

## Unit 3 / Lesson 3.1 / Overview

### Unit 3: Impediments to Escape

#### Lesson 3.1: Refugee Policy

##### Background

As the Nazi regime intensified its persecution of German Jews and, later, Jews throughout Europe, the United States and other countries had the opportunity to help those trying to flee. However, when a refugee crisis emerged in parts of Europe in the late 1930s, the world community did little to ease immigration restrictions. In fact, many countries, including the United States and Great Britain, made it more difficult for Jewish refugees to find safe haven within their borders. Some Jews managed to leave Europe before World War II began. As the war progressed, though, the Nazis saw the Allies' inaction on the refugee crisis as a sign of indifference. They launched the "Final Solution" (the attempt to murder all the Jews of Europe), certain that there would be little interference from abroad.

The efforts of Jewish organizations and other critics in the United States did little to influence government officials in Washington, D.C.; not even the confirmation of German atrocities against the Jews led to heightened concern. This lesson discusses the reluctance of the United States to take concrete steps to help Jewish refugees in Europe. The reasons that foreign powers gave to justify their lack of assistance will become apparent, as will the tactics they used.

**Video Running Time: 12:00**

##### Goal:

Examine policies in Germany, Europe, and the United States that created obstacles to immigration for Jews desperately trying to escape Nazi Rule.

##### Essential Questions

- How did the emigration policies create obstacles that prevented Jews from leaving Germany and other countries?
- How did policies in the United States and other countries create barriers to Jewish immigration?
- How did the nations of the world respond to the Jewish refugee crisis that arose in Europe before World War II?
- What were the motives behind the Évian Conference, and what were the outcomes?
- How did circumstances and attitudes within the United States influence the immigration policies of the U.S. government?
- What impact did the inaction of the world community have on the Nazis' policies against the Jews?

##### Learning Goals:

- Students will identify the obstacles in Germany that prevented Jews from leaving.

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- Students will identify obstacles that prevented Jews from entering the United States and other countries.

### Success Criteria:

- Students will explain Western Europe's response to Jewish refugees.
- Students will explain America's response to Jewish refugees.
- Students will analyze the conditions that existed in the United States in the 1930s including antisemitism, isolationism, economics, and nativism that prevented Jewish immigration.
- Students will describe how the Kindertransport program saved lives of Jewish children.

### Topics For Further Discussion

- Why did the American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, not assist in changing immigration policy?
- How did antisemitism in the United States factor into the lack of response to Jewish refugees?
- How did the world economic situation influence the lack of response to German Jewish refugees?
- One's universe of obligation begins at the center, with the people who are closest to you and for whom you feel responsible. Further from the center are those for whom there is less responsibility. At some point, there are people who are not in your universe of obligation. How did this influence American and world response to the Holocaust?

### Recommended Background Reading from *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader*

#### Unit 3 – Lesson 3.1

##### Chapter 3

- Introduction to **Chapter 3: Impediments to Escape**
- “The United States and Refugees, 1933-40” from *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* by Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut
- “Going and Staying” from *Between Dignity and Despair* by Marion Kaplan

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### Unit 3: Impediments to Escape

#### Lesson 3.1: Refugee Policy

Question	
Why was it difficult for Jews to leave Germany?	
What was the outcome of the Évian Conference?	
What was the outcome of the Bermuda Conference?	
What was the Kindertransport, and which countries participated?	
What led to strict immigration laws in the United States?	
How did the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 affect immigration?	
What impact did US Department of State Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long have on US immigration policy?	

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What was American sentiment after Kristallnacht?	
What happened to the passengers on the <i>MS St. Louis</i> ?	
How did American Jews respond?	

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### Answer Key

Question	Possible Answers
Why was it difficult for Jews to leave Germany?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burdensome paperwork</li> <li>• Jews were not permitted to take their assets with them</li> </ul> (Slide 4)
What was the outcome of the Évian Conference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only the Dominican Republic was willing to accept some 645 German Jews to create an agricultural colony in Sosúa</li> <li>• The Évian Conference saved no other Jews</li> </ul> (Slide 6)
What was the outcome of the Bermuda Conference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing – no Jews were saved</li> <li>• By 1943, the majority of Jewish victims were already murdered</li> </ul> (Slide 6)
What was the Kindertransport, and which countries participated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between December 1938 and May 1940, 10,000 children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia were brought to Great Britain</li> <li>• Parents were not allowed to accompany their child/children</li> </ul> (Slide 7)
What led to strict immigration laws in the United States?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The US was war-weary</li> <li>• Isolationist</li> <li>• Xenophobic/nativist</li> <li>• White supremacist</li> <li>• Antisemitic</li> <li>• Racist</li> <li>• Anti-Catholic</li> </ul> (Slide 9)
How did the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 affect immigration?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reset yearly quotas by country</li> <li>• Visas were to be from the immigrant's country of birth, not where the person was currently living or leaving from.</li> <li>• The process was long, multistep, expensive, and complicated</li> <li>• Required multiple documents, fees, and waiting periods</li> </ul> (Slide 10)

