

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International Voices of Conscience

Raoul Wallenberg

Raoul Wallenberg—who was recruited by the US War Refugee Board and was given diplomatic status by the Swedish legation in Hungary—sent these reports to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the rescue operation he led out of the Swedish embassy in Budapest:

July 18, 1944: “...Most people you speak to are ashamed of what is happening and maintain that these brutalities are not being committed by Hungarians but only by Germans. However, this is not true. Hungarian anti-Semitism is deeply rooted. Positive intervention is usually limited to helping friends by providing food and hiding places....I might mention, in this connection, that the presence of Jews is sometimes thought to constitute protection against bombing raids. Those who hold this view appear to believe that the scattering of the Jews into about 2,600 Jewish houses all over Budapest, instead of concentrating them in ghettos, is a deliberate act and that this is also the reason why the Jewish workforce has been forbidden to seek shelter during air raids....”

October 22, 1944: “Since my last report the situation regarding the Hungarian Jews has deteriorated considerably...During the first night of the [Arrow Cross] putsch...there were several pogrom acts, in the course of which some 100–200 persons are estimated to have been killed. Several Jewish houses were also emptied by Arrow Cross troops and the occupants taken away to detention centers....”

December 12, 1944: “Since the last report the situation of the Hungarian Jews has further deteriorated. Probably in the vicinity of 40,000 Jews, of whom 15,000 men from the Labor Service and 25,000 of both sexes [were] seized in their homes or in the street, have been forced to march on foot to Germany. It is a distance of 240 kilometers [149 miles]. The weather has been cold and rainy ever since these death marches began. They have had to sleep under rain shelters and in the open. Most have only been given something to eat and drink three or four times. Many have died....”

Zoltán Vági, László Csösz, and Gábor Kádár, eds., The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide (AltaMira Press, in association with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013), 320–23.

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Joseph M. Proskauer

Letter from Joseph M. Proskauer, president, the American Jewish Committee, to King Gustaf V of Sweden, April 26, 1945:

Your Majesty:

On January 31, 1944, the American Jewish Committee adopted a resolution expressing its gratitude to the Government of Sweden for the assistance extended by it to the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution in Denmark. The American Jewish Committee deems it proper solemnly to recall that resolution and to add its thanks for the noble efforts of Sweden in Hungary....

When the German invader took over control of the country, 800,000 decent and patriotic Hungarian citizens of Jewish descent faced the same fate as the other millions of innocent Jews who had been murdered in Poland and elsewhere in Europe.... The heroic action of Your Majesty's Government and its Legation in Budapest, in particular the valiant and fearless labors of Raoul Wallenberg, served as an example to those Hungarians whose hearts and minds had not been poisoned by the hateful doctrine of racism.... In the history of the Jewish people and in the timeless records of civilization the action of Your Majesty's Government will forever be inscribed in glorious letters.

Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents, vol. 17, *American Jewish Committee, New York, Frederick D. Bogin, ed. (New York: Garland Press, 1993), 186–87.*

Victims' Plight

Gyula Eörsi

Gyula Eörsi was a Hungarian law student who kept a diary until the Arrow Cross party took control of the government in October 1944. He survived the Holocaust and became an internationally recognized lawyer and professor. The following entries are from May 8 and 14, 1944:

"It has been exactly two months since I wrote. There is an explanation for this. I doubt I will be able to write for quite some time. Our private life has been suspended. Where are the girls, the kisses, the boring love affairs, teenage-style philosophy? Where is all the worry these days about an exam, where is all the worry about a poem—where is the person these days? A person who lives life leisurely, who is free, whose brain is not oppressed by fear.... People are snatched up in the street—you would not believe this is happening if you did not see it—they snatch them up because each day, they have to

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arrest 150 people.... Can you image that while you are walking the streets (by the way, let me inform you, my son, incidentally, that on the left side of one's chest, near the heart, you continuously wear a yellow star, a stigma), so you are in the street, wearing the yellow star, and all of a sudden, a detective approaches you and you are transported off to Germany? They take away your property and declare it national property.... Your apartment becomes everyone's apartment, your money becomes everyone's money.... You are the one wearing the yellow star.... [I]t is not just your enemies who are your enemies, your compatriots are likewise your enemies; they take away all that you have and herd you, along with ten thousand others, to a brick factory, to the ghetto, without food or water—let the typhoid fever come and take its toll. So there is nothing to write about.... No, I won't write; the Germans have come into Hungary.”

