



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

The Holocaust

During the final months of the war in Europe, Allied forces from the U.S.S.R. overran camps used by Nazi Germany to carry out its horrific “Final Solution”—the effort to eliminate Europe’s entire Jewish population that is known today as the Holocaust. Attacking eastwards, the Western Allies similarly discovered untold murders committed by the Hitler regime. While Nazi atrocities had been previously known, these gruesome encounters focused new attention on mass murder, particularly the killings associated with the campaign against European Jews.

The Final Solution was rooted in Nazi ideology, which held that Jews were inferior beings who, by their very existence, threatened the Nazi concept of racial purity. This systematic effort of the Nazis and their collaborators resulted in the murder of approximately six million Jews. The Nazis also murdered millions of Slavs, Sinti and Roma people, political dissidents, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, physically and mentally handicapped people, and others they considered to be “undesirable.”

Immediately after coming to power in 1933, Adolf Hitler began the persecution of Germany’s Jewish population. Emigration to the world’s democracies—especially after the *Anschluss* with Austria and the riotous anti-Jewish outbreaks associated with *Kristallnacht* in 1938—was seen by many as a way out. But American immigration laws were complicated and often harshly administered.

Germany’s armed expansion during the late 1930s and World War II led to enormous growth in German-controlled territory that put vast numbers of European Jews under German control and greatly diminished their prospects for escape to safety.

With the outbreak of war, persecution escalated to mass murder, beginning in Eastern Europe and eventually involving millions of Jews across the entire continent. What became known as the “Final Solution” of the Jewish Question was a carefully planned and organized effort to maximize the killing and destroy every Jew the Nazis could find. In Soviet territory, beginning in summer 1941, Jews were shot by the tens of thousands. The following year, Jews throughout Europe began

to be rounded up and sent by train to distant camps where they were killed by gas. The scale and depravity of the Final Solution was staggering.



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Reports of mass killings began reaching the Allies almost as soon as they occurred. The response of President Roosevelt and others within American government and society has sparked heated scholarly argument in recent decades. Historians debate why FDR and other American decision-makers did not do more to admit Jewish refugees and undertake policies—including bombing rail lines to Auschwitz or Auschwitz itself—that might have saved lives.

Letter, Herbert Luft to John W. Pehle, Executive Director of the War Refugee Board, August 19, 1944;
Letter, John W. Pehle to Herbert Luft, September 29, 1944.

When Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board by Executive Order 9417 on January 22, 1944, the President declared it to be the policy of the United States Government “to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war.” The Order further instructed the Departments of State, War, and Treasury to execute all requests and facilitate all measures the Board might take in furtherance of its mission. This exchange of letters between Mr. Herbert Luft of Los Angeles and War Refugee Board Executive Director John W. Pehle reflects the type of personal appeals that were made to the Board as well as the Board’s massive efforts to help Jews suffering in enemy territory. (War Refugee Board Records; Requests for Specific Aid; File: Luft, Herbert; Box 28).



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111 South Manhattan Place
Apartment 105
Los Angeles 4, Calif.

August 19, 1944

Executive Office of the President
War Refugee Board
Washington 25, D. C.

Attention: Mr. J. W. Pehle,
Executive Director

Dear Mr. Pehle:-

Re: 486 - 4-22-1944

I just read in a newspaper an announcement of the State Department in regard to the Hungarian Jews and I am happy to learn that the Governments of this country and Great Britain will take care of the Hungarian Jewry as far as they can be transported to Neutral- or United Nations territory. It is my desire to contribute to this aim and wish you would inform me if individuals can give Affidavits of Support for those Refugees to ease their situation or to help them in any other way possible.

At this occasion, I wish to bring to your attention that during recent years thousands of older Jewish men and women (most of them over 70 years of age), from Germany, Austria and Poland, were deported to the town of Theresienstadt-Czechoslovakia (Bohemia), among them my own parents, I would like to know if there is a way to send the few who are still alive (most of them already have died in Theresienstadt) through the facilities of the Red Cross to neutral territory, and if it is possible to contribute food, clothes or money to those who are without these necessities.

Thanking you again for the fine work of the War Refugee Board and trusting to hear from you soon, I remain,

Respectfully yours,

Herbert Luft
HERBERT LUFT

VIA AIR MAIL



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SEP 29 1944

Dear Mr. Luft:

Since my recent letter to you, the War Refugee Board, in collaboration with the Department of State, has developed a special program calculated to benefit certain categories of persons in enemy territory. These include, among others, the parents of United States citizens.

While no assurances can be given as to the success of the plan, I suggest that, if you are an American citizen you promptly file with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Department of Justice, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a petition to establish your parents as persons entitled to preference quota immigration visas as the parents of a United States citizen. Your petition should be accompanied by a letter stating that it is being filed at the suggestion of the War Refugee Board. The necessary form is enclosed for your convenience.

If you are not an American citizen, it is regretted that there is no specific action the Board can take with regard to your parents beyond its general efforts in behalf of victims of Nazi persecution. Please be assured, however, that the Board is doing and will continue to do everything in its power to rescue and protect these people.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) J. W. Pehle

J. W. Pehle
Executive Director

Mr. Herbert Luft
111 South Manhattan Place
Apartment 105
Los Angeles 4, California

Enclosure

EBT L.S.K. JOK
EBTowler 9-23-44