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What impact did US Department of State Assistant Secretary Breckinridge Long have on US immigration policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He created barriers, so-called “paper walls”</li> <li>• “Paper walls” consisted of making forms lengthy and difficult to complete</li> </ul> (Slide 10)
What was American sentiment after Kristallnacht?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 94% disapproved of the Nazi treatment of the Jews</li> <li>• 72% said no to permitting increased numbers of German Jews to immigrate to the United States</li> <li>• 7% were indifferent</li> <li>• There was no change to US immigration policy</li> </ul> (Slide 11)
What happened to the passengers on the <i>MS St. Louis</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before sailing from Germany, Cuba agreed to accept the Jewish refugees</li> <li>• Upon arrival in Cuba, Cuba refused to let the ship land and canceled all landing permits</li> <li>• The United States and Canada also refused to accept the refugees</li> <li>• The ship returned to Europe, where Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium permitted them to disembark</li> <li>• Of the 937 passengers on the ship, 254 were murdered during the Holocaust</li> </ul> (Slide 12)
How did American Jews respond?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held rallies</li> <li>• Raised funds to sponsor German refugees</li> <li>• Worked to change the US immigration policy</li> <li>• President Roosevelt did not change the policy</li> </ul> (Slide 13)

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### Unit 3: Impediments to Escape

#### Lesson 3.1: Refugee Policy

##### Slide 1 – Refugee Policy

Welcome to Lesson 3.1 of *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*, from The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This presentation will give you an overview of the topic “Refugee Policy.” This lesson was prepared by Tawny Anderson, who taught social studies and Holocaust Studies at Wellington High School in Palm Beach County, Florida.

##### Slide 2 – Refugee Policy

A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

This is a photograph of the Spanier family, Jewish refugees from Germany. They are on the *St. Louis*, the ship that no country would let land. It is ironic that the family is sitting in front of a sign that says, “No Admittance.” The *St. Louis* was denied entry to Cuba and the United States, and returned to Europe, where many of its passengers were ultimately killed during the Holocaust. The Spanier family survived. We will be discussing the story of the *St. Louis* in more detail in this lesson.

##### Slide 3 – Obstacles to Emigration from the Third Reich

We will now look at why it was difficult for Jews to leave the Third Reich.

The image on the left of the slide is an official notice instructing a Jewish person wishing to emigrate to report to Gestapo headquarters for an interview. Jews, like most Germans, would try to avoid contact with the Gestapo, the Secret State Police, at all costs.

##### Slide 4 – No Easy Way Out...

Nazi Germany wanted the Jews out of Germany and even encouraged emigration; however, it was not easy for Jews to leave Germany.

Obstacles were created, limiting emigration at the same time as it was being encouraged. For example, many nations wanted some evidence that the immigrants had assets, so they would not need financial support from the new country. However, Jews were not allowed to leave with their assets, as the Reich wanted to take control of Jewish property and wealth. German Jews needed to let Nazi Germany rob them of everything they owned.

Jewish emigration from Germany occurred throughout the 1930s, with major waves occurring in 1933 after Hitler came to power and in 1938 after Kristallnacht. By the start of the Second World War in September 1939, some 400,000 Jews had left Germany and Austria.



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### **Slide 5 – Europe’s Response**

For Jews who were able to leave Germany, the question was where to go. To help answer that, we must look at Europe’s response.

This photograph is of Helga Kreiner, arriving in Harwich, England, on the first Kindertransport. We will be discussing the Kindertransport momentarily.

### **Slide 6 – Europe – “Jews Not Wanted”**

Not only was it difficult for German Jews to leave Germany, but it was also difficult to find a European country to accept them. European countries closed their borders to German Jews for several reasons. Chief among them was the fact that no nation wanted new immigrants during a worldwide financial depression. Additionally, antisemitism on the part of European governments played a significant role.