Zoltán Vági, László Csösz, and Gábor Kádár, eds., The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide (AltaMira Press, in association with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013), 245–46.

Unknown Author

Memorandum titled “Out of the Depths”:

...The gentile world is not aware of the bitterness which overflows at present [in] so many Jewish hearts. Jews feel that there is a conspiracy of silence around the sufferings of their kinsfolk in Europe! The news which the press passes along is a drop on the rock of the public indifference. They see the doors of the countries of the Atlantic Charter slammed in the face of the unfortunate who tried to escape the butcher's hand. They cannot remain unaware of the fundamental contradiction existing between the freedoms for which this country is told to fight, and the steadily growing flood of formalities which aim at flinging back the cursed refugees into the ocean which separates these shores from the old world. But there is one conviction which gets stronger and stronger as the trying years are passing! The treatment meted out to the Jews is only premonitory of that which is awaiting other peoples. Jews are no longer alone being slaughtered.... Great Britain and the United States will not be saved by passing over in silence the wholesale massacres of Jews.... Deportations of non-Jews will follow, and nobody can foretell where this “settled state policy” of “continuous massacre” will stop. The belief in the immanent Justice is perhaps the only legacy which has been left standing in a collapsing world.

Author unknown, Switzerland, ca. 1943. From Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents, vol. 8, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: The Papers of the World Jewish Congress, Abraham J. Peck, ed. (New York: Garland Press, 1990), 302–03.

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Public Health Team No. 2 of the US Third Army

Of the 730,000 to 780,000 Hungarian Jews in 1944, only about 250,000 survived the Holocaust. The following is an excerpt from the report of Public Health Team No. 2 of the US Third Army, which liberated Ampfing (a subcamp of Dachau)—including some of the Hungarian survivors—on May 2, 1945:

Here on double-deck wooden beds—mere wooden slabs covered with filthy straw—were gaunt shadows of men with shaved heads, showing their ulcerated legs, the unhealed whiplashes across their backs. They all had pale faces and puffy ankles, the protein-deficient flesh that was unable to recuperate from even minor wounds. Numbers were tattooed on their forearms or across their chests.... At the far end a nude skeleton sat on a barrel with a plank across it. He was supported by another skeleton who was standing; rather, they leaned against each other in order not to fall down.... The shelves were filled with what had been men. Their bodies were naked or only partly covered by a scrap of tattered, dirty, gray blanket.... Some had enough strength to turn and extend their hands in our direction; some just lay, staring with unseeing eyes and barely breathing.

Zoltán Vági, László Csösz, and Gábor Kádár, eds., The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide (AltaMira Press, in association with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013), 330–31.

One Historian's Reflection

Henry L. Feingold

A simple searing truth emerges from the vast body of research and writing on the Holocaust. It is that European Jewry was ground to dust between the twin millstones of a murderous Nazi intent and a callous Allied indifference. It is a truth with which the living seem unable to come to terms. Historians expect that as time moves us away from a cataclysmic event our passions will subside and our historical judgment of it will mellow. But that tempered judgment is hardly in evidence in the historical examination of the Holocaust. Instead, time has merely produced a longer list of what might have been done and an indictment which grows more damning. There are after all six million pieces of evidence to demonstrate that the world did not do enough. Can anything more be said?

Henry L. Feingold, "Who Shall Bear Guilt for the Holocaust: The Human Dilemma," in Bystanders to the Holocaust (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989), 121.