In looking at Jewish emigration, were there any governmental efforts made to help Jews escape their fate in Nazi Germany?

World leaders met to discuss Jewish immigration at the Évian Conference, which was held in France in July 1938. Thirty-two nations participated, but only the Dominican Republic was willing to accept Jews. About 645 German Jews made their way to the Dominican Republic to create an agricultural colony and settled in Sosúa.

During the war, Great Britain and the United States met to discuss wartime refugees in April 1943 in Bermuda. Ultimately, nothing came out of this conference, and no Jews were saved. By the time the Bermuda Conference was held, it was too late to save many Jews. It was virtually impossible for Jews to leave the continent in the middle of the war, and by 1943 the majority of Jewish victims had already been murdered.

This political cartoon depicts the situation of German Jews; the countries of the world were closed to them – there was nowhere to go.

### **Slide 7 – Great Britain**

Although Great Britain did not contribute to immigration options at either the Évian or Bermuda Conferences, Great Britain did accept 10,000 children from Greater Germany. This Kindertransport, composed of mostly Jewish children fleeing Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, arrived in Great Britain in successive transports from December 1938, just one month after Kristallnacht, until May 1940, when the borders closed and no one else could leave.

Children arrived in Great Britain alone, without their families. British families housed these children with the hope of returning them to their families after tensions ended.

In 1939, Britain also closed off emigration to Palestine, which it governed under a mandate, thus limiting a possible option.



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This photograph from December 1938, shows a Jewish girl, wearing a numbered tag, sitting on a staircase with her head in her hands after her arrival in England with the second Kindertransport.

### **Slide 8 – America’s Response**

Let us look at America’s response to Jewish immigration.

In this photograph, Jewish children aboard the steamship President Harding look at the Statue of Liberty as they pull into New York harbor. They were brought to the United States by Gilbert and Eleanor Kraus of Philadelphia in June 1939. Mr. and Mrs. Kraus traveled to Nazi-controlled Vienna to rescue 50 Jewish children. As American Jews, it was potentially dangerous for them to be in Vienna in the spring of 1939.

### **Slide 9 – United States – Before 1933**

After World War I, the United States entered a period of isolationism and did not want to be involved with global affairs. By the early 1930s, the United States was in the middle of the Great Depression and wanted America for Americans without allowing for immigration. The country was xenophobic and nativist. This, along with widespread white supremacist beliefs that were antisemitic, racist, and anti-Catholic, resulted in stringent immigration laws. Gaining entry to America was not easy.

This photograph is of the Ku Klux Klan marching down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C. on September 13, 1926. Thousands marched. You can see the US Capitol in the background.

### **Slide 10 – US Immigration Laws**

American immigration laws made it extremely difficult for immigrants to come to America. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 reset the yearly quotas by country and required that visas were from the immigrant’s country of origin, not the country they were currently living in or leaving from. Thus, German Jews who had fled Germany would have to go back to Germany in order to obtain a US visa.

To immigrate to the United States, individuals had to complete a series of steps, in a specific order. Immigrating to the United States was a long, multi-step, expensive and complicated procedure, requiring multiple documents, fees, and waiting periods. Most applying for a US visa did not receive one.

US Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, seen in this photograph, and his staff, created barriers, so-called “paper walls,” to immigration. Visa forms were lengthy and difficult to complete.

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The United States assigned an immigration quota to each country. It was only in 1939 that the German quota was filled. This was the first time the quota was filled since 1930. There was space for people to come to the United States, but the requirements prevented many from doing so.

### **Slide 11 – American Sentiment After Kristallnacht – November 9-10, 1938**

After the November 1938 Pogrom, known as Kristallnacht, a Gallup poll asked Americans if they approved or disapproved of the Nazi treatment of Jews in Germany; 94% disapproved.

Americans were also asked: “Should we allow a larger number of Jewish exiles from Germany to come to the United States to live?” 72% said no, and 7% were indifferent.

Despite the overwhelming disapproval of how Germany was treating Jews, Americans did not want to change the immigration policy.

### **Slide 12 – The *MS St. Louis***

Cuba agreed to accept passengers sailing from Germany in May 1939 on the merchant ship *St. Louis*. Most of the passengers were Jewish refugees, some of whom are seen in this photograph. However, by the time the ship reached North America, Cuba refused to permit the ship to land and canceled landing permits. Passengers asked the United States and Canada for assistance, but both nations refused to accept these refugees. The *MS St. Louis* returned to Europe where the passengers were allowed to disembark in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Of the 937 passengers on the *St. Louis*, 254 were murdered during the Holocaust.

### **Slide 13 – The American Jewish Response**

The American Jewish community was quite vocal in hoping to change US immigration policy, holding rallies, and raising funds to sponsor refugees; however, their efforts and appeals to President Roosevelt were unsuccessful.

In this photograph, we see Rabbi Stephen Wise, a prominent American Jewish leader, speaking at a mass meeting in Madison Square Garden in New York City, protesting the Nazi persecution of German Jews.

### **Slide 14 – Summary – Refugee Policy**

In summary, German Jews were caught in an impossible situation.

As the situation for Germany’s Jews deteriorated in the 1930s, and especially after Kristallnacht, many Jews wanted desperately to leave. Clearly, Germany also wanted them to leave, but then placed logistical and financial obstacles that prevented and/or delayed their ability to do so.

The German government wanted to impoverish the Jews who wished to emigrate. However, Western European countries were not willing to accept refugees who could not provide for themselves once they arrived.

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America did not want the political, social, or economic challenges attached to the German Jews. Fear of communism, the global financial situation, antisemitism, and toxic nativism created a largely hostile environment for those seeking to flee Nazi Germany.

**Ultimately, no one felt responsible for the Jews of Europe. They were in no one's universe of obligation.**

Thank you for joining us today as we learned about “Refugee Policy.” Please continue your educational journey with us. This concludes our presentation of Lesson 3.1 from *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*. On behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you.

## Unit 3 / Lesson 3.1 / Lesson Quiz

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Circle the correct answers below.

1. Which of the following was an outcome of the Évian Conference?
  - a. Nothing happened to help the Jews of Germany
  - b. Costa Rica accepted 500 Jews to work in factories
  - c. The *MS St. Louis* brought Jewish refugees to Cuba where they were permitted to disembark
  - d. The Dominican Republic agreed to accept a relatively small number of Jews
2. What part did the Kindertransport play in successful emigration of Jewish children prior to September 1, 1939?
  - a. Planes brought families from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to the United States
  - b. Children were transported from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to Great Britain
  - c. Adults were transported from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to Switzerland
  - d. Ships brought children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to the Dominican Republic
3. Which of the following was not a barrier to Jewish emigration from Nazi Germany?
  - a. Quotas
  - b. Antisemitism
  - c. Easy application process
  - d. The policies of the U.S. State Department
4. How did Kristallnacht influence America's response to the plight of German Jews?
  - a. People approved of the Nazi treatment of Jews but changed the immigration policy
  - b. People disapproved of the Nazi treatment of Jews and changed the immigration policy
  - c. People approved of the Nazi treatment of Jews but did nothing to change the immigration policy
  - d. People disapproved of the Nazi treatment of Jews but did nothing to change the immigration policy
5. Identify which of the following goals American Jews failed to achieve.
  - a. Raising funds to sponsor refugees
  - b. Helping President Roosevelt to change immigration policy
  - c. Holding rallies to show support for German Jews
  - d. Protesting Nazi Persecution of German Jews

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#### Lesson Quiz with Answers Highlighted and Bolded

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**Link to Google Form Quiz (Instructions Available in the Appendix)**

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/12QtF1c9AAZfUZHZA8E7FS8xAWljmgLvHyw9U7xGtzA/copy>

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**Slide 1** - Yevgeny Khaldei via Getty Images

**Slide 2** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Rolf [Altschul] Allan

**Slide 3** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Henry Kahn

**Slide 4** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Werner Goldsmith

**Slide 5** - "Helga Kreiner of First Kindertransport Arrives in Harwich, England" (1938). *Bulmash Family Holocaust Collection*. 2014.1.43. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/bulmash/355>

**Slide 6** - Strube/Daily Express/Mirrorpix

**Slide 7** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

**Slide 8** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Anita Willens

**Slide 9** - Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-npcc-16225, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016842489/>

**Slide 10** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

**Slide 11** - Gallup Organization. (1938). Gallup Poll # 1938-0139: Nazi Germany/Politics (Version 3) [Dataset]. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. doi:10.25940/ROPER-31087123

**Slide 12** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Dr. Liane Reif-Lehrer

**Slide 13** - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD