From Zbaszyn to Manila: The Holocaust Odyssey of Joseph Cysner
and the Philippine Rescue of Refugee Jews

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Bonnie Mae Harris

Committee in charge:
Professor Harold Marcuse, Chair
Professor Randall Bergstrom
Professor Lawrence Baron

September 2009
The dissertation of Bonnie Mae Harris is approved.

____________________________________________
Lawrence Baron

____________________________________________
Randall Bergstrom

____________________________________________
Harold Marcuse, Committee Chair

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and the Philippine Rescue of Refugee Jews

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How does one in an acceptable manner even begin to thank all the people behind the scenes who have helped in some way or another over the last six years in bringing this dissertation to its full fruition? The task is daunting. Such an acknowledgement would include historians, archivists, professors, students, family and friends, along with countless others who offered me insights and directions along the way. But had it not been for Stanley and Laurel Schwarz, president and archives manager of the Jewish Historical Society of San Diego (JHSSD), who offered a work study job to a lowly grad student at San Diego State University in 2001, I would have never met Sylvia Cysner, nor would I have discovered the wonderful documentary legacy of her husband’s life that she retained for their posterity. These personal papers became the Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection in the Archives of the JHSSD, where I worked as a grad student. Therefore my special thanks go to Stan and Laurel Schwarz and the Cysner Family for giving me the opportunity to document the life story of Joseph P. Cysner and his Holocaust odyssey from Poland to the Philippines.
VITA OF BONNIE MAE HARRIS
June 2009

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in Humanities, San Diego State University, San Diego, May 2000 magna cum laude, with distinction in the major

Master of Arts in History, San Diego State University, San Diego, May 2002

Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of California, Santa Barbara, June 2009 with an emphasis in Public History

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2001-2009: Archivist, Jewish Historical Society of San Diego

2002-2006: Executive Administrator, Lipinsky Institute for Judaic Studies, San Diego State University

2003: Lecturer, Department of History, San Diego State University

2008, 2009: Summer Session Instructor, University of California, Santa Barbara

2008-2009: Instructor, Department of History, Grossmont Community College, El Cajon, California

2009: Instructor, Department of History, Southwestern Community College, Chula Vista, California

PUBLICATIONS


“A Quest to Qualify: Finding My Place as a Holocaust Historian,” Challenges, The Zachor Society Online Journal, Fall 2008
“From German Jews to Polish Refugees: Germany’s Polenaktion and the Zbaszyn Deportations of October 1938,” *Jewish History Quarterly*, Jewish Historical Institute Warsaw, 2009

AWARDS


The Mary Ward Memorial Award in Archival Preservation, Congress of History for San Diego and Imperial Co., March 2006

Robert L. Kelley Fellowship in Public History, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2008

Javits Dissertation Fellowship, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2008

Curt C. And Else Silberman Seminar for University Faculty, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2008

FIELDS OF STUDY

Modern Jewish History Field
Antisemitism and the Holocaust
Prof. Lawrence Baron

Modern German History Field
Diaspora of Germany's Jews
Prof. Harold Marcuse

Public History Field
Memorialization of the Holocaust
Prof. Randy Bergstrom

Cognate Study Field
Holocaust Survivor Literature
Prof. Susan Derwin
ABSTRACT

From Zbaszyn to Manila: The Holocaust Odyssey of Joseph Cysner and the Philippine Rescue of Refugee Jews

by

Bonnie Mae Harris

Of the many refugee trails filled with stateless Jews fleeing Europe during the decades of the Nazi crisis, the odyssey of one man’s escape from Poland to the Philippines stands unique. Cantor Joseph Cysner’s recently discovered memoir recorded the expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany in the Polenaktion of October 28, 1938 and recounted the destitution of the expelled Jews in the refugee border camp of Zbaszyn, one of many throughout the no-man’s-lands of eastern Europe. Rescued by a telegram from the Jewish Refugee Committee (JRC) of Manila offering him employment, Joseph left Zbaszyn and joined 1300 other European refugee Jews ultimately saved from destruction by little known rescue plans in the Far Eastern nation of the Philippines.

My research resurrects these important events from historical oblivion, while showing how they incredibly link to each other, not only through global diplomacy, but in the life experiences of a little-known Jewish cantor.
My Story

No one could have imagined that someone like myself would presume to become a Holocaust historian, least of all me. There were so many qualifications that I believed I lacked – most importantly, I thought, was the fact that I was not Jewish. While I had a better than average knowledge of the history of the Jews, being a long-time instructor of Biblical History in the L.D.S. Institute of Religion at San Diego State University (SDSU), my prior academic scholarship had focused on the Ancient Near East and Classical Greek and Roman histories. I had never even entertained the idea of pursuing Modern Jewish Studies until 2001 when one singular event changed the course of my academic and professional careers. It all started when I answered a “Help Wanted” ad for the Lipinsky Institute for Judaic Studies at SDSU. Thinking I would be employed in a typical student assistant position answering phones and filing papers, the actual job of working in the archives of the Jewish Historical Society of San Diego (JHSSD) couldn’t have been further from my mind. But it was a match made in heaven, and it was this affiliation that gave me a new career path in Public History, as well as bringing me into the field of Holocaust research.

After accessioning several new collections into the JHSSD archives in 2003, I began processing the collection of Cantor Joseph Cysner, a Holocaust survivor
whose personal papers had been donated to the JHSSD by his widow, Sylvia Cysner. I had just recently been accepted into the PhD program in Public History at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), where I planned on writing a regional history of Jews in San Diego as my doctoral dissertation. No sooner did I begin processing the newly accessioned collection of Cantor Joseph Cysner, then I knew I had found the story of a life-time – the Holocaust odyssey of a survivor from both Nazi and Japanese imprisonments. As I started to contemplate making his story the center piece of my dissertation, I knew it would change the entire direction of my program studies. Instead of concentrating on US History with a focus in American Jewish History, and more specifically Jewish history in California, this would steer me into Modern Jewish History of Europe. It would require looking at the history of antisemitism, regional Jewish histories in Germany and Poland, and, more importantly, focusing on the Holocaust and all that implied, which at the time I couldn’t even fathom. The deeper I delved into Cysner’s papers, the more I realized I had found a truly unique narrative within the field of Holocaust studies. The collection, which comprises two boxes of documents from Germany, Poland, the Philippines, San Francisco and San Diego, details Cysner's incarcerations by the Nazis, the Poles, and the Japanese before and during WWII. Some of the most important items come from Cysner's experiences in the Polish border town of Zbaszyn, c. 1938-1939, and the Santo Tomas Civilian Detention Camp in Manila, c. 1942-1945. How did one man experience forced imprisonment by both the Germans
and the Japanese during WWII? And more important, how did he survive them both and live to tell about it?

During my first quarter at UCSB, I consulted with my public history advisor, Professor Randy Bergstrom, who helped me explore the pros and cons of changing the focus of my program. I submitted a preliminary paper on Cysner’s personal odyssey from Zbaszyn to Manila. My program advisors all agreed that this story was too good to pass over so my program outline was adjusted and Professor Harold Marcuse, a professor of Modern German History at UCSB, agreed to be my dissertation advisor. The graduate division at UCSB allowed Professor Lawrence Baron, then Director of the Lipinsky Institute for Judaic Studies at SDSU, for whom I also worked as his administrative assistant, to act as my program mentor in Modern Jewish Studies. With that the paper work was done, but what did it really mean? I now literally had in my hands a Holocaust survivor’s story, fragmentarily preserved at best, that crossed several fields of Holocaust scholarship that I didn’t even know about yet. Where does one so unqualified as I begin a quest to become a Holocaust historian?

I began to fill my home office with films, books, and journal articles – titles on Jewish histories; ancient, medieval, modern, European, and American; titles on antisemitism, genocide, Diaspora; titles on the Holocaust, testimonies of survivors, histories of the events, and even psychological studies of the effects of Holocaust related trauma. As a public historian, I also assembled works on Holocaust memory
– memorials, museums, and witnesses. I had converted one of the upstairs bedrooms of our home into a library cum study with wall to wall bookcases and filing cabinets. And as I gathered I read. I read constantly. I was never without a book or journal article in my hand, no matter where I went. I wrote in the margins as I read, making notes to myself and asking questions that I would further pursue. And the more I read, the more I realized how ignorant I was. How did I ever think that I could internalize all this information? If it was not historical dates, facts, and figures churning in my head, then it was horrific mental scenes of torture and torment from survivors churning up my stomach. Insomnia started to set in from the stress of study coupled with trying to maintain a normal life style with my family. Normal soon changed. After all, I was a wife and a mother, working two part-time jobs while commuting to school over 200 miles away. There was nothing normal about any of it. And more than the academic and professional load, there was something happening to me – I was changing and it scared me.

I have never been one to run from a battle or to shrink from a challenge and yet I was positive that I was doing both. The battle wasn’t the books and the challenge wasn’t the commute – it was something much more ephemeral, something so swift and fleeting that just when I thought I had it, it would be gone. No matter how hard I tried, how much I read, analyzed, studied, compared, wrote, edited, listened, viewed – I was failing. I could not wrap my head around the enormity of the Holocaust. I didn’t understand it. Oh, I could explain it – historically, academically,
psychologically, geographically, and even historiographically – but I couldn’t explain it rationally, and certainly not emotionally. The closer I got to it on a human, emotional level, the more transient it became and the more detached from it as a human being I became. And that is what scared me. I felt myself becoming desensitized to its horrors and as much as I didn’t want that to happen, I knew to a certain point it had to in order to preserve my objectivity as a historian. And that made me feel guilty. I started to question whether I had the right, as a non-Jew, as a non-sufferer of generations of antisemitism, and more especially as a non-sufferer of Holocaust atrocities, even to be a Holocaust historian. Perhaps it was something I could only aspire to and never achieve – like a journey that never reaches a destination.

My PhD program course work came and went – exams came and went – and the final phase of travel and research loomed ahead before I would be ready to sum it all up into the written word of this doctoral dissertation – my first major contribution to the mass field of Holocaust scholarship. I had already done preliminary research at various archival venues in the United States, such as the National Archives in Washington DC (NARA), the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Center for Jewish History in NYC. I had also visited many Holocaust museums, as I am ultimately a public historian with a desire to produce a post-doctoral museum exhibit and film documentary based on my research. Oddly enough, my visits to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, the Holocaust Museum in
New York City, the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, and even the new Holocaust Museum at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Ghetto Fighters Museum in Akko only heightened my fears of futility in my quest to qualify as a historian in the field of Holocaust studies. I cannot fully express how the assistance afforded me from the historians of these venues helped me gather primary documents of exceptional worth.

The time came to plunge myself into the European phase of my research. I laid out a one-month itinerary, accompanied by my dear friend Michelle Mosemann who acted as my research assistant. I followed Joseph’s life, finding the places where he had been, while searching through repositories in Poland and Germany for the ever elusive singular piece of paper that makes all the time and money spent in finding it – worth it. I also made this research trip in Europe an extension of my mission to mold myself into a Holocaust historian and that meant I needed to visit the places of the Holocaust. I needed to see the camps, former sites of the ghettos, places of life and death, commission and submission, those places that defined the Holocaust. We first flew into Warsaw and spent time seeing the remnants of the ghetto and other sites of Jewish interest. I scheduled private tour guides who took us to the camp sites of Majdanek and Belzec near Lublin. My carefully planned itinerary then took us to Krakow, where I had prepaid for tours of Auschwitz and Birkenau, the site of the Podgorze Ghetto and the Kazimierz District of Krakow. In another couple of days, the schedule took us to the Czech Republic for a tour of the former Jewish District of
Prague, as well as the Theresienstadt Ghetto site and the Terezin prison camp.

Leaving Prague, I had routed our itinerary through Linz, making a stop to see the Mauthausen Concentration Camp before continuing on to Salzburg for some “R and R.”

After leaving Salzburg, we continued north to Munich, where we took tours of the sites of the Third Reich with a trip to Dachau. Then it was on to Berlin for one week, where we saw Sachsenhausen as well as more sites of the Third Reich. I visited several repositories of German and Jewish history in Berlin and I was especially pleased to see the new Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. I also made a special trip to Zbaszyn, the border refugee camp in Poland. After Berlin, when my research assistant left for home, I spent my last scheduled week alone in Hamburg, where I toured the Holocaust memorial sites in the Jewish District of Altona and visited the Neuengamme Concentration Camp and Museum. In Hamburg I found Joseph’s address and the Verband Synagogue where he worked when he was arrested and deported to Poland. I had already made contact with various repositories whose directors awaited my arrival and helped me with my research on the Polenaktion and the Zbaszyn Deportations. It took me two full weeks to plan out the itinerary, reserve the plane tickets, order the train passes, book the hotels, and arrange for the tours. It took me four weeks to execute it. The itinerary ran like a well-oiled machine, with very few deviations from the schedule. But what I couldn’t plan for – what became the heart and soul of the venture – were the emotional
connections, and sometimes lack thereof, experienced on my own personal
Holocaust odyssey.

Auschwitz was my greatest challenge and a turning point in my quest. While
there I had failed to make any kind of personal connection to its historical past.
Auschwitz truly convinced me that I was an outsider, a visitor, even an interloper,
who spent only meager hours trying to comprehend the lifetime experiences of
tortured and murdered victims of unimaginable cruelty. What a ridiculous idea that
was to even think that I could do such a thing. At first, I tried to blame it on the
scripted, overly dramatized voice of our tour guide interfering with my own private
moments of contemplation. But that wasn’t it. I even blamed the “touristy”
demeanor of some of the visitors as having distracted me. But that wasn’t it either.
Then as I was scanned through my digital photographs one image of Auschwitz
struck me like no other – it was a picture of the electrically charged guard fences of
the camp perimeter. But in this view the lens looked through multiple layers of
fencing, obstructing the focus, and I realized that was how I felt about the Holocaust.
I tried to look in and to see it clearly, but my vision was obscured by layers of
metaphorical fencing that blocked my view – fences of time, fences of experience,
and fences of distance. And I learned and accepted that those fences that impeded
my connection to Auschwitz would always be there, in essence as a guarding barrier
for my humanity – guarding me and others, survivors and visitors alike, protecting
all against the unending barbs of the Holocaust’s complete inhumanity.
As I continued to follow my itinerary through Europe, I made another very important observation – that no matter how jaded I sometimes felt, I never knew when that one picture, or one story, or one object would connect with me on a deeper level and push me over the edge of my growing indifference, slamming me with horrible awareness. My European pilgrimage, formulated around my research needs for the express purpose of helping me feel qualified to enter the field of Holocaust studies as a legitimate professional, saturated me beyond my ability to absorb. Places and objects that I had previously thought would be unbearable to witness seemed to have little effect on me as my tours progressed. I was tired. No, more than that, I was exhausted. After touring Mauthausen, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Neuengamme, it all began to be one big blur. When I came to Hamburg, the last week of my month-long venture, I had one last visit to make – to the neighborhood where Joseph had lived when he was deported in the Polenaktion of October 1938.

Once I had found his tax record at the Staatsarchiv in Hamburg, I now had his actual address in my hand. I purchased a detailed street map of Hamburg, determined the best street car route, and found Isestrasse. I walked and took many pictures of the area, including several of his address at #65 Isestrasse. As I went up and down the long boulevard of multi-storied apartment complexes, not wanting to leave the area where he had lived, I read the golden glowing surfaces of the Stolpersteine that had been mortared into the walkways. The Stolpersteine Project is
the creation of sculptor Gunter Demnig of Cologne, Germany.\(^1\) Crafted by Demnig personally, Stolpersteine are bronze plaques, each stamped with the name of a Holocaust victim under the phrase “Here lived . . .” Also etched into the metal are the birth date of the victim, when known, when and where they were deported, and when and where they died. These plaques are then set into the mortar of the sidewalk in front of the residence where the victim last lived. In this manner, Demnig has sought to preserve a memory of every known victim of Nazi Fascism, whether Jew, intellectual, political prisoner, Gypsy, Jehovah Witness, or Homosexual. Thousands of these Stolpersteine have been set into the sidewalks in Hamburg, Berlin, Bonn, Bremen, Essen, Cologne, and Frankfurt, just to name a few of the German cities embracing this program.

In front of nearly every apartment complex on Isestrasse, set into the walkways in front of the entrances, were several of these shining plaques. I tried to read them all, especially those in front of the address where Joseph had lived when he was deported to Zbaszyn. All these names, and yet they really were so few in the overall numbers of the victims of Germany’s fascist leaders. I watched as people walked along the sidewalks, noticing that no one else looked down to read the plaques except me. But as I looked back along the walkway, the setting sun glinted off the bronze stones and it was impossible not to notice them. Each radiant, glowing stone bearing the name of one remembered victim and in that moment, in that one

\(^1\) This project is explained and coordinated at http://www.stolpersteine.com/. The Wikipedia entry about the project is also very informative.
seemingly inconsequential moment, it all came into a piercingly sharp brilliant focus, imbedding itself into my psyche forever – I was not supposed to understand the enormity of the Holocaust. Such a quest was an exercise in eternal futility. I was there to understand the enormity of just the one holocaust – the uprooted life and experiences of Cantor Joseph Cysner. I was there for him, not for me. I was there to connect with his past so that I could restore his lost life to his family and to his congregants, and to the larger field of Holocaust studies in general.

I have been consumed for years with the writing of this dissertation, an academic exercise of precision research and analysis. But I feel the human life at the center of the story has at times gotten lost. In an effort to find him again, I thought it prudent to begin this work with what I know about the man Joseph Cysner, what kind of person he was. Though I have never met him, I probably know more about him than any other person living today.
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Introduction

Joseph Cysner’s Story Begins

Joseph was born into a very religious Orthodox family, who practiced a Judaism no doubt passed forward culturally to them by their ancestors of eastern European Jewry. But Joseph was also a product of the age of Haskala, the Jewish Enlightenment, that had afforded Jews a level of cultural adaptation and assimilation into non-Jewish society that had apparently appealed to many. Joseph was a young man of moderate height and weight, with a round happy face that loved to smile. He was also a very “dapper” dresser, not wearing the traditional attire that we so often associate with the more orthodox practitioners of Judaism. And although he trained in the traditional study of the Hebrew Chazzan and excelled in classical performance, he loved all genres of modern music – American theater, jazz, and Big Band music. Joseph had already adopted the newly emerging Liberal Reform Judaism when he had received his appointment in 1937 to the famous Verband Synagogue in Hamburg in 1937, one of the birthplaces of Reform Judaism. Key features of the Jewish liturgy of liberal Judaism were organ music and congregational choirs. Joseph was in his element when he was directing choirs, especially children’s choirs. The opening chapter of this dissertation, “Germany’s Jews,” expounds on the history of the Jews in Europe during this time, a historical period in which Joseph lived and thrived.
Joseph Cysner was the seventh and last child of Jewish parents from Poland. Regardless of the fact that he was born, raised, and educated in Germany (b. 1912 in Bamberg), he was considered a Jewish Pole under Nazi Germany’s laws. He left Bamberg in 1929 to attend the Jewish Theological Seminary in Würzburg and graduated in 1933, the same year Hitler came into power. Joseph then served as a Cantor in Hildesheim and Hannover before accepting a lifetime contract as Cantor at the Verband Synagogue in Hamburg in 1937, the same year his father died. Of course, during these years between 1933 and 1937, Nazi anti-Jewish measures in Germany accelerated, with the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 and their implementation in the years that followed. Joseph’s older brothers all emigrated in the early 1930s, one going to the US and two others becoming Zionists and going to Palestine. His sisters both married and moved to Berlin. Joseph shouldered the financial responsibility for his mother for the rest of his life. He never saw his brothers in Palestine again. His sister Charlotte and her family perished in Auschwitz.

The critical year of his story is 1938 – a critical year globally as well. Chapter two, “From German Jews to Polish Refugees,” details this time period. Poland passed new legislation aimed at its Jewish citizens by targeting all persons holding Polish passports living abroad. The measure basically nullified their passports essentially making nearly 60,000 Jewish Poles living in Germany and the newly annexed territories of Austria stateless. This enraged Hitler. Months of negotiations
followed, Germany demanded that Poland rescind the statute as it applied to Polish Jews in Germany and Austria. German state-ordered anti-Jewish measures against Polish Jews increased in an effort to drive them out before the statute went into effect. Poland then passed measures that required all passports to have validation stamps by October 30, 1938 – giving Polish citizens abroad only two weeks to acquire the stamp before they became stateless. During these months of negotiations, Czechoslovakia was carved up and more Jews in occupied German territories tried to run from the occupying German armies. The Anschluss of Austria in March 1938 and annexation of Sudeten-Czech territories in October sent thousands of fleeing Jews to Polish consular offices, while Poland tried to halt to the tidal wave of returning Jews. When Poland refused to change its newly passed revocation of citizenship laws, Hitler decided to trump Poland’s hand, and on October 26, 1938 ordered the German Foreign Ministry and the Gestapo to arrest all Jewish Poles in Germany and Austria and to deport them en masse to the Polish border.

It was titled by the Reich as the Polenaktion, the Polish Action. In short, about 17,000 Jews in Germany and Austria – men, women, children, elderly, cripple, whoever – were arrested on October 27, held overnight in community centers, jails, parks, or whatever kind of large facility for gatherings existed, trucked to train depots, locked into train cars, and transported to the Polish border on October 28th and 29th of 1938. Trains from all over the Reich packed with thousands of displaced people all headed in one direction – east. Joseph was one of nearly 900 Jews from
Hamburg deported that night. His mother, still in Bamberg, was spared. Joseph wrote a memoir of the event and the terrible scene of chaos, suffering, and terror at the border. Bayonet-armed German soldiers drove the Jewish mass across the no-man’s-lands and Polish border guards fired rifles into the air to stop them. Joseph Cysner described a scene of mass panic in his diary.

These stateless Jews sought shelter all along the border in makeshift tent camps until many were sent on to Warsaw. Joseph and about 8,000 others faced a forced incarceration at a Polish border town called Zbaszyn. Cysner also wrote about his experiences during his months spent in Zbaszyn. It is here that the obscure stories of the Polenaktion and the Zbaszyn deportations connect with existing Holocaust scholarship. Part of those transports of Jews taken to Zbaszyn included Jews from Hannover, where Joseph had once lived and worked. The Grynszpan Family from Hannover also ended up in Zbaszyn. From there they cabled their son, Herschel, who was at school in Paris, telling him of their terrible expulsion. With a postcard from his sister in his pocket, Herschel entered the German Embassy in Paris and shot a consular official. This act was used by members of Hitler's inner circle to trigger Kristallnacht, the infamous night of broken glass on November 9, 1938, that many historians describe as the beginning of the Holocaust. The Polenaktion thus not only precipitated Kristallnacht, but as the first mass expulsion of Jews from Nazi Germany foreshadowed later deportations to sites of mass murder. It required a coordination of several bureaucratic agencies to accomplish it – all precursors to the
expulsions during the war years. After hearing about Kristallnacht while being held at Zbaszyn, Joseph knew they would never return to Germany.

Joseph was beloved by his congregations, especially by the children. He was the Jewish pied piper with a violin. Children and adults alike seemed to gravitate to him. He taught Hebrew and prepared the young boys for their bar mitzvahs. He organized music classes and choirs and seemed to have a natural, gentle way with all people. While confined at Zbaszyn, he transliterated folk songs being sung at the camp so the music of the people could be preserved. He especially sought after and nurtured the children who were alone, separated from their families, or whose parents were too distressed to care for them. He brought them into classes and taught them music and taught them how to sing, so that in their singing they could express hope for a better future. He tried to bring a calm, healing influence into scenes of chaos and dread, and as he did in Zbaszyn, so he did again in Manila. There they called him the Angel of Santo Tomas, because he ministered to all people, not just Jews. All were alike to him.

Joseph had received a telegram while in Zbaszyn from his friend, Rabbi Josef Schwarz, who had immigrated to Manila in September 1938. Schwarz had convinced the leaders of the Jewish Community in Manila that the diverse Jewish community needed a Cantor to help unify it, and when he sent the telegram to Joseph, he did not know that Joseph was no longer in Hamburg. But the telegram, through good German bureaucracy, found him in Zbaszyn. He answered yes to the job offer and
left Zbaszyn in April 1939, arriving in Manila in May 1939. Joseph was met by other 
refugee Jews who had escaped Europe through the efforts of a rescue committee led 
by wealthy American merchant Jews in Manila. Over the course of three to four 
years, 1300 refugees from Europe found a safe haven from Nazi tyranny in the Far 
eastern metropolis of Manila. After giving a history of “Jewish Settlement in the Far 
East” in chapter three, the heart of this dissertation details the rescue of Jews in the 
Philippines in chapters four and five, with details of the selective “Rescue in the 
Philippines” that rescued Joseph, and the massive “Mindanao Resettlement Project” 
that never materialized.

The irony of the rescue of German refugees in Manila came in 1942, when the 
Japanese army occupied the Philippines in January of that year. The invading 
Japanese army arrested all civilian aliens who held a passport from a country at war 
with Japan or Germany and interned them for three years at Santo Tomas University, 
turning one of the world’s oldest universities into a civilian prison camp over night. 
After examining the on-again, off-again diplomatic relationship between “Japan and 
Germany” in chapter six, the details of the “Japanese Occupation” of the Philippines 
are expounded in chapter seven. Here the irony unfolded that the American and 
British Jews who had been the benefactors of the refugee Jews were now interned, 
while the majority of the refugee Jews who were German and Austrians were not. 
But Joseph held a Polish passport and he too was arrested and interned at Santo
Tomas. He survived Nazi arrest, expulsion, imprisonment and escape only to encounter it all over again at the hands of the Japanese.

Joseph survived the Japanese occupation, but during the liberation of Manila both his synagogue and his home were destroyed by the Japanese and nearly 100 of his fellow Jews lost their lives during the repatriation of Manila. When the liberating US military forces arrived, they were astonished to find European refugee Jews in the Philippines, and the refugee Jews were surprised to see Jewish servicemen as their liberators. Joseph officiated over a very special Seder of deliverance that Passover season of 1945, when thousands of servicemen and women from all over the Pacific Theater attended a special Passover service organized and sponsored at the Rizal Stadium in Manila. Eventually, Joseph and most all of the other European refugee Jews immigrated to America, as the destroyed Manila held no promise of any kind of prosperity any time soon. Joseph arrived in San Francisco in 1947, wrote to Sylvia begging her to join him in America. She came on a three month visitor’s visa in 1948 and they married soon after she arrived, with a congregation of attendees from all over the world.

When Joseph immigrated to America and he and Sylvia married, he divorced himself emotionally and physically from his German past. He was ashamed to have been a part of an age, part of a people who had inflicted such horrible atrocities on the world, even though he himself had been a victim. He never considered himself a Holocaust survivor. Survivors were the wounded and broken who still retained scars
on their bodies and on their psyches. And if Joseph could have taken their wounds
on himself to relieve any of their suffering, he would have. Joseph and Sylvia never
taught German to their children, nor did they share with them the horrors they had
seen and experienced, hoping to shield them from the lingering effects of that war,
just as he had tried to shield children while they had been living it. Joseph embraced
American life fully and proudly, becoming an American citizen a mere few years
before his untimely death.

Their happy ending only lasted for twelve years, as Joseph died of a massive
heart attack at the age of forty-eight in 1961 on the evening of Purim in their new
home city of San Diego. Sylvia lost the love of her life, but kept his memory alive
for their children and grandchildren by keeping his office intact and untouched for
over forty years, until she had to close up their home and move closer to her
children. Sylvia donated his papers to the Jewish Historical Society of San Diego,
where I worked as an archivist. And that is how I found this story and made friends
with his wonderful widow, until she passed away in 2007, also during the week of
Purim. I miss Sylvia greatly. I should like to have met Joseph. With the accom-
plishment of this dissertation, my quest progresses and the contextualization of
Joseph’s Holocaust story within the larger narrative of the Holocaust has helped me
feel qualified to now enter the scholarly world as a Holocaust historian, with my
humanity, hopefully, still intact.
I. Germany’s Jews

A. Prologue: Prelude to Destruction, 1918 – 1933

The advent of the 20th century held great promise along with great uncertainty for the Jews of Germany. They realized a level of reception and tolerance in the early decades of the 20th century that they had never before enjoyed. The paradox of the rise of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nazis) from the midst of this era of unprecedented social, religious, and political freedoms for Germany’s Jews remains a topic of considerable discussion among historians.¹ The political antisemitism that attributed the financial failures of Germany’s economy to a plot by Jewish financiers, mutated into a racially-based antisemitism completely separate from the religiously-based Jewish hatred of the past. The new modern-age slander against the Jews rose up suddenly at the very peak of Jewish emancipation and spread like a cancer throughout society.²

An aberration in the escalating momentum of modern German antisemitism in the first part of the 20th century occurred with the advent of the Great War. In order to rally all factions of the German population into supporting the war effort, the


Kaiser promised a civic peace that claimed all differences between classes, parties, and religions as no longer existing. If Germany’s Jews could not achieve acceptance in times of peace and prosperity, then perhaps they could find it in war and depravation. Even though well over 12,000 Jews lost their lives in defense of their German homeland, the battlefield failed to produce the universal acceptance that they had hoped for. Instead of finding solidarity with their non-Jewish co-combatants, Germany's Jews forged new and stronger bonds with the Ostjuden, as tens of thousands of east European Jews moved into Germany between 1916 and 1920. This immigration of the Ostjuden transformed the culture of the westernized Jews of Germany. Factions within the acculturated Jews of Germany responded to the spiritual devotion of their eastern co-religionists in ways that encouraged a renaissance of Judaic culture within the communities of the now secularized Jews of the west. This new resurgence of German Jewish cultural solidarity only succeeded in further defining their Jewishness in the eyes of Germany's antisemites.³

World War I and its armistice signed on November 11, 1918 had a profound effect on the postwar population of Germany. The German society that entered the Great War did so with a nationalistic fervor fed by decades of imperial-driven prosperity. This was certainly not the society that emerged from the war. Historian Jackson Spielvogel claimed that:

World War I created a lost generation, consisting of war veterans who had become accustomed to violence. Military life had seemed exciting and offered a comradeship that gave meaning to life. Unable to adjust to peacetime conditions, some veterans joined paramilitary groups, such as the Nazi Stormtroopers, which seemed to offer the discipline, adventure, and camaraderie of their war years. These men and many of their countrymen were fiercely nationalistic and eager to restore the national interests they felt had been betrayed in the peace treaties.4

Even though the cease-fire had been advocated by German generals in the field, and supported by Field Marshal von Hindenburg, these national “heroes” later promoted the falsehood that had the army been better supported on the home front, they would have won the war. German nationalists named this invented betrayal at home the infamous “Stab in the Back” theory. It became a popular outcry among many Germans who found the taste of defeat too bitter to bear. For these malcontents, the German politicians who signed the armistice became known as the “November Criminals.”5


Now destined to create a republic with a democratic form of government, the post WWI German state leadership eventually drew up a constitution in the Weimar Province that made it one of the most liberal democracies in history, even if only on paper. The Weimar Republic’s ideals included: equality for all; political power only in the hands of the people; proportional electoral representation in the new Reichstag; a cabinet and chancellor elected by majority vote in the Reichstag; and a president elected by the people. However, its realities were distinctly different from its ideals. The liberal democracy of the Weimar Republic failed to unite the nation politically as large portions of German society on the far right and the far left opposed the new Republic. In Berlin and Munich, left-wing Marxist groups proclaimed Russian-like revolutions, only to meet violent opposition from right-wing paramilitary nationalist groups. Communists, Socialists and even innocent bystanders were rounded up in Berlin and murdered in January 1919 and in Munich in May. Thus despite the cessation of the external war with its neighbors, Germany remained a nation with increasing degrees of internal political unrest.

Amid this political turmoil, the victorious Allies signed the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, which was then ratified by the Weimar democratic government. The terms of the treaty forced Germany to accept responsibility as the sole perpetrator for the destruction of WWI and required it to pay huge war reparations to
the other victimized nations of Europe.\textsuperscript{6} The Allies stripped Germany of its territories in Europe and overseas. The territories of Alsace and Lorraine, which had been under German rule since 1871, were given back to France to better secure that nation’s borderlands with Germany. The treaty also appropriated German territories in eastern Europe, such as Posen, Upper Silesia, and areas in the Sudetenland. As discussed in chapter six, Germany also lost holdings in Asia. The treaty effectively humiliated the German people, leading to a passionate desire in many to see their nation throw off the unfair fetters of the treaty and to once again take its rightful place of prestige in the world.\textsuperscript{7}

Many advocated authoritarian solutions to the nation’s post-war partisanship and the hyperinflation of an economy swiftly marginalizing its working masses. Under the pressure of diatribes of the discontented, the Weimar Republic never really had a chance to succeed. The vacuum of authority and leadership created by the implosion of the democratic republic in the aftermath of WWI increased popularity of radical nationalist movements, who, once on the fringe of society, moved rapidly into the center of popularity. Ironically, in the midst of this political turmoil during the era of the Weimar Republic, Germany’s Jews enjoyed a short season of relative safety.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{6}Mary Fulbrook, \textit{A Concise History of Germany} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 155-167.


\textsuperscript{8}Ibid. See also Katz, \textit{From Prejudice to Destruction}, 311-313.
Following five years of intense antisemitic revival immediately following WWI, German Jewry experienced an unprecedented renaissance of Jewish culture that would only flourish for a mere ten years. During this decade when Jews enjoyed the legal protection of the laws of the Weimar Republic, Germany’s Jews began to advance their presence in German society beyond a marginally tolerated role. Jews seized the opportunity to redefine their Jewishness in modern forms of cultural expression that were neither assimilative nor segregative. They succeeded in creating a new form of Jewish culture adaptable within the larger German culture. Michael Brenner describes this as an adaptation of their older, golden traditions into new and modern guises by reinventing or reconstructing older Jewish customs in order that their Jewish identity might fit better into their modern lives. Examples of this process of recreation included modern translations of classical Hebraic texts, secular museum displays of sacred ceremonial artifacts, concertized music for public performances based on the liturgy of the synagogue, and popular novels retelling episodes from Jewish history. This revitalization of Jewish culture was an integral part in the strengthening of the Jewish community, which Nazism exploited to create fear of the Jews in German society.\(^9\)

During the Weimar years, Jewish Germans advanced in positions of leadership in a variety of German societal institutions that included political parties, government agencies, educational institutions, and professional fields in the arts and sciences.

With this increasing Jewish presence in political, economic, and social leadership came an onslaught of antisemitic literature, epitomized by the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This fabricated myth of a Capitalist-Communist conspiracy of the Jewish people to take over the world pointed an accusatory finger at the rising status of Germany’s Jews, claiming it as prophetic fulfillment toward world Jewish domination. A wave of antisemitic literature blamed the Jews for WWI, and every other historical episode of human degeneracy, on their quest for global supremacy. The presence of the Ostjuden in Germany furthered the image of the Jew as the antithesis of the ideal German citizen championed in the antisemitic literature of the time. It is estimated that 70,000 eastern European Jews arrived in Germany as laborers during WWI. While their presence in German society had culturally re-vitalized the German Jews, many non-Jewish citizens saw them as the embodiment of a repulsive Jewish stereotype promoted in the rabid rhetoric of the antisemites. Such were the political and cultural seeds for the advent of National Socialism and the rise of Adolf Hitler.¹⁰

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**B: Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933 – 1938**

The presence of the culturally different Ostjuden became a sore spot for many people in the western countries of Europe. For the most part, the western Jews had

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¹⁰ Brenner, The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany, 32-33.
integrated into the societies of their respective countries decades earlier, a level of assimilation that eastern Jews had never quite attained. This process of post-revolution and post-enlightenment acculturation had been the result of varying degrees of secularization and modernization of Jewish culture. As we have seen, the Jews of Germany prided themselves on their acculturation within western European society. Germany's Jews enjoyed higher levels of social and economic interaction than their counterparts did in eastern Europe and they saw themselves as Germans first and Jews second. The Weimar Republic of the post WWI years completed emancipation in the new German Republic. But as we have seen, internal political and economic weaknesses of the Weimar Republic destined that short-lived Republic to an early demise.\textsuperscript{11}

Most Germans, as did most countries of Europe, still viewed Jews through the lens of Christian anti-Judaism. When given the right amount of stimulus, the bigotry bloomed like a cancer, finding the weaknesses of society on which to feed. Germany's defeat in WWI and the Versailles Treaty left it with heavy economic burdens and a weak national identity. Hitler arrived on the scene with his venomous racially generated antisemitism and placed the blame for Germany's economic problems, unemployment, social deficiencies, and weakened political status on an international Jewish conspiracy in command of the Weimar Republic. When Hitler and his Nazi party grabbed power in 1933, he embarked on his plans to make his

\textsuperscript{11} Pulzer, Jews and the German State, 1-15.
antisemitic agenda official policy. Hitler's hatred of Jews propelled racial antisemitism to an even greater diabolical dimension. Drawing on the pseudo-scientific trend of the 19th century that classified the world's populations into a division of races, Hitler officially promoted a redemptive aspect to the already racially charged antisemitism of German society.  

Hitler's racism claimed that the Aryan race, the Nordic blondes of northern Europe, was the superior race. He portrayed the Jewish race as inherently evil, not Judaism's beliefs or practices as Christian antisemitism claimed, but rather the literal racial blood of “the Jew” was inferior and posed a danger to the purity of the master race. Thus, for the Aryan race to endure, the Jewish race had to be eliminated, because its presence among Aryan society weakened and contaminated the gene pool. To redeem Germany from genetic corruption, Jews needed to be eradicated from German society. Only the struggle against the inferior Jewish race could assure the future dominance of the superior Aryan race.  

Historians continue to debate whether Hitler's personal form of racial antisemitism was shared by his underlings who carried out his directives. Scholars inquire if the bureaucratic machinery that enabled the officially sanctioned antisemitic policies of German society expressed their own racism, or if they were

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just obedient servants of his will who ultimately sought an economic restructuring of the Reich. Regardless of motives, whether redemptive or pragmatic, the results were still the same.¹⁴

When his Nazi Party came into power, Hitler embarked on an incrementally increasing program of legislation to separate the Jewish Germans from the rest of German society. His programs escalated according to the threshold of acceptance German society would allow at a given time. He started with laws and acts in 1933 that excluded Jews from academic professions, civil service, and legal systems. By legally barring Jewish participation in these and other occupations, Hitler began his campaign to separate Jews from the German Aryan race. But he went only as far as the populace would allow without reprisal. Popular sensibilities initially would not tolerate openly directed violence against the Jews by the government. It took some years of conditioning to accomplish that. Over the course of his twelve years in power, Hitler eventually enacted 2,000 anti-Jewish laws, but not all at once.¹⁵

As the years from 1933 to 1938 progressed, Germany ratified more and more laws that deprived Jews of their businesses, assets, properties, right to education, and citizenship. Ironically, as more and more Jews tried to emigrate and leave Germany as the years advanced, tighter and more restrictive international immigration policies


were imposed, intended to keep the oppressed Jewish Germans out of potential havens elsewhere. Due to the Depression and immigrant restrictionism, most countries refused to allow Jewish immigration. This further empowered Hitler as he saw that the international community was not willing to come to the aid of persecuted Jews. After the *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938, along with the attendant organized violence against Austria's Jews, the international community convened in the Evian Conference in July 1938, at FDR's behest, and further demonstrated to Hitler that other countries would take no action to neither counter his antisemitic actions nor accept more Jewish immigrants.¹⁶

Poland, with a Jewish population of well over three million, feared that Germany's policies would result in a massive return of its Jewish citizens there. Thus the Polish government passed new decrees that would rescind Polish citizenship from all Polish citizens who had been out of the country for more than five years. This especially targeted its Jews living elsewhere out of the country. Hitler preempted the Polish decree by ordering a mass deportation of nearly 20,000 Polish Jews living in Germany and Austria. This mass expulsion, known as the *Polenaktion*, or sometimes as the Zbaszyn Deportation of October 28, 1938, was highly organized and utilized an existing bureaucracy to arrest, imprison, and deport Jewish Poles throughout Germany and Austria in one day and transport them en

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masse to the Polish border. This forced deportation of Jewish Poles paradigmatically foreshadowed the treatment of all Jews who lived in the sphere of Nazi control.\textsuperscript{17}

There was little if any uproar against the expulsion of Jewish Poles among the people of Germany, who already perceived the Ostjuden as alien intruders. This terrorization of Jewish Poles, many even born in Germany of Polish parents, like Joseph, precipitated the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 9, 1938, that witnessed a highly organized, state sanctioned violence in Germany against its own German Jews. And again, Hitler saw that this “legalized” violent action against the Jews went unchallenged by the world, but more especially by his own people. These events of 1938 marked a turning point in the fate of Europe's Jews, and an escalation in Hitler's plans to rid Germany of its Jewish presence. It was not long before Hitler marched into Poland and exploited the Polish national hatred for Jews with his own in reaching new levels in his intensification of anti-Jewish measures. Ranging from mass deportations to eventual extermination, Hitler’s escalating war against the Jews decimated the Ostjuden of Poland, seen as the very bottom of the racial hierarchy, and then progressed through the communities of both eastern and western Europe. All that the Jews of the west had sought and accomplished with emancipation in German society amounted to nothing in the face of Nazi terror. Neither the

traditionalist attitudes of the Ostjuden nor the acculturated attitudes of the western Jews made any difference to their eventual fates.\textsuperscript{18}

It should be apparent from this brief overview of antisemitic events leading up to 1938 that traditional Christian-based anti-Judaism would never have been sufficient to have mobilized an entire nation into long-term organized campaigns of exclusion, isolation, and eventual extermination of millions of people, as that which happened under Nazi antisemitism. Modernity transformed an already vitriolic hatred by giving it the pseudo-scientific basis of a racist theory while linking it with the science of social engineering. While the modern, rational features of bureaucracy were essential in Hitler's antisemitic objectives, politics aside, traditional anti-Judaism based on Christian stereotypes still persisted within the churches and economic objections to the presence of Jews could still be felt in workers' unions. Anti-semitic attitudes were still very much present in German life but the racial aspects of modern antisemitism were central in Hitler's personal ideology.

A consensus of historians agrees that the traditional anti-Judaism of the pre-modern age that had for centuries been grounded on Christian formulated stereotypes underwent a terrifying transformation in the modern age. While most agree that secularism, nationalism, and the reaction to industrialization and capitalism had imbued traditional forms of anti-Judaism with new concepts of racist, economic, and social determinism, not all agree on how these new features of antisemitism affected

\textsuperscript{18} Dawidowicz, \textit{The War Against the Jews}, 169-196.
the populace at large. This becomes even more obscure when examining antisemitism in the Far East, which is discussed later. That racism was at the heart of Hitler's ideology goes without saying, but just how much of his racist ideology was embraced by his Party leadership, his inherited bureaucracy, his allies overseas, and German society as a whole is debated within the scholarship of Nazi Germany. I believe that while the crimes committed against the Jewish people must be situated in modern society, because it was during the modern era that these atrocities were perpetrated, the ideology that legitimated the carnage that was not typical of the enlightened modern age, but rather an aberration within it, although a product of modern events nonetheless.

**C: The Diaspora of Germany's Jews, 1933 – 1938**

The phases of Jewish German emigration under Nazi rule can be classified into four periods: The first phase is 1933 to 1938, beginning with Hitler's seizure of power and ending with the *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938. The other phases, while not a part of this section, should also be mentioned as they play a part in the totality of this study. The second phase, 1938 to October 23, 1941, begins immediately following the *Anschluss* and the other disastrous events of 1938 and ends with Hitler's reversal of emigration plans by sealing off any future escape of Jews from Europe in 1941, while the third phase from 1942 to 1945 is situated during the height of the war years up until the defeat of Nazism by the Allies. The
fourth and final phase of German Jewish Diaspora deals with the post war years of 1945 to 1950.

The first period of emigration can be divided into sub-periods that correspond to the episodes of antisemitic actions taken by the Nazi Party during the years 1933 to 1937. But during all these waves of emigration in the first period, two decisive factors affected all pre-war immigration of German refugee Jews from Europe: the first being the inability of German Jews to foresee the future, and the second being the limitation of prospective places for their immigration.\(^{19}\) I also believe that the latter factor restricted the former. Let me explain what I mean by that. First we must have an understanding of the international climate in respect to immigration policies for foreign aliens in general, and then Jewish immigrants in particular. Migrations were normal occurrences for populations in the industrialized age, and indeed the United States received huge numbers of European immigrants from the mid 1800s to the 1920s, in total approximately 50 million immigrants in a 100 year period.\(^{20}\) But with the WWI after-effects of isolationism and the Red Scare, along with the economic depression of the late 1920s and 30s, countries world-wide adopted nationalistic economic policies that drastically restricted the influx of foreign immigrants who were seen to be competitors for jobs that were badly needed by the


citizens of the home countries. Also it was feared that the new immigrants, who were racially different from earlier waves of émigrés, would drain already highly overburdened economies. Add to this a worldwide increase in nativistic nationalism, sprinkled with anti-alien and antisemitic propensities, and an extremely unfriendly and unresponsive environment for a refugee crisis formed.\textsuperscript{21}

In the 1920s, following two centuries of unlimited immigration, the United States imposed immigration quota limitations in reaction to the plummeting economic conditions and the postwar isolationism. On May 19, 1921, the US Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act, which set immigration quotas and reflected racist theories that under-laid the restrictionist movement for the next two decades. The new immigration procedures favored northern and western European countries, since most immigrants in the United States came from these regions.\textsuperscript{22} The act enforced a quota number of 3\% of any nationality resident in the US according to the 1910 census numbers.\textsuperscript{23} In essence, this percentage quota system, which was then lowered to 2\% with the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924, severely limited immigration from southern, central, and eastern European countries that harbored most of Europe's

\textsuperscript{21} For a more detailed examination on US Immigration Laws and Policies see Prologue to Chapter 4 of this dissertation.


Jews, while favoring immigration from the north-western states of Europe. The 1924 revisions placed an overall ceiling number at approximately 165,000 immigrants—drastically reducing European immigration into the United States from over 800,000 in 1921 to less than 150,000 by the end of the next decade.  

Not only were the quota numbers reduced, but the criteria for refugees to obtain visas established by the Immigration Laws of 1917 allowed antisemitic officials in both the State Department and the newly empowered consular offices to deny visas to applicants based on selective interpretation of the laws. This resulted in the actual number of immigrants being far below the already reduced quota limits. These controls, resembling those imposed by many countries at the time, translated into disaster for the millions of Jews in Europe who faced deportation and “resettlement” – a euphemism that soon meant extermination.

Immigration policies in the US remained unreceptive to Jewish refugees throughout the 1930s. In spite of Germany's openly antisemitic Nuremberg Laws of 1935 that declared their one half million Jews stateless, the United States still resisted accepting more immigrants than the quotas for Germany allowed. As the Jewish refugee problem intensified, representatives from the United States and thirty one other nations of the western world convened at Evian, France in July 1938 to determine which countries would be able to accept more Jewish refugees. When Poland implied that they would like to deport their three million Jews as well, any

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24 See Chapter 4.
serious resolutions at the Evian Conference in favor of Germany's Jewish refugees evaporated. The restrictive immigration policies of these nations remained unchanged.25

When Hitler seized power in Germany in 1933, an initial panic over-took a minority of the Jewish community of Germany, who had the foresight to know that his radical antisemitic posturing of the 1920s could spell disaster for Germany's one half million Jewish citizens. We know that 53,000 Jewish Germans left their homeland during 1933 because of the intensity of the anti-Jewish legislation and violence, but that 16,000 of them had to return from their places of refuge.26 How do we account for these numbers? Although the Jewish community was aware of the racist bias of Hitler's antisemitism before his rise to power, most of Jewish Germans did not understand the future implications that could result from Hitler's leadership. They thought his meteoric rise resulted from a rhetoric born of the depression that would pass as soon as the economy improved. To most, he was an anomaly that would eventually burn itself out. Surely his radical ideas would not be tolerated for very long. This attitude did not appreciably change over the next three or four years, because emigration numbers show that with each year after 1933 up until 1938, the number of Jews leaving Germany decreased successively. Wealthy urban families did not desire to give up the comforts of their homes and the security of their


established businesses on the off chance that a lunatic would be taken seriously for very long. The demographics of Jewish population also revealed that the majority of the Jewish German population was over forty years of age, with a significant number of elderly people. Families with older grandparents and young children found it was too cumbersome to flee and give up a sizeable portion of their assets, 25% in what the Nazis called a “flight tax.” But the wealthy waited too long and lost more and more time and assets to the ever increasing antisemitic legislation and policies of the Third Reich. It soon became nearly impossible for them to leave.²⁷

During this first phase of emigration, most of the Jews who did flee Germany found refuge in the other continental countries of Europe, especially in the early years. They were those who had been targeted by Hitler's first anti-Jewish legislation: professionals, civil servants, intellectuals, artists, and political dissidents, those whose voice of warning could have swayed more of the complacent Jews to view the Nazi threat more seriously. But it was also from these countries that most of the returning refugees left. Because of the highly restrictive immigration quotas of the US and other overseas countries, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Britain took in most of the early fleeing Jews from Germany. There was also a sizeable number who fled to Palestine, but as the years progressed, Britain restricted those numbers more and more. As the countries of Europe began to feel overburdened by the number of refugees seeking asylum on their shores, the US began to increase the

numbers of immigrants allowed within its quota system as the flow of refugees to countries in Europe started to decline. But there was always more Jewish Germans wanting to leave than there were places for them to go. This is why the world-wide immigration restrictions had such a devastating effect on Europe’s Jews. When faced with an international consortium of nations that did not want them and refused them safe harbor, Jews in Germany tended to try to stick it out at home in hopes that the situation would improve.28

A temporary respite in Nazi antisemitism took place during the Olympics of 1936, but ended with the events of 1938, beginning with the Anschluss of Austria, continuing with the crisis over Czechoslovakia, and culminating with the Polenaktion that precipitated the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 9, 1938. World leaders observed these events that triggered the next phase of Jewish emigration from Germany and sought answers to the refugee crisis with grandiose plans for mass resettlement. In June 1940, Germany contemplated a mass resettlement plan of its own on Madagascar in hopes of shipping tens of thousands of its Jews to this French-held African island. In January 1941, the Nazis also envisioned a plan to obtain land in the Soviet Union through aggression, code name Barbarossa, so that large numbers of Jews could be resettled far into the wastelands of Asia.29


29 For more on the Madagascar Plan and Operation Barbarossa, see Christopher R. Browning, The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March
The violence launched against Austria's Jews with the \textit{Anschluss} and the destruction of life and property of German Jews during \textit{Kristallnacht} had the effect of shaking the nearly 300,000 Jews still in Germany and the now nearly 200,000 Jews of Austria out of their complacency, prompting them to take whatever steps necessary to leave German-dominated territory. FDR advocated worldwide assistance for the refugees at the Evian conference by promoting efforts to find some opportunities of mass resettlement throughout the world. But the need was immediate and grand plans take time. FDR urged American consuls to fill US immigration quotas, which had gone only partially filled for several years. This had the effect of doubling and even tripling the number of refugees entering the US in 1938 and 1939 from previous years. In spite of Britain's restriction enforcements when it came to immigration into Palestine, illegal immigration before the \textit{Kristallnacht} pogrom brought mostly Polish Jews to Palestine’s shores and German Jews after it.\textsuperscript{30} The Nazis went so far as to forcibly expel Jews by either shipping

\textsuperscript{30} While the British limited the number of immigration certificates to Palestine due to unrest and violence from 1936 to 1938, Zionist movements had set rigid standards for prospective immigrants, seeking only young and healthy agriculturalists fit for heavy manual labor. In response to these restrictions, the Gestapo promoted illegal immigration to Palestine in 1938 and 1939. See Francis R. Nicosia, \textit{The Third Reich \& the Palestine Question} (London: I.B. Tauris \& Company, Ltd., 1985), 158-160.
them off to Palestine in rickety transport ships, or by dumping thousands of refugees at borders and forcing them at bayonet to cross into no-mans-lands.\textsuperscript{31}

During these years, German and then Austrian Jews also embarked for countries in Latin America and the Far East. If visas could not be obtained for Latin American countries, then many times refugees left without proper papers in hopes that they could find one port or another that would allow them entrance. In these years, Argentina took in the greatest number of refugees, about 25,000, with other countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia offering havens as well. In the Far Eastern international community of Shanghai, nearly 20,000 Jewish refugees, mostly Poles, came via ships and overland passage and were admitted without visas. Small numbers of refugees entered Japan, Singapore and the Philippines. By 1940, nearly one half million European Jewish refugees had found places of safe haven, over 350,000 of those being from Germany and Austria. When Hitler sealed off the escape of emigration in the fall of 1941, millions of Jews were still in Europe trying to find a way out.\textsuperscript{32}

In the third phase of Jewish emigration, 1942 to 1945, very small numbers of Jews were able to still trickle out of German-occupied areas, and those who had

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Marrus, \textit{The Unwanted}, 135-139. For extensive figures on Jewish immigration from Europe during these years, see Herbert A. Strauss, “Jewish Emigration from Germany – Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (1)” in \textit{Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XXV} (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1980), 326-327.
\end{itemize}
found havens in other countries of Europe soon found themselves under German
dominance again as Hitler marched west after his successful blitzkrieg in Poland.
Economic nationalism that had restricted immigration in the earlier phases now
converted to war-time policies of national security that nearly prevented Jewish
immigration completely. Immigration for refugees during this phase was mostly by
escape and hiding, where Jews had to rely on the good Samaritans of their host
communities in order to survive. When Hitler converted his “Solution to the Jewish
Question” of emigration into one of annihilation, most of those Jews who were
trapped in Europe found that death was their only escape.  

Two out of three of Europe's Jews died in the Holocaust – some nations
experiencing near total decimation of their Jewish communities. Holland lost 80% of
its Jews, but Poland suffered the greatest loss, three million deaths, with over 95% of
its Jews exterminated. The nations in the east suffered by far the greatest percentages
of losses, usually 70 – 80% or more. Approximately 75% of Germany's Jews
survived the Holocaust, mostly through emigration and a small number through luck
living in hiding. Between 1933 and 1945 the number of Jews in Germany declined
from 525,000, a population defined by religion, to 25,000, a population defined by
race and including many Jews from eastern Europe who had been deported west
under the Nazi “extermination through work” policy. But death and destruction did
not end with the war. Thousands of sick and starving Jews liberated from the camps

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33 Deborah Dwork & Robert Jan van Pelt, Flight From the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933-1946
died in the war’s aftermath, and many Jews returning to their communities experienced violence and death at the hands of their non-Jewish neighbors.  

In these first years after WWII, the last phase of immigration from 1945 to 1950, Jewish refugees still had to battle with immigration restrictions in their desire to leave Europe, now the graveyard of their families and friends. Through international pressures, Britain eased its restrictions over Palestine, and Jews from Europe sought every available means to resettle on the now officially recognized Jewish homeland. In the first year and a half after the state of Israel was established in 1948, nearly 350,000 Holocaust survivors poured unchecked into Palestine. The nearly twenty year long Jewish refugee problem in Europe had finally ended. With nearly six million murdered and another one million dispersed throughout the world, Europe's Jewish cultures would never be the same.

**D: Summary**

The great transformation of western European society that permitted its Jews unprecedented accomplishments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries resulted from the emergence of new nation states, the formation of new political ideologies, the migration of population masses from an agrarian lifestyle to urbanization, and the

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34 Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 325-349.

35 Ibid.
swift economic rise of societies from the industrial revolution. Few groups of society were as profoundly impacted by these evolutionary trends of the modern age as were the Jews of Germany. With advanced enlightenment came a new age of intellectualism, discovery, and invention. Every aspect of their centuries-old lifestyle changed over the course of a mere sixty to seventy years.

Once clearly defined as outsiders, with a different language, a highly dissimilar style of dress, disparate models of education, and old-world religious, cultural, and social practices, German Jewry had, by the middle of the 19th century, displaced these and other Jewish institutions that promoted social segregation. An ever increasing number of Jews moved out of their rural existence into the rapidly growing cities, sending their children to secular schools and adopting elements of German culture that would further their acculturation into non-Jewish German society. While most German Jews accepted their official emancipation with hope and enthusiasm, the unofficial practice of their non-Jewish counterparts still excluded them from full participation in German society.

No longer able to readily recognize the presence of Jews among a non-Jewish society, German antisemitism also underwent an evolution that would prove to be even more deadly and more sinister than the antisemitism of the past. The radical change in the status of Germany’s Jews from the relative safety of the Weimar Republic to that of the German Third Reich under Adolf Hitler foreshadowed a decade of human disaster of such huge proportions that it is considered the greatest
intentional genocide perpetrated in world history and has become a universal model for evil. While it is virtually impossible to comprehend the fullness of the horrifying events of the Holocaust, it is hoped that this study of the survival odyssey of Cantor Joseph Cysner and his escape from Nazi terror can help readers form a personal connection to the tragedy of the many by connecting to the story of just one.
II. From German Jews to Polish Refugees

A: Prologue - Diaspora of Polish Jews to Germany

Joseph P. Cysner, born in 1912 as the youngest of six children to Yiddish parents Aaron and Chaja Cysner, lived his entire life up until October 28, 1938 as a Jewish German. Several factors within the political, economic, and social circumstances of Poland prior to World War I explain why many Polish Jews like the Cysners lived in Germany during this era. Within a relatively short time period from the 1880s to the outbreak of World War I, these factors propelled an enormous migration of eastern European Jews to the west. Due to a high birth rate among the eastern European Jewish population, the Jewish people almost doubled their numbers in the fifty years between 1876 and 1925.\(^1\) By 1914, three of the largest centers of Jewish population in the world existed in eastern Europe, and their rapidly increasing numbers created a population of people that could not be readily absorbed into the traditional Jewish occupations. Couple this phenomenon with the rise of anti-Jewish policies that incited organized pogroms as well as exclusionary economic regulations, and what resulted was the westward migration of more than two and one half million Jews from eastern Europe just prior to World War I.\(^2\) This resettlement of entire families to western European cities generated a Polish Jewish population of more than 50,000


\(^2\) Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 9-10.
in Germany and Austria alone. This demographic shift in the late 19th century caused Polish families like the Cysners to think of Germany as their permanent home.

Following the demise of tsarist Russia and Austria-Hungary after WWI, new states with new national and cultural loyalties were established. Poland was reborn as an independent nation. New boundaries created new trade walls that slowed economic recovery for the defeated larger nations, and hindered the development of viable economies in the smaller, newer states. As long-standing ethnic groups tried to reconcile their cultural identity within new national territories, Jewish minorities became more and more isolated and marginalized within their host societies. Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer notes that -

in attempting to identify with nationalities who were fighting each other for control, Jews felt like outsiders; the foreignness of the Jew was emphasized - he was not a Pole, nor a German, a Czech, or a Slovak [. . .] none of the new nations saw the Jews as belonging to themselves.

Jewish families, ostracized socially and excluded politically, also endured economic impoverisation. The decade following WWI and the establishment of the new state of Poland witnessed hundreds of thousands of Jews losing jobs and businesses, not

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4 Ibid., 60.
due to the world economic crisis as much as to the growing antisemitism that looked for a scapegoat to carry blame for society's war losses and economic ills.  

Aaron, a shoemaker by trade, and Chaja Cysner resettled from Poland to Vienna, Austria in the late 1880s, where five of seven children were born, one dying in infancy. A close family of devoted practicing Orthodox Jews, they came to Bamberg, Germany, just prior to the birth of their last two children—Henrietta sometime in 1908 to 1910 and Joseph in 1912. As the youngest, Joseph lived at home during the early years of Hitler's rise to power. With the death of his father in 1937, Joseph assumed financial support of his mother for the remainder of his life. In 1935, the oldest sons, Ernst and Bartholdt, left for Palestine and never returned to Europe. Another son, Leopold, moved to Hildesheim, married, and immigrated before the war to the United States. Henrietta stayed in Berlin until 1941 and then made her way to London where she married and started a family. After the war they went to Los Angeles and from there left for Israel. Charlotte and her husband, Henry Kahan, died in Auschwitz.

Joseph entered the Israelitische Lehrerbildungsanstalt (Jewish Teachers College) in Würzburg, Germany in 1929 and graduated in 1933, the year Hitler came into power. Founded in 1864, the strictly orthodox college trained teachers for Jewish elementary schools and prepared cantors who served in rural Jewish communities. It

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5 Read & Fisher, *Kristallnacht*, 41-44.

6 Sylvia Cysner, interviewed by Bonnie Harris, 24 January 2004, Santa Monica, California, tape recording.
was the only Jewish Teachers College in the German Reich from 1864 until its closure during the Kristallnacht pogroms in November 1938.\textsuperscript{7} After his graduation, Joseph's first appointment placed him in a small Jewish community near Hannover, Germany called Hildesheim, a “mid-size provincial town in northwest Germany,”\textsuperscript{8} which claimed a Jewish population at its peak of only 600 at the beginning of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{9} But the significance of Joseph’s work there cannot be understated. At Hildesheim, his acquaintance with Rabbi Josef Schwarz became crucial to the sequence of events that would eventually deliver him from the limbo of the Polish border camp known as Zbaszyn in the spring of 1939. Joseph was merely one of thousands of victims at Zbaszyn who had been part of the first mass expulsion of Jews from Germany in October 1938, an event named by the Third Reich as the Polenaktion.

\textbf{B: The Polenaktion, October 1938}

In the annals of Holocaust history, one event looms larger than all others as to its significance in the story of the Jews of Europe – the Reichkristallnacht pogroms of


\textsuperscript{9} Shmuel Spector and Geoffrey Wigoder, \textit{The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust} (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), 513.
November 1938. Described as the day the Holocaust began, beginning on November 9th the Nazi government sanctioned violence destroyed hundreds of synagogues and Jewish storefronts throughout Germany and Austria. Thousands of German Jews lost their homes, businesses, synagogues, civic liberties, and some even their lives. As an episode of profound historical significance, it is no wonder that Kristallnacht overshadowed the event that precipitated it, pushing the incident into obscurity for the last seventy years. This affair, known as the Zbaszyn Deportations or the Polenaktion, received little to no attention in the field of Holocaust scholarship over the ensuing decades. Modern day scholarship turns for the most definitive information on the subjects to the historical contributions of the late scholar Sybil Milton, Trude Maurer, of Göttingen University, and Jerzy Tomaszewski, professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Warsaw and director of the Mordecai Anieliewicz Center for the Study of the History and Culture of Polish Jews. But even within these authors’ writings, contextualization of the Polenaktion and the Zbaszyn Deportations within the deteriorating political relations of Germany and Poland is weak, requiring a more detailed accounting of the diplomatic events of the months leading up to, including, and following October 28, 1938. This paper utilizes the works of Milton, Maurer, and Tomaszewski, along with original documents from the Politisches Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin and testimonies of Zbaszyn Deportation survivors and other witnesses of the Polenaktion to clarify the historical context.
As previously noted, eastern European Jews began immigrating to Germany in the 17th century, but the largest exodus of the Ostjuden occurred following government-directed violence of the Russian Empire in the early 1880s. Although most eastern refugees merely passed through Germany on their way to the United States, tens of thousands stayed and settled in the territories of the Reich. Polish Jews, seeking work opportunities during WWI and fleeing the pogroms of the then newly established Polish Republic, augmented these numbers significantly. In 1925, nearly 50% of the over 100,000 Jewish foreigners living in the Reich held Polish passports. By the census of June 16, 1933, over 57% of the Jewish foreigners in Germany were Polish, with 40% of this number having been born in Germany. The circumstances of these displaced Polish Jews residing in Germany took a horrifying turn in the 1930s. The Nazi party's anti-Jewish demonstration and one-day boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933 presented an early manifestation of Hitler's antisemitic practices that would eventually devastate European Jewry. This “testing the waters” of German society’s tepid indifference to an official antisemitic action prepared the way for the implementation of the racist Nuremberg Laws in 1935, which, among other things, deprived all Jews living in the Reich of their German citizenship. Hitler's vitriolic antisemitism became national policy,


11 Ben-Sasson, A History of the Jewish People, 1018.
identifying all Jews as unwelcome guests of Germany while officially naming them non-Germans without rights. Thus began Hitler’s crusade to rid his Third Reich of any Jewish presence, regardless of their citizenry. This campaign translated into dire consequences for Germany's large population of Polish Jews.

With a change in political leadership in Poland in 1935 came more restrictions against their Jewish Poles as well, which prevented Poland’s Jews from practicing their trades and professions. The Polish government encouraged mass emigration of its Jewish citizenry from 1936 on, and with Polish pogroms in 1936 and 1937 many more Jews attempted to leave Poland, only to find countries closing their doors to Jewish immigration. By 1938, countries such as Britain, France, Switzerland, Brazil, and the United States had imposed stricter quotas, and hopes for escape faded fast for the 3,250,000 Jews suffering in Poland, along with their 50,000 co-religionists in the German Reich. As the Jewish refugee problem in Germany grew more acute, the United States, along with nations of Europe and Latin America, met at a conference in Evian, France from July 6 to 15, 1938 in an effort to decide which countries would accept more German Jewish refugees. When Poland, which was not at the conference, expressed its desire to deport its Jewish citizens as well, the

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13 Read & Fisher, Kristallnacht, 41-44.

14 Ibid., 47.

15 Schulzinger, The US Diplomacy Since 1900, 164.
manageable refugee numbers from Germany and Austria suddenly increased by over 3 million potential refugees from eastern Europe. This ended the possibility for any serious resolutions at the Evian Conference that would have benefitted Germany's Jewish refugees. Strained economies resulting from the Depression convinced the western world that it simply could not, or would not, make room for that many more refugees.\(^6\) The Polish Jews in Germany found themselves between the proverbial rock and a hard place, as neither Germany nor Poland wanted them and virtually no opportunities to emigrate elsewhere existed. Coupled with the deteriorating diplomatic relations between Germany and Poland as each vied for regional recognition as the purveyor of power in eastern Europe, the events of the Polenaktion and the expulsion of thousands of Polish Jews from Germany was almost inevitable.

At the heart of the diplomatic conflicts arising between Germany and Poland in the 1930s lay the sovereignty of the Free City of Danzig (Gdansk). Once a German port city on the Baltic, Danzig was established as a free city-state in 1920 by the Treaty of Versailles and placed under the protection of the League of Nations. Hitler viewed Danzig’s sovereignty and ready access by Poland as one of many post-WWI abominations levied upon Germany by a world conspiracy of Jewry. The vast majority of Danzig’s population spoke German and lived as German citizens. When the Free City of Danzig was officially granted self-dominion in 1920, its German

population lost its German citizenship. It is not surprising that a majority of German-speaking citizens in Danzig supported Hitler’s nationalist ideology and contended with Poland and the League of Nations continually in the early 1930s over Danzig’s autonomy. Francis Yeats-Brown, a right-wing British journalist, noted the rising political diatribe over Danzig and spoke ominously prophetic words in The Spectator in September 1932:

    Germany intends to have Danzig and the Corridor; I have no brief for her. I deplore the fact that several million Germans would shed their blood for this cause, but since it is a fact, and since the Poles certainly cannot be talked out of their territory, how will the matter be settled except by arms? I believe there must be a war in Europe; the best we can hope for is that it will soon be over, and that it will not spread.\(^\text{17}\)

As the Nazification of the Free City of Danzig progressed throughout the 1930s, it seemed all but settled that Poland would eventually lose its access to this port on the Baltic Sea. Poland then turned its attentions to Lithuania and its 56-mile long Baltic coastline.

    Lithuania and Poland halted diplomatic relations earlier in 1920 when Poland exerted military force against Lithuania in a bid to take over the territory of

\(^{17}\) Reinhard Haferkorn, “Danzig and the Polish Corridor,” International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939) 12: 2 (March 1933): 224-239.
Vilnius. This region once again came into Poland’s sights in March 1938, when immediately following Germany’s Anschluss of Austria, Poland forced Lithuania into renewed diplomatic relations by annexing Vilnius. If Germany could away with annexing Austria, why not flex some Polish territorial muscle as well? A memorandum on March 16, 1938, by Under Secretary of State in the German Foreign Office Hans Georg von Mackensen, hinted at this Polish intent as he recorded the concerns of the Lithuanian Minister:

The Lithuanian Government considered the situation to be serious, as it had the impression that public opinion in Poland was being artificially whipped up, for the purpose – they thought – of utilizing the international situation which had arisen from the reunion of Austria with the Reich in order to obtain compensation elsewhere, so to speak, for the increase in the power of the German Reich.\(^\text{19}\)

Did Polish officials interpret Germany’s annexation of Austria in March 1938 as an antecedent of Hitler’s intensions of redeeming all German lands perceived lost in the Treaty of Versailles? This then included the Free City of Danzig and the port region of Memel, both autonomous port cities of the Baltic governed by The League of

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Nations. German seizure of these ports could only spell disaster for Poland’s economy and defense.

A communiqué from the German Ambassador von Moltke in Poland to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin on March 22, 1938 recounted the national fervor in Warsaw over the political triumph in the Lithuanian matter and warned Berlin that Poland’s “Baltic Sea Policy grotesquely” hinted at Poland’s plan to build up a naval force that could only find safe harbor at Memel.20 Lithuanian historian Robert Vitas asserted, while at Loyola University in Chicago, that Poland’s “Baltic Policy, which was never realized, envisioned the construction of a Warsaw-dominated Polish-Baltic-Scandinavian bloc free of Soviet or German influence.”21 Von Moltke’s message also relayed that the Polish Press reported that Poland’s triumph over Lithuania could give Poland a second point of access to the Baltic Sea, counting Danzig as its first.22 The memo ended with the suggestion that Germany carefully consider how Poland’s plans for the Baltic would affect the interests of the Reich.

With Poland’s immediate move on Lithuania after the Anschluss, forcing the renewal of political relations between Poland and Lithuania, Poland hoped to gain some leverage in future negotiations with Germany, while at the same time giving Poland

20 “The Ambassador in Poland to the Foreign Ministry,” Doc. No. 33, 22 March 1938, Warsaw, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 43-45.


22 “The Ambassador in Poland to the Foreign Ministry,” Doc. No. 33, 22 March 1938, Warsaw, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 43-45.
a transportation corridor to the more northern ports of the Baltic. The Polish-Lithuanian Crisis of 1938 launched a show of power on Poland’s part, sending an implied message of Poland’s status in Europe, a power that Germany must recognize, or so Poland thought, if Hitler wanted to exert German muscle in eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{23}

On March 28, 1938, Hitler met with Konrad Henlein, leader of the Sudeten-German Nazi Party, and voiced his desires for the repatriation of the German Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia, giving Henlein directions as how to proceed with party actions to precipitate that outcome. Did this event play a significant role in Polish legislation that followed? The German Embassy in Poland notified Berlin the next day, March 29, 1938, of a new bill being considered by the Polish Sejm. The bill revoked Polish citizenship of any Pole who had lived and worked abroad for an uninterrupted span of five years of more, having thus severed allegiance with their home country, or who had acted in a manner detrimental to Polish national interests.\textsuperscript{24} This measure was rushed into the Polish legislature only one day

\textsuperscript{23} Vitas, “The Polish-Lithuanian Crisis of 1938,” 43-73. Vitas quotes Polish Foreign Minister Beck: “I . . . considered that complete passivity in view of the German expansion would in any case be dangerous. If we had to maintain our position in Eastern Europe we should think of finding an assurance for Polish interests, should anyone think of violating them. It was clear that we could not think of any sort of race, running for who-would-get-the-most-problems-solved, but simply stressing the fact of our vigor and, without getting entangled in any dangerous conflict, of giving a warning that none could violate our interests unpunished” in Jozef Beck, \textit{Final Report} (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1957), 144-145.

following that meeting between Hitler and Henlein, and then hurried through the ratification process. It was no secret to the Poles that Hitler openly favored annexation of the Sudetenland.

Immediately following the *Anschluss* two weeks earlier, hundreds of Polish Jews living in Austria tried to return to Poland, seeking escape from the abuses of the German occupying forces. In an effort to stave off the mass return of Polish Jews escaping German occupied territories, Poland sought to legislate the revocation of citizenship rights for its populace living abroad, no doubt with the specific aim at stopping the return of Polish Jews from those areas of Europe being annexed by the Reich. Poland did not want its wayfaring Jews to return. Plus a German power play in eastern Europe without some kind of pact with Poland would weaken Poland’s hope for influence in the region.  

Poland’s decree to revoke Polish citizenship to its nationals abroad directly affected the tens of thousands of Polish citizens living in Germany and Austria, and also pertained to Polish citizens living in the Sudetenland and in the Free City of Danzig, as well.

Careful scrutiny of the economic ramifications for Poland as a result of Hitler’s territorial expansions in 1938 also explains Poland’s abrupt actions to stifle repatriation of its Jewish citizens abroad. As already noted, Germany and Poland maintained a rivalry of perception as to who wielded more power in eastern Europe, and jurisdiction over the Free City of Danzig stood right in the middle of it. Hitler

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25 Prazmowska, “Poland’s Foreign Policy,” 853-873.
resented the wresting of Danzig from German jurisdiction by the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. He hated that he did not control the valuable Baltic Port City and the Polish Corridor to the Baltic. When we ask how Poland’s potential loss of Danzig at this time related to Poland’s revocation of citizenship decrees, aimed at its foreign resident Jews in the Reich, the answer may lay in Poland’s economic concerns over the Anschluss of Austria. Remember, just days after Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938, Poland hurriedly passed legislation that revoked Polish citizenship from its populace who had lived abroad for more than five years. If we presume it stemmed solely from Poland’s antisemitic propensities and its desire to prevent an increase in Polish Jewish population, then we would be missing an important piece of the picture.

The Anschluss transformed Austrian citizens into German citizens. Austrian industry became German industry. Austrian shareholders in the Polish oil industry in Galicia became German shareholders in the Polish oil industry in Galicia – and most of those shareholders were Jews. So in thinking about Danzig again, we must remember that Poland depended on its access to the Baltic for a significant portion of its import-export trade and the businesses that handled that trade. Jewish merchants in Danzig were important players in that scenario. Why would Poland want to constrain Jewish immigration from Austria or Danzig, or from any other territory of the Third Reich, if not for antisemitic reasons? Because German regulations regarding its emigration of Jews stated that those Jews could take none of their assets
or money with them when they left. Jewish shareholders in Austria and Jewish merchants in Danzig would have everything confiscated by the Germans, which would give Hitler more economic power and leverage over Poland in those markets and industries. Poland was no different than the other nations of the world at that time who tried to keep the indigent poor from their borders, but Poland had an economic interest in seeing that those shareholding Jews of Austria either continued in their business affiliations with Poland, or that they turned over their shares to Poles before they were confiscated by the Germans. The diaries of the Polish Foreign Minister at this time, Jan Szembek, reveal secret negotiations between Poland and Germany on just this issue. Emanuel Melzer writes:

The Polish Ambassador in Germany, Lipski, suggested that his government begin secret negotiations with the German Government, adopting a passive stand on the sequestration of the property of its Jewish citizens in Germany, in return for which the German Government would give its assurances that these Jews would not be deported to Poland. In addition Germany would guarantee to transfer to the Polish Government the shares in the Polish oil industry formerly owned by Jews who had previously been Austrian citizens.26

Did Poland think that Hitler would be so worried about their protests concerning the confiscation of its citizens’ assets that he’d allow the Jewish Poles in Germany to

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stay, and give Poland their Polish assets just to keep Poland quiet? Or did Poland think the idea of tens of thousands of Polish Jews becoming stranded in Germany would be so repulsive to Hitler that it would give Poland leverage in negotiating economic transactions with Germany that would strip the Jewish Poles in Germany, Austria, and even Danzig of their assets, transfer them to Poland, and then leave the Jews really destitute in these foreign lands? If Poland thought it was bargaining with Germany from a position of strength regarding its revocation of citizenship decree, it obviously miscalculated. The terrible irony is that instead of keeping Jewish Poles and handing over their assets to Poland, Hitler kept the assets and forcibly deported the Jews.

A conference of several German agencies convened at Gestapo headquarters on April 21, 1938 to discuss the full implication of the Polish decree as it pertained specifically to Jewish emigration from Germany. Official documentation of that meeting summarized Germany’s concerns over the implementation of Poland’s citizenship nullification ordinance. The Nazi leadership immediately saw that this measure could seriously impair future emigration plans of all Jews from Germany, as other nations of the world would follow Poland’s lead in denying their Jews re-entrance back into their homelands. As early as this meeting in April 1938, Nazi officials considered executing a mass expulsion of Jewish Poles residing in Germany back to Poland, but officials feared that Poland would then reciprocate with a mass

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expulsion of German nationals living in Poland. Nazi officials then sought assurances from Poland that they would accept back into Poland expatriated Jewish Poles at Germany’s request.\textsuperscript{28}

Poland’s refusal in May to comply increased the rising diplomatic tensions that ensued between Germany and Poland over the next six months. Germany responded by announcing its own internal regulations pertaining to foreigners by stipulating that residency in the Reich would be contingent upon the character of the applicants and their intentions as residents. This ordinance clearly labeled Jews as undesirables. Another ordinance pronounced that any foreign residents in the Reich, who had lost their citizenship in their home countries, could have their residency permits revoked and be summarily deported without consent of the receiving country to accept them back. These were clearly reactions to Poland’s revocation of citizenship decrees. Polish-German diplomatic exchanges during this time were not, however, dedicated merely to settling this immigration issue, as Germany moved closer to its annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{29}

Known as the May Crisis of 1938, German troops massed in southern Silesia and northern Austria on the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} of May, implying the intention of a military blitz on Czechoslovakia in order to reclaim the German populated area of the

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} "Vermerk," Doc. No. R-8071, 007-009, 27 April 1938, Berlin, Politisches Auswärtiges Amt Archives, Berlin, Film 27-125, Band R 49013. See also Maurer, “Die Ausweisung der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht,” 60.
Sudetenland. Communications immediately flew between Czechoslovakia, Germany, France and England. Unrequited Czech concessions to German minority rights in the disputed territory ineffectively countered German demands for the Sudetenland, as France and England conversed between themselves that capitulation might be the only peaceful resolution. Months of negotiations resulted in the Munich Pact of September 29, 1938, when, after a series of three conferences by European powers, France and England promoted a policy of appeasement to Hitler’s demands and carved up the borderlands of Czechoslovakia for distribution between its adjoining neighbors, immediately giving Germany its coveted Sudetenland. Although the Munich Pact would have eventually given Czech territories to Poland and Hungary, Poland reacted to its exclusion from the conferences by refuting the authority of the pact. To secure Czech territories itself, Poland issued its own ultimatum on September 27, 1938, demanding that the Teschen territory of Czechoslovakia be evacuated for immediate occupation by Polish forces.

On October 1, 1938 German troops occupied Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland and the very next day Polish forces entered Teschen. Poland’s muscles continued flexing as it attempted to establish a position of power by becoming the negotiator for Hungarian and Romanian border disputes, but Germany quickly overturned the efforts. Poland’s leaders no doubt realized that while their political influence in the region receded, Germany’s advanced. Poland’s last domain for international
diplomatic power within the region, its position regarding the sovereignty of the Free City of Danzig, soon evaporated as well.\textsuperscript{30}

October 1938 appears to be the point where the fallout from Poland’s polices regarding its revocation of citizenship rights collided with its aspirations to hold onto Danzig and its corridor to the Baltic Sea. Following the implementation of Germany’s regulations regarding its foreign Jewish residents in September 1938, Poland’s Interior Ministry announced a new ordinance of its own, augmenting its already legislated renouncement of citizenry statute, by requiring that all passports held by Polish citizens obtain a special endorsement stamp at a consular office prior to October 30, 1938, or else the passport became null and void. According to the ordinance, the bearer of the passport would lose all Polish citizenship rights immediately and be refused entry into Poland. As Jews did present their passports at consular offices during this time, officials denied the special stamp for any number of dubious reasons, no doubt intentionally cancelling all Jewish passports when presented. The documentary record clearly shows that Germany perceived this Polish measure as being directed purposefully against Jewish Poles living in Germany. A communiqué from Dr. Werner Best of the Office of the Reichführer SS in the Ministry of the Interior on October 29, 1938 confirms that fact:

On 6\textsuperscript{th} October 1938, the Polish Government issued and on 15\textsuperscript{th} October 1938, published a decree whereby all passports must bear a control stamp in

\textsuperscript{30} “Political Report,” Doc. No. 64, October 6, 1938, Warsaw, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 853-873.
order to remain valid. Passports which do not have this stamp no longer can be used for entry into Polish territory. With this decree the Polish Government obviously intended to make it impossible for numerous Polish Jews living abroad – particularly in Germany – to return to Poland. This would mean that some 70,000 Polish Jews in Reich territory would have to be tolerated permanently in Germany.\(^{31}\)

The memorandum further reported that on October 26, 1938, the Office of the Foreign Ministry instructed the German Embassy in Warsaw to demand that the Polish government issue a binding statement permitting Polish passport holders in Germany admittance into Poland, even if the passports did not bear the newly required validation stamp. This telephone message from Berlin to Warsaw on October 26, 1938 further declared that Germany had no other recourse than to initiate the immediate expulsion of Jews of Polish nationality from Germany as a precautionary action. The Reich would only refrain from the expulsions if Poland guaranteed not to enforce its own decrees as they pertained to Germany.

An urgently marked *Schnellbrief* from Berlin, also dated October 26, 1938 and also coming from the Office of the Reichführer SS sent throughout the Reich, gave implicit instructions that the state police immediately instigate a large scale operation serving notice of termination of residency rights to all Polish Jews living within their jurisdictions. All Polish Jews were to be expelled from Germany on or before

\(^{31}\)“The Reichsführer-SS and Chief of the German Police to the Chief of the Reich Chancellery,” Doc. No. 91, 29 October 1938, Berlin, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, 117.
October 29, 1938, prior to their Polish citizenship being revoked by the new statutes of the Polish Government.\textsuperscript{32} These declarations made on October 26, 1938 came only two days following a critical proposal by German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to Polish Ambassador Lipski. On October 24, 1938, Ribbentrop met with Lipski at Berchtesgaden and put forth the following suggestions for the betterment of German-Polish relations: Germany would take Danzig back into the Reich, “Danzig was German – had always been German and would always remain German.”\textsuperscript{33} In exchange, Poland would be granted territorial concessions that guaranteed a free Polish port in Danzig, an extraterritorial zone for a railroad and highway through the Corridor to Danzig, and an extension of the German-Polish treaty of friendship. The Ribbentrop proposal also stipulated that both nations recognize their common boundaries and each other’s frontier rights. In light of the terms of this proposal made by Ribbentrop on October 24, 1938, one wonders if Poland had immediately consented to the terms of the proposal, or even hinted at accepting the terms, whether the German expulsion orders of October 26, 1938 would have even been issued. Although Lipski responded on October 24, 1938 that the German proposal would be discussed with Poland’s Prime Minister Beck at great


\textsuperscript{33} “Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister’s Personal Staff – Conversation Between Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and Ambassador Lipski on October 24, 1938, at Berchtesgaden,” Doc. No. 81, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 105-106
length, Lipski remained resolute that a German Anschluss of Danzig was out of the question. Within one week of this meeting between Ribbentrop and Lipski, German-Polish relations hit an all time low.34

After acknowledging receipt of the memo from the Germany Embassy in Warsaw regarding Germany’s intent to deport Polish Jews, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicated its position. It responded that Poland had always been the benevolent guardian of its foreign resident Jewish citizens, being “the subject of numerous interventions by Polish diplomatic and consular authorities” with “interventions aimed at obtaining protection for them from the effects of legislation of the German Reich.”35 While this October 27, 1938 communiqué openly admitted that Poland did not want a mass re-entry of Polish passport holders back into the country, the message purported that Poland’s reticence in receiving Jews from Germany back into Poland pertained not to the passport validation statute of October 6, 1938, but rather to Germany’s confiscation of Jewish property and assets, thereby making the deported Jews financially destitute upon their return. Thus Poland re-stated its position based on the economic ramifications of refugee Jews entering Poland from German territories. The Ministry informed Germany that it would gladly discuss the issue “clarifying the material situation of such persons and settling

34 “Aide-Memoire from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” Doc. No. 88, 27 October 1938, Warsaw, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 115-116.

35 Ibid.
the problem as a whole.”\textsuperscript{36} With this message, Poland laid the blame for its barring the return of Polish Jewish refugees back on Germany, for depriving them of their assets. Poland further stated that it would allow Jewish Poles resident in Germany to return if Germany allowed them to return with their assets in tact. This directly challenged Germany’s own domestic policy, an apparent reprisal against the Reich for trying to dictate Polish domestic policy regarding its passport controls. This diplomatic tug of war between the two nations victimized thousands of innocent Jews, as Germany carried through with its mass deportation plans for its foreign resident Jewish Poles.

Locating Jews through the centralized files created by German census records and residence registry cards, the Gestapo, as directed by the German Foreign Ministry, arrested nearly 20,000 Jews of Polish national origin throughout Germany and Austria on October 27, 28 and 29, 1938, and transported them en masse to the Polish border. In his October 29, 1938 memo summarizing these events, Dr. Best heatedly criticized the Polish border authorities who acted under instructions from Warsaw in refusing entrance for the deportees into Poland. “We succeeded in pushing some 12,000 Polish Jews into Poland, partly by way of the frontier stations,\textsuperscript{36}

partly surreptitiously.” Best’s memo reveals that the Polish government then issued reprisal directives to immediately expel German citizens from western areas of Poland. Immediate negotiations between the German Foreign Ministry and the Polish government halted any further deportations, on either side. The remaining Jewish Poles in Germany who were still in the throes of expulsion from Germany when the agreement was reached, returned to their homes. Another message from the Director of the German Political Department, dated October 28, 1938, related that several thousands of refugees still remained at the border, detained in the no-man’s-lands – apparently held by armed personnel on both sides of the zone. The Gestapo, who insisted the Foreign Ministry accept responsibility for the deportations, inquired what they were supposed to do with the human masses in their charge at the border.

Poland refused to allow the deportees to enter their country and the German secret police rejected the idea of sending them back to their homes in Germany until negotiations secured the fate of those Germans being threatened with deportation from Poland. Polish authorities estimated that 7,000 Polish Jews from Germany had entered the country already and they felt obliged to deport the same number of German citizens from Poland back into Germany. Resident Germans living near the border in Poland, deported in a reprisal action by the Poles, found comfortable accommodations in towns in Germany while the Jewish Poles, victims of the

37 “The Reichführer-SS and Chief of the German Police to the Chief of the Reich Chancellery,” Doc. No. 91, 29 October 1938, Berlin, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 117-118.
Polenaktion, lived in fear and varying degrees of deprivation in make shift border 
camps. Negotiations over their fate commenced in Warsaw the following week. 
Unfortunately for them, German-Polish negotiations concerned themselves more 
with territorial supremacy over Danzig than with the fate of a few thousand Jews 
abandoned at the border. This first mass expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany 
became a paradigm for later mass deportations of Jews from Reich territories.38

C: Zbaszyn and the Refugees

Whereas the why and when of the expulsions were fairly universal, disparities of 
where, who and how varied throughout the many communities of the Third Reich. 
While some cities only arrested and deported the men, as in Baden, other places 
arrested entire families and deported them together, such as at Frankfurt am Main 
and Württemberg. And in Nuremberg, the Gestapo arrested entire families, some 
becoming split when arresting police transported the men out two days earlier than 
the rest of their families. Women and children faced expulsion from Saxony, 
Hamburg and Munich. Armed men seized school children in Berlin and deported 
them to the border without their parents, who were later arrested and sent on 
different transports to different border locations. Jews in Leipzig, forewarned by 
Jews in Halle, sought protection from the Polish consulate, while others fled arrest in

some other manner. Consequently, only 50% of Leipzig’s Polish Jews experienced deportation, while Dresden expelled nearly 90% of its Polish Jewish population. Some victims, aroused from their sleep and arrested in the middle of the night, had time to pack one bag. Still others, arrested at their places of business, were sent immediately to transports, their only possessions what they happened to have with them at the time. Nazi officials set up collection points in places large enough to assemble several hundred people at one time. From schools, restaurants, or auditoriums, trucks and automobiles were used to transport the deportees to the nearest train depots. Major cities with train lines running directly to the Polish border became transit stops before sending the human cargo east. Although Germany had executed other deportations prior to the Polenaktion, this was by far the largest yet attempted.39

In the early days of October 1938, after the German invasion of the Sudetenland and the territorial changes in Hungary and Slovakia, the Nazis had deported about 3,000 Czech Jews amidst mass chaos and abandoned them in impoverished camps inside the border zones. In comparison, as a result of the Polenaktion, the first organized German bureaucratic alliance of agencies deported nearly 20,000 refugee Jews and concentrated them in a number of locations along the Polish-German border.40 Approximately 4,000-6,000 souls crossed the border between Beuthen and


40 Ibid.
Kattowitz, in the southern-most border area of Poland and Germany. Another 1,500 refugees from Berlin and Königberg in the north sought refuge at Chojnice (Konitz) and similar scenes occurred at the frontier site of Dworsky-Mlyn. Between October 30 and November 10, 1938, refugee camps sprang up along the borders of Slovakia, the Sudetenland, and Hungary, holding between 50 and 2,000 deportees each. Of approximately 4,000 Polish Jews who boarded German vessels in Danzig, only 1,500 disembarked at the port of Gdynia, while the others had no choice but to remain on board the ships.  

By far, the largest concentration of Polish refugee Jews, upwards of 8,000, descended upon the border town of Zbaszyn, the western-most Polish city of the Poznan district, just across the German-Polish border from Neu Bentschen. This sudden concentration of displaced persons at Zbaszyn more than doubled its population, which only purported an original Jewish population of 52 souls in an overall population of just over 5,000. Zbaszyn primarily received refugees from Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover, Hildesheim, Leipzig, and Rhineland cities such as Düsseldorf and Cologne.

The Altona District of Hamburg, with its Platz der Republik, a large square in front of the Old Altona Bahnhof, became a perfect gathering place for the nearly 1000 Hamburg Jews arrested and marked for deportation during the Polenaktion.  

Joseph became one of those victims. His expulsion experiences give an example of

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how the Nazis implemented the deportations. The process involved several typical steps. First the victims had to be identified through census and residency records, then once the Gestapo obtained the identifications, they made the arrests.\textsuperscript{43} The behavior of the arresting officers varied as much as their victims. Some allowed their Jewish charges to take their time packing, affording them a chance to change and pray, as it was the Sabbath, while others employed various means of humiliation and force to segregate men from their families.\textsuperscript{44} Once arrested, Nazis transferred their Jewish charges to assembly points to await relocation to train depots. Sometime during his deportation and confinement experience, Joseph began writing down his memory of the events. The original German manuscript has no dates, but from the paper, the language, and the penmanship, we can deduce that he began the memoir while he was detained at Zbaszyn shortly after he arrived. Paper type, ink, and handwriting demonstrate that the memoir was written on at least three different occasions, possibly more. The typewritten English version was composed from the German memoir while he was in Manila, possibly with the aid of a translator and certainly before the Japanese occupation, as the Japanese confiscated all typewriters. Joseph's English version recounts his experiences of October 28-29, 1938:

\textsuperscript{43} Expulsion testimonies of Rosa and Koppel Friedfertig from Hamburg relate how the Gestapo came to their door at 5:00 am on the morning of October 29, 1938 and called their names and their three daughters’ names from a prepared list. See Meyer, “Das Schicksaljahr 1938 und die Folgen,” 115.

\textsuperscript{44} Maurer, “Die Ausweisung der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht,” 64-65.
A well-planned action seals the fate of thousands of Polish Jews in Germany - a cruel and barbaric deportation brings sorrow and unhappiness to thousands of Jewish families. Over night comes the command of the Gestapo and immediately are the Polish Jews rounded up and marched into a dark future, taken away from their houses and property, pushed around like animals by inhuman beings! Hamburg's Jewry is full of anxiety and excitement! Word spreads around as all the Polish Jews are rounded up, and coming home from the Temple I hear the shocking news from our neighbor. Not knowing what to do, as a policeman called for me in my absence, I go fearfully to the Temple and pray, hoping that my Mother will be safe and well! In my restlessness I go to the Consulate, where crowds await an answer from the Consul and not achieving anything there, I hasten to Dr. Italiener, who advised me to report to the police station and who assures me to work for my early release. Being convinced to go this straight way I return home, took my Tefillin and a prayer book and go the heartbroken way to the police. Like a prisoner I was taken to Altona into a big hall where already hundreds of Jews are gathered, crying, praying, fearful what is going to happen next. A sorrowful picture! Old and sick people, children and babies are jammed into this hall awaiting their fate from the hands of the Nazis [. . .] It is Erev

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Shabbos, and a tragedy of being dragged away from the places of worship into a place of horror. Everybody is guessing what will happen - the chance of being freed in a few hours dwindles more and more [. . .] Rough policemen force us to line up for registration and beat the Jews in their savage manner. Every hope of being released is gone when the darkness comes and we are loaded like animals into police wagons, which move fast through the streets of Altona, heading for the station. There we were unloaded, lined up again and with four dry pieces of bread in our hands, we were packed into compartments. The cries and weeping increase as we all feel the uncertainty of that train ride, the fateful hour in our life, which is in the hands of the Gestapo [. . .] We did not know where we go, we only guess, to Poland, to the border! Our train passes numerous other trains moving in the same direction and tears roll down my cheeks when I saw frightful faces pressed against the window - and suddenly my name sounds out of the darkness ... Mr. Beim from Hildesheim recognizes me from another train and his voice trembles with fear.46

As attested by others, mass confusion and terror reigned everywhere during this time of arrest and expulsion. Another survivor from Hamburg recorded his family’s experiences:

46 Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.1-3, Jewish Historical Society of San Diego (JHSSD) Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01 My appreciation to Sylvia Cysner for the gift of her husband's papers to the Archives of the JHSSD. English version of handwritten German memoir and the original German manuscript are housed in the Archives of the JHSSD.
Everything changed that dark Friday morning when a policeman banged us awake and ordered us out of Germany. We panicked, protested, dressed, and packed, in ten minutes. Then he took us down the stairs, out the front door, down the stoop, up the street, and to the nearby police station [. . .] On this fateful October 28, 1938, we surrendered our only passport and joined shaken friends and acquaintances, some wearing prayer shawls and phylacteries. Around 9:30 am, as a small crowd jeered, we were driven away in open trucks. They stopped at a city jail. There Poppi was taken from us. We remained locked up the entire day, some thirty mothers and children listening to occasional screams from somewhere on the other side of the door. Around dusk, guards returned to drive us from the prison. They stopped at Altona’s Hauptbahnhof [. . .] Other Polish Jews had also been dumped at the station and were now looking for each other [. . .] We and a thousand others screamed and screamed into the hall. When at last we found Poppi, we had to board a guarded train and walk single file from car to car in order to look for seats [. . .] Suddenly a second cousin stood in front of his seat, wine cup in hand, sanctifying the Shabbes for all of us.47

These survivor testimonies confirm that others witnessed the expulsions, non-Jewish Germans as well as German Jews. Just as this survivor recounted jeering crowds attending their arrests, he also related how German Jews came to the train station

with “food and love,” pushing oranges through the windows, trying to minister to the victims. As their train sped eastward, victims saw other trains filled with refugees like themselves, calling out the names of their home towns. This most important of all main transport lines, from Berlin through Poznan to Warsaw, took the refugees of the northern cities to the German border town of Neu Bentschen, where police and officials unloaded the trains, and force-marched the refugees on the last seven kilometers (4.3 miles) of the journey at gunpoint. Stragglers on this arduous trek risked bodily harm as well as losing their luggage, as the armed troops beat many who fell behind.

Other witnesses to the mass expulsions included newspaper correspondents from other countries who wired in their eyewitness accounts for the rest of the world to read. The October 29, 1938 edition of the New York Times reported how the “raids” began in Berlin at 5:00 am:

Men were hauled out of bed and taken to police stations. Their panic stricken families followed them and all day weeping women and children stood

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48 In nearly all cases, the Zbaszyn deportees were sent east on passenger trains, as testimonies recount seats, windows, aisles, etc., that one would find on a passenger train. But as not all cities implemented the Polenaktion in the same manner, it would not be implausible for some refugees to have been sent on cattle cars, but I have not yet found documentation for that assumption.

around the police stations anxiously questioning everybody leaving them as to the whereabouts of their menfolk. Nobody knew any answer.  

NY Times articles further reported how neighbors cleared out or boarded up the Jewish businesses and marked the goods for sale. According to NY Times correspondents in Frankfurt am Main, trains with 700 to 800 deportees aboard passed through the city every hour, along with trucks crammed with other refugees being transported to the border via the highways. Munich secret police officials stood around taking pictures of the trains loaded with “700 Jews, including eleven women with babies in their arms and more than a hundred children.” In Vienna, “brown-shirted Storm Troopers in groups of six raided homes, loaded foreign Jews, including Czechoslovaks and Rumanians, into trucks and hauled them off to police stations.” Once they confirmed their non-Polish status, they were released. When officials released hundreds of Jewish Poles in Vienna because the detention sites were full, they also redirected a train of 2000 deportees to the then new Mauthausen concentration camp. These accounts confirm that the Nazis made no attempts to hide the action from the eyes of the German public or from the world. This aspect of the Polenaktion demonstrated that the “conditioning” of the German people and


52 Ibid.
observers worldwide as bystanders to Nazi atrocities had progressed far enough that hiding this brutality was no longer necessary. This test established a precedent for future deportations.

The first transports of refugees arrived at the border and crossed without incident into Poland, taking the Polish officials by complete surprise. “Fearing difficulties with the next load there, the Germans emptied the trains on German territory and drove refugees [on foot] across fields into Poland.”

Polish passport officials in Neu Bentschen tried to prevent or delay the transport of the refugees into Poland, but according to the New York Times, German officials carefully put persons on the trains who held valid Polish passports, showing that the deportations targeted all Jewish Poles regardless of the status of their passports. This left no other option for the Polish officials but to allow their passage. According to the Polish passport decree, these Jews could not be refused safe passage into Poland. By that night, not one refugee remained in Neu Bentschen.

Cysner recounted the scene that unfolded at Neu Bentschen, when he arrived in the first wave of refugees:

In the early morning we reach Bentschen, the city on the Polish border. We are told to leave the train and again lined up, searched if we have more than 10 Mark with us. For hours we stand around and while we shiver in the cold the endless column of Jews were forced to march, escorted by the military

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54 Jerzy Szapiro, “Nazi Guns Force Jews into Poland,” *New York Times* (1 November 1938), Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection,
police with fixed bayonets [. . .] Children could hardly walk anymore - old people collapsed on the way - but on went the column of Polish Jews, driven by the Nazi beasts and beaten and threatened with the bayonet if they refused to move on! Left and right were fields and woods ... it was evident that we were to be driven and expelled to Poland! Turning around I saw the suffering of a persecuted people, defenseless and weak, exposed to the cruelty of the Nazis [. . . .] For hours and hours we drag ourselves along through the rough highways and we approach a little house that stands right before the border - we reached No-man’s-land. The soldiers shout their orders and stand in groups, ready to do their job of chasing us with their bayonets over the border. On the other side you could clearly see the Polish border police, few men who were quite puzzled to see such a mass facing them. The following phase is the most tragic one of that historic event. The soldiers amused themselves, pushing us into No-man’s-land, making pictures while we passed them and threatened to kill everyone who retreats. VORWÄRTS IHR JUDENPAK!!! There was no alternative than to cross the Polish border, but we were between two rows of bayonets and nobody dared to move forward or backward. Men and women, children and babies cried and screamed at this moment of despair, Polish speaking Jews showed their passports to the guards, without chance of crossing the border. A wall of people was moving back and forth, a terrific screaming filled the air and the SHMA was uttered
in that hour of danger. The pressure from the Germans increases more and more and the prayers of desperate Jews are filled with tears and pleading. Suddenly the Poles raise their guns and we were all told to lie down - then to stand up and confusion made the people more afraid and frightened. The minutes of that pushing and pressing seemed like hours! I observe people looking for a place to run over and suddenly inspired by an inner voice I take a chance and take my little luggage and the violin of Dr. Broches and run ... run ... run ... right through the space between two guards into the woods.55

Cysner then told how a young girl, one of his former students from Hamburg, recognized him and ran with him, being separated from her parents in their initial expulsion. Both Joseph and his young student ran “several meters” through the woods to a road, evading a policeman searching the area on a bicycle. Cysner noticed a vehicle approaching on the roadway and called out for their help. He and his young student joined this transport of Hannover refugees heading for the Polish border town of Zbaszyn. Witnesses reported similar scenes at other locations:

Reports from Beuthen, a frontier station in Upper Silesia, graphically described the refugees’ plight. Threatened by frontier guards’ bayonets and machine guns and exhausted by long hours of travel in the most uncomfortable conditions, almost 2000 Jews this morning crossed the Polish frontier at that point. They had arrived in three trains, from which they were herded together at daybreak

55 Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.3-5, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01
by armed frontier guards and told to leave German territory without delay. At first, the Polish police refused to allow them to pass, but Germans with bayonets and rifles began mercilessly driving into Poland the mass of crying children, helpless women, and exasperated men. German machine guns were placed in a row along the station as if to impress the refugees that none of them would remain in Reich territory alive.\textsuperscript{56}

Those whom Joseph left at the border with his flight through the woods remained there for another 24 hours before police allowed them to travel further and find shelter from the weather.

In Warsaw, negotiations between Polish officials and representatives of Berlin to stop the deportations began immediately. Lipski, upon returning from his meetings with Ribbentrop regarding Danzig, optimistically reported that the “misunderstanding” had been cleared up, but when Germany later announced it would not stop its deportations, Poland retaliated by threatening an expulsion of its own. The Poles arrested about 1000 Germans, both Jews and non-Jews living in Upper Silesia and other western provinces of Poland, gave them food, warm clothing and 10 zlotys, and then immediately transported them to the border. It appears that Poland had deliberately targeted men of wealth and position. Almost immediately, Germany and Poland agreed on a bilateral halt to the expulsions and nearly all of the German

\textsuperscript{56} “Germany Deports Jews to Poland,” \textit{New York Times} (29 October 29 1938), Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection.
detainees from Poland returned to their homes.\footnote{Milton, “The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany,” 184.} Meanwhile, the Polish authorities forced the internment of the hastily deposited Jewish refugees in Zbaszyn because of its proximity to the border. They hoped that the Jews' temporary status would facilitate negotiations for their return to Germany. Nearby abandoned barracks provided meager shelter from the advancing bitter winter weather. Discarded in obscurity and near destitution, the refugees struggled to find their own shelter and provisions. In many cases, the only accommodations available were barns, stables, and even pigsties. Escape attempts could end in death.\footnote{Read, \textit{Kristallnacht: The Unleashing of the Holocaust}, 50. On January 27, 1939, the London Jewish Chronicle reported "Endeks" attacking the Jews in Zbaszyn and beating them in the streets. It also reported that "it has been necessary to place a special police guard over the old mill where several hundred of the deportees are housed. All Jews have been forbidden to appear in the streets after 10 pm." See The Jewish Chronicle, "Endeks Attack Zbonszyn Jews," January 27, 1939, 17, found in the Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel. Endeks were members of the Polish National Right Wing Democrats and many members within the party were virulent antisemites. The posting of these guards to abate violence also served as a means of containing the Jews. Anyone violating the curfews could have been shot, Endek or Jew.} Joseph's memoir recorded the dismal scene at Zbaszyn when he arrived:

Thousands of Jews from all over Germany were already assembled and the picture I saw was a typical page of Jewish History: Galuth, deportations, suffering ... Emek Habacha ... a valley of tears! Barracks were all around a desperate crowd - here and there trunks and blankets were lying around. Bearded Jews are praying fervently and the expression in their faces tell of their sorrows and hope. Hungry and thirsty we moved around the big compound, looking for friends, inquiring what cities are represented. And

\footnote{Milton, “The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany,” 184.}

\footnote{Read, \textit{Kristallnacht: The Unleashing of the Holocaust}, 50.}
while we are around that place of distress few Jews of that village walk around with buckets of tea and refresh us. They work day and night and try to encourage us and to give us whatever they could. 10,000 Jews were made homeless over night.\textsuperscript{59}

Jewish refugees who arrived at the border following the bilateral cessation of expulsions, returned to their homes in Germany, along with detained Germans residing in Poland. It is interesting to note that 27 German Jews residing in Poland also ended up at Zbaszyn, deported from their homes by the Polish authorities as part of Poland’s reprisal expulsions.\textsuperscript{60} Some Jewish Poles, upon returning to their homes in Berlin, found offensive placards plastered on their homes and businesses, in retaliation for the deportations implemented by the Poles. 700 deportees from Munich found a reprieve when their train neared arrival at Beuthen, as it turned around and was sent back to Munich. Those who had arrived after the eleventh hour agreement returned home but those who had already been unloaded at the border did not.\textsuperscript{61}

Once the expulsions stopped, Warsaw tried to deal with the thousands of displaced persons still abandoned at various border locations. Evacuations of these border camps in no-man’s-lands by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)

\textsuperscript{59} Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.5-6, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01

\textsuperscript{60} Melzer, “The Jewish Problem in Poland, 1935-1938,” 224.

in Warsaw allowed hundreds of refugees to find shelter with relatives in Poland, while 1000 refugees received accommodations at assembly sites in Warsaw from the JDC and other relief organizations. Jerzy Szapiro, a correspondent for the NY Times in Warsaw, reported seeing children being taken from one assembly point to another, as relief workers searched for their parents. For the over 12,000 refugees at Zbaszyn and other smaller sites of detainment, no rescue from their forced incarceration materialized as they awaited further negotiations between Germany and Poland.\(^{62}\)

Joseph recited his arrival at Zbaszyn:

> For days and nights registration is going on, every time somewhere else and every time by another official. Few people escape into the interior of Poland, but the majority are concentrated in Zbaszyn. After a few days a strict rule forbids any move out of the village. We sleep in barracks like horses, crowded in stalls and resting on straw, living on a little bread and butter. The Hildesheimer Family Beim take good care of me and whenever there is somewhere something to eat they share it with me. Hundreds are sleeping in our barracks and try to get some rest while voices are whispering and babies are crying [. . . .] Not being able to sleep in this unbearable atmosphere, I stroll around the camp, move over resting bodies, stumble over trunks. I got some fresh air and passed by the railway station, where a great number of

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Jews warm themselves and lie all around the halls. You hardly could find your way through, such a mass of unhappy people.⁶³

Although Poland expressed its position that the refugees be allowed to return to Germany, Germany made it very clear that if Poland did not rescind its revocation of citizenship decree, many more thousands of Polish Jews still residing in Germany would be deported as well. The tug of war between Germany and Poland placed the refugees in Zbaszyn between a rock and a hard place. Quoting an article in a Warsaw newspaper, the British Jewish Chronicle concurred that political posturing had victimized these several thousands of stateless souls:

The deportation of Polish Jews from Germany, the paper states, spells the end of Polish-German friendship. The conflict is purely political and its occurrence at the present time is very significant. Poland will not agree, it continues, to remain passive when the new European balance of power is about to be decided. Poland cannot allow Germany alone to gain from the present reconstruction of Europe. Germany wants to weaken Poland in order to strengthen the economic and political influence of Germany in central, eastern, northern, southern, and south-eastern Europe, especially in the

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⁶³ Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.6, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01.
Ukraine. Poland is the strongest power in the territory, which German policy regards as its sphere of influence. This is the real cause of the conflict.\footnote{“Nazi’s Inhuman Hounding of Polish Jews,” \textit{The Jewish Chronicle} (4 November 1938), 25. Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection.}

While a political solution to the plight of the refugees seemed hopeless, Polish Jewish relief organizations eventually arrived in Zbaszyn with food and supplies.

Four long days passed before that help came. A November 4\textsuperscript{th} London \textit{Jewish Chronicle} article noted, “as the American Joint Distribution Committee was busy organizing help for the Jews expelled through Chojnice, Beuthen, and one or two other places, Zbonszyn had to wait until Monday.”\footnote{“Nazi’s Inhuman Hounding of Polish Jews,” \textit{The Jewish Chronicle} (4 November 1938), 26. Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection.} The correspondent reported on the horrible conditions he found there when he arrived, describing rodent-infested stalls and pigsties where even women and children languished, most crying from hunger. He also portrayed the dismal sanitary conditions, relating how 200 refugees had fallen ill and were hospitalized in Poznan and elsewhere. As this correspondent walked through the camps, he heard and witnessed tales of terror and agony from the countless crowds:

[. . .] the tragedy I saw is almost beyond description . . . Several people have gone mad. I myself saw one of them – a woman. Eye-witnesses told me that near the frontier she started screaming and weeping and would not move any farther. Two Gestapo agents dragged her for about two miles until Polish territory was reached. Aged Jews were kicked and beaten by Gestapo agents
because they could not run as fast towards the frontier as ordered. [...] A father of three boys was arrested in Frankfort with his wife and only one boy. The other two were not at home when he received his expulsion orders, and he was weeping bitterly over their unknown fate. One young man was searching for his mother, whom he lost when crossing the frontier. He tried to search for her, but was not allowed to by the Gestapo, who beat him and forced him to move on [...] I visited the temporary hospital in Zbonszyn. This was worse than any war hospital. The patients, men, women, and children, lay on straw without any blankets. Their only covers were meager straw mattresses. Among the patients I saw an old woman of about ninety and a baby of eleven months.66

Once relief arrived and basic human needs began to be appeased, postcards and other forms of communication shared the refugees’ plight with family and friends back home.

By December, as many as 4,000 letters and postcards to and from refugees were transmitted by aid workers daily. And while messages brought much needed currency so that some refugees could pay for room and board at private locations in the town, other communiqués only seemed to heighten the fear and anxiety of the

Jewish community at large. Joseph related the alleged effects of one family’s postcard to their son, Herschel.\textsuperscript{67}

Strange enough, but human, many Jews think that there is a chance of returning to Germany and many cables were received from there expressing the same hope. Rabbi Dr. Italiener sent me also an encouraging cable. Joy and happiness suddenly prevails – optimism creates an atmosphere of hope – till the day of the killing of Rath by Grünzspan, whose parents and sister are in the same camp.\textsuperscript{68}

Any hope for freedom among the refugees from their confinement at Zbaszyn evaporated with the tragic shooting on November 7, 1938 of the German Embassy official, Ernst vom Rath, by the distraught son of Zbaszyn refugees, Herschel Grynszpan. After receiving a postcard from his sister Esther that recounted the expulsion of the Grynszpan family from their home in Hannover, Herschel acted out his revenge on the German consulate in Paris.\textsuperscript{69}

Nazi officials seized on the Grynszpan incident as justification for the mass destruction of Jewish property and synagogues throughout Germany. A previous

\textsuperscript{67} Herschel’s parents and sister were deported on Thursday evening the 27\textsuperscript{th} of October, 1938 from Hannover. Herschel’s sister, Berta, sent him a postcard from Zbaszyn dated October 31, 1938, which he had in his pocket when he shot vom Rath. See Read, Kristallnacht: the Unleashing of the Holocaust, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{68} Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.6, Jewish Historical Society of San Diego Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01.

\textsuperscript{69} For a full recounting of the expulsion of the Grynszpan family, see Schwab, The Day the Holocaust Began, 59-69.
incident in 1936, the assassination of Wilhelm Gustoff, head of the Swiss Nazi Party, by David Frankfurter, a Jewish medical student from Yugoslavia, was linked by Nazi officials to the November 7, 1938 shooting of vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan and promoted by the German press as examples of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Violence erupted independently on November 8th, as a result of these inflammatory editorials, but once vom Rath died, Goebbels then used this shooting as the means to promote government sanctioned statewide violence against the Jews beginning on the evening of November 9th.70 Ben Austin, Holocaust educator, remarks:

The assassination provided Goebbels, Hitler's Chief of Propaganda, with the excuse he needed to launch a pogrom against German Jews.

Grynszpan's attack was interpreted by Goebbels as a conspiratorial attack by “International Jewry” against the Reich and, symbolically, against the Führer himself. This pogrom has come to be called Kristallnacht, “The Night of Broken Glass.”71

The centrally invoked violence of the Kristallnacht pogroms left over 267 synagogues destroyed, along with an estimated 7,500 Jewish businesses burned or

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looted. By November 30, 1938, 30,000 arrests of German Jews filled concentration camps. According to Nazi estimates, nearly 100 died that first night—some of the early casualties of the European Holocaust, along with the victims of the Polenaktion.\(^2\) Joseph recorded the despair in Zbaszyn from the news:

> The jiddish papers report the destruction of the synagogues in Germany and the rounding up of all Jews and we know that the return is impossible. Not even into Poland we are allowed to travel—they have enough Jews there, they do not like any more! And Zbaszyn develops into a Jewish center, a community of its own with all its organizations. A polish village turns over night into a lively city of active Jews, who try to help each other and uplift each in the hour of grief.\(^3\)

Resigned to an indefinite internment, the refugees at Zbaszyn, with the help of representatives from the JDC and other relief organizations, formed committees that planned and implemented educational and cultural activities, in which Joseph played an integral part.

As these thousands of displaced and abandoned refugees strove to survive in the meager conditions at Zbaszyn, negotiations for a final disposition of the refugees’ fate stalemaled following the violence of Kristallnacht. While rehearsing the


\(^3\) Joseph Cysner,"Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.7, Jewish Historical Society of San Diego Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01
repartee conducted in a meeting between Polish Ambassador Lipski and German State Department official Ernst von Weizsäcker in Berlin on November 8, 1938, just one day before the implementation of the Reichskristallnacht pogrom throughout Germany, Weizsäcker stated to Lipski that Germany “could definitely not consent to a mass of 40 to 50 thousand stateless former Polish Jews should be dropped into our laps as a result of their being deprived of citizenship.” Weizsäcker further stated to Lipski that the Jews were Polish property and that it behooved Poland to take care of their own:

. . . it did not seem to me to be such a considerable sacrifice. Moreover, Lipski should think of the von [sic] Rath case. I should not be surprised if this incident led to a very considerable increase in the severity of the German measures against the Polish Jews.  

This veiled threat of more violence against Poland’s Jews, combined with the destruction of German Jewish life and property just one day later, brought German-Polish negotiations concerning the borderland refugees to a halt. Realizing that Germany would not consent to allowing the Polish refugee Jews to return to Germany, Poland tried to manipulate the situation in order to gain worldwide recognition in the growing international awareness of the Jewish refugee dilemma in Poland.  

74 „Memorandum by the State Secretary,” Doc. No. 95, 8 November 1938, Berlin, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 122.

75 Maurer, “Die Ausweisung der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht,” 67
Negotiations between Poland and Germany over the fate of the Zbaszyn refugees appeared to ebb and flow in conjunction with the efforts of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGC), whose formation was the only positive outcome of the Evian Conference of July 1938. According to Myron C. Taylor, the US Representative at the Evian Conference, the IGC “had as its aim the solution, by negotiation between the member governments, of the problem of population dispersal.”

The IGC’s Director, George Rublee, had acted as the political advisor to Taylor at the Evian Conference, and Robert Pell of the US State Department served as the IGC’s Acting Vice-Director. Significant participants included Vice-Chairmen from Britain, France, Brazil, and The Netherlands, with delegates from the thirty two original attendee nations at Evian. The purpose of the IGC was to improve, through negotiations, the chaotic conditions of the exodus of refugee Jews from Germany and to replace them with a more orderly emigration. Its goal also involved approaching governments of nations accepting refugees with propositions to develop opportunities for permanent resettlement. Taylor outlined how negotiations for the facilitation of Jewish refugee resettlement involved talks with the “country of origin,” Germany, and coordinated dialogues with potential host countries for refugee rescue. In essence, this involved all other countries of the world, with a notable exception of Poland and a few others.

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76 Myron C. Taylor, Confidential Memorandum Regarding Refugees, 1938-1947, Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri, Papers of Myron C. Taylor, Box 3, p. 3.
Poland had been excluded as a participating nation at Evian and therefore had no official representation in the IGC. Polish diplomatic representatives in Washington, London, and The Hague lodged formal complaints, demanding that the refugee problem in Poland be addressed first. While the IGC sought to engage Germany in negotiations for the peaceful emigration of its Jewish population, Poland tried in vain to acquire similar considerations for its Jewish populace stranded at the border.77

For several months following the formation of the IGC at the Evian Conference, representatives from the United States, Britain and France tried to influence German agencies to meet in an official capacity with Director Rublee, but to no avail. The October 1938 response of von Weizsäcker to one such request in represents Germany’s initial position regarding the IGC:

I made it plain to the Ambassador – as I had done once last summer – that in my personal opinion a journey by Mr. Rublee to Germany would be of no value. It was not even definite which countries were prepared to admit German Jews. So far the Committee had proved sterile. In order to justify its existence it now wanted to talk with the German Government. In Germany it would then be ascertained that – for obvious reasons – we would not let the Jews take along any foreign exchange, and thereby the purpose would be achieved, namely to prove that once more it was German obstructionism that was to

77 Maurer, “Die Ausweisung der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht,” 67.
blame for the misery of the Jews. I could not help to promote Mr. Rublee’s journey merely in order to make Germany the scapegoat.\textsuperscript{78}

It wasn’t until after the deportations and pogroms of the \textit{Polenaktion} on October 28, 1938 and the \textit{Reichkristallnacht} on November 9, 1938 that German officials began to consider offers of cooperation from the IGC, just as negotiations with Poland ceased. In Berlin on November 12, 1938, a conference under the jurisdiction of Field Marshal Göring discussed the rising Jewish problem and determined that Jewish emigration was “to be promoted by all possible means.”\textsuperscript{79} Acceleration of the “Aryanization of the economy” called for all Jewish assets, holdings, fortunes, real estate, art objects, stocks, bonds, etc. to be immediately confiscated – the only exceptions being Jewish-owned and operated export businesses that served the interests of the Reich.\textsuperscript{80} A follow-up memorandum by the Director of the Political Department of Germany, dated November 14, 1938 disclosed that Germany now appeared ready to seriously consider offers by Director Rublee of the IGC, but only on a strictly private basis. Negotiators

\textsuperscript{78} “Memorandum by the State Secretary,” Doc. No. 645, 18 October 1938, Berlin, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 900.

\textsuperscript{79} “Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department,” Doc. No. 649, 12 November 1938, Berlin, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 904.

\textsuperscript{80} “Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department,” Doc. No. 649, 12 November 1938, Berlin, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 904. (ff #2 to document reads: “A set of partly illegible notes on the meeting by Schumburg, who accompanied Woermann, has the following on this point: ‘As long as a Jew is engaged in export business he is not to be touched. We can link our interests with Jewish interests. The Jews are to be used in the export trade.’”)

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made overtures to Rublee that Germany might be willing to secretly cooperate in facilitating more peaceful emigration of its Jews.\footnote{\textit{Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department}," Doc. No. 650, 14 November 1938, Berlin, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 905.}

As an important meeting of the IGC quickly approached in early December 1938, urgency in facilitating further back door negotiations ensued, at which Poland took great exception. A communiqué on November 30, 1938 from Herbert von Dirksen, the German Ambassador in London, quoted Karl Heinz Abshagen, a journalist and personal friend of Robert Pell of the IGC who assisted in arranging the covert negotiations, which disclosed Polish interference in the talks:

\begin{quote}
The Polish Government is now extremely active in the matter of the Polish Jews and is practicing blackmail so to speak. Both in Washington and in The Hague, and also here, it has had representations made demanding a settlement of the question of the Polish Jews threatened with expulsion from Germany before the refugee question of the Jews emigrating from Germany was taken up. If there was not an immediate settlement of the question of the Polish Jews, the Polish people would allegedly become so wrought up that extensive persecutions of the Jews could also be expected in Poland.\footnote{\textit{Memorandum,}" Doc. No. 652 [enclosure], 30 November 1938, London, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 909.}
\end{quote}

The IGC regarded this as nothing less than extortion on Poland’s part, who seemed to resent the careful courtship being extended to Germany over its Jewish refugees, when
in fact Poland had a far greater Jewish population than Germany and was prepared to persecute them to greater extremes if it meant being able to systematically deport them as Germany seemed to be doing. It is ironic that Poland threatened the IGC with the same increase in violence against its Polish Jews as Germany had threatened Poland with. It appeared to be another example of ‘what is good for the German goose is just as good for the Polish gander.’ The Polish press promoted this attitude as well. A political report by the German ambassador in Warsaw stated that:

. . . it could be read in the Kurjer Poranny that by her ruthless solution of the Jewish question, Germany had procured an advantage for herself, since as a result England and America were interesting themselves in the emigration of the German Jews, whereas no one spoke of the Polish Jews.83

Financially sponsoring the repatriation of Germany’s Jews may have been a doable international enterprise, but augmenting those numbers with over 3 million Jews from Poland could conceivably scuttle all possible rescue plans. The IGC rejected Poland’s demands to transfer the borderland matter to the committee. Zbaszyn’s refugees remained all but forgotten in the greater political schemes of Nazi Aryanization, Polish hegemony, British imperialism, and American isolationism.

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83 “The Ambassador in Poland to the Foreign Ministry – Political Report,” Doc. No. 103, 22 November 1938, Warsaw, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 133.
E: Zbaszyn and International Negotiations

It is also important to understand the diplomatic arenas concerning Danzig and Memel during this time and to ask what, if any, affect these areas of Nazi interest had on relations between Germany and Poland and their subsequent compromise over the Zbaszyn deportees. In German minds, the issue of the Polish refugee Jews at the border was a moot point – they stood on Polish soil now and there they would stay – let Poland deal with them. But Germany still needed to maintain diplomatic relations with Poland over the Danzig issue.

On November 19, 1938, Ribbentrop and Lipski conducted a follow-up appointment to their October 24th, 1938 meeting, in which the topic of Danzig prevailed. In expressing the position of Polish Foreign Minister Beck, Lipski “made a verbose statement to prove the importance and significance for Poland of Danzig’s status as a free city.” Poland still resisted the union of Danzig with the Reich, much to Ribbentrop’s dismay. After Lipski laid out a Polish proposal for a bilateral treaty on Danzig between their two nations that preempted the League of Nation’s presence in Danzig, Ribbentrop refused to acquiesce to its terms. He further stressed to Lipski that if Polish Foreign Minister Beck “would think about our suggestions at his leisure, perhaps he would come to regard them is a positive light.”\(^8^4\) It seemed rather serendipitous that in only two days, a communiqué from Viktor Böttcher of the

\(^{84}\) “Memorandum by the Foreign Minister,” Doc. No. 101, 19 November 1938, Berlin, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, 127-129.
Foreign Affairs Department of the Danzig Senate related his impressions that “it almost looked as if Poland would try to give way step by step in Danzig, in hope that Germany would then be more likely to comply with Poland’s wishes in the Carpatho-Ukraine.” Böttcher’s feeling on this resulted from his meeting with Danzig High Commissioner Burckhardt, who had just returned from Warsaw. Burckhardt had intimated that “only a suggestion by Germany was needed in order to initiate a conversation” with Poland again on the subject of Danzig. Such dialog did not ensue for another three to four weeks.

In the meantime, Germany concentrated its efforts on the incorporation of the Baltic Port City of Memel back into the Reich. Memel (Klaipeda) was Lithuania’s only Baltic Seaport, which also became a protectorate by the Treaty of Versailles in order to guarantee Baltic port access to Lithuania and Poland, fashioning its sovereignty after that of Danzig. Lithuania, aided by German arms, invaded the Memel territories in 1923 and annexed the city. Tensions between the culturally dominant German Memellanders and the incoming Lithuanians rose over the next twelve years, placing Memel in ongoing conditions of social unrest and eventual martial law. While Polish Jews in Germany endured terror and abuse in the events of

85 Poland favored Germany’s expansionism regarding the Sudetenland in hopes that the break-up of Czechoslovakia would improve Poland’s strategic position. Poland anticipated extending its influence into the Ukraine and the Sub-Carpatho-Ukraine with the creation of a Polish-Hungarian border that would acquiesce to a Hungarian annexation of Sub-Carpathian territories and the extension of the Polish-Rumanian border, neither of which happened. See Prazmowska, “Poland’s Foreign Policy,” 855.

86 “Minute by the Director of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Danzig Senate,” Doc. No. 102, 21 November 1938, Danzig, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 130.
the *Polenaktion*, peaceful coexistence ultimately prevailed in Memel and martial law ended on October 29, 1938. Indications showed Lithuania weakening in its jurisdictional hold over Memel. No doubt Poland regarded this with a great deal of trepadation.

A memorandum by the Head of the German Political Division on November 25, 1938 summarized the course of events in Memel since September 1938, which testified to a growing public desire for the reincorporation of Memel into the Third Reich, observing that “Lithuanian authorities are insecure and frightened.”\(^87\) The memo also revealed that Germany’s reincorporation of Memel could be justified “on the right of self-determination” of the population of Memel. German confidence ran high that the results of Memel’s Landtag elections on December 11, 1938, would be overwhelming “evidence of the will of the people” to reunite with Germany. While warning that Britain and France would probably lodge objections that could easily be answered with the rights of self determination, “the opposition will not come from the signatory powers but from Poland.” When asked by the German Political Department if Lithuania’s government was prepared to cede the Memel territory to Germany, the Lithuanian Ministry issued a response on November 30, 1938, citing numerous reasons for its decline to yield, naming relations with Poland as one. The German Political Division reported to German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop on the recent dispatches with Lithuania and advised that the Reich instigate plans soon to reincorporate the

\(^{87}\) “Memorandum by the Head of Political Division V1,” Doc. No. 364, 25 November 1938, Berlin, in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, 487.
Memel Territories “in view of Poland’s expansionist policy in the Baltic.”\textsuperscript{88} In light of the pressure exerted by Germany to lay hold on Memel territories again, it is easier to understand Poland’s adamancy in holding onto Danzig’s sovereignty. Poland faced being cut off from all of its access ports on the Baltic Sea. International concerns over these issues held far greater importance in Polish foreign policy matters than did the fate of the refugees at Zbaszyn.

As the refugees languished in “the second month of a strange, comfortless existence at Poland’s front gate and Germany’s back door – unable to move in either direction,”\textsuperscript{89} Polish Foreign Minister Beck sought a reconciliation of relations between Poland and Germany in an effort “to continue the policy inaugurated by Pilsudski” of a peaceful non-aggression pact signed by the two countries in 1934. Describing the tensions between the two countries as “absurd,” on December 15, 1938 Beck extended an invitation to German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop to meet in Warsaw that winter. Hoping no doubt for home-field advantage, Beck’s invitation for a furtherance of their peaceful negotiations mentioned Danzig, the Carpatho-Ukraine question, the Memel territories, and Polish-Soviet relations.\textsuperscript{90} The refugee question at the border never

\textsuperscript{88} “Memorandum by the Head of Political Division V1 – Report to the Foreign Minister on the Memel Question, December 1, 1938,” Doc. No. 369, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 494.

\textsuperscript{89} “Arrest of Jews Go On in Germany,” Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection, New York Times (29 November 1938).

\textsuperscript{90} “Memorandum by the Ambassador to Poland,” Doc. No. 113, 15 December 1938, Berlin, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 144-145.
arose. Both ministers agreed to an unofficial meeting in early January 1939 as a prelude to a more formal, official diplomatic meeting in Warsaw in later weeks.

On January 5, 1939, Polish Minister Beck sat in a face to face meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, Munich, in the company of Ribbentrop, Polish Ambassador Lipski, German Ambassador von Moltke, and Count Lubienski. Just days prior to this scheduled meeting, an internal memorandum within the offices of the Foreign Ministry advised that certain issues be stressed with Beck, especially that “Beck should be made to see that we understand the entire weakness of his position and are waiting until he becomes more pliable.” The memorandum further emphasized that Beck needed to realize that the alterations in European affairs were a direct result of the recovery of German strength through the events of 1938, alluding to the Anschluss of Austria, annexation of the Sudetenland into the Reich, and Germany’s flaunting of Poland’s decrees with the expulsion of the Polish Jews. “Poland will certainly realize that Germany is today the only power in Europe with which she can align herself.”

After opening platitudes by both Beck and Hitler concerning the history of favorable relations between the two countries, Hitler stated that one “remaining problem in direct German-Polish relations” was the issue of Danzig and Poland’s corridor to the Baltic Sea. An apparent generous offer from Hitler emphasized the desire to retain Poland’s access to the sea, while still proposing that Danzig “come into the German community politically but remain with Poland economically.”

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91 “Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister’s Secretariat,” Doc. No. 119, 5 January 1939, Munich, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 152-153 ff.
stressed that only he could guarantee that Poland’s Baltic corridor would remain undisturbed. Interestingly enough, following Hitler’s remarks concerning Germany’s emphatic interests in Danzig, he immediately discussed “another problem in which Poland and Germany had a common interest” and that was “the Jewish question. He, the Führer, was firmly resolved to get the Jews out of Germany.” By this time Beck and Lipski must have realized that no possible return of the refugee Jews in Zbaszyn to Germany existed. Having been already summarily told that the Memel question “would be settled in the German sense,” meaning that Lithuania would cooperate with the wishes of the Reich to annex Memel, Beck refused to acquiesce to Hitler’s implied demands regarding Danzig and remarked that he would “like to think the problem over at leisure.”\(^9\) In a follow-up meeting in Munich on January 9, 1939 between Beck and Ribbentrop, Beck “immediately reverted to the Danzig problem” and, in essence, refused to regard Hitler’s proposals with any real seriousness. Ribbentrop stressed again that the reincorporation of Danzig was a German priority and that Germany would assure “in the most generous manner” retention of all of Poland’s economic interests in both the use of Danzig’s ports and Poland’s corridor to the sea. It is indeed difficult to understand how Beck could still shun Germany’s offer, given the fact that Germany had the power to take outright what it wanted, which eventually it did.

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\(^9\) “Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister’s Secretariat,” Doc. No. 119, 5 January 1939, Munich, in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, 156-158.
Poland mistakenly placed too much importance on its own power in the region as a necessary go-between with Germany and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{93}

While ministers Beck and Ribbentrop executed their diplomatic dance over Danzig during the months of December 1938 and January 1939, another duet of diplomats formed to discuss a solution to the German Jewish refugee issue. Following the December 5, 1938 meeting of the IGC in London, at which IGC director George Rublee hinted at future negotiations with Germany, Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht, with personal authorization from Hitler and Göring, met with Rublee and IGC vice-director Robert Pell in London to discuss proposals Schacht made earlier regarding the emigration of Jews from Germany.\textsuperscript{94} Schacht’s plan called for the “transfer of part of the assets of emigrating German Jews by the export of German goods financed by a loan fund to be set up by Jews abroad.”\textsuperscript{95} In other words, the financing of future Jewish emigration from Germany would be linked to an increase in German exports being purchased abroad,\textsuperscript{96} so not only would Germany confiscate


\textsuperscript{95} “The Director of the Economic Policy Department to the Embassy in Great Britain,” Doc. No. 654, 12 December 1938, Berlin, in \textit{Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945}, 911-912.

\textsuperscript{96} This was a form of the Ha’avara Agreement of August 28, 1933 between the Third Reich and the Jewish Agency for Palestine, an organization supporting Jews immigrating to Palestine. The agreement stated that an emigrating Jew “was permitted to make a contract with a German exporter for the transfer of goods from Germany to Palestine. The German exporter was paid with funds drawn from the blocked account of the emigrating Jew.” Raul Hilberg, \textit{The Destruction of the European Jews, 3rd Edition, Vol. 1} (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 139.
Jewish property and assets, but could then expect greater revenues in export sales, of which only a part would go to financing Jewish emigration.\textsuperscript{97}

Objections to the Schacht plan soon arose within the ranks of the German Foreign Ministry, which absolutely rejected “the danger of coupling Jewish interests in transfer of their property with the interest of German industry in increased exports, leading German industry to support the most extensive transfer of Jewish property.” The German Foreign Ministry always maintained that “Jewish immigration first of all be pursued without property transfer thus leaving the Jews in no doubt that they had no economic future in Germany.”\textsuperscript{98} But the Ministry could overtly do little since Schacht had both Hitler’s and Göring’s backing in the matter.

Covert actions by Ribbentrop to scuttle the Schacht-Rublee negotiations saw Schacht suddenly relieved of his position as Reichsbank President, which was then filled by Helmuth Wohlthat, a deputy of Göring, who reconfirmed the Führer’s support of Schacht’s proposal. The Schacht-Rublee plan, in essence, allowed for 400,000 Jewish men, women and children to emigrate from Germany over a three to five year period. The emigrating Jews could take their personal and professional possessions with them, liquidating the rest of their property with 25% of the proceeds going into trust for the purchasing of German exports, while the other 75% would supposedly support the nation-wide emigration expenses and lend financial support to the Jews

\textsuperscript{97} Christopher Browning, “Referat Deutschland,” 60-63.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 62.
remaining behind who were unfit for immigration elsewhere.\textsuperscript{99} Rublee submitted the
plan to the IGC in London on February 13, 1939, and a scholarly review of the plan
concluded that the German proposal advanced international sanctions “to a far-
reaching, indeed almost complete, spoliation of the German Jews.”\textsuperscript{100} Other perceived
deficiencies in the plan offered no guarantees regarding humane treatment of the Jews
remaining in Germany and “no assurances have been obtained with regard to the
treatment of the Jews in the concentration camps.” Holding true to the IGC’s position
regarding Poland’s demand for its refugees, the Rublee Plan gave no recognition to the
Jewish refugee problem at the border nor did it allow for any rescue of the detained
Jewish victims at Zbaszyn.

In light of the looming threats from Germany regarding Poland’s vital outlets to the
Baltic Sea and as Poland realized that no international plan to liberate the refugees at
Zbaszyn, or at any other refugee border camps, was forthcoming, Polish authorities
began to relax their attitudes concerning the fate of the Zbaszyn refugees as
negotiations with Germany resumed in January 1939. Negotiations threatened to stall
again as Germany and Poland haggled over how the spoils of the Polish Jewish
deportees should be divided up between the two nations.

\textsuperscript{99} Göring’s Four-Year plan for complete Aryanization (confiscation) of Jewish assets and
property was already three years in operation and Göring pushed for its finalization. See David M.

\textsuperscript{100} Eric Estorick, “The Evian Conference and the Intergovernmental Committee,” in \textit{Annals of
Poland is demanding the greater part of the fortunes as belonging to its citizens, and Germany is counter-claiming on the grounds that the capital involved was built up on Reich soil. [...] Any compromise on the division of the spoils will be reached directly with the Polish Government, not with the Jews to whom the money belongs. The Nazis say that if, as a result of the negotiations, Poland is granted a percentage of the capital involved, it will be entirely up to Poland to decide now much of its share, if any, is to be given back to the Jews. [...] On Monday, it was reported that negotiations had been suspended as a result of failure to agree over the proportion of Jewish property to be retained by the Nazis. Germany is said to have held out for 80 per cent. The negotiations, it is added, may be resumed later; but meanwhile the unfortunate deportees undergo privation in their camps at Zbonszyn and elsewhere.¹⁰¹

Perhaps as a show of good faith to the IGC, as back door negotiation between Schacht and then his successor Wohlthat ensued with IGC Director Rublee, Germany too made concessions to Poland concerning the status of the deported refugees at the border. A compromise formed that permitted the refugees detained at the border to temporarily reenter Germany for a brief period of time in order to put their personal and business affairs in order:

Jewish sources in Warsaw reported today that expelled Polish Jews possessing real estate or businesses in Germany would be permitted to return there in

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groups of 1,000 men and would have until July 1 to liquidate their property. The Polish Government agreed, it was said by the same circles, that families of expelled Jews still living in Germany would be permitted to join their husbands and fathers in Poland.\footnote{Reich in Accord with Poland on Ousted Jews; Will Readmit Some, Let Others Settle Affairs” \textit{New York Times}, 25 January 1939, 7, in \textit{Proquest Historical Newspapers}, [database on-line], The New York Times (1851-2004); accessed March 30, 2009.}

This actually served the interests of the Reich quite nicely in its plan to aryanzize all Jewish assets and to eliminate Jews from the economy.

Poland’s part of the compromise allowed the families of the refugees to join their deported spouses and to resettle in Poland permanently. This also furthered the interests of Germany in that another estimated 5,000 to 6,000 Jewish women and children left Germany.\footnote{Milton, “The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany,” 172} Another part of the compromise secured a part of the proceeds from the liquidation of the Polish-Jewish assets and businesses for transfer to Poland. This bilateral compromise of January 24, 1939 between Germany and Poland served the interests of both Germany and Poland in the matter, but offered nothing to the deported. Not only were the Jews systematically robbed by both countries, but provisions of the agreement deported even more Jews and destroyed more families. On February 3, 1939 the Jewish Chronicle reported:

That the Polish Government has yielded to Nazi brutality on the question of the 15,000 Jewish deportees is shown by the details of the agreement reached by the two countries last week. The concessions granted by the Nazis are minor
ones. Only those Jews who have left property in Germany will be allowed to return for a short time to sell it and liquidate their affairs [. . .] Jews may seek permits to have their families brought to Poland, but only wives, and children up to the age of eighteen, will be allowed to leave Germany. Children over eighteen must remain in Germany. Aged parents, too, will have to stay behind. [. . .] The arrangements, reached after nearly two months of bargaining, do not solve the problem. On the one hand, they will add to the number of the expelled, through the arrival of part of their families, and will also separate many families, maybe for years.\textsuperscript{104}

Germany would be able to rid itself of several thousands more Jews, along with the 10,000 – 12,000 who still suffered at border sites, and Poland received the promise of a share of the liquidated assets of the refugees. It would not be unfounded to assume that this German-Polish compromise over the fate of the refugees held at the border could be perceived by the other side as a show of good faith in order to precipitate an agreeable compromise between the two nations over the still looming issue of Danzig. Such a presumption owes more towards Poland’s naiveté regarding Germany’s desire to maintain peaceful relations, then to Germany’s actual intent to honor such a plan, for the enactment of these terms never fully materialized as 3700 Jews still languished in Zbaszyn by early June 1939.

\textsuperscript{104} “Poland Yields to Nazis – Deportees Not to Return,” Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection, The Jewish Chronicle (3 February 1939): 25.


**F: Life in the Zbaszyn Camp**

Zbaszyn existed as a rather insignificant agricultural township that happened to lie near a border crossing station on the very important rail line that connected Moscow – Warsaw – Berlin – Paris. Various accounts number the population of the town in 1938 at around 5,400 people, fewer than 360 being German with only about fifty two Jews – not more than ten families. To this day, we know very little about this original small Jewish community of Zbaszyn.¹ Tax records of the Jewish district, to which Zbaszyn belonged, reveal that the entire district numbered 156 members, but only nine of those actually paid taxes. District tax laws exempted members with sufficiently poor incomes. The majority of those who did pay taxes were merchants; a couple owned houses, and others were craftsmen. In Zbaszyn, the ten Jewish families depended on subsistence farming and lived poorer lives, as did most of their non-Jewish counterparts in similar small, provincial Polish towns, than did most of the refugees dumped there. The infrastructure of this little town simply could not handle the burden of its population being nearly tripled overnight. And the refugees themselves, mostly affluent people left virtually penniless, had no immediate means with which to care for themselves and their families. Both the townsfolk and the refugees needed outside help to cope.²

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² Ibid., 262.
Survivors and rescuers all depict terrible scenes of deprivation and want during those days, weeks, and months of incarceration, in spite of the valiant efforts of the small Jewish community of Zbaszyn and relief organizations from Warsaw and Poznan to assist the refugees in any way possible. The memoir of Gerd Korman describes how relief trucks loaded with bread, butter, and eggs arrived and how workers in the trucks hurriedly broke loaves in half, slapped hunks of butter on the fragments and tossed them over the sides of the trucks into the crowd. Gerd recalled how refugees frantically grabbed for the buttered loaves and similarly tossed eggs before they fell to the ground. Cysner’s memoir attested to the relief work as well, but also disclosed his observations on the mood of the community that developed in those early weeks:

Polish Jews prove their Jewish heart and traditional spirit of helping the brother in need by sending immediately food, medicine, and clothes to the refugees. Community leaders from nearby Posen encourage us and give us hope. “Gulaschkanonen” [soup wagons] roll after days into the camp and hungry Jews line up to get their ration. A post office is quickly organized and one of the most important activities of the day becomes the patient waiting for the mail. Cash and money orders are coming in and after days I am also lucky to
get few zlotys. [. . .] Money makes everything easier and even in some ways it helps to forget. ³

The refugees tried any means available to them to contact family and friends in Poland and Germany in order to secure help.

Relief organizations finally appeared on the scene at Zbaszyn after about four days. Help from Poznan and Warsaw was slow in coming, owing in part to the fact that neither the Polish press nor the Jewish press could publish details about the expulsion – efforts by the Polish authorities to minimize the deportations’ overall importance in the greater scheme of relations with Germany and to force the international community to respond to Poland’s Jewish problem.⁴ What news did get out incited the formation of the Central Aid Committee for the German Refugees, lead by Rabbi Moshe Schorr, professor and senator in Warsaw. The Bund Party and Jewish trade unions provided assistance through a specially established “Actions Committee,” which brought in representatives of Polish workers’ organizations. The most immediate needs that the committee addressed concerned special aid for the children, of which there were about 700 in the camp, along with food, material, and legal assistance as needed. Emanuel Ringelblum,⁵ who at the time worked for the JDC in Warsaw, arrived as one of the

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³ Joseph Cysner, “Zbaszyn,” October 30, 1938, p.7, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01


⁵ Emanuel Ringelblum, (1900-1944), was a Jewish historian and later became director of the secret Oneg Shabbat Archive in the Warsaw Ghetto. For an extensive biography, see “Ringelblum, Emanuel,” Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority.
first on the scene with much needed aid. The greatest service Ringelblum rendered embodied his foresight in organizing the hordes of refugees into groups of medical professionals, legal advisors, craftsmen, teachers and others so that the refugees learned to be self sufficient, thereby doing as much as possible for themselves, while relieving the local citizens and the many relief organizations to do other things.\(^6\)

Ringelblum related how they set up the Zbaszyn Township with -

- departments for supplies, hospitalization, carpentry workshops, tailors, shoemakers, books, a legal section, a migration department, and an independent post office . . . a welfare office, a court of arbitration, an organizing committee, open and secret control services, a cleaning service, and a complex sanitation service.\(^7\)

Ringelblum further explained how cultural activities included classes in Yiddish and Polish, with educational facilities such as a reading room, a library, and a Talmud Torah religious school. Joseph related how important these activities became for the refugees:

Life in that isolated place became more contented when the cultural activities were emphasized. The moral was in danger as people had nothing to do and

\(^6\) Pollmann, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, 269.

children were lingering around in the community houses. Under the leadership of experienced social workers from Poland and from Germany, committees were formed to activate the camp. One of the first activities and the most impressive ones were services held in the Synagogue and in the Schützenhauses, as well as in the mill. Wherever there are Polish Jews there are Chasonim – and there were a number of good ones right in the camp. We alternated in different places and it was quite an experience to pray in the midst of the Zores and in the houses of the refugees. I recall the Chanukah days when I officiated in the hospital where my eyes saw the whole cruelty of the Nazis dragging away the sick and lame people!! The tears of the poor people touched me immensely and I prayed for light, for help for these poor and helpless Jews.  

Refugees themselves manned this entire newly created infrastructure of social organizations, numbering nearly twenty.

The internees also enjoyed concerts and the formation of a choir, assisted by Joseph, who taught singing classes in camp and assisted in the care of the children: Our noble duty was to take care of the children and to give them an education to prevent demoralization. Courses of all subjects were introduced and I was very successful with my music classes. The kids liked to sing and forgot all their worries and at the same time learned music and its moral and ethical

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8 Joseph Cysner, “Zbaszyn,” October 30, 1938, p.8, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01.
value. Those children whose parents could not take care of them were sheltered in a big stadium under the supervision of young and experienced teachers employed by the miracle-doing Joint [JDC]. They had good food and all the privileges they needed and plays and other programs proved the good job that was done in such a short period. One of the most impressive features was also an Oneg Shabbat on the 6th floor of the mühle [mill], where hundreds were housed. While a dim light was burning, girls and boys gathered around, sitting on the floor and singing spirited and inspiring Jewish songs. A discussion about current problems gave that evening a high level. All different organizations united in that affair and one could feel the spark of Chaverut, of brotherhood!9

But all the social and medical dangers of overcrowded, overtaxed living conditions still caused great hardships for Zbaszyn’s townsfolk and refugees alike, as outbreaks of typhus claimed more and more lives as time wore on and Poland’s harsh winter weather rolled in.

The task of feeding, clothing, nursing, and housing 5,000 to 8,000 extras bodies over an extended period of time was not an easy venture. Most of the refugees spent the first week in Zbaszyn in deplorable conditions, as already discussed. Eventually 2,000 refugees took up permanent shelter in the long abandoned army barracks on the outskirts of town, originally converted horse stalls. One letter from Zbaszyn, printed in a local newspaper, reported 107 persons living in barracks #1 alone. Over 500 refugees

9 Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.9, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01
occupied the Old Flour Mill in town, which comprised five levels of bare concrete floors strewn with damp straw, on which people slept in their clothes, lined up like sardines. The *Schützenhausen*, mentioned by Cysner, were machinery warehouses where literally hundreds of children lived who had been separated from parents, deported without parents, or whose parents or guardians could not care for them. Refugees, who either smuggled in money, jewels, or other negotiable items with them, or procured money from family and friends, rented single rooms in homes or even entire apartments from the townsfolk. Nearly every house of the local townsfolk harbored one or more Jewish refugees.  

About one third of the total number of refugees in Zbaszyn found accommodations in private homes.  

Joseph’s memoir recounted his various housing situations during his first few months at Zbaszyn, when he left the Old Mill to find other accommodations:

> I was very lucky to be with a family I knew well as they did everything possible to make life bearable. A Friday evening was just like home and there was no food lacking as we got our daily rations from the mühle and we were able to buy food at exorbitant prices. After weeks I moved from that crowded place and rented a bed in a small room – but my friend and I moved soon again

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10 Pollmann, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, 278.

as the Polish “Trefniak”\textsuperscript{12} came shikker [drunk] from the village and it was pretty dangerous for us. The room we rented with four others afterwards was very comfortable and clean, very beautifully located at a vast lake. At last I had my own bed and that was a luxury for Zbaszyn.\textsuperscript{13}

Money donated to the plight of the refugees from local, national, and international relief organizations made only a small dent in the daily cost of supporting the refugees, which Ringelblum estimated at about $2000 to $2500 per day.\textsuperscript{14}

Meeting the most basic of human needs for the refugees, supplying adequate food, water, and clothing became a constant struggle. When winter set in, Zbaszyn’s refugees battled the freezing weather, making survival impossible for many.

Among the Polish Jews deported by the Nazis and now encamped in Zbonszyn, on the Polish frontier, the cold weather is causing unspeakable misery. An eleven-day-old child was frozen to death this week, and twenty-seven other children are said to have lost limbs owing to frostbite. According to the News Chronicle, about 2,000 people are crowded in an old stable with only one stove

\textsuperscript{12} "Endeks Attack Zbonszyn Jews," \textit{The Jewish Chronicle} (27 January 1939): 17. Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection. Trefniak, a Yiddish word, comes from ‘tref’ which is non-kosher food. Trefniak is a non-Jew and also someone with malicious intent. On January 27, 1939, the London \textit{Jewish Chronicle} reported “Endeks” attacking the Jews in Zbaszyn and beating them in the streets. Joseph was probably referring to these episodes when drunken Endeks, National Democrat party members, conducted raids in Zbaszyn. For more on Endeks, see ff#57 of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{13} Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.8, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01. *Alternate spellings of Zbaszyn: Zbonszyn, Sbonszyn, Sbonsin.

\textsuperscript{14} Milton, “The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany,” 191
to keep them warm. Five hundred are living in an old mill with no heating facilities whatever. As most of the deportees were driven from Germany without proper clothing, many are unable to leave their tents and stables to fetch food from the field kitchen. A number of them have been frozen while waiting in the long queues for food.\textsuperscript{15}

After five weeks of relief work performed almost exclusively by local Jewish organizations, Emmanuel Ringelblum and his companions left Zbaszyn, commenting that there had “never been so ferocious, so pitiless a deportation of any Jewish Community as this German deportation.”\textsuperscript{16}

As conditions for refugees worldwide worsened, funds and assistance for the refugees in Zbaszyn waned. In May 1939, the Jewish Chronicle reported that the deportees instigated one fasting day per week “in order to be able to live a day longer on the verge of starvation.”\textsuperscript{17}

By the middle of May 1939, 3,500 refugee Jews still lay encamped at Zbaszyn, most living in the poorest conditions. Relief funds dried up when the Polish government stopped all nation-wide fundraising operations for any purposes, except


\textsuperscript{17}“Starvation Conditions of Deportees in Poland,” \textit{The Jewish Chronicle} (26 May 1939), 20. Ghetto Fighter’s Museum Archives, Akko, Israel, Zbaszyn Clippings Collection.
for the Anti-Aircraft Defense Fund. Negotiations between Germany and Poland finally
ended in June 1939, putting an end to the initial agreement between the two nations
and leaving 3,000 to 4,000 women and children stranded in Germany waiting for exit
visas.\(^{18}\) Germany threatened more expulsions when on May 8, 1939, German security
chief Reinhard Heydrich ordered all Polish Jews still residing in the Reich to leave the
country by July 31, 1939 or be interned in concentration camps and then forcibly
expelled to Poland.\(^{19}\) When the Nazis arrested another 3,000 Polish Jews and secretly
forced them to cross the border near Zbaszyn in early July 1939, Polish military guards
forced the masses to return.\(^{20}\) In the summer of 1939, many stateless Jews still in Reich
territories tried to bribe border guards to let them into Poland, while any refugee still
left in Zbaszyn who could confirm that they had either secured a job in Poland or a
visa to emigrate, left the camp and moved into the interior of Poland. The unfortunates
who remained and whose numbers were slowly augmented by straggling refugees
sneaking over the border, fought growing conditions of paucity in order to survive.\(^{21}\)
By the middle of summer 1939, 16,000 Polish Jews banished from Germany now
resided in Poland and 12,000 of them needed refugee assistance. The Polish
government disbanded the refugee camp of Zbaszyn just days before Germany invaded


\(^{19}\) Maurer, “Die Ausweisung der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht,” 67.


\(^{21}\) Melzer, “The Jewish Problem in Poland, 1935-1938,” 226. See also Maurer, “Die Ausweisung
der Polnischen Juden und der Vorwand für die Kristallnacht,” 68.
Poland on September 1, 1939, marking the beginning of WWII and the subsequent acceleration of Nazi-led terror against the Jews of Europe.  

**G: Zbaszyn and Refugees’ Fates**

As already mentioned, over the first several months of 1939, some of the fugitives obtained permits to live with relatives in Poland, and some obtained immigration visas to other countries, but most faced an indeterminate confinement in varying degrees of want and deprivation in and around the township of Zbaszyn. Under the terms of the afore mentioned compromise between Germany and Poland, other refugees acquired temporary permits to return to Germany, settle their affairs, gather their family members, and then return to Poland. Some from this group were still in Germany when Hitler’s forces seized Danzig and invaded Poland, only to be interned in other circumstances. With careful research over the course of several years, I found numerous survivor accounts detailing personal and family experiences in the *Polenaktion* and the Zbaszyn internment. I have included only a few of the testimonies in this account to show both the differences and similarities of their experiences, and to illustrate the various methods by which refugees managed to escape their confinement at Zbaszyn.

The archives of Yad Vashem house nearly 100 letters and postcards sent by Zbaszyn refugees to family and friends over the course of their incarceration, eliciting

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help for their deteriorating circumstances. These communiqués are in Polish, Hebrew, English, Yiddish, Russian, but mostly German. A set of letters, donated to Yad Vashem, were sent by refugee, Max Karp to his cousin Gerhard in New York City. Having been arrested in Berlin very early in the morning of October 28, 1938, Max wrote how:

one [police] car after another left the barrack yard and a long queue of these vehicles meandered their way through the city under extreme noise of sirens of the cars; which seemingly had been done purposely to catch the attention of Berlin’s population regarding our forced transport. The people filled the streets; they were supposed to be witnesses of the historical exorcism of Jews from Germany.  

Max detailed his arrival at Neu Bentschen, the detainment of the transported refugees at the depot while guards checked passports, and their forced march to the border. Max was one of those kept in the confines of no-man’s-land over night before being marched to Zbaszyn:

After three kilometers, we reached an old cavalry barracks on the outskirts of Zbaszyn . . . We were then permitted to find shelter in these buildings that were mostly already occupied. People were laying and sleeping on sacks and piles of

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23 Letters of Max Karp, 17 November 1938, Zbaszyn, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, Israel, Record Group: “Letters from Zbaszyn.”
straw. Only those who had brought blankets could wrap themselves warmly, 
the others had to cover themselves with their coats or whatever else they had.\textsuperscript{24}

As more and more people arrived, the barracks and any other places of repose filled to 
excruciating capacity. “Due to the hardships and the enormous emotional trauma, there 
were and are many deaths here, also suicides, people who have fainted or have gone 
insane and others who are very ill.”\textsuperscript{25}

In subsequent letters, Max pleaded with Gerhard for continued help in securing 
necessary papers and family sponsorship so that he could escape Europe. Each letter 
testified to the growing anxiety of the refugees, how “the place had been blocked off 
by many police” to insure that no one left without authorization papers. On June 28, 
1939, Max wrote that he secured a temporary visa to return to Berlin “in order to take 
care of my affairs and to prepare for immigration.” In trying to acquire some kind of 
visa or travel permit, Max begged his cousin to send money so he could buy passage to 
Shanghai: “I am in a most frantic situation through Alfred’s rejection and Jacque’s 
silence and I am already very desperate. […] Dear Gerhard, please do your best and 
let me know as soon as possible.” His last letter from Berlin dated August 23, 1939, 
told of his plans for his departure to Shanghai and expressed his greatest gratitude to 
the families in America who had made his emigration possible. “We will hope that 
nothing will occur that may delay my departure or even make it impossible!” This was

\textsuperscript{24} Letters of Max Karp, 17 November 1938, Zbaszyn, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, Israel, 
Record Group: “Letters from Zbaszyn.”

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
the last letter received by any member of the family of Mendel Max Karp. His ultimate fate remains unknown.26

Several sources for Zbaszyn survivor accounts can be found in the archives and library of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The testimony of Isidor Kirshrot tells of his family’s experiences in the small town of Minden, Germany. On the morning of October 26, 1938, Isidor and his brother worked on different farms in separate hamlets outside of Minden. Isador’s tearful boss approached him with another civilian, who arrested him after confirming his identity. After calling his father in Minden, where the “round-up of Polish Jews had not yet started,” Isidor’s father came out to Uchte where Isidor worked and was also arrested by the Gestapo. Isidor’s brother was arrested near Oldenburg and sent to another camp on the border. Isidor never saw his brother again. The Nazis immediately sent both Isidor and his father to a collection camp in Hannover, where they later met Isidor’s mother and sister, who had packed luggage for the family. Isidor recounted the forced march from Neu Bentschen to the border:

Upon arrival at Neu Bentschen, the males had to leave the train. Also all the luggage was unloaded. My mother and my sister and all the other female personnel could stay on the train which transported them to Zbaszyn. The men had to march from the railroad station in Neu Bentschen to Zbaszyn carrying our suitcases. We were accompanied by SS Troops equipped with riding crops

26 Letters of Max Karp, 17 November 1938, Zbaszyn, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, Israel, Record Group: “Letters from Zbaszyn.”
and rifles. By whipping us with the riding crops and pushing us with the rifle butts they made us walk at a face pace. I was in good physical shape and was able to maintain the pace and carry the two suitcases. My father could not. It was either his life or the two suitcases. He let them go and we never saw them again. As it happened, one of the lost suitcases contained the jewelry and the money. We must have marched 3 to 5 kilometers. It was hell. Many of the older men fell down and were whipped by the SS. I don’t know if any of them died on that march.27

Prior to his incarceration at Zbaszyn, Isidor had attended school at the Auswanderungs-Lehrgut at Gross-Breesen and because of his affiliation there with Professor Bondy, the director of the school, Isidor became one of many ex-students of this professor whom he helped secure agricultural student visas to England. “I left the camp in May 1939, never realizing that I said goodbye to my father and sister for ever. I stopped in Minden for a few days to visit with my mother who was in Minden to liquidate our affairs there. I arrived in England on April 22, 1939.” Isidor then related how forty of the agricultural students immigrated to the US where a farm had been purchased in Virginia by a wealthy Jewish merchant “for the purpose of facilitating the emigration of Gross-Breeseners to the USA.”28 Isidor arrived in the US in June 1939 and immediately began working to obtain papers for his family. By late August 1939,


28 Ibid.
he secured entrance visas and sent them to Poland. Unknown to him at the time, his family had moved to Miedszeszyn, near Warsaw, when the camp at Zbaszyn closed down in late July 1939. He wrote in 1995:

On September 1, 1939 the Germans invaded Poland. I believe the papers allowing them to come to England never reached them. I have tried the Red Cross, UNRRA, HIAS, the International Tracing Service at Arolsen, and the archives at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to find a trace of my family. All attempts were fruitless. I don’t know when and where they perished. Going through the personal papers of my uncle, which I found in his wife’s possession in Brussels, I ran across 7 postcards from my mother to my uncle, the last dated July 7, 1942 from Miedszeszyn. Even what she could write sounded sad, and if you could read between the lines, it must have been a horrible life for them.29

Isidor went on to enlist in the US Army, eventually becoming a Captain supplying rations to Jewish refugee camps in Austria after the war. He ended his military career as a retired Colonel on July 1, 1974.

The published oral history of Thea Feliks Eden, transcribed and edited by Irene Reti and Valerie Jean Chase, offers a poignant recollection of the Zbaszyn experience through the eyes of a child survivor:

A day you get up – it’s like any other day. Suddenly there are Nazis at the door, and they tell you you’re leaving your home, right now. […] You leave your

house. You leave your possessions. You leave everything [...] and you are shoved on a train. You don’t know where you are going. On that train they lock the doors. It’s full of Jews, being sent somewhere [...] they stop the train and start calling out names in a certain tone of voice which means doom for somebody.30

Thea remembered circumstances that she described as “horrifying,” as dozens of men, women and children inhabited a little attic “that had water leaking through it because the building had been condemned.” Thea and her family were interned at Zbaszyn for ten months, a widowed mother with four children. Thea also recounted women giving birth in abandoned horse stalls and people slowly dying from diseases. “You felt that death was no longer the enemy. It became a friend in many cases. Those notions all got twisted around. You wouldn’t expect a child to have thoughts like that. And yet they were there because you saw people kneeling over, people getting very sick. I think I had typhus.”31 Thea’s mother worked endlessly at trying to secure a means of emigration for her and her children. Finally, Thea and two of her siblings left Zbaszyn on Kindertransports to England, leaving the youngest behind with Thea’s mother:

I saw my mother the last time, oddly enough, on my 13th birthday [August 25, 1939]. My mother was really on her own. She had that struggle for years until they executed her, essentially. It took a long time to find out how that

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31 Reti & Chase, A Transported Life, 26.
happened. For some reason I felt compelled to find out where she had died, how she had died. [. . .] I had heard that she had moved back to her original home town on the Polish-Russian border [. . .] I discovered twelve years later, by constant inquiries from a doctor who had been a doctor in the area that the only people who escaped were four adult males. They had rounded up everybody else who was Jewish and just … shot them. That was the end of the line for them. My youngest brother, Leopold, was with her.\textsuperscript{32}

Thea and two of her siblings only managed to survive because of the sacrifice of a mother who knew she had to send them away to save them.

Gerd Korman told the story of his family’s expulsion, internment, and years of separation through different escape channels in his memoir, \textit{Nightmare’s Fairy Tale}. Gerd lived in the mill with his mother and younger brother, while his father had to find accommodations elsewhere. Gerd remembered experiences in the mill:

\begin{quote}
[Mutti] spent hours preparing sandwiches for the mill’s five hundred deportees: her children would have their morning glass of tea plus bread and butter, or, later, just bread and jam. No one ever tried to take bread away from her, even when raw violence flared at mealtimes as hungry, cold, scared refugees fought over an extra slice of bread, hot soup, potatoes, or, for a while, meat when it
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} Reti & Chase, \textit{A Transported Life}, 36.
was served as part of the main noontime dinner. No wonder I remember eating only Mutti’s bread and butter in Zbaszyn.\textsuperscript{33}

Gerd’s father was one who left Zbaszyn and returned to Germany to settle the family’s affairs and tried to obtain immigration papers to somewhere, anywhere for himself and his family. While in Hamburg, he secured passage on the ill-fated \textit{St. Louis}, thinking that once he got to Cuba, which had a favored position for immigration to the US, that there he could secure visas for the rest of the family. The fiasco trip only landed him in a detention camp back in Holland, separated from his wife and sons who still languished in Zbaszyn. After efforts by Gerd’s mother to secure a position for her sons in a Zionist youth group going to Palestine failed, she managed to get her sons out of Poland on the \textit{Kindertransports} to England, where they arrived August 29, 1939, just days before Germany invaded Poland. Gerd’s mother secured her own immigration as a German Jew to the US in 1940. The family reunited after the war in New York City, in 1946.

Joseph stands as one witness within a relatively select group of recorded testimonies to the events of the Zbaszyn deportation and internment. While most refugees at Zbaszyn faced internment for nearly a year, Joseph found an escape from Europe and the impending Holocaust after only six months.

Half a year passed quickly and every week had another attraction, another experience that formed our personality. Naturally everybody was working to

\textsuperscript{33} Korman, \textit{Nightmare’s Fairy Tale}, 45.
be released soon and emphasizing his immigration. Numerous Chaverim went illegally to Palestine, led by Shelichim, who came from Palestine to liberate them. The news that I was called to Manila as cantor gave me more confidence and hope. The formalities for getting the visa gave me a chance to see Warsaw for a few days and – imagine, all by myself without a guard as originally planned – but I had to make a number of pictures, just in case I [was to] run away. The few days I spent there gave me a good impression of the Jewish status in Poland and I never forget the uplifting service in the Klomatzki Synagogue and the Jewish life in the Ghetto. The Jewish patriarchs that roamed the street – the sweating Jew carrying heavy loads – the carefree children playing on the streets or in the dark Ghettoyards – and the frightened look of many a Jew ... I cannot forget you [. . .] In the middle of April I had all my papers fixed and was permitted to stay four weeks in Germany to arrange my transportation. The committee for the refugees, as well as all the teachers, gave me a fine farewell party, handing me a precious certificate for the services I rendered. Teachers and children accompanied me to the railway station and I felt honored and proud to have worked successfully and to have given to my students and to the Jews in distress ideas that strengthen, prayers that uplift, songs that enlighten. The train rolls out of the station and hundreds wav their hands with Shalom and Beracha on their lips – and we passed that thornful and tearful road that we walked months ago –
and with prayers of gratefulness and gratitude for my salvation and those of my brothers and sisters I head for a new world.34

Joseph left his refugee camp imprisonment at Zbaszyn and found a new world freedom in the Far Eastern community of Manila. He is but one of a small number of Zbaszyn deportees who were able to obtain papers for non-European immigration. Those who found refuge in other countries of Europe faced futures of escalating persecution, incarceration, and extermination.

**H: Summary**

The expulsion of the Polish Jews from Germany in the Nazi-labeled *Polenaktion* and the internment of these refugees at Zbaszyn have been pushed into near obscurity in the genre of Holocaust studies over the past seven decades by the mass scholarship concerning the historical significance of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9, 1938. Historians of the *Polenaktion* and the Zbaszyn refugee camp concur that “it was the forced repatriation of Polish Jews that was a paradigm for later Nazi anti-Jewish measures” and not *Kristallnacht*.35

*In der Ausweisungsaktion von 1938 wurde ein Paradigma für spätere nationa-lsozialistische Maßnahmen gegen die Juden gesehen: Sie war die*

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34 Joseph Cysner, "Zbaszyn," October 30, 1938, p.10, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01

erste größere Deportation, die die Koordinierung von Polizei, Reichsbahn, Diplomatie und Finanzbehörden erforderte. Daß Polen nicht fähig and nicht gewillt war, das Lager in Zbaszyn aufzulösen, sei ein Symbol dafür, daß es Deutschland gelang, andere Nationen mitverantwortlich für seine Judenpolitik zu machen. Die internationale Öffentlichkeit aber habe gleichgültig zugesehen.  

Maurer says that the deportation events, the Polenaktion and the subsequent internment of the refugees at Zbaszyn, required an extensive coordination of the German national bureaucracy in order to facilitate the actions and that this offered a foundation upon which all subsequent events against the Jews relied, Kristallnacht included. It also signaled to Nazi Germany that the international public offered no sizable objections to Germany’s anti-Jewish measures. Couple these observations with the shooting of vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan, and Kristallnacht could be instigated.

With the massive pogrom of destruction against the Jews on November 9, 1938 that followed the Polenaktion by less than two weeks, most of the identities of the victims of the mass deportation of Polish Jews from Germany and of those hidden in the obscurity of Zbaszyn have been lost forever. Only through the personal accounts of the few survivors can we know about the fate of the masses. As I investigated the life story of Joseph Cysner and traced his steps through Europe to his eventual

immigration to the Philippines, I discovered that historians for the Temple Verband Synagogue in Hamburg, where Cysner had a lifetime appointment as a cantor, knew nothing of his arrest and deportation to Zbaszyn. They had merely listed his fate as unknown. And even though the fate of the vast majority of the victims of the Polenaktion and the Zbaszyn internment still is and always will be unknown, the recovered memoir of Joseph Cysner, his sufferings, his service, and his rescue, stands as a witness for them all.
III. Jewish Settlement in the Far East, 16th C – 20th C

A: Prologue - Jewish Diaspora and the “Port Jew” Identity

The Jewish Diaspora is a term rightfully included in nearly every era of human history. In its broadest application, it refers to any and all communities of Jews who, by reasons of exile or escape, evictions or migrations, reside in any part of the world outside their home land of Israel. The Hebrew term Galut describes forced relocations of the Jewish people since the time of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, the wanderings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and perhaps even from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. But whether we are talking about ancient historical Jewish expulsions, such as those executed by the Assyrians in the 8th century BCE, the Babylonians in the 6th century BCE, the Romans in the 2nd century CE, or about forced migrations in the modern eras induced by persecutions from Christians and Muslims, Communists or fascists, the result has always been the same – Jews of the Diaspora surviving through methods of acculturation, assimilation, and accommodation. The question of how a Jew remains a Jew while living in a non-Jewish world has created schisms of thought for centuries. Recently, scholars identified a cultural and economic adaptation of a certain class of Jews in the Diaspora and labeled it the “Port Jew” identity.¹ In examining the Diaspora of

Jews to the Far East, for contextual comparisons with Jews in the Philippines, it became evident to me that certain arguments supporting the Port Jew theories could be, and should be, evaluated in relationship to the history of Jewish settlement in the Far East in general, and to the Philippines in particular.

David Sorkin, professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin Madison, identified definitive characteristics of the Port Jew that drew from several topics: migration and immigration practices of Jews relocating to port cities; commercial utility of Jewish merchants to larger non-Jewish port societies; forms of legal and social emancipation for the port Jews; the re-education or re-conversion to Judaism of the port city Diaspora Jews; and the intensification of the Jewish identity in port Jewish communities. Although I wish to apply some finer points of Sorkin’s thesis of the Port Jew identity to several historical Jewish communities in the Far East, Sorkin adamantly narrowed the definition of the Port Jew to the Sephardic and Italian Jews of the 18th and 19th centuries who settled in Mediterranean, Atlantic, and New World ports. Sorkin felt it necessary to caution against massaging the Port Jew identity to include Jews in port cities outside this geographical and chronological framework. While I understand his desire to preserve “the historical specificity of the social type of the port Jew” within the study of the emancipation of Europe’s Jews during that particular era of Modern Jewish History, the characteristics certainly

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apply to the phenomenon of the Diaspora of Jews to the Far East. Jonathan Goldstein, Research Associate of the Harvard University John K. Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, also feels that Sorkin’s thesis of port Jew identity can “apply to contemporaneous Asian Jewish communities” in India, China, and Singapore. Before applying the characteristics of the Port Jew identity to the Diaspora Jews of the Far East, it is important first to understand the details of those characteristics.

In the genre of Modern Jewish History, epics have been written discussing the \textit{Haskala}, Jewish Enlightenment, and the sequence of events that led to the acculturation and sometimes assimilation of Jews into western European society in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, marking a time of transition of Jewish life from the medieval to the modern. At the heart of these studies stood the treatise of Court Jews as instigators of the modernization of Europe’s Jews. But it is only in the last two decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century that serious historical considerations identified others as models of Judaic modernity – the Port Jews. Contemporaries of the Court Jews, the Port Jews shared several distinctions with their mercantilist counterparts in Europe’s royal courts and it is in both their similarities and their differences that the Port Jew

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identity lies. Court Jews, mostly Ashkenazim of central Europe, fulfilled basic economic functions for the royal courts of Europe that secured these Jews favored positions of power and prosperity. In today’s societies, these same services of economic utility identify Port Jews as fellow “avatars of modernization” in a Jewish ascent. However, the Sephardim of Spain and Portugal, and not the Ashkenazi of central Europe, provided the seagoing wayfarers who established trading networks, connecting Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean with new ports of industry throughout the Atlantic seaboard.

The value of this commerce to the host nations provided the Port Jews with heightened status within the societies in these foreign lands. The hypothesis is that the advancement of legal and social privileges of these Port Jews abroad influenced the status of Jews back home. And as the status of these Port Jews increased, they were allowed to re-discover their “Jewishness” and either re-convert to Judaism from their forced conversions to Christianity, or acculturate their Jewishness in accommodating the cultural practices of their host societies. Rather than assimilating and losing their distinctiveness as Jews, the Port Jews enjoyed an intensification of their own Jewish identity that encouraged them to develop communal and social institutions that strengthened their Jewish community, rather than weakening it. This is indicative of modern Judaism and its adjustments to the modern world that have allowed it to co-exist next to its modern non-Jewish neighbors. So how do these

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characteristics of the Port Jew identity translate into the history of Jews in the Far East?

At the core of the identification of the Port Jews social type lays the economic study of international commerce of the time and the utilitarian presence of Jews in those commercial endeavors. While Sorkin assigns his Port Jew identity to the emerging post-medieval merchant shipping industry establishing seafaring trade routes between seaports of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic worlds, this same process of long-distance trade routes and the dispersion of peoples and ideas by virtue of transcultural exchange through trade is a process that has been going on since ancient times. However, situating the dispersion of Jewish communities along those ancient trade routes, whether transcontinental or transoceanic, can only be legitimately verified in the last several centuries. While some scholars of Jewish history suggest that Babylonian Jews would have, in all probability, traveled to all provinces of the Persian Empire in the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE, taking them to the eastern-most borders of the Persian Empire on the Asian continent, it is as yet unsubstantiated with direct empirical evidence. Professor Richard Foltz, of the Department of Religion at the University of Florida and specialist in the religious traditions along the Silk Road, offered this insight:

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6 Bonnie M. Harris, “The Form and Function of Temple Construction in the Ancient Near East as Evidence of Trans-cultural Religious Exchange” (Master’s Thesis, San Diego State University, 2002),

It does nevertheless seem likely that many of the post-exilic Judean settlers in Persian lands took up commerce. It would have been consistent with later patterns for them to set up trade networks with relatives or other Judeans in other parts of the Persian Empire or elsewhere. Thus, influences picked up by Judean communities in one cultural environment could easily travel to connected communities in another. It is beginning in the Persian period that a number of Iranian beliefs and concepts appear to have worked their way into the religious tradition of the Judeans, a tradition that would later evolve into Judaism.  

Foltz’s observations allude to the “later patterns” of the Port Jew social type that Sorkin had named and defined. It is apparent that ancient trade routes, especially the Silk Road, allowed Jewish traders to function in the same utilitarian commercial fashion, with a network of trading posts between other Jewish stops, as did the Port Jews of the 18th and 19th centuries. And the comparisons do not stop there.

Sorkin succinctly defined the Port Jew social type as the “merchant Jews of sephardi” extraction who “re-appropriated” their Jewishness in their diasporic locations. In that process, they had accommodated their re-found Jewishness to the larger culture in which they lived, thereby “understanding Judaism to be fully compatible with it.” This acculturation of Sephardic Judaism is not unlike what

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8 Foltz, “Judaism and the Silk Route,” 10.

Foltz describes among the Babylonian Jews who had adapted their Judean religion to the beliefs of their larger Persian hosts, and in extension, to those outlying regions in the Asian provinces of the Persian Empire that Jewish traders would have inhabited. Therefore aspects of the Port Jew identity that Sorkin ties to the transoceanic trading routes of the Sephardi merchants of the 18th and 19th centuries had a prototype in the Jewish Diaspora along ancient transcontinental trading routes of the Asian continent centuries earlier. This becomes even more apparent when we look at the history of Jews in China.

**B: Ancient Jewish Community in Kaifeng, China**

In honoring Sorkin’s caution not to “dilute the historical specificity of the social type of the port Jew,” which he defined as the Sephardic and Italian Jews of the 18th and 19th centuries who settled in Mediterranean, Atlantic, and New World ports, I will adhere to his distinction of the Jews in port cities when discussing Jewish Diaspora in the Far East, but only partially when referring to the ancient Jewish merchants of China since they did not technically reside in a seaport area. They did, however, inhabit a center for inland trade associated with the great Silk Road, the ancient trading route connecting merchants of the west with goods from the east. In the study of the Jewish Diaspora to China, the unique settlement at Kaifeng separates China from all other Far Eastern nations recipient of Jewish migrants.
Jewish settlers began arriving in ancient China during the late Tang Dynasty, approximately 900 CE, arriving in Chang’an, the ancient capital of northern China and eastern terminus of the trans-Asiatic Silk Road, along with other Muslim, Nestorian Christian, Manichaean, and Zoroastrian traders. Two to three hundred years later, a Jewish community that lasted for nearly one thousand years was well established in Kaifeng, the capital of the northern Song Dynasty.\textsuperscript{10} The earliest evidence of a synagogue in Kaifeng dates it to 1163 CE, when an inscribed stele recorded the authorization for the construction of a Jewish house of worship in the Song capital. Over the next seven hundred years, the synagogue underwent a series of reconstructions and renovations until its final destruction by flood waters in 1860.\textsuperscript{11} By this time, the Jewish community of Kaifeng had been so thoroughly assimilated into the oriental culture of Kaifeng, having lost its knowledge of Hebrew and most of its traditional Judaic practices that the Jewish community at Kaifeng, as a Jewish entity, ceased to exist. However, descendants continued to identify themselves as Jews genealogically. So how does one apply the concept of Jews in port cities to the Jewish community of Kaifeng?

Since neither Sorkin nor others have recorded a study of the traits of Jews in port cities as opposed to Port Jews, other than to say that the former phenomenon is an


“unlimited subject with neither fixed geographical or chronological boundaries,” it is reasonable to presume that aside from the identity of Port Jews as a specific people in a specific time and place, other social traits and cultural practices could be borrowed in defining similar characteristics of Jews in port cities. Although Kaifeng was not a seaport location, it was a metropolitan trading center of more than a million people at the “hub of an overland and river communications network.” Kaifeng functioned as a center of international import and export for the trading highway of the Silk Road as well as the water highways for the port cities in the Yangzi delta. The characteristics of Kaifeng that attracted Jewish merchants reappeared in nearly the same form with seafaring merchants in port cities centuries later. Irene Eber, the Louis Frieberg Professor of East Asian Studies emeritus at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, believed Jewish traders also settled in Yangzhou and Ningbo. And while the characteristic of the commercial function of Jewish traders in Kaifeng bears important similarities with Port Jews of later centuries and other Jews in port cities, one characteristic of the Jews of Kaifeng that made their experience unique was their eventual loss of Jewish culture due to their total isolation from other Jewish communities and their degree of assimilation into Chinese society.


14 Ibid.
As Jewish merchants began arriving in Kaifeng in the 12th century, Eber contends that Kaifeng Jewry was “strengthened and reinforced by contacts with other Jewish communities within and without China.”\textsuperscript{15} When this transcontinental networking of Jewish merchants, another specific trait of the Port Jew identity that can be applied to Jews in port cities in general, declined and land travel as the primary means of dispersion was replaced by the advancement of seafaring trade in later centuries, the Kaifeng Jews in China lost their Jewish connections with the outside world. This resulted in their complete isolation within their host nation, which then in turn caused, what Eber defined as, the “sinification” of their Jewish identity, taking on Chinese names, intermarrying with multiple Chinese wives and concubines, organizing into Chinese lineage families, and taking careers as Chinese officials.\textsuperscript{16}

Once the Kaifeng synagogue underwent its final destruction, never to be rebuilt, and its partial Torah scrolls were sold, the already well assimilated Jewish community lost its cultural norms that served to preserve a modicum of Jewish identity – knowledge of the Hebrew language, practice of Jewish \textit{kashrut} dietary laws, and a rabbi or other Jewish community leader. The only trait that still remains to identify descendants as Jews is their genealogical traditions, which Chinese family organizational practices preserved. By the 18th and 19th centuries, “the Jews had

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{16} Eber, “Kaifeng Jews,” 22-23.
blended into their environment so completely that they were indistinguishable from
their Chinese neighbors."¹⁷ They had appropriated Confucianism so thoroughly into
their lives that they became another syncretic sectarian Chinese community, of
which there were many. Eber stresses that although this syncretization with Chinese
customs altered Kaifeng’s Judaism so completely as to be almost indistinguishable
as Jewish at all, it did adopt familial practices that preserved a memory of its Jewish
origins.¹⁸

**C: Baghdadi Jews in Asian Ports**

Just as Kaifeng’s Jewish community was being swallowed-up by the larger
Chinese culture, another Jewish presence, Baghdadi merchants Jews of the 18th
century, began arriving on the waves of European commercial shipping ventures in
India, China, Singapore, Burma, and Japan. Goldstein, champion of the “Asian Port
Jew” treatise, adopted Sorkin’s Port Jew identity theory based on the maritime
Sephardi merchants of Atlantic port shipping, and applied parts of its characteristics
to the Baghdadi merchant Jews of Asia and the Far East. In doing so, he situated his
treatise within the migration theories of US immigration historian Caroline Golab.
This may be the first attempt of a fellow academician to define specific

¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸ Eber, “Kaifeng Jews,” 32.
characteristics of Jews in port cities as a cultural Jewish class that is distinct from the Sephardic Port Jews of the Atlantic world.

Goldstein believes that Golab’s definition of migrants, people relocating from one country to another without the clear intention of establishing permanent residency, such as “persons of Jewish origin temporarily living or working in ports,” may be the better description of the Baghdadi Jewish communities of Asia and the Far East, rather than using solely the characteristics of the Port Jew identity. While the feature of the Baghdadi Jews in creating a mercantile network of fellow Baghdadi Jewish merchants in Asian and Far Eastern port cities resembles traits of the Sephardic Jewish merchant class of Sorkin’s studies, other characteristics owe more to Golab’s theses of migration and immigration practices.

Golab’s excellent treatment of migratory practices of nations of people wandering in and out of economic centers of the Atlantic world detailed distinctions between migrants and immigrants. And while her treatise expounded on the masses of humanity that came to the shores of America throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, her definitions of migrant laborers versus immigrant settlers offered academic enlightenment for population relocation studies of earlier eras. Golab emphatically stated that “immigrants were people who had left their homelands with

no intention of returning.”²⁰ For whatever reasons, they left former locations with a sense of permanence in their move, establishing new home and new communities in new lands. Hence, they journeyed with their families, their possessions, and their intentions to improve their lives.

These traits, according to Golab, contrasted dichotomously with the characteristics of transient migrant laborers. Members in this latter group usually ventured out alone, making a temporary move for purposes of acquiring some degree of wealth that could be taken back to their permanent homes and families. In some cases, migrant laborers transformed into immigrant settlers when conditions, regional or global, prevented their return to former homes and former lifestyles. Whether one saw oneself as a permanent settler or as a temporary worker affected the manner in which they related to the host environment wherein they resided, either developing a sense of belonging and “citizenship” as immigrants, or remaining aloof and separated culturally, socially, and economically, as migrants. Self-perceptions often remained static even when circumstances changed. “Migrant laborers became immigrants only when conscious choice or force of circumstance caused them to see their futures” permanently in their host lands rather than in their former homes. “Many of those who converted to immigrant status nevertheless remained migrant-laborers in attitude and psychology.”²¹ These distinctions affected

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²¹ Golab, Immigrant Destinations, 49.
how the host society viewed the incoming foreign nationals as well, which then in turn influenced the eventual reception of the newcomers into the receiving populace. From Golab’s treatise, it is evident that the Baghdadi merchant Jews who settled in Asia and the Far East certainly carried the characteristics of a migrant people who then became immigrants. They came seeking fortunes to be readily consumed by families and selves in their home environments, and then eventually settled permanently in the commercial centers where they traded, building families and communities, as well as businesses.

Although called Baghdadi Jews, Arab-speaking Jews heralded from more than Middle Eastern locations alone, as the Ottoman Empire of the 18th and 19th centuries extended from the Persian Gulf in the east to the Straits of Gibraltar in the west, and from Austria and Slovakia in the north to Yemen in the south. As the Ottoman Empire began to decline in the early decades of the 19th century, Jews from the eastern regions of the empire began migrating east, pursuing economic opportunities as migrant laborers in the wake of British Imperialism. “Encouraged by the British to go to India to expand commerce,” Baghdadi mercantilist Jews established trading networks that encompassed Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.22 Many of these wealthy and influential Jews, either sensing the imminent demise of their nation-empire, or merely favoring the “greater privileges

available from Great Britain,” traded their Ottoman citizenship for British, giving them greater legal status and protection as they took on immigrant characteristics. Thus as the British Empire rolled through Asia establishing British colonies, Baghdadi Jews were not far behind, setting up business empires and becoming “leaders of Asian industry, banking, trade, and real estate.”23 With extraordinary positions of power and influence, Baghdadi Jews in Asia and the Far East had the freedom to form their cultural and social lives around their own religious institutions.

The Baghdadi-Sephardic wave of Jewish merchants and migrant/immigrant workers to Asia and the Far East may be classified as the First Wave of Jewish Migration to Asia and the Orient. The following cursory discussion of 18th and 19th century merchant Jews in India and China can be carried further both geographically and academically. Little to no scholarship exists on the early histories of Sephardic Jewish communities in such places as Singapore, Thailand, Japan, or the Philippines. Goldstein augmented his treatise concerning the Sephardic Merchant Jews of India and China with a recent work discussing Asian Port Jewish identity in Singapore, Harbin, and Manila. In it he claimed that “Baghdadi Jewish merchants reached Singapore” by the mid 19th century and enjoyed civic and commercial privileges from the moment they arrived, living a prosperous and peaceful life in the British colonial port city then devoid of internal and external strife.24 Singapore’s first

23 Ibid., 142.
Jewish settler, Sir Stamford Raffles, a Baghdadi Jew from India, established a trading post in 1819. A census in 1830 recorded nine Jewish traders in Singapore. By 1833, the numbers had increased to twenty-two and by 1858 there were twenty Jewish families in Singapore. Similar terse histories can be found for Sephardic Jewish origins in Kobe, Japan, in Bangkok, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. Certainly it is not necessary here to offer a concise history of Baghdadi-Sephardic Jewish merchants throughout Asia and the Far East, although more studies such as those utilized here are sorely needed, but it is important to understand the role these prosperous Jewish merchants played in the later phases of Jewish migrations to Asia and the Far East. The foothold of Baghdadi Jewish merchants first established in India spread their power and influence throughout Asia and the Far East in true Port Jew fashion.

Baghdadi Jewish merchants arrived in Bombay in the late 19th century and soon established economic empires that became the root of expansive Jewish merchant operations throughout India, sending out off-shoots of Jewish-owned trading centers for the next century. These merchant family empires that impacted the economies of all the regions tied into their trading networks, attracted Jews from western lands seeking the benefits of wealth and community readily found in the seaport

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commercial centers. Jewish populations of Sephardim steadily grew and by the end of the 19th century, Calcutta, as an example, had a Jewish population of over eighteen hundred. When the British-Chinese Treaty of Nanjing was signed in 1842, opening up ports in China for foreign trade following the Opium Wars, Jewish merchant empires in India soon set up branches in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

By 1882, the Sephardic community of Baghdadi Jews in Hong Kong numbered about sixty and the only synagogue in Hong Kong, Ohel Leah, was built in 1901 and 1902. Unlike the Kaifeng Jews of China, who had assimilated so completely into their host society as to have lost all identity as Jews, the Baghdadi-Sephardic Jews retained their cultural norms that readily identified them as Jews in thought and practice. With their first cantor coming from Baghdad, Hong Kong Jews predominantly spoke Arabic as late as 1925. Hong Kong Jewry appears to be one of those groups of people who first came to Asia as migrant laborers, employed by wealthy Baghdadi Jews who provided a cultural, educational, and social community of Judaism for their employees, thus separating them from the dominant Chinese culture. These Sephardic Jews retained those separatist practices when their migrant status evolved into a more permanent persona as immigrants.

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Shanghai was one of four ports along China’s coast that opened to foreign trade, along with Hong Kong. The first Jewish settlers in Shanghai arrived in 1848, being Sephardic Jews from Baghdad and Bombay. By the 1870s, the Shanghai Jews began renting buildings for religious observances and by 1887 the Beth El Synagogue community formed. By 1900, another congregation was created and schools and benevolent organizations soon followed. The Jewish community of Shanghai numbered about 700 by 1921, with three synagogues.\textsuperscript{29} Interestingly enough, it was during this time of growth that the Sephardic Jewish community of Shanghai tried to revitalize the Jewish community in Kaifeng but the plight of the persecuted Jews in Russia and eastern Europe seized the attention of would-be Jewish rescuers in the east. The wave of Ashkenazi Jews fleeing the pogroms of the Russian Revolution and the persecutions of the German Third Reich augmented the peaceful and prosperous Sephardic Jewish communities of Asia and the Orient with multitudes of helpless and destitute refugees.

\textbf{D: Russian Jews in Harbin and other Asian Ports}

Much like the earlier Jewish community of Kaifeng that settled around an inland trading hub rather than a seaside merchant port, Harbin is another inland Chinese city that hosted a rather sizable Jewish community of merchant families. Harbin

\textsuperscript{29} Earns, “The Shanghai-Nagasaki Judaic Connection, 1859-1924,” 158-159. See also “Shanghai Jewish History,” in Shanghai Jewish Center – A Project of Chabad, \url{http://www.chinajewish.org/JewishHistory.htm} (accessed October 15, 2006).
emerged from its small village status along the banks of the Sungari River in the late 19th century to that of a commercial center at the joining of the river with the building of the Chinese Eastern Railroad by Russia.\textsuperscript{30} It was no small irony that Jewish merchants enjoyed greater freedoms both politically and economically at this Russian-ruled outpost in China then they did back at home in mother Russia, which built the railroad that carried its persecuted Jews to their merchant networking systems formed along the new trading highway. Five to six million Russian Jews confined to the Pale of Settlement region extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea, endured severe restrictions limiting their residential choices, their economic involvement, and their educational freedoms. Not only didn’t these restrictions apply to Manchuria where the Russian Jews immigrated to in significant numbers, but they were indeed welcomed and thereby encouraged to build an economic trading network along the rail line.\textsuperscript{31}

This movement of significant numbers of Russian refugee Jews eastward can be classified as the Second Wave of Jewish Migration to Asia and the Orient. But unlike the Baghdadi Jews who first came predominantly as migrant workers looking to make their fortunes to send back to families at home, the Russian Jews came as immigrating families with all their worldly goods that they could carry in search of a better place to call home, taking advantage of the transportation highway and its

\textsuperscript{30} Goldstein, “The Sorkin and Golab Theses,” 188.

need for merchant establishments. This is a perfect example of the utility of the Port
Jew identity at work along the extension of the Trans-Siberian rail line with the
Chinese Eastern Railroad. Russia’s Jews developed a trading network similar to the
However, the Ashkenazi Jews, no doubt due in part to their larger immigrating
numbers over a shorter period of time, never realized economic success in the same
proportions as the Sephardic merchant class enjoyed.

After a mere five years, a handful of Jewish merchants in Harbin expanded into
a Jewish population of over five hundred. These were then joined by families of
discharged Jewish soldiers of the defeated Russian army following the Russo-
Japanese War in 1905, as well as by thousands of refugees fleeing pogroms and civil
unrest following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. By 1922, the Jewish community
of Harbin, numbering about 15,000, was merely 3% of Harbin’s overall population
boom of nearly half a million inhabitants. Following the demise of the Russian
Empire, Harbin was ruled over the next thirty-five years by an international coalition
of powers that included Chinese warlords, the Soviet Union, Japan, and the
Communist Regime of China. In spite of its political turnovers, Harbin harbored a
prosperous Jewish community till 1940, when the Jewish community numbered
about 2,800, significantly lower than a decade earlier. According to Goldstein, the

Harbin Jewish Community,” 191.

33 Goldstein, “The Sorkin and Golab Theses,” 189.
prosperity of Harbin’s Jews, whose annual profits at this time totaled nearly 13 million yen, allowed the Jewish community security in their religious and cultural lives, as well as allowing them to shelter fellow refugees fleeing persecutions in Europe. The Russian Jewish Community of Harbin became the hub of Russian-Jewish immigration to other destinations in Asia and the Far East.\textsuperscript{34}

In the previously mentioned Baghdadi-Sephardic Jewish communities of India, China, and Singapore, Russian Jews augmented already existing Jewish communities in varying population numbers. Their presence was never really significant in Hong Kong, Bombay, or Singapore, but Ashkenazi Jews from Russia, “most of whom came via Harbin,” arrived in far greater numbers in Shanghai than all other Asian port cities during the closing decade of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. They built their own synagogue, Oihelo Moishe Synagogue, in 1907 and increased in numbers, reaching a population of about 1,000 by the 1920s, exceeding in size their Sephardic co-religionists.\textsuperscript{35}

The distinction between these two Jewish communities was not confined to size, but also to their affluence. While the older Baghdadi-Sephardic Jewish community of Shanghai always remained the smaller, it “included some of the most illustrious

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\footnote{35} Earns, “The Shanghai-Nagasaki Judaic Connection, 1859-1924,” 159.
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names of Shanghai’s commercial and social roster.”  

The degree of economic success enjoyed by the Sephardic Jewish community of Shanghai eclipsed that of the Russian Jewish immigrants, who had named themselves the Shanghai Ashkenazi Jewish Communal Association for the express purpose of separating themselves from the Sephardic community.  

David Kranzler, professor at the City University of New York and historian on rescuers of Jews from the Holocaust, maintained that the separation of the two communities stemmed from the Sephardic Jewish community who viewed the Ashkenazim as lower class citizens, “ex-soldiers, escapees from Siberian exile, political exiles, and adventurers” who engaged in baser economic trades such as “dope peddling, white slavery, and the opening of bars.”  

These prejudices were only exasperated when tens of thousands of White Russians, including a significant number of Russian Jews, fled the horrors of the Russian Revolution in 1917, which over the next two decades resulted in an Ashkenazi Russian Jewish Shanghai settlement of approximately 4,000. Golab’s migration theories dealing with the psychology of migrants versus immigrants could account for the separatist tendencies of the two distinctly different Jewish communities of Shanghai.

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38 Ibid., 58.
While the Shanghai Jewish settlement grew, Harbin’s Russian Jewish population diminished. Its 1929 Jewish populace of 10,000 fell to about 2,500 by 1939. “Its position as the leading Russian-Jewish community in the Far East” passed away with the further engorgement of the Ashkenazi Jewish community in Shanghai with nearly 20,000 refugee Jews fleeing Nazi Europe. The Third Phase of Jewish Migration to Asia and the Far East, that of Ashkenazi Jews from Germany, Austria, Poland, France, and other war-torn nations of Europe, followed the migratory paths of its Baghdadi and Russian predecessors.

**E: Europe’s Ashkenazi Refugee Jews in Asian Ports**

The European Jewish refugee crisis of the 1930s and 1940s produced an incredible forced migration of stateless, persecuted Jews from nearly every country of both western and eastern Europe, as fleeing Jewish families attempted to find safe havens from the accelerating antisemitic policies of Germany’s Third Reich. The Jewish population of Europe, numbering between nine and ten million persons, would, in the course of twelve years of Nazi terrorism, lose over two-thirds of its members, some due in part to compulsory and voluntary emigrations, but mostly due to fascist policies of torture and extermination.

As has been discussed above, Jewish refugees began exiting Europe, specifically Germany and Austria, in 1933, reaching maximum emigration numbers in 1939. While the majority of Europe’s fleeing Jews headed west, a relatively small number
of European refugee Jews fled to the east in the Third Wave of Jewish migration to Asia and the Far East, finding safe ports in existing Jewish diasporic locations in China, India, Singapore, Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines. Receiving these predominantly Askenazi Jews presented extreme difficulties for the already established Jewish merchant communities of both Sephardic and Russian origins.

Cantor Joseph Cysner’s odyssey illustrates the obstacles tens of thousands of Jewish refugees endured in their quests to flee Europe and find safety in the Far East. Having already suffered the loss of his citizenship rights, leaving him and over half a million other Jews in Germany and Austria with no legal recourse, Joseph and others endured the confiscation of their property and assets, termination of their jobs, expulsions from schools, random acts of violence, brutal arrests, forced deportations and/or incarcerations, starvation, and depravations. If one was able to survive these and amass the small fortune sometimes necessary to secure travel papers and passenger tickets, the actual journeys themselves could take anywhere from four to ten weeks to accomplish. For several years, when international immigration quotas drastically inhibited refugees’ chances in obtaining visas and other necessary travel permits to western countries, many refugees opted for more immediate travel opportunities to uncertain destinations in the Far East rather than risk their lives waiting for an immigration quota number to a western nation.

Depending on the time frame in which refugees left, two major routes provided transports for refugee Jews from various points of departure in Europe to ports in the
Far East. From the early 1930s to mid 1940, the first route, by sea, carried fleeing refugees from ports mostly in Italy on to Alexandria, then through the Suez Canal to ports of call in Bombay, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, Shanghai, and Kobe and Yokohama, Japan. Other vessels that left from seaports in the north, such as Bremen or Hamburg, usually sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, extending the already four week voyage time to the Far East by another six weeks.\(^{39}\) Refugees often had to pay for first class passage because they were the only berths still available and shipping companies were known to charge exorbitant prices in times of extreme demand. Ships could be booked six months in advance and carry as many as one thousand Jewish refugees per voyage. The other major route of transportation to the Far East was the land route across Russia and Siberia via the Trans-Siberian Railway and Chinese Eastern Railroad that had brought the Russian Jews to Asia and the Far East two decades earlier.

When Denmark and Norway fell to the Germans in April 1940 and Italy entered the war in June 1940, the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas’ ports closed to commercial shipping, so that refugees fleeing to the Far East now had only the land route by which to escape.\(^{40}\) Thousands of Polish Jews as well as Jews from western Europe labored to secure travel documents and train tickets to Moscow, where many boarded the Trans-Siberian rail for a 6,000 mile journey to Harbin in Manchuria, and


then onto either the port city of Dairen or Vladivostok, where they hoped to secure papers to final destinations anywhere within the Pacific Rim. The small Jewish Community in Kobe, Japan is said to have received over 2,000 refugees between July 1940 and June 1941. Similar but smaller numbers of Jewish refugees reached other Asian and Far Eastern ports, such as Bangkok, Singapore, and Manila, where already existing Jewish communities hosted the new arrivals as best they could.

I can only offer a few facts and figures about these other small communities of Jews in Asia and the Far East, to which refugee Jews escaped prior to WWII. A 1931 census for Singapore revealed a Jewish population of about 800 persons, but by 1939 that number had increased to over 1,500 Jewish inhabitants, their community nearly doubled due to the influx of Jewish refugees. Many were then interned by the Japanese during World War II and left Singapore after the war, immigrating to the United States, Australia, or Israel.

In Thailand, a country that is 95% Buddhist, Jewish merchants probably began arriving as early as the latter half of the 1500s, for by 1601 Spanish missionaries reported the existence of a synagogue in the Kingdom of Ayuthaya, Siam. No doubt these early Jewish merchants came as “New Christians” accompanying Spanish adventurers, as similarly occurred in Manila. But unlike the Crypto-Jews of the Philippines who inhabited a Spanish colony under Catholic rule, these Sephardic

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41 Ibid.
Jews of Spain could easily reconvert to their Judaic practices in a Buddhist country that tolerated religious differences. Thailand also received Baghdadi-Sephardic Jews in the 1800s during the First Wave of Jewish Migration to Asia, and Russian Jews arrived via Harbin in the 1920s during the Second Wave of Jewish Migration. In the 1930s during the Third Wave of Jewish Migration to Asia, only about 120 Jewish refugees from Europe escaped to Thailand but more Jewish refugees came from Syria and Lebanon during WWII. As in Singapore, about 150 refugee Jews in Thailand were interned during the war by the Japanese at Kanchanturi, most then immigrating elsewhere after the war.43

No doubt other fleeing refugee Jews from Europe found similar experiences in other Asian and Far Eastern ports and it is hoped that their stories of survival and rescue will be gathered before their stories are lost. But by far the greatest number of European refugee Jews fleeing to the Far East, approximately 18,000, found a safe harbor in the Far Eastern port city of Shanghai, China. As already noted, Shanghai had been a port of Jewish immigration long before the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe arose in the 1930s.

As previously mentioned, Shanghai welcomed its first Jewish settlers in 1848, as a result of the Treaty of Nanjing that ceded Hong Kong to Great Britain as reparations for the First Opium War from 1839 to 1842. Due to this treaty, four other port cities along China’s eastern coast opened up to foreign trade – Shanghai being one. Even though the first Jew to pass through Shanghai was a British soldier in 1841, the growth of a Jewish community of settlers required the advancement of Jewish owned businesses that soon flourished in the peaceful conditions of the British Settlement. Many of Shanghai’s greatest business empires during this era were owned and operated by Jewish businessmen who had already established lucrative businesses in Bombay. Following the pattern of their successful operations in India, these rich and powerful business owners employed fellow Jewish religionists, establishing a complete Jewish community for their workers, including schools, cultural enjoyments, and religious worship.44

After the Opium Wars with the British, Shanghai attracted merchants from the Americas, Spain, Portugal, Italy and France, and the arrival of foreign traders and their families soon contributed to Shanghai becoming China’s largest city by the mid-1800s. Dozens of different nationalities eventually inhabited sections of the city partitioned into territorial zones. The original British and American zones reorganized into the International Settlement in the western part of Shanghai, with

the French Concession loosely joined to it on its southern flanks. Exempt from Chinese laws in these international zones, national enclaves within these zones exhibited their own western cultural norms in the social and professional lives of their inhabitants.

As western ways spread, Chinese opposition to the ever growing foreign influence in Shanghai steadily grew, culminating in the capture of the eastern Chinese section of Shanghai by the Nationalist army of Chiang Kai-shek in 1927. Although threatened, the foreign settlements remained unmolested by the revolutionary violence. Shortly thereafter in 1931, the Nationalists also initiated resistance to the ever encroaching presence of the Japanese within China’s territories, which resulted in the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This time the conflict did not spare the foreign territories and large sections of Shanghai fell to the Japanese, one of those being Hongkew in the International Settlement. Violence ripped through large areas of the industrial sector of Hongkew, leaving piles of rubble in its wake. Into this already suffering war-torn city, 18,000 refugee Jews from Europe arrived.  

Shanghai’s two distinct Jewish communities predated the arrival of the refugee Jews from Europe in 1938 and 1939. As previously mentioned and discussed as the First Wave of Jewish immigrants, the earlier Sephardic Jewish merchant class remained relatively small and elite while the later, primarily Ashkenazi Jews, were

refugees from the wars and pogroms of the Russian Revolution of 1917. As already stated, the Sephardic community developed as a result of migrations of Jews from Baghdad, via Bombay in India, which extended from the latter half of the 19th century to World War I. This group that ultimately numbered about 700 included a number of prominent business families, but most were employees of the Jewish-owned and operated businesses. The Ashkenazi community of Jews from Russia and eastern Europe had settled in Shanghai as a result of four waves of migration, beginning in 1895 and ending in 1939. During these decades Jewish immigrants included ex-soldiers, political exiles, escapees from Siberian exile, adventurers, and refugees. The Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews each had their own synagogues, cultural norms, and language. With the massive influx of German and Austrian refugee Jews between 1938 and 1941, yet another Jewish community in Shanghai formed.46

Jewish refugees escaping Nazi persecutions began arriving in Shanghai as early as 1933, following Hitler’s ascent to power. With immigration quotas still in place in virtually every country of the western world, many refugees turned their attentions to the east, especially Shanghai where visas were not required for entrance into the city. The number of refugees fleeing to Shanghai corresponded to the waves of increased antisemitic violence in Third Reich territories. Following the Anschluss of Austria and especially in the aftermath of Kristallnacht, refugees from Austria and Germany

“streamed in like a flood.” In one year’s time, the Jewish refugee numbers went from 1500 near the end of 1938 to nearly 17,000 by the end of 1939. Stripped of their assets and property, these refugee Jews augmented the already destitute population of Hongkew with their similarly impoverished numbers. Large-scale relief plans implemented by the existing Jewish communities of Shanghai collected funds and provided affordable lodging and food distribution centers. Much needed aid also began to arrive from foreign offices of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, commonly known as the Joint or the JDC, and from the American Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS). But as time advanced and as more and more refugee locations around the world competed for funds from the JDC, HIAS and other Jewish relief organizations of the world, it became more difficult to fill the needs of the thousands of Jewish refugees in Shanghai.

The ever swelling numbers of refugees in Shanghai alarmed the Japanese overseers, who began to restrict the refugee immigrant flow in August 1939. These restrictions, along with the invasion of Poland by the Germans just one month later, marked the beginning of WWII that closed escape routes and effectively ebbed the refugee tide. Shanghai received one more substantial contingency of Jewish refugees when Polish Jews, fleeing the invading German armies, escaped eastward, many with the famous Sugihara transit visas issued by the Japanese consul against his

47 Bachrach and Kassof, Flight and Rescue, 147.

48 Liberman, My China: Jewish Life in the Orient 1900-1950, 118.
government’s orders in July and August 1940, only to find themselves stranded in Japan with no other options then to be redirected to Shanghai. This brought another 1000 or more refugees to the already overflowing “ghettos” of Shanghai.49

As is indicative of Jewish resiliency in diasporic conditions, the Jewish refugees in Shanghai managed to establish European-esque neighborhoods in Hongkew with numerous shops tailored to the needs of the cosmopolitan make-up of the population. Cafes, bakeries, factories, doctor and dentist offices and other industries provided some degree of self-sustenance for the nearly 20,000 Jews in Shanghai. But still a minority of destitute refugees existed requiring relief assistance. Conditions went from bad to worse with the December 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan. Synchronized attacks by the Japanese targeted numerous other sites in the south Pacific, including China. Japanese warships sank a British gunboat in Shanghai and then “proceeded to occupy the entire city without incident.”50 Any hopes of refugees escaping Shanghai for other ports ended with the Japanese invasion. Leading Sephardic Jewish businessmen, who were great supporters of the relief work for the refugees, had their properties confiscated and their accounts frozen. This, in

49 Chiune Sugihara was a Japanese Consular officer in Kaunas, Lithuania. Between July 11, 1940 and August 31, 1940, Sugihara issued 2,140 transit visas granting passage through Japan to other ports of transit and/or entry. Once refugees arrived in Japan, their visas to other ports were nullified and most then made their way to Shanghai. Because of Sugihara’s efforts, the members of the only eastern European Jewish yeshiva, the Mir Yeshiva, to survive WWII were saved. See Bachrach and Kassof, *Flight and Rescue*, 55-73, 125-141. For a general history on the Shanghai Ghetto see Ernest G. Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

conjunction with relief funding from the western nations suspended due to declarations of war, created an ever deepening refugee crisis.⁵¹

Shanghai endured all the effects of a city captured by the enemy as Japan effectively isolated its inhabitants from the rest of the world. Prominent British, American and other foreign national civilians became refugee themselves, interned by the Japanese in various detention sites throughout the area. The refugee Jews of Shanghai, predominantly from Germany, Austria and Poland, faced new Japanese policies influenced by Japan’s allegiance with Nazi Germany. A new proclamation in February 1943 detailed a “designated area” where all “stateless refugees” who had arrived from Germany and those nations now occupied by Germany were to be restricted, creating what came to be known as the Shanghai Ghetto. Some 15,000 refugee Jews became co-tenants with tens of thousands of Chinese in the poorest area of Hongkew. But while Nazi officials tried to sway the Japanese to enact harsher laws against the Jews in the designated area, the Japanese never exacted the same torturous treatment of the Jews in the Shanghai Ghetto as had been perpetrated by the Nazis in the ghettos of Poland. There were however isolated incidents of cruelty by some Japanese officials as they demonstrated their contempt for the dishonorable status of the refugees. But Jewish life went on in the ghetto with feats of industry and business, as well as groups of artisans and students carrying on traditions of music, theater, education and religious worship. As the war years wore

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⁵¹ Ibid., 145-179.
on, conditions steadily worsened and by the end of the war, the JDC reported having 10,000 refugees on its relief rolls. Once liberated by the American military, they did not wish to remain in Shanghai, nor did they want to return to Europe. Refugees headed for the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Canada, and eventually Israel. Only a very small number of Jews remained to watch Shanghai and the rest of China pass into Communist hands. When civil war erupted in China, the few remaining Jews fled and at the end of the 1950s, Shanghai's synagogues were boarded up. One hundred years of Jewish life and history in Shanghai came to an abrupt end.  

**G: History of Jews in the Philippines**

The history of the presence of Jews in the Philippines bears many similarities to the story of the Jews in Shanghai and the three Phases of Jewish migration to Asia and the Far East that have already been discussed. But more importantly, it exhibits many more differences. One such difference is its roots that go back to the Spanish Inquisition of the 16th century, when many Jews of Spain, who were forcibly converted to Christianity, observed their Jewish life in secret, and found themselves tried, convicted, and expelled for heretical behavior. These Marranos or “New Christians,” also known as Crypto-Jews, accompanied Spanish adventurers who

settled in the island republic of the Philippines in south East Asia. The “New Christian” brothers Jorge and Domingo Rodriguez are the first recorded Jews to have arrived in the Spanish Philippines, reaching Manila in the 1590s. By 1593 both were tried and convicted at an auto-da-fe in Mexico City because the Inquisition did not have an independent tribunal in the Philippines. The Inquisition imprisoned the Rodriguez brothers and subsequently tried and convicted at least eight other “New Christians” from the Philippine Islands. Such was the precarious status of the first Jewish settlers in the Philippines. The progression of the Jewish presence in these islands during the subsequent centuries of Spanish colonization remained small and unorganized.

John Griese, who authored a Master's thesis in 1954 on the Jewish Community of Manila, writes that “Spanish law would not have permitted an organized Jewish religious life,” so that Philippine Jews would have practiced Judaism in secret. The Philippines had the rare distinction of being colonized by the Spanish to become a Christian enclave in an Orient world. Christian prejudices against Judaic adherents would have discouraged the settlement of overtly practicing Sephardic Jews, although as Crypto-Jews, they would have blended into the Spanish-Christian


55 Griese, “The Jewish Community in Manila,” 19.
society of the elite and continued to fulfill their utilitarian mercantilist roles. Goldstein maintained that “unlike Singapore, where there is no record of the existence of any ‘new Christians,’ we know that a ‘new Christian’ community existed in Manila.”

It appears that the Baghdadi-Sephardi phase of Jewish Migration to Asia and the Far East in the 18th and 19th centuries was very late in coming to the Philippines. The first permanent settlement of Jews in the Philippines during the three hundred years of Spanish colonialism began with the arrival of three Levy brothers from Alsace-Lorraine, who were escaping the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. As entrepreneurs, their business ventures over the years included jewelry retail, a general merchandising business, and import trade in gems, pharmaceuticals, and eventually automobiles. The opening of the Suez Canal in March 1869 provided a more direct trading route between Europe and the Philippines, which allowed all passenger and cargo ships to follow “a similar route: along warm-weather sea lanes of the Mediterranean through the canal along the Red Sea, and finally into the Indian Ocean.” Businesses grew and the number of Jews in Manila grew as well. The Levy brothers were then joined by Turkish, Syrian, and Egyptian Jews, creating a multi-ethnic community of about fifty individuals by the end of the Spanish period.

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was not until the Spanish-American war at the end of the 19th century, when the United States took control of the islands from Spain in 1898, that the Jewish community started to advance in the “first and only official American colony in history.”

When the Philippines became an American concern, this created opportunities for American Jewish citizens to take advantage of this new frontier – a wave of Jewish migration to the Far East that was neither Baghdadi nor European. The arrival of American military forces to the Philippines brought a few Jewish servicemen who decided to remain in the islands after their military discharge and become permanent residents. Jewish teachers from the United States also arrived with a contingent of “Thomasites,” a delegation of volunteer teachers, who gave public instruction to Filipino children. In 1901, 540 American teachers and some of their families boarded the US Army Transport “Thomas” at San Francisco Pier, bound for the Philippines. Trained by prestigious institutions in the United States, these young men and women were selected by the US Civil Service Commission to establish a modern public school system in the newly acquired US territory of the Philippines and to conduct all instruction in English. By 1902, the number of American teachers, labeled Thomasites, swelled to 1,074.

59 Annette Eberly, "Manila? Where? Us?" Present Tense, 2:3 (Spring 1975): 60. Puerto Rico was another country annexed under US jurisdiction as a result of the Spanish-American War, but it did not acquire its commonwealth status till 1952.

60 Michael L. Tan, “The Thomasite Experiment,” September 3, 2001, Pinot Kasi,
In addition to education, new markets for import-export businesses attracted young American Jewish businessmen, who set up new shops in the islands as well. In this regard, the attraction of the Philippines for Jewish American merchants in setting up outposts for their larger home companies back in the United States seems consistent with the Port Jew identity of the Sephardic Jews of the Atlantic seaports and the Baghdadi Jews of port cities in Asia and the Far East.

Two important names appear in the Jewish community of Manila at the turn of the century: Emil Bachrach and Morton I. Netzorg. Annette Eberly, freelance author and Philippine resident, recorded that Emil Bachrach arrived in Manila in 1901 and soon “built a commercial empire of fairly substantial proportions.” Because he is regarded as the first American Jew who permanently settled in the Philippines, the synagogue and cultural hall, which the Bachrach family financed in subsequent decades, bore his name: Temple Emil and Bachrach Hall. Bachrach encouraged his extended family to resettle in the Philippines and experience the good life provided by this beautiful archipelago. Eberly, quoting Minna Gabermann, Bachrach's niece, stated that living in Manila “was distinctly colonial and elegant in those days. It had a special air of a sumptuous, civilized world.”


allowed him to be a generous philanthropist, who supported both Jewish and Christian causes.

By 1918, twenty years after the Americans took over the Philippines from the Spanish, the Manila Jewish community totaled about 150 people, including a small number of Russian Jews who sought asylum following the Bolshevik Revolution. Aside from these few Russian Jews who became a part of the multi-ethnic Jewish community in Manila, the second phase of Russian Jewish immigration to Asia and the Far East had little effect on the Philippines. No doubt because the presence of both Sephardic Jews and Russian Jews were of so little consequence during both the Spanish and American period of colonialism in the Philippines, the Jewish community remained small and rather secular in its makeup.

In 1911, the Jewish community in the Philippines gained one of its most important families, Morton I. Netzorg and his wife, Katherine. They came from the United States and joined the Philippine public school teacher corps of Thomasites. Their son, Morton “Jock” Netzorg, was born February 4, 1912 in the town of Nueva Caceres. His memoirs, written in 1987, relate the family’s many business ventures and the educational influence they had on the lives of the children of Manila's most prestigious families. Some of those students included “the daughters of Paul

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McNutt, General Sutherland, Ambassador MacMurray, [and] General Casey."\textsuperscript{65}

When asked by an interviewer on March 4, 1987 why his parents had remained in the Philippines, Jock responded: “It was a much more civilized place than the United States for people of their temperament.”\textsuperscript{66} Jock maintained that his father considered his most important deed in the Philippines to have been “bringing refugees out of Hitler's Germany.”\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, Morton I. Netzorg played a vital role in saving the lives of hundreds of German refugee Jews, including Joseph.

According to Jock Netzorg, businesses from the American mainland began to arrive with increasing volume in 1920. Manila Jewry included the founder of the Makati Stock Exchange, the conductor of the Manila Symphony Orchestra, and other professionals such as physicians, dentists and architects.\textsuperscript{68} The Frieder brothers, the family most instrumental in saving German-Jewish refugees in the late 1930s, arrived in 1921 and expanded their family's state-side cigar business into a lucrative venture in Manila. Economic prosperity, along with a high level of societal interaction, precluded the need for strong Jewish institutions. Eberly described their Jewish society:

\textsuperscript{65} Morton I. Netzorg to Jewish Welfare Board, NY, April 15, 1945, American Jewish Historical Society Archives, National Jewish Welfare Board Collection, “Philippine Islands, 1945,” 1-180, Box 198, Fld. 1.

\textsuperscript{66} Onorato, \textit{Jock Netzorg: Manila Memories}, 2.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{68} Goldstein, “Singapore, Manila, and Harbin,” 7.
There was little Jewish flavor in this 19th century lifestyle of the very rich. The Jewish families did go to the Temple for special occasions, and the existence of the adjacent social hall [did] serve to centralize and focus Jewish interrelationships and concerns, but it was all very low-key.  

Even though Temple Emil was built in the 1920s primarily through the generous contributions of the Bachrachs, Netzorgs, and Frieders, the only services conducted on an annual basis were the High Holidays, when a visiting Rabbi or Cantor from Shanghai officiated the services. It is worth mentioning here that the Jewish community of Shanghai, which formed initially under British rule, was a much larger version of its Pacific neighbor in Manila, which was a US colony. The Jewish community of Manila, which continued to gradually increase in size in the 1920s and early 1930s as businessmen and merchants from the US and the Middle East began filtering into the Far East, along with political refugees from Russia and other parts of Europe, remained a predominantly American Jewish community.  

By 1936, the Jewish community in the Philippines had a distinctly cosmopolitan makeup with a total population of about 500 persons. Even though there were no separations by communities as existed in Shanghai, one would not describe the community as uniform either. It wasn’t until the Nazi danger to European Jewry  

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arose in the 1930s that a renewed Jewish consciousness in the Philippines sprang into existence. The small, decentralized and secularly-minded Jewish community of Manila took heroic steps to save its fellow Jews from sure destruction. As Bachrach's niece Gaberman told Eberly in 1975, “We only really became Jewish-conscious in a deep way when this terrible threat came out of Europe, and suddenly there were Jews in desperate need of help.” The Third Wave of Jewish Migration to Asia and the Far East as embodied in the rescue of refugee Jews in the Philippines is the central focus of this dissertation.

**H. Summary**

While the Jewish Diaspora to the Far East may reach back in time to eras undocumented in recorded history, those migrations of the last several centuries brought Jewish merchants to the shores of nearly every nation and culture of the Pacific-rim Far East, filling utilitarian economic services similar to the role of the Port Jews in the Atlantic world. China, India, Japan, Burma, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines all hosted Jewish colonists from as early as the 15th century, arriving on the galleons of Spanish and Portuguese adventurers. From these inauspicious beginnings, Jewish communities grew throughout Asia and the Far East with Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Russian, and European migrant workers and immigrant settlers. The modern age brought a new kind of Jewish émigré, the refugee.

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In the first three decades of the 20th century, persecuted Jews from eastern and western Europe sought respite in any nation willing to grant them safe haven. Refugees from encroaching Nazi expansion found asylum in every country in the greater Asian world, but it was in the Philippines that an American-led Jewish community organized refugee rescue programs that became templates for organized rescue in other parts of the world. Through a selection plan based on distinct professional and vocational needs of the greater Philippine community, nearly 1000 European refugee Jews immigrated as resident aliens primarily into Manila, but into outlying provinces as well. As many as 200 to 300 refugee Jews came to the Philippines as temporary immigrants through a sponsorship program that had the potential to save hundreds, if not thousands more, were it not for the bombing and occupation of the Philippines by the Japanese and the advent of WWII, at which point rescue turned into incarceration again for some, and attempts at survival for all.
IV. Rescue in the Philippines, 1937 – 1941


Refugee rescue in the Philippines operated selection and sponsorship programs unlike any Jewish rescue operations executed anywhere else in the world during the years of Nazi persecution in Europe. In order to understand the significance of Jewish immigration to the Philippines prior to the US entering WWII, it is important to discuss it within the context of US Immigration Laws and their application to the US Commonwealth of the Philippines. The US Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924 became the dual directives of immigration policies for the first half of the 20th century.\(^1\) However, only the Immigration Act of 1917, which outlined qualitative restrictions on potential immigrants, applied to the Philippines during its eras as a territory and then as a commonwealth nation of the United States. The opening section of the 1917 Act reads:

That this Act shall be enforced in the Philippine Islands by officers of the general government thereof, unless and until it is superseded by an act passed by the Philippines Legislature and approved by the President of the United

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States to regulate immigration in the Philippine Islands as authorized in the Act.\(^2\)

No such directive appears in the text of the US Immigration Act of 1924 that regulated immigration quantitatively into the United States. This is extremely important when discussing the rescue of refugee Jews in Manila, as the qualitative nature of the refugees came under scrutiny by virtue of the 1917 Act alone.

However, no number restrictions on immigration into the Philippines existed in US Immigration Laws, as was prescribed for immigration into the United States by the Acts of 1921 and 1924. Such numeric restrictions to the Philippines did not become law until the Commonwealth passed their own immigration regulations in 1940. Thus, during the years of Jewish refugee rescue in the Philippines from 1937 to 1940, restrictive quotas did not apply, nor did US State Department or consular oversight in approving the issuance of visas to refugee aliens immigrating to the Philippines. However, the Immigration Act of 1917 did impose numerous grounds excluding individuals as acceptable immigrants to the US, and by extension, to the Philippines. These grounds included but were not limited to: the physically and mentally diseased; vagrants, criminals, and the morally deviant; contract laborers;

and aliens likely to become public charges.³ While the US State Department supposedly could not restrict the numbers of Jewish immigrants going to the Philippines, it could, and did, demand a process that ensured adequate financial support for the refugees. This becomes more apparent when we contextualize refugee rescue in the Philippines within the discriminatory US immigration laws enacted in the 1920s.

Following two centuries of unlimited immigration, the US State Department developed restrictionist policies in the 1920s spawned by economic decline, post WWI isolationism, and nationalistic racism.⁴ Nearly half a million immigrants disembarked at US ports in 1920, and this number increased to over 800,000 in 1921. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 tried to stop this exponential immigrant population explosion. Congress passed the first attempt to quantitatively restrict immigration on May 19, 1921, which set immigration quotas based of the number of foreign-born inhabitants already residing in the US.⁵ The act enforced a quota of 3 per cent of any nation’s foreign-born population residing in the United States


⁴ Lemay and Barkan, US Immigration and Naturalization Laws and Issues, 128-135.

according to the 1910 census.\textsuperscript{6} By using the totals of 1910, allowable immigration numbers favored northern and western European countries, since most immigrants in the United States at the time of the 1910 census came from these regions.\textsuperscript{7} Understanding the changing trends in the ethnic origins of the aliens entering the US in the first two decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century helps explain the restrictionist provisions of the new laws.

The first US census of 1790 showed that nearly the entire population of four million inhabitants descended from original immigrants of British and Irish origins, with only slight numbers from France, Spain, Holland and Germany. Another 300,000 immigrants from northern and western Europe arrived by 1820, cresting to nearly half a million immigrants in 1873, again chiefly from Britain, with a considerable number from Germany and others from various places in north-western Europe. A distinct change in the demographics of the national origins of the immigrants began in 1880, increasing every year. An ever greater proportion of immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe, until 47 percent of the immigrants in 1892 could be identified from such countries as Italy, Russia, Poland and Austria-Hungary, with a considerable number of the immigrants being “of the Hebrew race.”\textsuperscript{8} Not until 1896 did the numbers of immigrants from southern, central,


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
and eastern Europe surpass the number of immigrants from the north-west. From 1880 until the implementation of the first quota law in 1921, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe exceeded half the total numbers of immigrants, which amounted to slightly under 23.5 million.\footnote{L. Edward Purcell, \textit{Immigration: Social Issues in US History Series} (Phoenix: The Oryx Press, 1995), 43.}

In 1907, over 75 percent of nearly 1.3 million immigrants to the United States came from southern and eastern Europe. US census data reveals that eastern European Jews were one of the largest ethnic groups of this period.\footnote{Purcell, \textit{Immigration: Social Issues in US History Series}, 59.} Attempting to halt this rising trend lay at the heart of the 1921 provisions that limited the total number of aliens entering the US to 350,000 per year until June 30, 1924. The permanent immigration law of 1924 then restricted the numbers from “the racial inferiority of Southeastern Europeans,” as a contemporary writing in \textit{Foreign Affairs} put it,\footnote{Robert DeCourcy Ward, “Our New Immigration Policy,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, 3:1 (September 15, 1924), 99-110.} even more and, in conjunction with the comprehensive immigration laws of 1917, “governed American immigration policy until 1952.”\footnote{“Legislation from 1901-1940,” US Department of Homeland Security.}

The Johnson Immigration Act of 1924, which superseded the 1921 Emergency Quota Act, had essentially two quota systems. Until July 1, 1929, immigration quotas were lowered to 2 percent of the number of foreign born residents according
to the 1890 census. This intentionally targeted the undesirable aliens who had been pouring in from southern and eastern Europe, favoring immigrants from northern and western areas, who made up the bulk of the émigré numbers before the 1900s. The 1924 revisions placed an overall annual ceiling for the next five years at approximately 165,000 immigrants—drastically reducing European immigration totals from over 800,000 in 1921 to less than 150,000 by the end of the decade.13 Countries’ quotas for immigrants from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Russia, Romania, and Hungary totaled less than 10 percent of the overall total annual immigrant quota.14 In 1929, the second quota provision of the 1924 Immigration Act reduced European immigration numbers even more. Known as the “national origins formula,” a new convoluted quota system, adopted to calculate new national quotas, stated:

Sec. 11 (b) The annual quota of any nationality for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1927 [later amended to 1929], and for each fiscal year thereafter, shall be a number which bears the same ratio to 150,000 as the number of inhabitants in continental United States in 1920 having that national origin (ascertained as hereinafter provided in this section) bears to the number of


inhabitants in continental United States in 1920, but the minimum quota of any nationality shall be 100.\textsuperscript{15}

In simple terms, the Act reduced the total annual number of immigrants from 165,000 allowed annually between 1924 and 1929 to 150,000. Quota calculations then computed a ratio based on the total number of inhabitants of a specific nationality in the United States to the entire population count of US inhabitants according to the census of 1920. Using “national origins” rather than “foreign-born” allowed a redistribution of quota numbers that utilized population numbers of US born ethnic citizens along with foreign-born residents. This essentially increased British and Irish quotas while reducing German quotas. Whereas quotas for Britain and N. Ireland between 1924 and 1929 allowed 34,000 immigrants annually, Germany’s quota allowed over 50,000. With the redistribution calculations, Great Britain’s quota increased to just over 85,000 and Germany’s numbers decreased to just over 20,000.\textsuperscript{16} Although originally slated for implementation in 1927, the difficult task of determining the national ethnic numbers required the postponement of the initiation of the national quota formula until 1929, which increased Germany’s annual quota to 25,557.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to these quota restrictions, new regulations on

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\textsuperscript{17} Bat-Ami Zucker, \textit{In Search of Refuge: Jews and US Consuls in Nazi Germany, 1933-1941} (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), 35.
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how immigrants obtained permission to immigrate empowered newly appointed US consular officers in foreign posts.

The National Origins Immigration Act of 1924 also established a new “consular control system” that mandated visa requirement reviews at foreign US consular offices before the immigrants ever left their home countries. This added a further method of culling applicants wishing to immigrate to the US. No alien could obtain entrance to the US without an immigration visa issued by a US consular officer abroad. By joining the provisions of the Act of 1924 to the comprehensive Immigration laws of 1917, US consuls in offices throughout Europe determined the eligibility of visa applicants according to an exhaustive list of exclusionary standards. This allowed consular officials to deny visas to applicants based on selective interpretation of the laws, especially due to the one line of the 1917 law that excluded “persons likely to become a public charge.”\(^1^8\) Strict adherence to these new laws for the next decade resulted in the actual number of issued visas being far below the already reduced quota limits. Had these quotas been filled between 1929 and the advent of WWII on September 1, 1939, over 275,000 German immigrants could have entered the US during that decade, over half the entire population of Jews living in Germany at the time. These constraints, similar to those imposed by many countries at the time, translated into disaster for the millions of Jews in Europe who

\(^{18}\) “Immigration Act of 1917,” EBSCOhost Online Database.
faced encroaching Nazi antisemitic practices that demanded their “deportation”—a euphemism that soon translated into extermination.

Immigration policies of the 1930s remained hostile to Jewish refugees while a growing presence of antisemitism infected all levels of US society, including US government institutions such as the military, the Congress, and the State Department. ¹⁹ In the face of Germany's openly antisemitic Nuremberg Laws of 1935 and America’s social barriers to implementing rescue, the United States resisted accepting more immigrants than the quotas allowed, even after Hitler classified 500,000 German and Austrian Jews as stateless enemies in 1935. As the Jewish refugee problem grew more acute, the United States, along with over 30 western nations in Europe and Latin America, met in conference at Evian, France from July 6 to 15, 1938 to decide which countries would accept more Jewish refugees. When eastern European countries implied that they would like to deport their Jewish citizens as well, the manageable refugee numbers from Germany and Austria became suddenly augmented by over 3 million potential refugees from Poland alone. As stated earlier, this ended the possibility of any serious resolutions at the Evian Conference in favor of Germany's refugee Jews. The Depression had strained economies and the nations of the world declined to increase their immigration

quotas.\textsuperscript{20} America's restrictive immigration polices remained unchanged, although Roosevelt urged the State Department in 1938 to allow the immigration numbers to reach their fullest as granted by the US quota system.\textsuperscript{21} It is against the background of these events that the collaborative effort of the Jewish Community in Manila, the office of the US High Commissioner to the Philippines, and the President of the Republic of the Philippines in rescuing over 1300 refugees from Europe’s Holocaust is so remarkable.

\textbf{B: US & Philippine Political Relations}

Appreciating the accomplishment of the Jewish Community of Manila in rescuing Jews from Europe also requires some insight into the political relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Upon the acquisition of the territories ceded to the United States as a result of the US victory over Spain in 1898, the US government created an agency on December 13, 1898 called the Division of Customs and Insular Affairs within the Office of the Secretary of War. This agency oversaw all customs issues and civil affairs pertaining to the Islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines.\textsuperscript{22} The name of the agency changed in 1900 to Division of

\textsuperscript{20} Marrus, \textit{The Unwanted}, 170-172.


\textsuperscript{22} Kenneth Munden, compiler, "Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs Relating to the Philippine Islands 1898-1935, A List of Selected Files," NARA I, compiled October 1942, vii-viii.
Insular Affairs, and then changed again in 1902 to Bureau of Insular Affairs. This agency administered all civil governments of US territorial possessions of island nations and came under the jurisdiction of the US War Department. The Bureau of Insular Affairs administrated the civil government of the Philippines continuously for the entire forty-one years of its existence. It primarily served as an advisory liaison between the governments in the Philippines and in the United States.

The United States’ colonial era in the Philippines began January 20, 1899 when President McKinley empowered the First Philippine Commission, comprised of 5 appointees, to investigate conditions in the islands after the end of the Spanish-American War and make recommendations for future proceedings. The commission’s report recommended establishing civilian government as soon as possible, with a bicameral national legislature and autonomous governments in the provinces and municipalities. President McKinley established the Second Philippine Commission on March 16, 1900, called the Taft Commission, with William Howard Taft as its head. With both legislative and executive powers, this commission enacted 499 laws that allowed the Filipinos an ever increasing share in the operation of their own governments, providing for popularly elected officials in

23 George A. Malcolm, (Philippine Supreme Court Justice), "Opinion for the United States High Commissioner," January 9, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 126, Office of Territories, Classified Files 1907-1951, “High Commissioner – Administrative General,” Entry 1, Box #752, folders 9-7-17.

municipal and provincial offices along with a nation-wide police force that gradually took over jurisdiction of their civilian territories from the US Army.\textsuperscript{25} The July 1902 Philippine Organic Act authorized the creation of a bicameral legislature with a popularly elected lower house, known as the Philippine Assembly, and an upper house known as the Philippine Commission, whose members were appointed by the President of the United States. The chairman of the Commission was the American Governor-General of the Philippines, appointed by the president of the United States and regarded as the chief executive of the colonial administration. Included in this executive level was a Vice-Governor, four secretaries heading executive departments, members of the Philippine Commission, and members of the Philippine Supreme Court, all appointed by the US President with the consent of the US Senate. The Second Philippine Commission literally wiped away 300 years of Spanish feudalism, while permitting the Filipinos guarded advancements in democratic self-rule.\textsuperscript{26}

The Jones Act of 1916, which carried forward certain provisions of the Organic Act of 1902, provided for a twenty-four member elected Philippine Senate to replace the appointed five-man Philippine Commission. The former ninety member Philippine Assembly was renamed the Philippine House of Representatives. “The legislature’s actions were subject to the veto of the governor general, and it could not

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Seekins, “The First Phase of United States Rule, 1898-1935.”
pass laws affecting the rights of the United States citizens.”

The governor general of the executive branch remained an appointed position by the US President until the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth, which was inaugurated on November 15, 1935.28

The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, also called The Philippine Independence Act, outlined the terms of the Philippine Commonwealth and its anticipated ten year transition period into the fully independent Republic of the Philippines, which was predetermined for July 4, 1946.29 The Tydings-McDuffie Act authorized the Philippine Legislature, now one body called the National Assembly, to draft a constitution for the government of the Commonwealth.30 The executive power of the new government centered in an elected Filipino President, as stipulated by Article VII of the Commonwealth Constitution, which was ratified on May 14, 1935. “Laws passed by the legislature affecting immigration, foreign trade, and the currency system had to be approved by the United States President.”31 Another important provision of the Tydings-McDuffie Act was the creation of the Office of

27 Ibid.


the US High Commissioner to the Philippines. The US High Commissioner had no direct administrative powers in the Philippines, but was concerned primarily with protecting American interests in the new commonwealth nation. This office superseded that of the American Governor-General. The connection between these newly invested offices and the US War Department was never really clarified until Philippine Supreme Court Justice George A. Malcolm composed an official statement to the High Commissioner's Office on January 9, 1939. His official opinion clarified “the relationship of the office of the High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands and the War Department.”

Malcolm's treatise explained that the Tydings-McDuffie Act provided three agencies to act as representatives of the president of the United States in the execution of his duties as the supreme commander over the Islands of the Philippines. In the islands proper, that representative was the US High Commissioner to the Philippines. At the US Capitol, as pertaining to the foreign affairs of the Philippines, that agency was the Office of Philippine Affairs within the Department of State. Certain other affairs of the Philippines continued to be administered by the Secretary of War through the Bureau of Insular Affairs. All three of these executive representative agencies played a significant role in the immigration of Jewish refugees to the Philippines.

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32 Malcolm, "Opinion for the United States High Commissioner," NARA II.

33 Ibid.
The Office of Philippine Affairs within the State Department was created on December 12, 1936, for the sole purpose of carrying out the directives of the State Department as pertaining to foreign affairs issues in the Philippines. Whenever situations demanded communication between the Philippines and the State Department, the practice was to transmit the message to the War Department via the Bureau of Insular Affairs, which then forwarded the message to the designated agency, whether that was the High Commissioner in the Philippines or the Office of Philippine Affairs in Washington DC. In this manner, the Secretary of State advised the High Commissioner of the Philippines on issues of foreign affairs, and “the views of the Secretary of State [were] accepted as conclusive.” 34 Within just a few months of Malcolm's official opinion, the functions of the Bureau of Insular Affairs were transferred to the Department of the Interior on July 1, 1939, and combined with those of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions. 35 It was nearly forty years after the cessation of hostilities between United States forces and revolutionaries of the Spanish-American War that the Philippines were no longer under any jurisdiction of the US War Department. Between 1936 and 1941, as the United States government granted more self-determination to the government of the

34 Malcolm, "Opinion for the United States High Commissioner," NARA II.

35 Franklin D. Roosevelt to Francis B. Sayre, September 7, 1939, “High Commissioner – Authority to the Philippines,” NARA II, Record Group 126, Records of the Office of Territories, Entry 1, Box #752, folders 9-7-17.
Philippines, this rising autonomy allowed the execution of a rescue plan that saved refugee Jews from encroaching destruction.

**C: Pre-Selection Plan Rescue, 1937 – 1938**

The migration of Jews escaping Europe between 1933 and 1941, which included Joseph and his mother in 1939, was the last major immigration of Jews to the Philippines. Jews fleeing Nazi Germany came to the Philippines as early as 1933, but they were few in numbers and their escape almost entirely undocumented. Frank Ephraim, Austrian emigrant and survivor of the selection rescue in the Philippines, related many stories of these immigrants in his 2003 treatise *Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror*. However, the first significant influx of European refugee Jews to arrive in Manila did not come directly from Europe, but rather from the Jewish refugee community in Shanghai. With the renewal of hostilities between the Japanese and Chinese in 1937, which resulted in the occupation of Peking by Japanese forces, the four million inhabitants of Shanghai faced the dangers of war in an occupied territory and various civilian communities sought escape from Shanghai’s battle grounds. Germany’s shift of alliance from China to Japan at this time alarmed German Jews in Shanghai, who feared German pressure on Japan to adopt Nazi discriminatory policies against Shanghai’s German

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36 See Chapter 3, Section F, pg. 161 of this dissertation for details concerning the Jewish Community in Shanghai.
Jewish population. The Manila Jewish community feared for them as well, and the Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila (JRC), comprised of influential and affluent US members of the Jewish community, formed with the intention of rescuing German members of the Shanghai Jewish community. These Jews had already been deprived of their German citizenship, and the Gestapo presence that was taking root in Japanese areas threatened their existence in Shanghai as well.

When the Sino-Japanese War broke out on July 7, 1937, the JRC received a telegram from Shanghai asking for assistance for Shanghai's refugee Jews. The small Jewish community in Manila immediately raised a sum of $8000, but before the money could be dispatched, the wealthier Sephardic Jews of Shanghai stepped up and cared for the needs of the Shanghai refugees on their own. The JRC, under the leadership of Philip Frieder in Manila, decided to hold the funds in escrow to meet some future need. That need came almost immediately:

A month later the German government sent a boat to Shanghai to remove all German nationals from the war zone. In so doing they also took aboard about 30 Jewish German refugee families. All of these German nationals, including the refugees, were deposited in Manila and the German government signed an agreement with the Philippine government to the effect that these people removed from the war zone would not become public charges. At that time the German Consul in the Philippines suggested to Mr. Philip Frieder that it would be well for the Jewish community to take charge of the German Jewish refugees. This
suggestion was adopted and the refugees were placed in various Jewish homes and eventually jobs were found for all of them.  

37 This rescue, observant of US immigration directives that enforced the exclusion clause regarding refugees not becoming public charges, set the precedent for the later immigration program in Manila that involved efforts to rescue victims from Europe's Jewish communities—efforts that saved Joseph and 1300 other refugees.  

38 The experiences of the nearly 100 German refugee Jews who fled Shanghai in August 1937 is told in the memoir of Max Berges.  

39 He and his wife Annie fled Germany to Shanghai in 1935 and recounted the horrifying ordeal of living in a war zone in Shanghai, and then the twist of fate that brought them to Manila:

To our unbelievable surprise the German Consulate General called us,
offering us evacuation with the passenger liner “Gneisenau” which was going to be diverted from Japan to Yang tze-kiang. We could not decide to accept the risk of setting foot on German soil again and a German ship was just that. We refused at first, but the Consulate called again assuring us that under the

| 37 | “Memorandum of Conversation Between Mr. Hyman and Morris Frieder of Cincinnati, Ohio on November 28th [1938] at 3:30 P.M,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784. |
| 38 | Frank Ephraim, *Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 22. Frank Ephraim, a survivor of the Jewish refugee Community in Manila, presented a complete database of all the Jewish refugees who came to the Philippines to the JewishGen Family Geneology website, in which he identified 1301 names. |
| 39 | Max Berges, “Please, don’t worry! Nothing came of it,” Center for Jewish History, New York, Leo Beck Institute Archives, Max Berges Memoir Project, call no. MM8, 334. Berges stated that 30 to 40 Jewish couples left Shanghai on the Gneisenau. |
circumstances we would be absolutely safe and be regarded as Auslands-
deutsche (Germans living abroad).\footnote{Berges, “Please, don’t worry! Nothing came of it,” 271.}

Berger further recounted how the German consulate “offered us a free trip to Manila as guests of the German Reich.” The irony of the event was not lost on Berges as he observed how Germans “at home killed and imprisoned the Jews” but in Shanghai “they saved them.” The event became even more surreal when Berges and the other refugee German Jews from Shanghai joined several hundred German nationals on the dock under protection of brown-shirted storm troopers wearing German swastika armbands as the assembly prepared to board a launch that would take them all to the Gniesenau. Once the launch arrived at the ship, all abroad scaled up the side of the ship on a “Jacob’s Ladder” with what Berges described as “a nightmarish determination.”\footnote{Ibid., 272-288.} But Manila was not their first destination.

After two days at sea, the German refugees from Shanghai, Jews and non-Jews alike, reached Kobe, Japan, where they stayed for three days. This surreal experience turned even more bizarre for the refugee Jews, as a welcoming committee of Germans from Kobe, Yokohama, and Tokyo met the ship in company of a German brass-band playing rousing national tunes while shouts of “Heil Hitler” resounded throughout the welcoming throng. The German Embassy in Japan even presented the refugees, Jewish refugees included, with fruit baskets adorned with German
swastikas. When the voyage to Manila resumed, tensions on board motivated the Jewish refugees to keep aloof of the other passengers. After enduring a horrifying typhoon at sea, described by Berges as “a super-chimerical orgy of total evil” that precipitated a collision with a rudderless freighter, the damaged Gneisenau eventually made port in Hong Kong where all aboard remained for several days while the ship underwent repairs. Finally the last leg of their journey to Manila transpired peacefully. Berges describes their arrival:

I won’t ever forget how deeply we breathed in relief as we walked down the gangplank and stepped on Pier Five in Manila. With the exception of the two of us all other non-American evacuees had only been granted temporary visas for the Philippine Islands by the American Consulate General in Shanghai. They were all supposed and expected to return to Shanghai whenever conditions were normal again there. [. . .] Everything went all right at our arrival in Manila. We weren’t retained on the Gneisenau and were welcomed by a Jewish Relief Committee [. . .] There were reporters and press photographers on the pier because like in Kobe we were the first Shanghai evacuees [. . .] However, unlike our arrival in Shanghai, there was a Jewish Reception Committee to greet us and take care of us because none of us had any means to pay even for a single meal, leave alone lodging. . . .

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42 Just prior to the Japanese invasion of Shanghai, the Berges’ had been advised to see the American Consul in Shanghai to receive a visa to immigrate to the US. That letter allowed them to receive a permanent visa to the Philippines rather than a temporary one. Berges, “Please, don’t worry! Nothing came of it,” 338.
certainly were received by high-fluting speeches and very kind-sounding words and finally taken to Hellman’s Boarding house for temporary shelter.\textsuperscript{43} Max Berges and his wife Annie remained in Manila for the next sixteen months until December 1939, at which time they completed their paper work for the second time and immigrated to the United States, having received letters of recommendation from Professor Albert Einstein that significantly aided their immigration.\textsuperscript{44}

**D: Rescue by Selection: Origins, 1938**

The rescue of these German Jews from Shanghai came to the attention of the Refugee Economic Corporation (REC), headquartered in New York City and an affiliate of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.\textsuperscript{45} Incorporated in 1934, the REC, originally called the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee,\textsuperscript{46} specialized in funding Jewish settlements in countries that agreed to take in refugee Jews.\textsuperscript{47} Exactly how the plan to initiate rescue in the Philippines was conceived has become shrouded in legend over the last seventy years. Stories credit President

\textsuperscript{43} Berges, “Please, don’t worry! Nothing came of it,” 330.

\textsuperscript{44} Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Albert Einstein Archives, Berges File, 52-545.


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 145.

Quezon for initiating the offer, others claim High Commissioner McNutt devised the plan, and still others place members of the JRC at a poker table with Eisenhower, Quezon, McNutt, and Frieder, where these gambling buddies hashed out the plan while indulging in fine cigars rolled by S. Frieder & Sons Manufacturing. But according to the documentary record, once information spread to the REC that the Philippines could be a safe haven for further Jewish immigration, the notable correspondence between the real initiators began: Charles Liebman and Bruno Schachner of the REC in New York; Paul V. McNutt, the U. S. High Commissioner for the Philippine Islands; Philip Frieder and his brothers, of the successful Jewish merchant family in the Philippines and directors of the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila; Manual Luis Quezon y Molina, President of the Commonwealth nation of the Philippines; and J. C. Hyman of the New York-based American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

According to correspondence between Liebman of the REC and US High Commissioner McNutt in May and June of 1938, the REC initiated contact with McNutt through mutual acquaintances with two brothers, Julius and Jacob Weiss, the former an associate with the REC and the latter an Indiana State Senator and personal friend of McNutt. McNutt’s May 19, 1938 letter to Julius Weiss, brother of his friend and colleague Jacob Weiss, is the earliest official record discussing rescue in the Philippines:

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48 For details about the background of the Weiss brothers, see Ephraim, Escape to Manila, 27-28.
In performance of my promise made to your brother Jacob, as soon as I returned to the Islands I discussed the possibility of absorbing a part of the Jewish political refugees from countries in Europe with the Commonwealth Officials and the responsible leaders of the Jewish community in Manila. Several conferences have been held and serious study given the entire problem.49

One obscure newspaper article from the papers of Paul V. McNutt housed in the Lilly Library at Indiana University, with neither date nor newspaper title, sheds some light on how this “promise” to Jacob Weiss came about.

From a South Haven, Michigan Jewish newspaper printed sometime in 1940, this article discussed “how Paul V. McNutt aided the refugees:”50

Senator Weiss wrote a letter to High Commissioner McNutt, asking simply what McNutt thought of the possibilities of refuge in the Philippines. By return mail came a letter from McNutt. He said he’d talk to Weiss in a few weeks when he returned to the United States [. . .] There was no opportunity for the two to talk in Indianapolis. In Washington there was a reception. The line looked a mile long. Thousands were grouped around and in front of McNutt. When Weiss came into view, McNutt stopped him. They talked

49 Paul V. McNutt to Julius Weiss, May 19, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

there in full view of thousands for 10 minutes [. . .] McNutt explained that he
had to visit the President, the Secretary of State, and a dozen other important
government officials. Would Weiss stay in Washington for breakfast two
days hence? [. . .] “Jake,” said McNutt, “it’s all arranged. The visas will be
okayed by me and won’t have to clear through the State Department. When I
get back to Manila I’m going to arrange for the proper reception of these
refugees.”

The article further described how McNutt, upon his return to the Philippines,
“organized the Jewish community in Manila” and sent details of a selection plan in a
letter to Weiss. This supports the correspondence from McNutt to Julius Weiss in
May 1938 that discussed components of the plan. While this article may take some
liberties in its summations, it helps to place a timeline together of when the idea for
rescue in the Philippines was conceived.

McNutt arrived in Washington DC on February 23, 1938 and remained in the US
for two months before returning to the Philippines, at which time meetings
convened with leaders of the Jewish Community in Manila. We learn from
correspondence between Liebman and McNutt that Weiss had made the inquiry on

52 Ibid.
behalf of the REC. 54 A memorandum of a conversation in Cincinnati on November 26, 1938 revealed that “a letter from the Refugee Economic Corporation . . . asked whether it would be possible to allow 100 German Jewish families to settle in the Philippines.” 55 The undated newspaper article in McNutt’s collection tells us that the initial letter from Jacob Weiss to McNutt inquiring about rescuing refugees in the Philippines must have been sent before McNutt traveled to DC in February 1938, perhaps as early as December 1937. In the communiqué of May 19, 1938, from McNutt to Weiss, McNutt further stated:

I find that the commonwealth officials are quite sympathetic to the idea of receiving those who can be absorbed. With the foregoing in mind I asked a representative committee of Jewish leaders to prepare a list of those who might be absorbed at the present time. 56

From this we know that meetings had already transpired prior to mid May 1938 to devise a program of selection to bring German refugee Jews to the Philippines.

The November 26th memorandum revealed that McNutt had shown the initial inquiry from Weiss on behalf of the REC to Philip Frieder and that Frieder

54 Charles Liebman to Paul V. McNutt, June 10, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

55 “Memorandum of Conversation Between Mr. Hyman and Morris Frieder of Cincinnati, Ohio on November 28th [1938] at 3:30 P.M,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

56 Paul V. McNutt to Julius Weiss, May 19, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
affirmatively responded, “provided they could select the type of people who were to come and provided also that the Refugee Economic Corporation could supply these hundred families with enough money to maintain them for about ten weeks after their arrival in order that they might learn the language and become acclimatized.”

According to this memorandum, the REC agreed to advance funds in order to meet the stipulations voiced by the Jewish community of Manila and commissioner McNutt that the refugees not become public charges. The importance of McNutt’s role in this selection program cannot be overstated. Without his initiation of the dialog between the Philippine Government, the US State Department, the Jewish Community in Manila, and the American Jewish relief organizations, it is doubtful this plan would have ever germinated. McNutt's willingness to work with the many agencies involved in this rescue effort was key to the success of the program.

President Roosevelt appointed McNutt High Commissioner to the Philippines on March 1, 1937 and he served in this capacity for two years—the most crucial years in organizing Jewish immigration to the Philippines. McNutt, when still in his mid-thirties, was appointed dean of the Indiana University law school, and in 1932 he was elected governor of Indiana, the first Democratic governor after a long line of Republican governors. McNutt’s biographer, I. George Blake, describes him as a defender of all and “particularly of their civil rights. [. . .] The result of McNutt’s stand


58 For more on McNutt’s years as Governor, see I. George Blake, Paul V. McNutt: Portrait of a Hoosier Statesman (Indianapolis: Central Publishing Company, 1966), 124-172.
was that the Jews, Negros, and the Catholics looked upon him as their champion.”

As governor, he built a political machine dedicated to his presidential ambitions. But when Franklin Roosevelt decided to forego the presidential custom of retiring after two terms, McNutt had to stand aside at the peak of his political career while FDR won third and fourth terms as president. After his service as High Commissioner, McNutt filled other governmental posts in the Roosevelt Administration and later returned to the Philippines as the first US Ambassador to the New Republic in 1946.

**E: Rescue by Selection and the US Dept. of State, 1938 – 1940**

In the aforementioned May 19, 1938 letter from McNutt to Weiss, we learn that McNutt understood that the Immigration Quota Act of 1924 did not apply to the Philippines when he requested that members of the JRC in Manila present him with “a list of those who might be absorbed” into the current Philippine economy. The Philippine government was at the time engaged in a complete overhaul of its immigration practices and would not complete the ratification process of their new immigration laws until 1940. Therefore during the first five years of the

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Commonwealth Government, greater freedom existed for refugee immigration, but it was vital that immigrant aliens not become a drain on their host nation.\textsuperscript{62} Absorption of Jewish refugees into the Philippines was therefore dependent on the economic ability of the existing community to support the increasing population rather than an imposed quota limitation. Therefore the leaders of the Jewish community in Manila, led by the Frieder brothers, composed and sent to McNutt a list of needed professionals who could be economically absorbed immediately into the community. McNutt included the list in his communiqué with Weiss, a list of various professions and skills requiring about “one hundred families” to fill.\textsuperscript{63} McNutt's correspondence reflects how sincerely he supported the efforts to rescue German Jews:

I am deeply interested in the solution of the problem of caring for political refugees and I am anxious to have any experiment in the Philippine Islands succeed [. . .] I should be very glad to do anything in my power to assist in handling these matters.\textsuperscript{64}

Ephraim’s characterization of McNutt as “no more than lukewarm about Jewish immigration to the Philippines” in the beginning is not reflected in the documentary record.\textsuperscript{65} In post-war correspondence between Charles Liebman of the REC and Dr.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} Goldstein, “Singapore, Manila, and Harbin,” 8.
\item \textsuperscript{63} McNutt to Weiss, May 19, 1938, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ephraim, \textit{Escape to Manila}, 23.
\end{itemize}
Isaiah Bowman, geographer and consultant to the US State Department, Liebman rehearsed the history of the rescue of Jews in the Philippines and declared that “Mr. Paul McNutt was the prime mover.” He further explained how “McNutt succeeded in persuading the Philippine Government and our State Department to grant visas for a considerable number of selected immigrants.” McNutt's magnanimous position reflected a genuine altruistic attitude, and whether or not he felt it would serve some political or economic exigency, his involvement was crucial. But the success of the selection plan hung on other contingencies as well, such as the cooperation of the US State Department and support from various relief organizations in the world.

Julius Weiss immediately shared his May 19, 1938 communiqué from McNutt with Bruno Schachner, assistant secretary of the REC, who penned a letter to the Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland (Relief Association for Jews in Germany) in Berlin on June 1, 1938, recounting the initial provisions for a rescue plan for refugee immigration to the Philippines:

Gentlemen:

We are informed by the United States High Commissioner for the Philippine Islands, who is turn bases his opinion on information furnished him by leaders of the local Jewish community, that there could be absorbed in the Philippine Islands, within a relatively short time, the following persons:

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66 Charles Liebman to Isaiah Bowman, September 25, 1947, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

67 Ibid.
20 Physicians, among whom should be one eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, one skin specialist, and one or two surgeons.

10 Chemical Engineers

25 Registered Nurses

5 Dentists, who should have their own equipment

2 Ortho-Dentists

4 Oculists

10 Auto Mechanics

5 Cigar and Tobacco Experts

5 Women Dressmakers, stylists

5 Barbers - men and women

5 Accountants

5 Film and Photograph Experts

1 Rabbi, not over forty years of age, conservative, married and able to speak English.

20 Farmers

We are trying to organize the immigration of these people, and we should be indebted to you if you could meanwhile prepare a preliminary list of people meeting the requirements outlined above. As soon as we have completed arrangements, we will proceed with a final selection. Please let us know, meanwhile, whether all the various classes of persons could be found among
the people registered with you, and if not, which ones are lacking. In view of the delicacy of the negotiations involved, we expect you to keep this matter entirely confidential, and under no circumstances to give it any publicity whatsoever. In addition, we would appreciate it if you would not approach the United States High Commissioner on your own behalf, in order not to confuse him by a variety of inquiries.  

The Hilfsverein began assembling applicant names immediately and in spite of an international resolve “to keep this matter entirely confidential,” word spread rapidly of a rescue opportunity in the Philippines.

An official correspondence from Charles Liebman, president of the REC, to McNutt on June 10, 1938 disclosed Julius Weiss’s transmittal of McNutt’s May 19th communiqué to the REC and how the REC had “taken the liberty of transmitting the list of desirable immigrants to a social-work agency in Germany, which will, in turn, select from among the applicants for emigration those who might be welcome in the Philippine Islands.” Liebman assured McNutt that no plans for sending the selected immigrants to the Philippines would be made until their total economic assimilation in the community could be guaranteed, thereby eliminating “any special problem[s]” that would be caused by their arrival. Liebman reminded McNutt of Germany's

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68 Bruno Schachner (REC) to Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland, June 1, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

69 Charles Liebman to Paul V. McNutt, June 10, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
emigration policies restricting the amount of assets that Jews could take out of the country and how it would be necessary for “outside agencies . . . [to] care for them for an initial period” until they could become self-supporting. Liebman asked McNutt for an estimate “as to how much money would be required to support a person or a family at subsistence a level, and how long the period of adjustment [was] likely to last.” Liebman finished his letter to McNutt with a sincere appreciation for McNutt’s generosity and interest in the “fate of refugees.” This also challenges Ephraim’s characterization that McNutt started off ambivalent to refuge rescue.

In a return communiqué dated June 24, 1938, McNutt informed Liebman that subsistence for a single person for a seventy-five day period amounted to about $50.00; $75.00 for a family of two; and about $90.00 for a family of three. McNutt revealed that he understood the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee “was prepared to supply single persons with 900 marks, and families with something over 2000 marks,” advising further that single persons come with at least $125.00 and families with $235.00. McNutt related the ongoing rescue of refugees arriving independent of the proposed selection plan:

70 Charles Liebman to Paul V. McNutt, June 10, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

71 Ibid.

72 Paul V. McNutt to Charles Liebman, June 24, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
The local Jewish community is comparatively small and few are in a position to support the local fund. The burden actually falls on about five families. Because of the fact that the local group furnished all of the funds to care for the forty refugee families which have arrived during the past few weeks, and will be required to meet the needs of others who come on their own account, I do not feel that the local group should be asked to do more.73

McNutt assured Liebman that the JRC in Manila would receive the refugees when they arrived and arrange for their lodging. He further advised Liebman that all future contact regarding the rescue of refugees by this plan could be directed personally to Philip Frieder in Manila.74

As the various agencies worked to put the selection program into play, refugees arrived in Manila independently, most en route to Shanghai. These disembarked at Manila seeking asylum on US soil and hoping that residence in Manila would lead to quota status for eventual immigration to the United States. Ephraim maintains that immigration to the Philippines represented a back-door entrance into the United States,75 but such a proviso certainly existed neither in the US immigration laws of the time, nor in the Philippine immigration laws being formulated. The

73 Paul V. McNutt to Charles Liebman, June 24, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

74 Ibid.

aforementioned memorandum of a conversation held in New York on November 28, 1938 between Mr. Hyman of the JDC and Morris Frieder, brother of Phillip Frieder of Manila, summarized the destitute circumstances of these refugees:

Approximately 350 refugees have arrived in Manila independently. Most of these are totally without funds and are constituting a serious problem for the Jewish community there. There are, all told, about 60 Jewish families in Manila, (the American Jewish Yearbook lists the Jewish population of the Philippines as 500) of whom Mr. Frieder says there are only about 6 Jewish families who are in a position to contribute. It costs about .50 cents a day to maintain each of the 350 refugees there.76

Jock Netzorg, son of Morton I. Netzorg another member of the JRC in Manila, told his interviewer, Michael Onorato, how the community practiced the principle of tithing to support the refugees who arrived before financial support was received from the REC.77 By this means the Jewish community of Manila raised an average of $2000 to $2500 monthly for the refugee rescue efforts. For McNutt and others, it was vital that entrance into the Philippines follow a controlled, organized plan so that indiscriminate immigration would not overload the community and scuttle the plan. With financial support promised by the REC for the needs of selected


77 Onorato, Jock Netzorg: Manila Memories, 3.
immigrants to the Philippines, another contingency needed to be dealt with, namely how to obtain visas for the immigrants.

In a written communication from Schachner of the REC to Frieder dated July 29, 1938, Schachner revealed that applications from refugees in Germany had already arrived from the Hilfsverein in Berlin. After informing Frieder of their intention to transmit those lists to the JRC in Manila, Schachner inquired if Frieder “anticipate[d] any difficulties in obtaining visas for those people” who would be approved by the JRC for immigration to the Philippines.\(^78\) This begs an answer to the question of when the US State Department was informed about the plans to select Jewish refugees for immigration to the Philippines. Two weeks prior to this correspondence between Schachner and Frieder, McNutt received a radiogram from the Department of State through the office of the Secretary of War, Washington DC, dated July 13, 1938: “Have been informally advised emergency entry into the Philippines of several hundred Jewish refugees from Europe being arranged. Please radio all information available.”\(^79\) Apparently having heard through the grape-vine of intended rescue in the Philippines, a more official statement was sought. In reply, McNutt stated that:

> Approximately forty families of Jewish refugees, who came to Philippines on own initiative or because of connections here, have been absorbed. Through

\(^{78}\) Schachner to Frieder, July 29, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

\(^{79}\) Burnett to McNutt, July 13, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943-1.
cooperation leaders local Jewish community and Commonwealth officials. 

*arrangements have been made to take one hundred additional families of approved professions and vocations in three groups at intervals [of] sixty days.* [italics added] If this experiment is successful it may be possible to absorb others. In order to prevent attempted entry of more refugees than can be cared for properly it is considered unwise to give any publicity to the movement.  

The significance of these radiograms lies in the fact that the dispatch agency for these encrypted messages was the Bureau of Insular Affairs within the Department of War, which transmitted copies of all communiqués to the Department of State: “The Secretary of War presents his compliments to the Honorable Secretary of State and is pleased to enclose herewith a copy of a radiogram (No. 518, July 16th) relative to the entry of Jewish refugees in the Philippines.” The reaction of the State Department can best be understood by examining an episode in early September 1938, which suggests that the State Department was not completely supportive of the Philippine immigration plans.

US Secretary of State Cordell Hull received a telegram dated September 6, 1938 from the American Consul in Milan, Italy inquiring about immigration for 500 non-

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80 McNutt to Burnett, July 16, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-19445, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943-1.

81 “Confidential,” July 16, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-19445, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943-1.
Italian refugee Jews to the Philippines. The Jewish Central Refugee Committee for Italy had inquired at the US Consul in Milan about obtaining visas for these refugees, stating that Jewish relief organizations in Paris and London would finance all necessary expenditures. The US Consul stated that “unless otherwise instructed visas will be granted here under the immigration laws of 1917. Please instruct.”

Hull immediately responded that the matter was being broached with the Philippine authorities and “pending the Department’s further instructions, visas should not repeat not be granted.” Similar telegrams were dispatched to US embassies and consuls in London, Zurich, and Rotterdam. Hull then dispatched a communiqué concerning the refugees to McNutt on September 12, 1938:

Please inform the Commonwealth Government in strict confidence that the Department of State has received a telegram from the American Consul General in Milan, Italy saying that the Jewish Central Refugee Committee for Italy proposes to have five hundred non-Italian Jews of whom one-half are merchants and one-quarter professional persons obtain visas and proceed to the Philippine Islands. It is stated that these applicants will be furnished with transportation and landing money by refugee organizations. Information from other sources indicates the possibility of a movement from Central Europe to

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82 Gray, Milan to Secretary of State, September 6, 1938, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B.55, J/1.

83 Hull to American Consul, Naples, September 7, 1938, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B.55, J/1.
the Philippine Islands. [italics added] The Department of State has telegraphed the Consul General at Milan and certain other officers in Europe that the matter is being taken up with the appropriate authorities of the Philippine Islands and that no action in the cases of the persons in question should be taken pending the receipt of further instructions from the Department. The Department of State brings the foregoing to the attention of the Commonwealth authorities for their information and consideration and for a statement of their desires in the matter. The attention of the Commonwealth authorities should be called to the fact that aside from the question of policy involved in the admission into the Philippine Islands of these and similar groups of persons from Central Europe, there are also involved technical questions of admissibility under section 3 of the Immigration Act of 1917 which excluded among other classes of aliens, persons whose passage is paid for by any corporation, association, society, municipality, or foreign government either directly or indirectly and persons likely to become a public charge.  

Several important observations can be made as a result of this radiogram from the US Secretary of State to the US High Commissioner of the Philippines regarding the issuance of visas to Jewish refugees fleeing to the Philippines. It shows that the US State Department had not been officially notified earlier about rescue immigration to

84 Hull to McNutt, September 12, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, Entry 5, File #28943-2.
the Philippines and it implies that the State Department viewed this rescue as a way for undesirable “central” Europeans to enter US territories. It also shows that while the State Department could not cite quota restrictions on immigration to the Philippines, they did focus on exclusionary clauses of the 1917 immigration laws to try to deter the rescue.

How should we view then the process of organizing a selection plan for Jewish refugee rescue in the Philippines that ensued without disclosure to the US State Department officials? Obviously McNutt had regarded such a disclosure as unnecessary and considered it an affair that fell totally within the discretion of his office and that of Philippine President Quezon, who had already offered his support for the program. (McNutt’s July 16th radiogram to Burnett quoted earlier mentioned Commonwealth officials having approved of the plan). The fact that US Secretary of State Cordell Hull requested clarification of the immigration procedures for the Philippines from the US High Commissioner tells us that he too recognized McNutt’s authority over the issue. This may be reasonably assumed when given the fact that additional duties and functions delegated to the High Commissioner under the provisions of section 7 of the Independence Act were forwarded to McNutt on March 1, 1937, when he accepted his appointment by FDR to be High Commissioner to the Philippines. These instructions granted the High Commissioner authority to

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85 McNutt to Burnett, July 16, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, Entry 5, File 28943, -1-. 

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waive passport and visa requirements for aliens in certain categories.\textsuperscript{86} Recalling the contents of the undated newspaper article from McNutt’s manuscripts, the article quoted McNutt as saying: “it’s all arranged. The visas will be okayed by me and won’t have to clear through the State Department.”\textsuperscript{87} The manner of the issuance of the visas in the execution of the plan confirms McNutt’s preeminence over the State Department in approving applicants for visas. An examination of important events regarding immigration practices in the Philippines in 1937 and 1938 offers added contextualization for the procedures initiated in order to facilitate controlled immigration of refugee Jews into the Philippines.

According to McNutt’s quarterly report for December 1937, “considerable confusion” occurred in 1937 when instructions from the US State Department advised US consular officers overseas “that they had no authority to refuse to issue visas for aliens desiring to proceed to the Philippines, except for such aliens whose entry might be considered harmful to the public safety.”\textsuperscript{88} McNutt’s annual report further stated that the US State Department advised the consular officers that “admissibility of aliens is one to be determined by the immigration officers of the

\textsuperscript{86} Woodring to McNutt, March 1, 1937, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files, Office of the US High Commissioner, Entry 5, Box 472, Folder 3038-B, 118.

\textsuperscript{87} “How Paul V. McNutt Aided the Refugees,” Indiana University Bloomington, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, McNutt Mss., Box 10.

\textsuperscript{88} Quarterly Report of the United States High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands to the President of the United States Quarter Ending December 31, 1937, Indiana University Bloomington, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, McNutt Mss, Box 9, p. 18.
Philippine Islands upon arrival at Philippine Ports.” McNutt recounted how the observance of the US State Department directives by the consular officers abroad had allowed “large numbers of aliens from various disturbed regions of the world” unlimited influx into the Philippines, creating a serious problem that the Commonwealth government was ill equipped to handle. According to McNutt, Philippine immigration authorities “were disposed to admit without question an alien who presented a travel document bearing the visa of an American consul.” Neither consuls abroad nor immigration officers in the Philippines exercised appropriate restrictions when needed. When the administration of the immigration laws were transferred from the Commonwealth Department of Finance to the Department of Labor, officials unschooled in the Immigration Laws of 1917 failed miserably in their execution of those laws. That became evident in McNutt’s report to the US President the next year.

McNutt related in his quarterly report at the end of 1938 that multiple appeals from US and foreign consuls requested “copies of the regulations governing the administration of the applicable immigration law in the Philippines,” so officials could advise immigrants properly as to what to expect under Philippine Law.

89 Quarterly Report of the United States High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands to the President of the United States Quarter Ending December 31, 1937, Indiana University Bloomington, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, McNutt Mss, Box 9, p. 18.

90 Ibid., 19.

91 Ibid., 66
McNutt’s office penned a memorandum on this growing problem, which documented serious infractions by Philippine officials. The memorandum depicted Philippine immigration as having “no regulations and the whole thing [being] handled on a purely hit-or-miss system.” McNutt’s observation of the ineptitude of the Philippine immigration officials to execute laws and procedures effectively was written April 29, 1938, during the time when McNutt and the JRC conferred together on procedures for refugee rescue in the Philippines. McNutt’s office advised Quezon that he hire experts on immigration laws and practices in the US to come and restructure immigration laws for the Philippines. According to McNutt’s report, such advisors arrived in December 1938. But during the earlier months of 1938, Quezon executed a probe into the allegations of misconduct in his immigration office and as a result suspended twenty-three officers and employees of the immigration service and prosecuted four. It was during this time of upheaval and restructuring of the immigration policies and offices in the Philippines that the unusual empowerment of selection by the JRC in Manila for the issuance of visas came into being, a process that took the power of visa selection out of the hands of US State Department Officials and American consular officers abroad and put it in the hands of the JRC and Paul V. McNutt.

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92 Quarterly Report of the United States High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands to the President of the United States Quarter Ending December 31, 1937, Indiana University Bloomington, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, McNutt Mss, Box 9, p. 59-60.
In response to Cordell Hull’s inquiry regarding Philippine immigration policies for the 500 non-Italian Jews seeking visas to the Philippines, McNutt advised the US Secretary of State that the—

commonwealth officials and local committee [referring to the JRC] think it unwise to attempt absorption additional refugees at this time [. . .] visas should be given only to those selected from lists submitted in advance to Commonwealth officials and committee. Commonwealth officials concur in opinion that, with such safeguards, experiment will be successful and maximum number of refugees can be absorbed.  

From this point forward, it was clear that immigration of refugee Jews into the Philippines would be under the auspices of Commonwealth officials, namely Quezon and McNutt, and members of the JRC. After several communiqués went back and forth between the offices of the US State Department and the High Commissioner of the Philippines, McNutt detailed the selection plan for State Department officials:

Initial request and placement of refugee families in the Philippines came from the Refugee Economic Corporation [. . .] and was submitted to Commonwealth officials and to a Committee of Representatives Jewish Citizens headed by P.S. Frieder. [. . .] All concerned agreed to absorb 100 families of approved records in designated professions and vocations in three

93 McNutt, translation of coded radiogram received September 15, 1939. NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-2.
groups at intervals of sixty days [. . .] Selections based on these records now being made by Commonwealth authorities and committee. Suggest that when lists are complete, they be forwarded to Department of State in order that appropriate consular officers be authorized to give visas. Commonwealth officials request that visas be given only to them on approved lists.94

A JDC memorandum reveals that this selection plan intended “to be increased to five hundred if initial efforts [were] successful.”95 I am unaware of any other rescue of Jewish refugees where the power of the consular officers in selecting those so fortunate as to receive an immigration visa was taken from the consuls and put into the hands of a local committee of Jewish businessmen.

However, the State Department did not accept its impotence in this matter lightly. Communiqués ensued as State Department officials felt the need to emphasize the authority of the Immigration Laws of 1917 over the influx of refugee Jews in the Philippines, drawing attention to certain clauses they felt excluded any sizable immigration of Jews from Europe.

In view of the small sums which it is stated the selected refugees will have in their possession, and in the absence of information that plans have been made for placement of refugees and for their support in the meantime, you may...

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94 McNutt, translation of coded radiogram received September 30, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-5.

95 “Memorandum re: Philippine Islands,” October 1, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
wish to invite the attention of the authorities to the provisions in section 3 of the Immigration Act of 1917 relating to the exclusion of aliens likely to become public charges. This act is applicable to the Philippine Islands and as the Commonwealth authorities are responsible for the enforcement of the Act in the Philippine Islands they will wish in giving tentative consideration to the cases of these refugees to go into the matter of their admissibility or inadmissibility under the provisions of the Act, including those relating to aliens likely to become public charges [. . .] To avoid exclusion under the public charge clause, aliens must establish that they have sufficient means of support or such assurances of continuing support by persons able to support them.96

McNutt’s short response on October 25, 1938, assuring State Department officials that “all refugees now in [the] Islands have been placed satisfactorily” while explaining how the “responsible local committee has undertaken placement and support of all others selected” accompanied the first official list of German refugee Jews selected for immigration into the Philippines.97

After the Hilfsverein in Berlin received the McNutt-Frieder profession and vocation preference list, they compiled applications from German Jewish candidates

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96 Messersmith to McNutt, October 8, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-6.

97 McNutt to State Department, October 25, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-8.
and forwarded them to the REC, which then sent them to the Philippines, where a
three man committee from the Jewish community, led by one of the Frieder brothers,
evaluated them. The committee checked their prerequisites for immigration,
including current passports, applicant background information, former professional
or other activities, available funds to offer temporary sustenance, and the likelihood
of eventual successful assimilation into the current community. When the committee
had the assurances it needed, it recommended the issuance of visas by name and
address of the applicants in the form of an affidavit, which they presented to McNutt
for his approval. Once approved by Quezon and McNutt, both of whom looked for
the necessary documentation that the JRC had adequate funds on deposit for the
refugees, the list was radioed in code through the War Department via the Bureau of
Insular Affairs to the State Department. Through this communication process,
McNutt directed that the State Department request “that appropriate consular
officials be authorized to give visas” to the listed names of selected refugees. This
first selection list, composed October 25, 1938, authorized visas for over one
hundred Germans Jews – men, women and children – along with six refugee Jews
from Austria. McNutt augmented this list one month later with another forty-six
names from Germany and two from Italy, totaling one hundred families in all.

98 Herbert Katzki, JDC Office meeting, June 23, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution
Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

99 Ibid.
McNutt requested confirmation of official notification to the appropriate consular officers on three different communiqués until an official reply confirming the transmissions came from George Messersmith, Assistant Secretary of State, on November 30, 1938:

The names of the refugees contained in telegrams no. 811 of October 25, and no. 883 of November 22, 1938 from the High Commissioner have been transmitted by mail to the consular officers in the respective districts of the aliens’ residences. The consular officers have been requested to inform the Department regarding the action taken in the cases of the refugees referred to and upon receipt of the reports the War Department will be informed. The procedure of having the names of the refugees for whom the Philippine authorities have granted authorization for entry into the Philippine Island communicated through the War Department to the Department of State for transmission to the appropriate consular officers is considered to be satisfactory.100

Evidence of State Department compliance with the provisions of the Jewish refugee selection plan went even further as Messersmith also informed McNutt that consular officers in Singapore, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands, East Indies, India, Egypt, and Shanghai had been notified “that visas should not be issued to German refugees proceeding to the Philippine Islands without notice of authorization for...

100 Messersmith to McNutt, November 30, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-16.
entry into the Islands having been received from the Philippine authorities through
the Department of State.”¹⁰¹ This widespread communication to consular officers
abroad spurred inquiries regarding non-German and non-Jewish refugee immigration
into the Philippines as well.

When instructions from the State Department reached the consular offices
advising them not to issue immigration visas to the Philippines except to persons on
a pre-approved selection list,¹⁰² clarification for exceptions to the rule began to pour
in. One such communiqué came in from Singapore:

Strict interpretation of the Department’s telegram dated November 22, [1938]
7 p.m., indicates that the procedure outlined may be applicable to all persons
proceeding to the Philippines Islands. If not is it applicable to non-German
refugees, to non-destitute German refugees, or only to German destitute
refugees?¹⁰³

Messersmith repeated this inquiry to McNutt “to obtain an expression of the views of
the Philippine authorities regarding the cases of persons other than those of German

¹⁰¹ Messersmith to McNutt, November 30, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the
Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, Folder #28943-16.

¹⁰² The Department of State issued an official “Visa Instruction” regarding “German Refugees
Proceeding to the Philippine Islands” for transmission to all US Consuls and Embassies. Messersmith,
Visa Instruction, November 30, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of
State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B55, J/19a.

¹⁰³ Telegram from Singapore to Secretary of State, November 25, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59,
General Records Department of State, Entry 704, Visa Division 1914-1940, Box 245, 811B.55,
J/16.
refugees” seeking visas to the Philippines at US consular offices.\textsuperscript{104} When a similar inquiry came in from the American Embassy in Paris, the response sent can only be categorized as astounding:

Information has been received from the Philippine authorities indicating that the procedure outlined in the circular instruction of November 30, 1938, diplomatic serial no. 3008, should be followed in the case of \textit{all refugees} \textsuperscript{105} desiring to proceed to the Philippine Islands.

The significance of this must not be overlooked. This tells us the JRC committee in Manila had been empowered to review all applications for immigration to the Philippines, not just those of Jewish refugees. In light of the complete disarray of the immigration offices of the Commonwealth government at the time, assigning this immigration application oversight to the JRC made a great deal of sense. They already had an effective organized system in place. So not only did the Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila select European Jews for immigration, but they selected non-Jewish and non-destitute immigrants as well. Visa records of the State Department testify that in addition to names of refugee Jews being granted visas through the McNutt-Frieder selection plan, names of other classifications of refugees also emerged: “Commonwealth authorities authorize issuance of visas to following

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Messersmith to Woodring, November 30, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B55, J/16.}

\footnote{“To the American Charge d’Affairs ad interim,” Paris, 12/14/38. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B.55, J/17.}
\end{footnotes}
persons: Miss Hertha Gottscheer, Vienna, Austria, Catholic refugee [. . .] Names of Catholic priests and nuns also show up in the visa records.

Queries about rescue opportunities in the Philippines started to come in from all directions. J.C. Hyman, Executive Director of the JDC, responded December 27, 1938 to Col. Julius Ochs Adler of the New York Times:

Dear Colonel Adler: Dr Jonah Wise mentioned to me that you wished some information concerning the settling of a German immigrant in the Philippines. [. . .] immigrants are admitted entirely on a selective individual basis in limited numbers, acceptability being dependent on background and former professional or other activities of the applicant. It virtually lies within the discretion of the High Commissioner to determine who should be admitted and who may not be [. . .] a gentleman by the name of Mr. Frieder, one of the outstanding Jewish leaders, is the chairman, and very largely on his recommendation to the Philippine Immigration Commissioner and Governor McNutt is [application] formally approved.¹⁰⁷

Rabbi Wise had been head of the JDC and worked extensively in the United States and Germany to facilitate aid to German refugee Jews. He also represented the JDC

¹⁰⁶ War Department, Washington, May 19, 1939. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division 1914-1940, Entry 704, Box 246, 811B.55, J/192.

¹⁰⁷ J.C. Hyman to Julius Ochs Adler, December 27, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
at the Evian Conference. Dialogs concerning refugee rescue in the Philippines had now reached influential circles.

Inquires from private parties wishing to guarantee financial support for relatives in Europe so that they could obtain visas to the Philippines referred to the JRC came from many directions. This following reply from A. M. Warren, Chief of the Visa Division to Mr. Stephen Skodak of Lorain, Ohio, represents numerous letters to dozens of private parties seeking information on immigration to the Philippines:

I have your letter of June 2, 1939 requesting to be advised of the procedure to be followed by two chemical engineers, subjects of Hungary, in affecting their immigration into the Philippine Islands. The Philippine authorities have requested that advance authorization for entry into the Islands be obtained from the Philippine authorities at Manila before visas may be issued. It is understood that the names of persons desiring to proceed to the Islands may be submitted to the Philippine authorities by the Jewish Refugee Committee, Post Office Box 2233, Manila, Philippine Islands.

So not only do we have a selection rescue plan of Jews saving Jews, but we have a selection plan of Jews saving non-Jews as well.

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108 Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 131-132, 235.

Various Jewish relief organizations share credit for the implementation of the McNutt-Frieder selection plan. As already discussed, the first Jewish relief organizations involved with rescue in the Philippines, other than the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila, were the Refugee Economic Corporation, the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden in Berlin, and the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The JDC, founded in 1914 to provide relief for Jews in Palestine and eastern Europe, was the primary organization for the distribution of funds from the American Jewish community to Jews in Germany. It had a virtual monopoly on overseas aid. A general trend in American Jewry against unification of Jewish relief organizations existed during the years between the world wars. These agencies divided into Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox persuasions, along with innumerable political, social, and cultural distinctions. Sometimes these agencies got in each others’ way in their quests for philanthropic resources, as is seen in the next chapter’s treatise on the Mindanao Resettlement Project. But in the initial financing of the McNutt-Frieder selection plan, the REC held the reins.

The successful implementation of this rescue plan depended solely on its financial viability. From the very beginning, when McNutt sent the May 19, 1938 communique to Weiss listing needed professions and vocations of refugees, McNutt

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stressed that the refugees “be provided with sufficient funds to care for their needs for seventy-five days.”\footnote[111]{Paul V. McNutt to Julius Weiss, May 19, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.} As the selection plan progressed into fruition in those early months, the REC pledged “that the proper financial arrangements” would be made to insure its success. An REC memorandum dated October 1, 1938 revealed intentions to expand the plan:

Through intervention of the United States High Commissioner for the Philippine Islands, the Hon. Paul V. McNutt, the Jewish community of the Philippine Islands found employment possibilities for one hundred persons, divided into various occupational groups. This figure is later to be increased to five hundred if initial efforts are successful.\footnote[112]{Memorandum re: Philippine Islands, 10/1/38, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.}

The memorandum stated that the JRC had requested four hundred dollars for the temporary support for each family until they could support themselves. “Since it is impossible to find the money any other way, it is suggested that the Émigré Charitable Fund provide these funds on a loan basis. There is asked, therefore, an initial appropriation of $10,000 for the support of 21 refugees in this manner.”\footnote[113]{Ibid.} The JRC in Manila kept exceptional records of the moneys distributed to the rescued refugees, and in turn, collected moneys from the employed refugees as payment

\footnote[111]{Paul V. McNutt to Julius Weiss, May 19, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.}

\footnote[112]{Memorandum re: Philippine Islands, 10/1/38, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.}

\footnote[113]{Ibid.}
against their loans. But there were always more refugees applying for immigration to the Philippines then there were moneys to support them.

A communiqué from Frieder to the REC in New York on October 31, 1938, illustrated the precarious position of the community, as non-selected immigrants arrived almost daily:

Every steamer that is coming here from Europe is bringing refugees without visas to enter the Philippine Islands. We do everything possible so that they can stay here but all this requires money as none of them have any funds whatsoever. Last week one of the Italian steamers brought 150 enroute to Shanghai. Fourteen of these remained. About fifteen did the same thing a few days before. We now have so many here that in a short time it will be impossible for us to take care of them. We are advised that another steamer, due this week, is bringing sixteen. We are placing them as fast as possible, but they cannot be absorbed so quickly. Therefore, we must support them and our small community here cannot do this. For this reason, I telegraphed you last week asking for financial assistance. The Philippines are still open, but it won't be long if these refugees are not taken care of without government assistance.¹¹⁴

This situation limited the ability of the Manila Jews to offer financial support for the selected refugees that were soon to arrive from Europe.

¹¹⁴Philip Frieder to REC, October 31, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
Funds from other US Jewish refugee relief organizations became crucial. Frieder’s earlier telegraph requested the REC to petition the JDC on their behalf for $10,000 “for 1939 to supplement our local contributions.”\textsuperscript{115} Two weeks later, when Morris Frieder, brother of Philip Frieder of the JRC, met with Joseph Hyman of the JDC in Cincinnati on November 28, 1938, he personally communicated the dire situation in Manila as “approximately 350 refugees [had] arrived in Manila independently” and the local Jewish community simply could not finance their support until they could all be absorbed into the economy. Morris Frieder further stated that “the Philippines might easily become an important resettlement center for German Jewish refugees if it were handled right and that it was dangerous to these future prospects to allow these 350 refugees to become public charges and thus alienate the sympathy of the native population.”\textsuperscript{116} Earlier that day, Morris Frieder had met with the REC and they placed $5000 at the immediate disposal of the JRC — moneys that had been allocated by the JDC. Frieder stressed their need for another $5,000 and Hyman informed him “that in view of the many demands being made upon the JDC it was difficult for [them] to consider a larger allotment.” Since the JDC had not made its budget yet for 1939, Hyman assured Frieder that they would

\textsuperscript{115} Frieder to REC, November 9, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

\textsuperscript{116} Memorandum of Conversation Between Mr. Hyman and Morris Frieder on November 28\textsuperscript{th} at 3:30 pm, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
do their best to allocate another $5000 in a few months time, which they did in February 1939.\footnote{Morrissey to Chase National Bank, February 8, 1939, re: transfer of funds, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.}

Precluding the first wave of arriving immigrants selected by this McNutt-Frieder Plan, a German Rabbi and his wife arrived from Hildesheim in September 1938. Josef Schwarz, who had worked with Joseph in Hildesheim from 1933 to 1937, soon played a critical role in bringing Cysner to Manila. Schwarz's settlement in the Philippines marked a historic moment, for he was the first ordained rabbi ever to reside and serve in the Philippines.\footnote{Ephraim, \textit{Escape to Manila}, 31.} He faced a significantly diverse community of ethnicities, languages, cultures, religious practices, and especially economic status. Bringing religious unity to this conglomerate of differences required the presence of an element of worship that promoted uniformity. Rabbi Schwarz urged the Temple's board of directors to create a position for a cantor to officiate at religious services and who would also teach Sunday School, train choirs, and organize other musical programs.\footnote{Ibid., 37.}

Having obtained permission from the JRC, Rabbi Schwarz cabled his friend Cysner on November 22, 1938 at his last known place of employment, the Verband Reform Synagogue in Hamburg. Amazingly, the telegram made its way to Poland and found Cysner in Zbaszyn. The English translation read: “Do you want to come?

No doubt Cysner informed his friend of his detention at Zbaszyn and his urgent need to emigrate, for Cysner’s name made it on the third list of refugees selected and approved in December 1938 by the JRC for visas to the Philippines.

For the State Department: Local Jewish Refugee Committee and Commonwealth Government Officials have approved a third list of selected refugees. It is requested that instructions be given the appropriate Consular officials authorizing them to issue permanent visas for the Philippines to the following list: Joseph Cysner, 24 years; care American Joint Distribution Committee, Warsaw, Poland.121

A dozen other names, mostly from Germany, appeared on that list as well. Cysner worked to obtain the necessary papers to secure his release.

With the telegram from Schwarz and references from leaders of the refugee community in Zbaszyn, Cysner traveled to Warsaw to obtain a Polish Passport and his visa from the American Consul General in Warsaw, John K. Davis. A few weeks later another communiqué from the State Department arrived on Davis’s desk, informing him that:

120 Telegram, Schwarz to Cysner, November 22, 1938, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01.

121 McNutt to SECWAR, December 8, 1938, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Visa Division, Entry 704, Box 245, 811B.55, J/24.
The Commonwealth Government has granted authority to issue permanent visa to Joseph Cysner even though Polish Government will not permit him to return to Poland. Please issue instructions to American Consul in Warsaw authorizing him, to issue permanent visa for the Philippines to Cysner.\textsuperscript{122}

Apparently Cysner needed to return to Germany to settle his affairs and Poland was not going to allow him to return. Obtaining the visa before he left Poland was imperative. Unbeknownst to the State Department as of their April 20\textsuperscript{th} communiqué quoted above, Cysner had already obtained his visa and was preparing to sail for the Philippines. Warsaw Consular General Davis confirmed:

Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the Department’s instruction of April 24, 1939 (file No. 811B.55 J/160) and, in compliance therewith, to report that a visa was issued to Joseph Cysner on March 13, 1939 for the purpose of enabling him to proceed to the Philippine Islands.\textsuperscript{123}

When Cysner eventually arrived in Manila in May 1939, the Philippine Jewish Community had already been augmented by several hundred refugees, who began arriving in December 1938, bringing the total Jewish population, residents and

\textsuperscript{122} State Department to American Consular Officer in Charge, Warsaw, Poland, April 20, 1939, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Visa Division, Entry 704, Box 246, 811B.55, J/160.

\textsuperscript{123} John K. Davis to the Secretary of State, May 9, 1939, “Subject: Visa case of Joseph Cysner,” NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, Visa Division, Entry 704, Box 246, 811B.55, J/198.
refugees, to nearly 1000, the largest number of Jews in Manila as yet ever assembled.

Cysner's unique talents and abilities enhanced the religious life of the Jewish Community in Manila in many ways, from conducting religious services at the temple, to forming and training choirs, teaching religion classes, and training young Jews for their bar mitzvahs. As Griese wrote, under the tutelage of Rabbi Schwarz and Joseph,

Jewish life in Manila flourished . . . the Sunday school was revived, a Chevra Kadisha (funeral and grave committee) was founded, a Jewish debating club brought those interested in discussing Jewish art and science together, a Youth Club was founded, regular performances were given by a Musical Club and a Dramatic Club, and a Woman's Auxiliary was formed to assist in Jewish welfare work. In addition, a community home was founded in Marikina for the aged and indigent. Numerous social gatherings served to bring the Community together.  

But some refugees experienced difficulty adapting to their new life in the Philippines, and here the treatise of the permanent “immigrant” colonizer versus the temporary “migrant” worker discussed in chapter three may explain some of the problems.

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A detailed report composed in May 1940 by Alex Frieder revealed that a small minority of the refugees could not, or would not, adapt to their new lives in this new environment, failing to adjust to the need to change professions, learn a new language, or just “to evince to even a small degree a spirit of co-operation and mutual helpfulness.” Those unwilling to adjust demonstrated the migrant mentality of temporary existence in an environment that would always be, to them, a foreign host. Alex Frieder had experienced the height of the influx of refugees into the Philippines and his reflections on the successes and failures of the adaptation of the refugees to life in the Philippines offered valuable reflections:

I am unable to account for the failure of some of the immigrants to make full use of the opportunity [to attend English classes offered by the JRC] which has been placed at their disposal. It is strange to note the large attention of aged persons, all beyond the period of employment, and the efforts which they put forth to learn the language. On the other hand, a number of the younger persons, who so badly require English instruction, absent themselves from classes. They have been advised and admonished in vain.

This observation further supports the idea that some of the younger refugees may have harbored the notion that they would return to their prior lives and professions, while the more jaded “older” refugees knew such a hope was futile.

125 Alex Frieder, “Jewish Refugee Committee,” May 7, 1940, p. 10, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

126 Ibid., 12.
Alex Frieder’s extensive and detailed report of the life of the rescued Jewish refugees in Manila for the JDC in New York also revealed great details about the operation of the rescue selection. Alex had been the Frieder brother in charge of the JRC from “December 5, 1938 to May 8, 1940,” as a result of the rotational residency that the Frieder Brothers practiced in their supervision of their cigar manufacturing company in Manila. While Philip Frieder played an integral part in the origination and implementation of the selection rescue plan in 1937 and 1938 during his residence in the Philippines, Alex Frieder coordinated the reception for the refugees, including their maintenance and employment in 1939 and 1940. Another brother, Herbert Frieder, took the reins of the S. Frieder & Sons Cigar Manufacturing Company and the Jewish Refugee Committee in the remainder of 1940 and into 1941, during the implementation of the sponsorship rescue plan soon to be discussed. Morris Frieder, yet another brother, had remained stateside during these years.

Alex witnessed the population of the Jewish community in Manila multiply fivefold with the influx of 850 refugees in an 18 month period, stating “it can be readily asserted that there are few, if any, places in the world that have undertaken [a] bigger refugee burden in proportion to its former Jewish population than has
Manila.” Alex detailed the operation of the JRC and its empowerment for this work by the Philippine government:

The work of our committee in selecting immigration [...] has been such facilitated by our cordial relations with the Office of the United States High Commissioner, as well as with many branches of the Philippine Government, not only with the Office of the President of the Commonwealth. These look to this committee as the sole source of information and advice, and recommendations for permitting any immigration of any refugee from any part of the world to this country. All such applications arriving in this office of the US High Commissioner or in any of the various branches of the Philippine Government are routed to our committee for service and action.  

Alex Frieder further stated that the JRC held a “semi-official status” in this immigration review process for the entire archipelago, detailing factors the committee utilized in rendering their visa selections in a “non-sectarian” manner.

We are duty bound to give conscientious consideration to all cases alike, thus our “approved lists” have contained names of non-Jews. The harsh laws of the Reich were leveled against Jews on the grounds of race and not religion, hence many professed Catholics and Protestants of Jewish origin have been

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127 Alex Frieder, “Jewish Refugee Committee,” May 7, 1940, p. 2, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

128 Ibid., 3.

129 Ibid., 5.
cast forth and we count a large number of these in our community. In addition to this should be mentioned the numerous cases of intermarriage, so that a really considerable percentage of our immigrants is non Jewish. I feel positive that I speak the complete truth in stating that we have shown absolutely no discrimination when offering assistance, although it must be admitted that most non-Jews after arriving in this country, do not look to us for aid.\footnote{130}

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the immigration department of the Philippine Commonwealth government had been riddled with corruption and this also contributed to the empowerment of the JRC as a quasi-official government body of the Philippine nation. So here we have another rare, if not totally unique situation where a committee of Jewish businessmen not only facilitated rescue for fellow religionists in Europe, but for non-Jews and non-Germans as well.

The Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila had composed three different lists of approved immigrants before the end of 1938 when Alex arrived in the Philippines, always receiving more applications than could possibly be approved. The JRC endorsed additional lists of immigrants in every month of the first half of 1939, which became progressively shorter as fewer funds were available until rescue by selection faced suspension in June 1939. In a memorandum by Herbert Katzki, Secretary for the Committee on Refugee Aid in Europe, concerning a visit made by

\footnote{130}{Alex Frieder, “Jewish Refugee Committee,” May 7, 1940, p. 5, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.}
Philip Frieder to the JDC offices on June 23, 1939, Philip now being stateside while Alex took up residence in Manila, Philip expressed that the JRC was “receiving hundreds of applications for visas from people who undoubtedly would be desirable persons for settlement in the Philippines, but it was unable to approve any of them in view of its present financial circumstances.”¹³¹ By this date, 750 refugee Jews had arrived in the Philippines and two-thirds had successfully been placed in jobs. The Jewish community of Manila continued to raise $2000 a month to support the indigent refugees. With the intent of resuming the “approval of immigration applications,” thereby increasing the population numbers of refugees admitted into the Philippines, Philip Frieder requested a grant of $30,000 from the JDC stating that “200 to 300 families per month could come in if there were sufficient funds to provide for them.”¹³² The JDC made those funds available in August 1939. As 1939 wore on, the ability to procure employment for refugees declined, and the Frieder Brothers along with others of the JRC, devised recommendations for a future immigration policy that they felt a need to consider and eventually implement if rescue in the Philippines were to continue.

¹³¹ Katzki, “Confidential,” June 23, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

¹³² Ibid.
The rescue refugee Jews in the Philippines is a rare incident where three methods of saving Jewish lives through immigration transpired. The McNutt-Frieder selection plan morphed into a sponsorship program while plans continued for the mass resettlement of refugees on the Island of Mindanao, to be discussed in the next chapter. Alex Frieder laid out a detailed recommendation in his May 1940 communiqué to the JDC for a “future immigration policy” to further immigration to the Philippines in response to the escalating economic trials in sustaining an increase in refugee population. Alex noted that before he could lay out the full details for this new sponsorship program, three factors needed to be considered, which involved: securing “substantial affidavit[s]” guaranteeing ample support for the applicants; a cash deposit in the committee trust fund to sustain every applicant for a minimum one year’s support; and more careful scrutiny of applicants’ qualifications ensuring their ability to become self-supporting.\footnote{133}{Alex Frieder, “Jewish Refugee Committee,” May 7, 1940, p. 19, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.} In regards to applicants seeking temporary residence “while awaiting permission to proceed to some other country,” Alex Frieder recommended a cash deposit for two years support, along with funds sufficient to purchase their passage to the country of their ultimate destination. He also recommended –
-that the above conditions be waived in cases of applicants, applying directly from Europe, who, in the opinion of our Executive Committee, possess the training and experience and are within the desirable age limits, which will permit them readily to find opportunity for gainful employment.  

In order to avoid such incidents where sponsors of affidavits had “resolutely refused to make good their sworn promises,” Alex Frieder recommended that affidavits of support be filed through the auspices of their local Jewish relief organizations, which will also assume liability for insuring that the affidavits’ sponsors fulfill their obligations as outlined in their affidavits. Alex Frieder closed his comments with sincere expression of gratitude to the JDC and the REC for their continued financial support of their rescue operations.

Committee members of the JDC convened a meeting on June 21, 1940 with both Philip and Alex Frieder in attendance to discuss the “refugee situation in the Philippines.” The Frieders recounted that the resident Jews of Manila, numbering 100 persons, of which no more than twelve were “comfortably situated,” could no longer “contribute funds to the Jewish refugee Committee” for the support of the indigent refugees. At that time, approximately 800 refugees had been received into

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134 Alex Frieder, “Jewish Refugee Committee,” May 7, 1940, p. 20, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

135 Robert Pilpel, “File Memorandum,” June 21, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

136 Ibid.
the islands and two-thirds were employed. Another 182 visa applicants were in route and more visas stood ready to be issued. The Frieders sought confirmation from the JDC that funds for facilitating rescue well into 1941 could be reasonably promised, as the JRC in Manila needed to show guarantees to the Philippine Government that all necessary monies would be available before visa affidavits could be issued:

It was suggested that if we undertook by letter to show you that we would provide you with $10,000 toward the latter part of this year for use beginning January 1, 1941, such a commitment would give you the necessary security to continue your immigration and maintenance program. Messrs. Philip and Alex Frieder found this suggestion acceptable.\(^\text{137}\)

This illustrates the constraints the JRC had to deal with as it affected rescue in the Philippines. Without proof of monies already on deposit or promised by valid relief organizations, visa affidavits for further immigration of refugees to the Philippines would have been denied.

By the beginning of July 1940, sponsorship became the practiced extension of the selection program. Maintenance for a family of three for one year amounted to $1800, plus an additional $100 per person also needed to be deposited for the

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\(^{137}\) Robert Pilpel to Jewish Refugee Committee, June 26, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
administrative expenses of their rescue.\textsuperscript{138} By October 1940, sponsorship procedures were well established:

The Jewish Refugee Committee requires that a deposit of $1300 be made on behalf of each [single] applicant. The persons making the deposit must guarantee that the applicant will not become a public charge. The applicant must be in good physical condition. The deposit covers the applicant’s maintenance at the rate of $50 a month for a period of two years. The remaining $100 constitutes a contribution to the committee for its general program of aid and to cover incidental expenses in each case. If a particular applicant is likely, by reason of occupational training or vocational experience, to be able to secure employment in the Philippines, the amount required to be deposited may be reduced.\textsuperscript{139}

With the necessary monies on deposit, along with effective affidavits, visas for applicants could be secured within about a one month period. But everyone involved in the rescue of refugees in the Philippines knew “that possibilities existing today may be changed or non-existent tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{140}

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138 Emery Komlos, REC to James Becker, Chicago, July 3, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

139 Robert Pilpel to Lazaro Zelwer, Colombia, October 8, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

140 Ibid.
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Under the sponsorship program, more refugees found haven in the Philippines, as funds were continually made available for rescue in the Philippines by the JDC. A November 7th 1940 memorandum by Robert Pilpel, Secretary of the Sub-committee on Refugee Aid in Central and South America and the Philippines of the JDC, revealed that “about 1100 refugees” now resided in the Philippines, along with a total white population of “not more than 5,000 persons.” The JDC considered the rescue operation in the Philippines so successful that an inquiry from Pilpel to the REC in October 1941 sought more detailed information on the origins and operation of the rescue programs in the Philippines “and the applicability of the method used to the establishment of temporary havens elsewhere.” An REC memorandum on “Refugee Immigration in the Philippines” forwarded to Moses Levitt, Secretary of the JDC in response to Pilpel’s inquiry, recorded that “there are now about 1300” refugees in the Philippines, most having entered “as participants in a program of selective immigration” and the other “have been admitted under a recently established system of temporary immigration.” After a thorough recitation of the processes involved in both the selection and sponsorship programs and a closing note rendered on the “invitation of the Philippine Government . . . on large-scale settlement possibilities on Mindanao,” Komlos’s memorandum advised that “the

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141 Robert Pilpel, to Edwin Goldwasser, “Memorandum re: Philippines,” November 7, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

142 Emery Komlos to Robert Pilpel, October 17, 1941, attachment: “Refugee Immigration in the Philippines,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
pattern of the Philippine selective and temporary immigration would be applicable to the establishment of similar activities in other counties.” Philippine refugee rescue became a template for rescue elsewhere.

**H: Summary**

The rescue of European refugees in the Philippines through uniquely devised selection and sponsorship programs accomplished what most other nations of the world avoided, saving Jewish lives. The significance of Jewish immigration to the Philippines prior to the US entering WWII goes beyond the 1300 refugee lives they saved, important as that may be, and demonstrates that industrious persons could devise rescue in the face of both natural and contrived obstacles when there was a will to do so. The gates of fate could swing both ways and rescuers in the Philippines exploited that fact whenever it swung in their favor.

The sequence of rescue in the Philippines verifies that observation, beginning with the rescue of German Jews from Shanghai, whom fate delivered into the hands of the Jewish Community of Manila via the strangely generous auspices of the German Consul in the Philippines. And while US Immigration Laws restricted rescue into the United States both qualitatively and quantitatively, quota limitations

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143 Emery Komlos to Robert Pilpel, October 17, 1941, attachment: “Refugee Immigration in the Philippines,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
on immigration into the Philippines would not be enforceable until the Commonwealth Government enacted its own immigration laws in 1941. By this time, the McNutt-Frieder selection plan and sponsorship program had already successfully rescued well over 1000 refugees.144

The empowerment of the Jewish Refugee Committee by the Philippine government over immigration applications prior to 1940 came during one of those favorable swings of fate when corruption had crippled the immigration offices of the Philippine Government and a complete revamping of the immigration laws were in process. The JRC’s impartial, non-partisan approach to selection between 1937 and 1940 guaranteed its ability to continue to offer refuge to Jews through the then newly constituted immigration laws of the Philippine Government.

Another important “fateful” sequence of events brought Paul McNutt to the Philippines as US High Commissioner from 1937 to 1939 – the most important years for the organization and implementation of the selection rescue program. The importance of McNutt’s role in the rescue of Jews in the Philippines cannot be overstated. His mediation between the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila, the Jewish relief organizations in New York, and the US State Department committees and agencies was absolutely essential to the success of refugee rescue. It is doubtful if rescue could have been implemented without his intercession. In contrast, as will be seen in the next chapter dealing with the failed resettlement plan on Mindanao

144 For further discussion on the Immigration Laws of the Philippines ratified in 1940 and how these new laws affected rescue in the Philippines, see chapter 5 on “The Mindanao Resettlement Project.”
Island, the High Commissioner of the Philippines after McNutt, Francis Sayre, showed absolutely no interest in rescuing Jews in the Philippines and never voiced any encouragement, official or otherwise, to Quezon or any other Commonwealth government official to help facilitate the implementation of the resettlement program. By the time Sayre arrived in Manila, rescue through selection and sponsorship was so well established that it operated successfully without much input from him.

Different Jewish relief organizations share credit for the success of Jewish rescue in the Philippines as well. But the unique system of residential rotation that the Frieder brothers practiced between their homes in Ohio and Manila always placed one brother in charge of the rescue relief operations in the Philippines, while the other brothers stateside continually visited offices of the REC and the JDC in New York to effectively cut through bureaucratic red-tape that often tied-up philanthropic purse strings. The presence of the Frieder brothers in the Philippines, along with their business affluence and humanitarian proclivity, assured a continual leadership over the rescue operations in the Philippines that had to adjust as conditions changed over the years.

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145 A communiqué from Kenneth Day, owner of land on Mindanao Island where the resettlement plans were to be implemented, to Richard Ely of the Bureau of Philippine Affairs in August 1940, offered this comparison of McNutt and Sayre in regards to the refugee rescue issue: “Commissioner McNutt was very keen to see President Quezon’s promises fulfilled, and if he were in Manila I am sure everything would be fixed up before now. Commissioner Sayre, however, had not interested himself actively in this project and apparently will not do so unless the State Department indicates to him that it would like the see matters arranged so that Jews may be admitted, as per Q’s promise and that of the State Department.” Day to Ely, August 13, 1940, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Entry 5, Box 1338, 1914-1945, File #28943 - 59.
V. The Mindanao Resettlement Project, 1938 – 1941

A: Prologue - The US Response to the Holocaust – Where Are We?

A throng of Holocaust historians have reviewed, concurred, and challenged scholarship concerning America's response, or rather lack of, to the plight of Europe's refugee Jews during WWII, indicting politicians, presidents, the press, and even Jewish relief organizers as bystanders cum perpetrators complicit in the death of Europe’s six million Jews. Historians concurred that more could have been done and should have been done to save Jewish lives and offered a variety of viewpoints as to why it was not done. My own research shows that while selective and sponsored rescue in the Philippines successfully occurred, plans for massive resettlement rescue on the Island of Mindanao ultimately failed. The success of one and the failure of the other lay in the fact that humanitarian rescue was subordinate to other economic and sociologic expediencies. Situating my own research results into this huge volume of historical exegesis requires a preliminary historiographical literature review.

David Wyman admits in his 1984 best seller, Abandonment of the Jews, that his arguments concerning America’s response to the worldwide refugee problem are not new and that they have been around for a while. He published his first book on the subject, Paper Walls, in 1968, on the heels of another work by Arthur Morse, While

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1 Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews, x.
6 Million Died. Morse was the first to publicly renounce FDR for duplicity in his responses to the plight of Europe's Jews. He accused Roosevelt of acts of obstructionism when it came to opportunities for rescuing Jews. Wyman's Paper Walls, the first scholarly work on the subject, also expounded on the failure of FDR's administration to take moral action in regards to the persecution of Jews and went so far as to accuse the State Department of antisemitic practices purposefully aimed at preventing Jewish immigration into the US. These early monographs opened wide the door of scholarly research that offered both consensus and rebuttal to their accusations.

Henry Feingold was one such reviewer who published his own work, The Politics of Rescue, in 1970 with the intent of contextualizing the arguments of his literary predecessors, Wyman and Morse, within the political and social climate of the United States between 1938 and 1945. Feingold maintained that it was poor historical practice to over-moralize the poor response of the FDR Administration until one had sufficiently contextualized all aspects of the era to determine what, if anything, could have been done differently. Several other works by other Holocaust historians followed. In 1973, Saul Friedländer published No Haven for the Oppressed, in which new evidence, he felt, supported the claim that FDR and his

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administration, along with the Jewish leaders in America, could have done more, maintaining opportunities were there.\textsuperscript{5} Martin Gilbert's 1981 \textit{Auschwitz and Allies} explored how the US refused to take steps regarding the bombing of Auschwitz when it had plenty of chances to do so.\textsuperscript{6} Wyman took up this argument in his \textit{Abandonment of the Jews} in 1984. Just prior to Wyman's second book, Monty Penkower came out with his work in 1983, \textit{Jews Were Expendable}, in which he used newly discovered archival documents to show that several means were feasible to facilitate rescue of the Jews that the US flatly refused to take.\textsuperscript{7} With this already rich scholarly treatment of the failed opportunities of the US to take action to save Jewish lives, David Wyman's best-seller \textit{Abandonment of the Jews} hit the scene at a full gallop.

Wyman's arguments can be summarized as follows: He maintained that the US State Department had no intention of ever saving Jewish refugees and did all it could to obstruct their immigration. He implicated FDR in this argument and claimed that Roosevelt knew of the exterminations at an early date and made no attempt to aid the situation until pressured by the American Jewish leaders to do so. Wyman felt that had the Jewish organizations in America challenged FDR sooner with a more united


front that more lives could have been saved. Wyman emphatically declared that FDR's failure to respond in a higher moral manner to the plight of Europe's Jews was the greatest failure of his Presidency. The book came at a time of renewed interest in the public on all things Holocaust. Wyman's book was reviewed by the most renowned Holocaust scholars of the day and it propelled him into Hollywood-esque stardom. Over the next decade Wyman gave over 400 lectures and made guest appearances on nationally syndicated talk shows. His work was revered by the public and championed by scholars, who praised him for dispelling the myth that the US did not know about the Holocaust or was unable to rescue Jews. His work even affected national foreign policy when a copy was given to President Bush, who then facilitated the rescue of Ethiopian Jews in 1985.  

One noteworthy critic of Wyman's exposé, Henry Feingold, objected to Wyman's over-moralizing of political intentions at a time of war. Feingold claimed that according to Wyman's moral standards, everybody was implicated and all were guilty of gross negligence. He accused Wyman of coloring the historical aspects with his own moralistic beliefs that did a disservice to true historical interpretation, calling it retroactive investigative journalism. Feingold published his other work on the subject, as the second part of his two book series, *Bearing Witness* in 1995. In his introduction, Feingold commented on his closing statement in *Politics of Rescue*.

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8 Wyman, *Abandonment*, ix-xii.

(1968), asking if it was fair to expect nation-states to be capable of moralistic human response during extreme times of economic depression and war. But it is important to note that Feingold concurred that America's response to the Holocaust was weak, yet maintained that when looked at in the context of the economic conditions, the presence of a virulent antisemitism in the US, and a disunited American Jewish community, what more could have realistically been expected in those circumstances? One would have had to go in and have changed the circumstances in order to have changed the result and that is a shoulda, woulda, coulda argument.

After nearly three decades of an accelerating diatribe by both Jewish and non-Jewish historians, along with journalists and film-makers, on the complicity of various sectors of US society in the Holocaust, the pendulum started to swing back with new pedagogical thought in the early 90s.

In November 1993, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library convened a conference of Roosevelt and Holocaust historians, who presented papers discussing “Policies and Responses of the American Government toward the Holocaust.” The compiled articles of the participants, and non-participants alike, were published in 1996 under the title, *FDR and the Holocaust*. The conference hosts from the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute organized the event to respond to the last twenty five years of opinions professing that FDR and other individuals, as well as US

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institutions, “failed to rescue the Jews of Europe from the Holocaust and therefore bear some responsibility for the death of six million Jews.” The major objective of the conference, which was closed to press and public, asked if the controversy still boiled because the issues “defied scholarly resolution,” and if so, could it be rectified with further historical exegesis, or not. While the debates that ensued neither excused nor forgave all perceived issues of failure, many agreed that it was “unreasonable to expect leaders of one sovereign nation to intervene on behalf of the citizens of another nation [. . .] the Jews were not FDR’s responsibility.” An intriguing hypothetical asked that if every lack of action had been reversed, if all rescue plans had been endorsed, and if Auschwitz had been bombed – what difference would it have made. If histories of the past had been seeing the glass half empty, from this conference forward, histories written on FDR and the US response to the Holocaust began to see the glass half full.

Self-proclaimed “Rooseveltian” and Holocaust historian Robert Beir, composed his 2006 monograph, Roosevelt and the Holocaust, after a personal investigation wherein he found “a disturbing story.” And even though he admitted to State Department antisemitism, “internecine warfare” among the Jewish organizations, and suppression of information in the US press, Beir believed FDR did the best he

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12 Newton, FDR and the Holocaust, vii.

13 Ibid., ix.

could with the hand he was dealt. Whereas Beir commented that FDR “was not an anti-Semite” and “was not responsible for the Holocaust,” Beir did not turn a blind eye to FDR’s weaknesses in his judgments or his decisions, ending his treatise on FDR with “Great People are not great all the time.”

Historian of American Judaism, Robert Rosen, experienced a similar disturbing awakening to FDR’s flaws when he researched his 2006 narrative, *Saving the Jews, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust*. Rosen also recounted the historiography, “the verdict of history,” that labeled FDR “a coward who was guilty of indifference and even complicity in the Final Solution.” But Rosen claimed his research exposed documentary evidence, as yet un-cited by prior historians, which acquitted FDR of any egregious indifference, inaction, or ineptitude. In fact, Rosen characterized Roosevelt as having saved Europe’s surviving five million Jews instead of being complicated in the deaths of the six million.

So then, how does my research into the Jewish Community of the Philippines and its rescue of European Jewish refugees figure into these arguments? And how does the Mindanao Resettlement Project defend or dispute critics of FDR’s and the US response to the Holocaust? Briefly, as the more detailed recital of the rescue of refugee Jews in The Philippines can be found in chapter four, the American-led

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17 Rosen, *Saving the Jews*, xxv.
Jewish community of Manila, an affluent and well-acculturated and assimilated community in the Philippines, devised rescue plans that saved 1300 refugees from the Holocaust between 1937 and 1941, although to be fair, there was no “Holocaust” or extermination of Jews in Europe, as yet. What they did was to save selected refugees, based on their ability to enhance Philippine economy, from the persecutions of Nazism through immigration to Manila. While this rescue ultimately saved them from the uncertainty of Europe’s future, it positioned them to boost Philippine society with their professional and vocational skills. Selective rescue, as well as a short lived sponsorship program, depended on their economic viability in Philippine society.

The Mindanao plan for massive resettlement sought to use the presence of refugee Jews as a cultural leverage against Muslim insurrection and Japanese exploitation on this Philippine island. Other proposed places of refugee resettlement also exhibited ulterior motives, other than mere rescue alone, in accepting a potentially substantial Jewish population. The plan for Jewish resettlement in Costa Rica suggested that it could offer added security at the Panama Canal. Economic advantages spurred suggestions for colonization in the Caribbean, Brazil, and Haiti as US businessmen such as Henry Ford and William Randolph Hearst, since described as antisemites, measured rescue from a purely capitalistic standpoint. A resettlement plan for Alaska saw a mass influx of labor as advantageous for that under-populated and economically stagnated territory. These proposals, and others,
ultimately died on the vine because rescue was not their primary aim – therefore economic or political implausibility won out over humanitarianism. One after another these ventures failed to reach fruition. Mindanao was no exception. Stalled due to political and economic debates among members of the Philippine government, rescue on Mindanao never reach fruition as Japan’s entrance into the war, which in turn created a state of war between the US and Germany, brought all rescue efforts in the Philippines to a halt.

These Philippine rescue plans came at a time when American immigration laws had already been well established with quotas that restricted the total numbers of immigrants entering the US from certain parts of Europe. The highly restrictive immigration laws and quotas had been written and passed as law in 1917 and 1924 and were immutable unless the laws were changed by Congress. It is ridiculous to suppose that FDR could have altered them in a political environment of both congressional and public opposition to quota increases, along “with an entrenched State Department bureaucracy with a restrictionist viewpoint.”  

Furthermore, FDR would have risked splitting his delicate Democratic Party coalition of Dixiecrats, eastern Liberals, and western restrictionists, which voted him into office based on his economic strategies, not on social reforms or foreign policies.  

In an atmosphere of post-depression economics, nativistic nationalism, and Congressional restrictionism,

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peppered with antisemitism in nearly every American government agency, to expect these laws to have been changed to facilitate an increase in immigration numbers of destitute aliens is very unrealistic, especially at a time of war. On that point I agree with Feingold. But the immigration quotas did not apply to the Philippines, which at this time was not an American territory, but rather a Commonwealth Nation, with its own domestic autonomy, until its full emancipation slated for July 4, 1946. Even though the Filipinos had full power over their domestic affairs and a major part of their foreign affairs, certain international issues still came under the purview of the US President and the State Department. So here is where Wyman's thesis of US government obstructionism should hold true, if it is true.

Did the State Department impede immigration of Jewish refugees into the Philippines? The answer is yes and no, no in regards to the McNutt-Frieder selection plan and sponsorship program that rescued 1300 refugees between 1937 and 1941, and yes when we look at the documentary evidence concerning the resettlement plan for Mindanao Island. So let me quickly explain: Without going into the full details here of how the McNutt-Frieder Plan came into being, that is fully explained in chapter four, let me just say that the process involved US State Department officials, Jewish Relief organizations in the US and Europe, President Manuel Quezon of the Philippines, US High Commissioner to the Philippines Paul V. McNutt, and the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila.
The Frieder family of brothers, influential American Jewish businessmen in the Philippines with home offices in Cincinnati, in partnership with McNutt and approved by Quezon, organized a plan that listed professionals who could be easily and rapidly assimilated into the Manila economy. The plan called for this list to be circulated through the German Refugee Aid society in Germany, der Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden (HDJ), who compiled applications from refugees for the various professions and then sent them from Germany to the Refugee Economic Corporation (REC) in New York, who procured the funding for the rescue effort from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The applications were then forwarded to a three man committee in Manila comprised of members of the Jewish Refugee Committee of the Philippines. The committee reviewed the applications and all required prerequisites, made selections from the applications, and then gave a list of names, with addresses in Europe, to McNutt for his approval.

After receiving joint approval from Quezon, McNutt then wired the list to the State Department through the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the US War Department. State Department officials then forwarded the lists onto the appropriate US consuls in Europe with instructions that the listed persons be contacted and visas issued for their immigration to the Philippines. Here is where true obstruction by the State Department could have been exercised but was not. Nor have I read any objections in any State Department memorandum concerning this rescue effort, although a couple of State Department officials pressed the issue of the exclusionary clauses of
the Immigration Laws of 1917 that denied visas to people likely to become a public
charge. This level of objection was miniscule at best and never enforced by the
consuls abroad.

I believe that all of the past scholarship that I have previously summarized has
failed to adequately comment on the role of the US consuls abroad concerning the
interpretation of the restrictive immigrations laws and their obstruction of
immigration at the consular level. This is addressed in the 2002 published work by
Bat Ami Zucker In Search of Refuge, in which Zucker detailed how the consuls
exercised autonomous power over who got visas and who did not according to the
advice given by the State Department to the consuls to render a very strict
interpretation of the law so as to thwart Jewish immigration. But the successful
selective immigration of Jews into the Philippines was taken out of the hands of the
consuls and put directly into the hands of the Jewish Community of Manila itself,
and neither the State Department nor the consuls did anything to undermine that
process.

But another argument supported by many historians concerns the Jewish relief
organizations in the US. It is true with the rescue efforts in the Philippines that
infighting occurred with the various Jewish Relief Organizations in the US, whose
financing was imperative in order to sustain the immigrants until they were
financially viable on their own. The Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila expressed
several times to the REC and the JDC that they could take in hundreds of more
refugees on a faster basis if there were more funds provided for their initial support. The McNutt-Frieder selection plan and sponsorship program, as well as the Mindanao Island Resettlement Plan all came to abrupt ends with the Japanese invasion of Manila after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent bombing and invasion of the Philippines.

If these rescue plans in the Philippines were to either confirm or dispute previous historical scholarship concerning deliberate Executive or State Department obstructionism in rescuing Jewish refugees, the mass resettlement plan on Mindanao can do both. When it became known that the Philippines was rescuing German Refugee Jews, US State Department Officials approached McNutt to inquire how many more refugees could be admitted and if large numbers could be accommodated in a mass resettlement plan. This seems to go against Wyman's claim that the State Department never intended to save refugee Jews. Long story shortened, the Mindanao Resettlement Project was the brain child of President Quezon, High Commissioner McNutt, and the Jewish Refugee Committee of Manila. It was one of many resettlement plans entertained by the FDR Administration. But unlike nearly all the others, it actually achieved a state of implementation and was the only American led resettlement plan that had been accepted by the State Department, by FDR's International Commission on Refugees, and had received a go ahead by all political and funding organizations involved.
But that is not to say that certain individuals in the State Department didn't try to impede the plan, because they did. And that certainly supports Wyman's accusations concerning antisemitic sentiments in the US State Department. State Department documents show that US officials contended with each other over the viability of the Mindanao Resettlement Project. Those in opposition did succeed in altering Quezon's initial offer to giving safe haven to 50,000 refugees, if not eventually a million, by having the number of potential immigrants reduced to no more than 10,000. But the Mindanao Resettlement Project, which had already purchased well-established ranch lands on Mindanao Island, came to the same abrupt end as the selection and sponsorship plans when the Japanese invaded the Philippines and all rescue efforts ended with Japanese occupation.

Indeed, there are accusations by Wyman and Feingold and others that hold true in the Philippine rescue stories, especially concerning the presence of antisemitism among some officials, but there is also evidence that others in the State Department had a genuine desire to save Jewish refugees and did all they could to facilitate a workable plan, albeit motivated perhaps by some with intentions not altogether altruistic. But time ran out and no one as yet knew that Hitler's hate would evolve into the extermination of the Jews of Europe. I have to agree with Feingold, that more could always have been done, but I feel that Wyman's harsh indictment against FDR'S Administration and the Jewish Relief Organizations of America is too simplistically sweeping and fails to look at the implications of the small stories, such
as the rescue of refugee Jews in the Philippines, that offers exceptions to his generalizations.

**B: Mindanao & the IGC – “A New Palestine”**

At a press conference held in Washington D.C. on Wednesday, April 27, 1938, US officials revealed the formation of an international committee to deal with Austrian and German refugees. President Roosevelt called for the international conference shortly after Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938, which increased the refugee dilemma. At President Roosevelt's behest, the first intergovernmental meeting on the political refugee crisis opened at Evian on July 6, 1938 to facilitate the emigration of refugees from Germany and Austria. Delegates from 32 western countries met at the French resort to establish an international organization to work for an overall solution to the growing refugee problem. Roosevelt chose Myron C. Taylor, a businessman and close friend, to represent the US at the conference. FDR commissioned the US committee of this international agency to “do as much as possible in this country through private organizations and groups for the refugees.”

During the nine-day meeting, delegates from all the nations expressed sympathy for

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22 Ibid.
the refugees but offered plausible excuses for refusing to increase their immigration quotas. The Evian Conference offered little or no relief for the refugees. The failure of the Evian Conference to facilitate an increase in refugee rescue permeates Holocaust literature today.

However, one positive outcome of this international conference was the organization of the new Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees (IGC) in August 1938.\textsuperscript{23} The IGC's main purpose, as stipulated by the text of the resolution adopted on July 14, 1938 in Evian, was to “improve the present conditions of exodus and to replace them with conditions of orderly emigration,” and to “approach the governments of the countries of refuge with a view to developing opportunities for permanent settlement.”\textsuperscript{24} However, the committee's pleas to the international community to relax immigration restrictions in order to fulfill its resolution fell on deaf ears and the IGC declined into inactivity. Even the United State’s immigration quotas remained immutable due to political pressures by congressional restrictionists. Because of the Great Depression, many US citizens also believed that refugees endangered their job security and would overburden US social assistance programs for the needy. But with the Zbaszyn deportations on October 28, 1938, followed by the massive destruction of Jewish life and property during the

\textsuperscript{23} Henry L. Feingold, \textit{The Politics of Rescue}, 76.

\textsuperscript{24} Department of State Press Release, “Text of Resolution Adopted July 14, 1938, By Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees At Evian, France.” NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6.
Kristallnacht pogrom on November 9, 1938, US public opinion, sympathizing with the refugee issue, prodded Roosevelt to press the IGC for results, but without changing immigrant quotas.  

With a renewed purpose, the attention of the IGC focused on several potential havens of massive resettlement rescue for the growing refugee problem. A radio address on November 25, 1938 by Myron C. Taylor, Vice Chairman of the IGC and, as mentioned, leader of the US delegation to the Evian Conference, revealed that the director of the IGC, George Rublee, had been actively conducting a world-wide search for possible places of settlement. By December 1938, the committee proposed more than fifty different worldwide resettlement projects for investigation. The Philippines, along with Alaska, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Palestine, appeared among the many global resettlement locations slated for scrutiny. The resettlement schemes for German Jews transpired at the same time that Joseph and 8,000 other displaced Polish Jews from Germany languished in Zbaszyn and 30,000 others suffered in concentration camps in Germany, all desperately needing to emigrate.

25 Feingold, Politics of Rescue, 22-44.

26 Radio address by Myron C. Taylor, Confidential Press Release, November 25, 1938. NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, “Philippines”, Lot 52D408, Box 10. The content of the address was released to the press for publication November 26, 1938.


28 Ibid.
A timeline established by a careful examination of documents from several different agencies reveals that the first official expression of the idea of locating a mass resettlement program in the Philippines came from one of the Frieder brothers near the end of November 1938. Just three days after Taylor’s November 25th radio address about the world wide search for resettlement locations, Morris Frieder met with Joseph Hyman at the JDC offices in New York. The Frieder brothers alternated their residences between Cincinnati and Manila so that one brother ran the Frieder business in the Philippines on site for up to two years while the other brothers remained stateside. During this meeting that focused on the financial needs to subsidize the selection rescue plan, “Mr. Frieder stressed the fact that the Philippines might easily become an important resettlement center for German Jewish refugees if it were handled right.”  

In other words, the future rescue of thousands through a resettlement plan depended on the successful assimilation of a few hundred in a selection plan, whereby the Philippines could trust the rescuers in their commitment to protect Philippine national interests.

The Frieders approached President Quezon regarding a larger resettlement plan in the Philippines on the first day of December 1938. We know this because on December 8, 1938, Herbert Frieder sent a letter from Cincinnati to Bruno Schachner at the REC offices in New York at the behest of his brother Philip Frieder, who had sent him a letter from Manila written on December 2nd. In quoting the letter from

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29 “Memorandum of Conversation on November 28,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

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Philip, Herbert Frieder revealed that his brother and members of the Jewish Refugee Committee had a luncheon with President Quezon on December 1, 1938. According to Philip’s letter, Quezon said he -

“heartily approved our plan of resettling as many of the refugees as we cared to in Mindanao. He was willing to give them all the land that they wanted, build roads for them, and do everything in his power so that they could re-establish themselves. He intimated that Mindanao is big enough to support as many people as Luzon has, but he would be happy if we could settle a million refugees in Mindanao.”

Philip Frieder’s assessment of Quezon’s offer for refugee resettlement in Mindanao described it as “a bigger project than Palestine. The land is more fertile than Palestine, there are more minerals, timber – as a matter of fact, it is the richest land in the Philippines – virgin soil. This is such an enormous proposition that one can hardly visualize the potentialities of same.” Philip Frieder further informed his brother that McNutt and Quezon would be meeting the next day on December 3, 1938 to discuss it further on an official level. According to Philip, Quezon understood that the US State Department needed to be consulted.

On December 2, 1938, the same day Philip penned his letter to his brother Herbert about their luncheon with Quezon, McNutt radiogrammed a communiqué.


[31] Ibid.
for Secretary Hull with his assessment of President Quezon’s intentions. The Bureau of Insular Affairs transmitted it to the Secretary of War in Washington D.C., who received it via translation of December 3, 1938. The cable was then forwarded to the Department of State on December 5, 1938. It read:

President Quezon has indicated willingness to set aside virgin lands in Mindanao for larger groups of Jewish refugees who wish to engage in agricultural enterprises of related activities in the development of community life in underdeveloped and practically uninhabited areas. Soil and climate conditions in Mindanao favorable to development of agricultural industries supplemental to Philippine agricultural economy. Philippine National Economic Council about to improve Mindanao colonization plan for Filipinos. It is believed that this program would be materially aided by colonization plan for Jewish refugees through development by organization directing refugee colonization of sources of supply, medical, and hospital and other services near areas. Local Jewish Committee, in cooperation with Refugee Economic Corporation of New York, will submit plan for colonizing refugees in Mindanao for approval of Commonwealth officials. The situation is now such that the larger program for the colonization of refugees in Mindanao can be successfully inaugurated if a message of approval is received from you. President Quezon is anxious that nothing be done which is not in accord with the policies of the United States. I urge your
consideration of the suggestion and strongly recommend its approval if the proposal is in accord with established policies. McNutt.³²

Some important observations about this message from McNutt to Secretary of State Cordell Hull should be noted. First, McNutt fully understood that refugee resettlement meant Jewish resettlement and he was not afraid to state that. The message also demonstrated McNutt’s personal interest in rescuing Jews by strongly urging the US Secretary of State to approve of the resettlement plan.

While McNutt was transmitting his message to Hull, Joseph E. Jacobs, Chief of the Office of Philippine Affairs within the Department of State and acting for Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, composed a cable for Commissioner McNutt also on December 2, 1938, inquiring about the number of refugees the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines had already absorbed – since the US State Department was now fully aware of the selection rescue plan in operation – and how many more it felt it could handle.³³ While the formal version of the confidential letter given to the Secretary of War for transmittal to the Philippines bore the personal signature of Acting Secretary of State Sumner Wells, an “advance copy” of


³³ Jacobs to McNutt, "Confidential", December 2, 1938. NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6. This draft copy bears an administrative code in the lower left hand corner of the last page that identifies “JEJ” as the author on “12/2.”
the letter went to Col. Eager of the US War Department attached to a handwritten note by Jacobs and dated December 2, 1938.  

34 Apparently crossing communication corridors with McNutt’s communiqué, the finalized State Department inquiry of December 5, 1938 reads:

At the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees, which is expected to be held in London in the near future, a further intensive effort will be made by the powers to find a solution of the German refugee problem. [...] It is believed that the question of how many such refugees the Commonwealth authorities believe could be absorbed annually in the Philippine Islands may arise. If, therefore, the Commonwealth authorities feel that they would care to participate in this effort, the Department of State would appreciate receiving at an early date an estimate of how many such refugees could, within the restrictions imposed by existing immigration laws applicable to the Philippine Islands, be absorbed annually over a period of years. The Department would also appreciate being informed

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34 A copy of the message of ff #30 in the NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, 1914-1945, Entry 5, File #28943 - 18 has a handwritten note attached to it, signed by J. E. Jacobs and dated Dec. 2, 1938, informing Col. Eager, of the War Dept., responsible for all dispatches to the Philippines, that the enclosed “advanced copy of a letter” would be received by the Bureau “sometime tomorrow.”
as to the approximate number of German refugees who have come to the
Philippines since January 1 of this year and have remained there. 35

The State Department assured McNutt that Myron Taylor would convey "any
statement which the Philippine Commonwealth may wish to make." 36 McNutt’s
December 2-5 communiqué had already disclosed that 205 refugee Jews had arrived
and that the local Jewish Committee had cared for their needs. 37 As McNutt had
indicated, the Philippine National Economic Council stood ready to approve a
colonization plan for Filipinos on the island of Mindanao in an effort to relieve
overpopulation on Luzon and Quezon believed that program could be aided by a
colonization plan for Jewish refugees on Mindanao as well. 38 This local resettlement
plan of Quezon’s for Mindanao, involving both Filipinos and Jews, and offering

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35 Sumner Wells to McNutt, “Confidential,” December 5, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350,
Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, 1914-1945,
Entry 5, File #28943 - 18.

36 Sumner Wells to McNutt, “Confidential,” December 5, 1938, NARA II, Record Group 350,
Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files 1898-1945, Box 1338, 1914-1945,
Entry 5, File #28943 - 18.

37 Herbert Frieder to Bruno Schachner, December 8, 1938, American Jewish Joint Distribution
Committee, JDC, Collection 33/44, File #787a.

38 One of the economic results of the implementation of the Commonwealth status of the
Philippines was the windfall revenues collected in the form of excise taxes on the export of coconut
oil and sugar to the US from the Philippines that was slated to be returned to the new Commonwealth
nation. The return of the coconut excise taxes collected from August 1934 and transferred to the
Philippines in one lump sum on July 1, 1937 was 114 million pesos, just over 50 million dollars.
Quezon planned on using portions of the funds to purchase large landed estates on the provinces and
reselling them in smaller parcels to the tenant farmers working the estates by financing loans to the
farmers. Quezon also planned on using the windfall to build roads and execute other forms of
development on Mindanao to encourage resettlement of Filipinos from Luzon. See Satoshi Nakano,
The “Windfall” Revenue Controversy (1937-1941): A Perspective of Philippine Commonwealth
already allocated redevelopment funds and an organizational structure, demonstrated an alternative motive to humanitarian inspired Jewish rescue.

On June 6, 1936, Quezon had announced a plan to develop the southern region of Mindanao by systematically resettling Filipinos from the crowded areas of Luzon and Visayas onto tracts of land in the less populated areas of Mindanao. The Commonwealth Government declared huge acreages of lands public domain and made them available for purchase by foreign and domestic investors. Quezon believed the presence of a white community with hospitals, clinics, and other service professions supplied by European immigrants would further economic and social development of the area. This is a prime example of Jewish rescue being facilitated for politically and economically convenient reasons. Nevertheless, rescue is rescue, and McNutt relayed that the local Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila and the REC in New York were prepared to submit a plan to Quezon and Commonwealth officials in the Philippines for the colonization of refugees on Mindanao. McNutt believed the settlement of refugees there could be successfully inaugurated if approval came immediately from Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The ensuing message exchanges between the State Department, the office of the High Commissioner of the Philippines, and the REC of New York exposed an escalating conflict between humanitarian expediency and State Department reticence.

With McNutt’s December 5th radiogram now in hand, Jacobs drafted a reply on December 6, 1938, again under the signature of Acting Secretary of State Sumner Wells, which stated that “there is no objection on policy grounds to the Commonwealth authorities giving considerations to the matter of colonizing in Mindanao refugees from Germany or elsewhere in Europe.”\(^\text{40}\) However, Jacobs cautioned McNutt to avoid any difficulties for the Commonwealth or for the United States, “which would result if a large number of refugees were hurriedly settled in Mindanao and the colonization plan were found to be unworkable.” He also stressed the provisions of the immigration laws of 1917 and suggested “it may not be possible […] to permit a large group of immigrants, which the plan would necessarily envisage, to enter under the conditions peculiar to their situation.”\(^\text{41}\) Another communiqué to McNutt the very next day advised him to “confer with Messrs. Brandt and Wixon” once they arrived in Manila around December 12, 1938. These two State Department officials had been sent to the Philippines to assist the Commonwealth government in writing new immigrations laws for the Philippines.\(^\text{42}\) Jacob’s responses revealed his skepticism for the project. Apparently when he

\(^{40}\)“From the Acting Secretary of State,” December 6, 1938, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J /21.

\(^{41}\)Ibid.

informed McNutt that Myron Taylor would convey Quezon’s official reply, he was not prepared for the enthusiastic offer rendered.

A few days later on December 13, 1938 a telegram sent to Rublee, Director of the IGC in London, signed by Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, appeared genuinely more favorable to the plan. It appears the message was composed by Theodore Achilles, Acting Chairman of the Departmental Committee on Political Refugees of the European Division, and not by Jacobs, which accounts for the supportive tone of the message. Achilles conveyed that immigration into the Philippines, while governed to a certain extent by the Act of 1917, was “not subject to numerical limitations.”  

Achilles informed Rublee that the Commonwealth Government had been requested to consider how many refugees it could absorb annually and Achilles assured Rublee that more specific information about mass immigration into the Philippines would be available in time for the upcoming IGC meeting in January 1939. Achilles also stated that large sums of money were available for general development of Mindanao due to the plans of the Commonwealth Government to colonize the island with its own Filipino citizens as well. He further explained how the island was sparsely populated and climatically favorable and capable “of supporting a very considerable population.” The telegram informed Rublee that the US had approved of the project and that the State

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44 Ibid.
Department hoped to supply more specifics in time for the IGC meeting. The content of this State Department communiqué composed by Achilles certainly gave an affirmative outlook on immigration to Mindanao.

Meanwhile, McNutt conferred with Quezon about the refugee colonization in Mindanao and telephoned Welles at the State Department long distance on December 16, 1938, and stated “that President Quezon and the Commonwealth authorities are prepared to admit during 1939 some 2,000 families of Jewish refugees into the Philippines for colonization on the Island of Mindanao, and about 5,000 families annually until a total of 30,000 families has been reached.” With this amazing support from the Commonwealth authorities of the Philippines, Mindanao quickly went to the top of the list as a potential haven for successful refugee resettlement.

**C: The Island of Mindanao and US State Dept. Obstructionism**

However, these remarkable totals alarmed a number of officials in the State Department and certain key men sought to discredit the plan. Apparently officials within the Office of Philippine Affairs, Jacobs being one, believed that an opportunity existed to settle only a small number of doctors, engineers, assistants and advisors in the Philippines in conjunction with “their plan for the colonization

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of Filipinos from Luzon (which is overpopulated) on the Island of Mindanao."  

These officials “had in mind that [. . .] a reasonable number, say one or, at the most, two thousand persons, might be absorbed in the Philippines over a period of years. “It [Office of Philippine Affairs] did not, however, have in mind that such a large number as 2,000 families in one year, or 30,000 over a period of about five or six years could be absorbed.” These numbers could have translated easily into one hundred thousand “persons,” something Jacobs obviously objected to. A struggle of wills over these proposed immigration numbers for settlement in Mindanao then ensued.

Welles divulged his telephone conversation with McNutt to Francis B. Sayre, Chairman of the Interdepartmental Commission on the Philippines. Sayre was the son-in-law of Woodrow Wilson and a career State Department diplomat who was appointed High Commissioner to the Philippines immediately after McNutt in 1939. Sayre related in a responding memo to Welles that he “discussed the


47 Ibid.

48 According to Philippine historian Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr., Sayre’s personality was “ill-suited to the Philippine political scene.” Although Sayre was selected for his knowledge and experience with the economic issues that dominated Philippine-United States relations at the time, “Sayre’s austere and didactic personality was anathema to the mercurial and earthy Quezon.” Gleeck further maintained that Sayre was almost a total failure as an effective High Commissioner in the Philippines because of his constant battle of wills with Pres. Quezon, especially regarding the expenditures planned for the coconut excise tax refund. Sayre favored using the refund for military purposes in the defense of the Philippines and Quezon objected wholeheartedly to the proposal, feeling the US was “less concerned with Philippine than American defense” interests. Quezon had marked these funds for Filipinos needs and development of Mindanao was big on his list. Quezon believed expenditures for
proposal with one or two others,” Jacobs of the Office of Philippine Affairs being one. Jacobs in turn drafted the memorandum of the conversations between McNutt and Welles, and Welles and Sayre, wherein Jacobs related the opinion of the Office of Philippine Affairs that they “had in mind” far fewer immigrant numbers, as previously mentioned. Jacobs went on to declare that such a large colonization plan as offered by the Commonwealth Officials had a number of “elements of danger.”

His list of eight reasons why such a large colonization effort would be ill advised contained derogatory tones that demeaned the ability of Jewish refugees to adapt.

Jacobs arguments stated: that climate conditions were unsuitable to white settlers; that a current lack of roads prohibited the convenience of modern travel; that the ability to produce cash crops may not be sufficient enough to appease a European style of living; that there was a questionable ability of white labor to grow tropical products; that the ability to initially finance these settlers until they could maintain themselves by their own efforts was questionable; that the US really didn’t want to inject a “German and white element of this size” into a strictly racially Asian defense should fall squarely on the US as they still held reins over Philippine independence. It is to Sayre’s credit that he did not scuttle the selective refugee plan already in operation when he came to the Philippines in 1939. Sayre served as High Commissioner until 1941, escaping before the advent of the war. See Lewis E. Gleck, The American Governors-General and High Commissioners in the Philippines (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1986), 341-359.


area; that there was a potential “refugee problem of grave proportions” should the resettlement plan fail; and the final objection was that such a “grandiose plan, which would [. . .] seem to take care of almost one-fourth of all the Jews in Germany” would lessen the interest of other countries of the world in assuming their proper share of the responsibility of rescue. Jacobs’ anti-Jewish tendencies were truly revealed when he asserted that 30,000 Jewish colonists on Mindanao would appeal “to their co-religionists in the United States to exert their efforts to have our historic policy [referring to Philippine independence] changed. Do we want to add another troublesome group to our stay-in-the-Philippines advocates?”

Therefore the official recommendation by the Office of Philippine Affairs, according to Jacobs, was to wait on any stipulation of immigration numbers “pending further study.” Jacobs passed his memorandum onto Sayre immediately.

Sayre had attached this memorandum by Jacobs to his personal note to Welles, wherein Sayre had mentioned discussing the proposal “with one or two others” as previously mentioned. Sayre’s personal note to Welles characterized Quezon's offer as a “scheme” that was “utterly impracticable” and, if a failure, would ultimately be laid on the State Department's doorstep. He went on to declare that “I am in favor of some such proposal as that contained in the draft telegram proposed by the

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52 Ibid.
Philippine Office and attached to its memorandum.” Sayre then met with Welles and presented him with Jacobs’s memorandum expounding on the inadvisability of white refugee settlement in Mindanao, with his own written opinion on the matter, and with a proposed reply to be cabled to McNutt in Manila. This radiogram to McNutt from the State Department, penned by Jacobs, pronounced that “the mere suggestion of such a large number as 2,000 families in one year, and 30,000 families as an ultimate objective – almost one-fourth of all the Jews in Germany – might arouse hopes which later could not be fulfilled, and might deter the other powers, which could better absorb these refugees than the Philippines, from taking as large a quota as they otherwise would agree to take.” Jacobs’s draft to McNutt proposed a complete revision of Quezon’s original offer – countermanding the previous State Department promise of issuing “any statement which the Philippine Commonwealth may wish to make.”

Jacobs’s suggested proposal for the IGC Conference reflected a newer, more restrictive representation of the Philippine Commonwealth's stand on the refugee resettlement issue. His proposition allowed for a possible 500 “able-bodied”

53 Sayre to Welles, December 17, 1938, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J /21 .

54 Jacobs, “Confidential from the Acting Secretary of State to the High Commissioner,” December 17, 1938, NARA II, RG 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, “Philippines,” Lot 52D408, Box 6.

professionals in 1939 and then an indeterminate number of refugees to arrive in subsequent years, provided that the first wave of immigrants to Mindanao proved themselves adaptable to the life style and had procured adequate support for themselves and their families. Jacobs had considerably lowered resettlement numbers in Quezon’s original generous offer. The draft further advised that “the Commonwealth Government cannot estimate the number of settlers who could thus be absorbed,” only that the number “may be large.” When Sayre presented Wells with this draft intended for McNutt and Quezon, along with Jacobs’s memorandum detailing his objections, Sayre recounted in his memo of the day that “Mr. Welles read only the draft of the letter to [McNutt], which contained the moderate program which we [Sayre and Jacobs] had in mind. Mr. Welles said that this draft was not satisfactory to him and that he felt that something more positive would have to be done.” Jacobs marked the draft to McNutt “not to be used.” An obvious difference of opinion existed among these State Department officials regarding resettlement rescue in Mindanao.

Welles advised holding off on any decisions on the program for transmittal to the IGC until conferences could be held with the REC in New York and other relief

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56 Jacobs, Confidential to High Commissioner, December 17, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/21.


58 Jacobs, Confidential to High Commissioner, December 17, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/21.
organizations to ascertain what level of financial commitment they were prepared to make for resettling refugee Jews on Mindanao. The State Department in turn requested that McNutt “consult the private organizations concerned as the extent to which they would be prepared to finance the settlement and maintenance of the refugees in the Philippines.” Yet another December 17th communiqué from McNutt related the intent of President Quezon to send a representative to the IGC meeting and that Quezon would, in a few days, send “a tentative plan covering number of refugees to be absorbed and conditions to be imposed.” Quezon’s plan, revised in anticipation of future provisions in the new Philippine Immigration Laws being formulated in the Philippine Assembly, offered a reduced number, which still exceeded Jacobs’ and Sayre’s intentions.

December 21, 1938 rolled around and Quezon’s plan had not yet arrived and Jacobs inquired through the Bureau of Insular Affairs regarding the delay. After being informed by McNutt on the 22nd of Quezon’s ill health, the much awaited statement by Quezon “setting forth the terms and conditions for colonization of

59 To: Mr. Welles, Re: Mr. Warren of the Advisory Committee, December 17, 1938. NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6.


Jewish refugees in the Philippines” arrived December 23, 1938. President Quezon cabled through McNutt that “the Commonwealth Government is happy to be able to cooperate [. . .] in an effort to find a solution of the German refugee problem, which this Government realizes must be approached from broad Humanitarian grounds.” Quezon affirmed that the Philippines felt prepared to let the selection rescue plan continue, which had been in operation since May 1938. He also revealed that the selection plan would need to eventually conform to the new Philippine Immigration Laws, which were “now being drafted with the assistance of experts from the State and Labor Departments of the United States Government.” Quezon believed they would be able to accept “as many as 1,000 persons annually” under this selection plan. Quezon then detailed proposed stipulations for “refugee settlement in Mindanao and other sparsely populated areas of the Philippines:”

1. that a responsible committee representing refugees or acting on their behalf shall submit a satisfactory plan to finance such settlement, 2. that the settlers will agree to engage in subsistence farming and not to grow money

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62 Jacobs to Welles, Note, December 23, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/21.


64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.
crops that now enjoy protection in the American market,\textsuperscript{66} 3, that they shall take out naturalization papers as early as possible thereby expressing their intention to become Filipino citizens, 4, that until they become Filipino citizens they shall reside in the land reserved for them, 5, that the number of refugees to be admitted as settlers shall be fixed for the time being by this Government acting upon the recommendation of the committee in charge of the settlement in course of preparation, having in view the committee’s ability to take care of the settlers, provided that the total number shall not exceed 10,000 persons, and 6, that the plan contemplated and its execution shall be subject to the immigration laws now in force or which may hereafter be passed by the National Assembly.\textsuperscript{67}

Quezon’s offer to settle a maximum of 10,000 “persons” was markedly smaller than his earlier offer of 30,000 “families.” Quezon had judicially outlined cautionary conditions for resettlement that mimicked State Department concerns. The State Department conditionally accepted Quezon’s proposal, but even with this lowered immigration total, certain State Department officials remained dissatisfied.

\textsuperscript{66} Clarification was sought for the phrase “money crops,” i.e did it refer to all exports. Reply: “‘not to grow money crops’ should be clarified as follows: ‘not to grow crops competing with Philippine products now sold in the American market.’” McNutt, Radiogram, January 7, 1939. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/35.

\textsuperscript{67} McNutt, “Message from President Quezon,” December 23, 1938. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/35.
Nevertheless, plans ensued to open a dialog between the State Department and private relief organizations to determine how much capital the refugee agencies in the US were prepared to raise to finance the rescue. Achilles related information to Welles on December 30, 1938, concerning a meeting of various national Jewish relief agencies being held in Baltimore on January 20, 1939. The Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Fund, the agency heading up the meeting, intended to open a drive in 1939 to raise 20 million dollars for relief purposes throughout the world. Achilles suggested that the State Department inquire of the organizations just how much in the way of relief funds they could provide for Mindanao, knowing that a Philippine representative for the IGC Conference would soon set sail for the IGC conference and it was imperative to relay that information to the Philippines before his departure.68

When word reached the State Department on January 3, 1939 that Quezon’s representative would not be able to attend the IGC meeting later that month, State Department officials grabbed the opportunity to amend Quezon’s proposal yet again and cabled a version of an “official Philippine statement” to be delivered at the IGC Conference, slated for January 26, 1939, on behalf of the Commonwealth Government concerning the resettlement plan in the Philippines. The formal directive reflected nearly all of President Quezon’s remarks made in his December 23rd cable, along with his assessment that 1,000 refugees could be admitted annually

under the existing selection plan. However, one very telling omission was made – an altered version of Quezon’s fifth provision regarding the resettlement plan for Mindanao, which read as follows:

5, that the number of refugees to be admitted as settlers shall be fixed for the time being by the Commonwealth Government acting upon the recommendation of the committee in charge of the settlement in course of preparation, having in view the committee’s ability to take care of the settlers and the consequences of large-scale settlement upon the national economy of the Philippines.  

The proposal explained the obvious omission of Quezon’s offer for settlement of 10,000 refugees on Mindanao as an attempt to “avoid a commitment to a definite numerical figure which experience might prove to be either too high or too low. The American delegate might, however, confidentially mention the figure of ten thousand for illustrative purposes.” So contrary to Jacobs’s prior assurance to McNutt that Myron Taylor would convey “any statement which the Philippine Commonwealth may wish to make” in regards to mass resettlement in the Philippines, Quezon’s original offer of an eventual rescue of one million refugees

69 To High Commissioner, January 7, 1939. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/36.

70 Ibid.

had all but been reduced to an “illustrative” amount of possibly ten thousand. President Quezon accepted the variations and conveyed his approval of the address through the proper communication channels. His eager willingness to further the cause of the rescue of Europe's refugee Jews, demonstrated by his compliance to State Department alterations in time for the IGC meeting, is better understood when scrutinized against the history of Mindanao Island itself.

D: Rescue on Mindanao – Pros and Cons

An official statement composed by the US State Department for the IGC described the Island of Mindanao as the southern-most part of the Philippine Archipelago with an area of 37,000 square miles. It depicted Mindanao as sparsely inhabited, climatically favorable, and believed to be capable of supporting a very considerable population – this description derived from McNutt’s December 3, 1938 rendition of Quezon’s characterization of the island. Quezon’s redevelopment plans for Mindanao had been in the works for several years. Consequently a conference of Philippine officials had convened on October 12, 1938, to discuss the plans of the Commonwealth to develop the Island of Mindanao. The Institute of Pacific Relations printed the findings in an effort to illuminate some of the problems of development studied at that conference.

Fred Maxey, Executive Secretary of the Philippine Council with the Institute of Pacific Relations, described Mindanao as the second largest island of the
archipelago, but with a population in 1935 of only 1.5 million, 11 percent of the country’s total population.  

Eulogio Rodriquez, Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Commerce, estimated that the island of Mindanao could feed 40 million inhabitants with “it’s numerous rivers, virgin forests, vast land area, and mineral resources” combined with its “more than 5,000,000 hectares of [untouched] fertile agricultural lands.”  

But Rodriquez revealed that Mindanao’s paradise-like qualities were both a blessing and a curse, as it became more imperative to colonize and civilize Mindanao in order to secure it from “invading hordes” seeking to exploit its abundant resources. 

Understanding the ethnic history of Mindanao helps to contextualize these comments as they pertain to Quezon’s civic plans for the island.

Catherine Porter, journalist for the Institute of Pacific Relations in the 1930s and 1940s, wrote dozens of articles covering political, social, and economic issues relating to the Philippines during these decades, drawing particular attention to Philippine concerns about Mindanao. She too described Mindanao Island as the “second largest in the archipelago, rich in agricultural and mineral resources, which

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74 Rodriquez, “The Economic Development of Mindanao.”
have been barely tapped.” But she also revealed that “it has a large Moro population, and in Davao is the largest group of Japanese in the Islands.”\textsuperscript{75} These two communities of foreigners in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao, created apprehensions among Commonwealth Officials over Philippine rule and future economic viability in the region. In April 1937, Porter related that the Japanese had “entrenched themselves in the Philippines” through their control of hemp plantations on Mindanao. Japanese settlers accomplished this through “illegal leases” procured through various questionable practices that presented “a popular example of the Japanese menace in the Philippines.”\textsuperscript{76}

Stories have been rife about land-grabbing in this province, about the illegal means employed by the Japanese to secure leases, and about the threat to the whole future of the country implied in the establishment of this little “Japao,” or “Davaokuo,” as it is sometimes called in the Philippine press. . . . in some cases title has been secured by the marriages of Japanese to native women who are acting within their rights in filing homestead claims. . . . In other cases Japanese resort to the device not unknown to other races and countries, of having a Filipino lawyer or “dummy” secure leases for them.\textsuperscript{77}


\footnotesize\textsuperscript{77} Porter, “An Independent Philippines and Japan,” 87.
Japanese exploitation of Filipinos helped them secure controlling interests in the hemp producing plantations that provided the greater part of the Philippines’ exports for this important cash crop for the island nation. This presence of a growing population of Japanese settlers on Mindanao presented an alarming situation, which Philippine officials believed could be minimized by the presence of white immigrants in the area. The “invading hordes” mentioned by Rodriguez no doubt alluded to Japanese exploitation and eventual assimilation of Mindanao by Japan if the Commonwealth failed to populate the island with Philippine citizens.

Quezon and others of the Commonwealth Government believed a program to settle large numbers of refugee Jews would help further their own plans to resettle Filipinos from the northern areas of Luzon and Visayas and they believed that both groups would stimulate the economy in the south and protect the area from Japanese infiltration. The Los Angeles Times published an AP from Washington DC on June 4, 1939 that reported the “settlement of tens of thousands of German Jewish refugees in the Philippines to offset the influence of Japanese there.” The article further explained how both the Philippine and US governments worried over the twenty thousand Japanese inhabitants on Mindanao, who owned “more than 50 per cent of the arable land, [and] 70 per cent of the abaca production.” The Japanese controlled “more than 50 per cent of the lumber, copra, hemp, and fish exports, [and] 95 per

The Japanese on Mindanao controlled the only viable exports being exploited on the island at the time and according to the article in the LA Times, they regarded Mindanao “as a vast and potential field for immigration and settlement.” The advantage of Jewish settlers on Mindanao appeared to be their anticipated ability “to compete on equal terms with the Japanese and not be utilized by them.”  

Quezon obviously saw the presence of a considerably sized Jewish community in his country as a social and economic asset. 

As the second largest island in the Philippines, as mentioned, Mindanao was one of three island groups in the country, with Luzon and Visayas being the other two. Luzon, in the north, was home to a vast urban population of Christian Filipinos and other nationalities in and around the capital of Manila. Mindanao, in contrast, was sparsely populated, primarily rural, and home to almost all of the country’s Muslim, or Moros, population, which numbered 650,000. 

Accumulated bitterness between the Moros inhabitants and the ever increasing Christian Filipino population on Mindanao resulted in an acceleration of violence throughout the 1920s. The Moros rejected Filipino government officials as the US appointed more and more Philippine nationals to civil service positions in Mindanao after the US takeover of the Philippines following the Spanish-American War of 1898. The creation of the 

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Philippine Commonwealth Government in 1935 then gave complete control of Mindanao over to Commonwealth officials, a political condition vehemently opposed by the Moros.  

Throughout these opening decades of the 20th century, all western colonial powers with Muslim populations feared the impact of Islamic insurrections in their territories. Moros leaders in Mindanao threatened secession from the Philippines if religious guarantees for their Islamic laws, customs, and traditions were disregarded. The Moros became enraged when the Commonwealth government shut down the Moros religious tribunals, which adjudicated legal matters under Islamic law. As Christian Filipinos from the northern islands continued to settle in the thinly populated areas of Mindanao, tensions grew and Quezon became anxious to find solutions to issues raised by Muslim predominance in the south. Quezon had made an extensive tour of Mindanao provinces in August 1938 and spoke at many rallies. While speaking in Lanao on the development of that predominantly Moros province on Mindanao, he stated:

I want you to live peacefully. I want you to work and make this province rich; and I want you to be benefitted by the development of this province. . . .


83 Yegar, Between Integration and Secession, 225-230.
I want you to realize that I am interested in your welfare, that I have no prejudice against you, that I am not going to favor a Christian Filipino simply because you are against him, that if you are right I will stand by you, whoever your opponent may be, even if he is my friend. I want you to feel that the Government of the Philippines is your own government, the President of the Philippines your President, and that your President and your Government are anxious to serve you and to improve your conditions.84

Quezon’s offer for Jewish settlement on Mindanao came just three months after his extensive trip to the area, and he may have hoped that the settlement of Jews on Mindanao would buffer tensions between Christians and Muslims. The possibility that the refugees would be merely going from one type of persecution into another certainly existed, but their usefulness to the overall future of the area, along with their immediate resettlement needs, seemed to outweigh these considerations. But whether or not Quezon saw the rescue of Jews in the Philippines strictly through glasses shaded with utilitarian uses for the Jewish refugees, it does not change the importance of his efforts to facilitate their rescue, which were not always strictly pragmatic.

In 1939, Quezon gifted his own personal property to the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila as a resource for them to further the selection plan rescue of

Jews by financing and constructing housing on the site. In an annual accounting sent
February 17, 1940 by Alex Frieder to Robert Pilpel, secretary of the JDC regarding
the dispersion of JDC funds in 1939 for the benefit of the refugees in Manila, Alex
reported four rented community houses in operation with “the fifth one in the course
of building [. . .] which is situated on a conveniently located farm owned by
President Quezon.” Alex further explained that the new communal building “will
house forty to fifty persons” who “will work on the farm and so provide themselves
with fruits, vegetables, poultry, etc., so that their living costs will be reduced.”

Named Mariquina Hall, the facility eventually accommodated forty refugee families
in a farming co-op on a three-hectare farm in Quezon City – a Jewish Kibbutz in the
middle of the Philippines. At the dedication of the site on April 24, 1940, Quezon
gave an extemporaneous speech in the presence of several hundred refugee Jews and
Filipino dignitaries, politicians, and businessmen. His unguarded words declared:

What a blessing to the Filipinos it should be if we learn from these few
refugees who come to these Islands how to make even the rocky land of
Mariquina produce enough quantities to support 40 persons. What a
magnificent lesson we can get from that! That would simply mean that the
Filipinos have no reason to fear; that if 40 people can raise enough to support

85 Alex Frieder to Robert Pilpel, February 17, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution
Committee, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

86 “Quezon’s Policy on Jews,” Philippines Herald, April 24, 1940, NARA II, Record Group
350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files, Box 1338, Entry 5, File
#28943-23.
them on four hectares, we with a population of 200 million people will be well off, if we can learn to do just that. So I think the Filipinos are going to realize that in allowing these few refugees to come to these islands, we are not only performing a humanitarian act, but we are, in the end, going to profit from this humane act as is always the case. [...] It is my hope, and indeed my expectation, that the people of the Philippines will have in the future every reason to be glad that when the time of need came, their country was glad to extend to a persecuted people, a hand of welcome.87

Not only do Quezon’s words here confirm his intent of benefitting socially and economically from rescuing Jews, but he alludes to objections and fears within Philippine society regarding the presence of Jews in their country.

Not everyone in the Commonwealth government rallied behind Quezon’s policy on rescuing refugee Jews. Emilio Aguinaldo was one such opponent. Regarded as both a Philippine patriot and a dangerous dissident, Aguinaldo incited the Philippine Revolution as a patriot against its Spanish overlords in 1895 and led its armies in conjunction with the forces of the US in the Spanish-American War of 1898. He then proclaimed Philippine independence and established himself its first “president” and commander-in-chief against US hegemony in a three year Philippine-American War of Independence. On April 28, 1939, Aguinaldo told a reporter of the Manila

87 “Quezon’s Policy on Jews,” Philippinnes Herald, April 24, 1940, NARA II, Record Group 350, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, General Classified Files, Box 1338, Entry 5, File #28943-23.
Bulletin his reasons for opposing the plan to admit Jews to the Philippines. In the first place, Aguinaldo professed that millions of Filipinos wanted to settle on Mindanao and he believed that they should have first preference to the choice areas. In was in his second objection that the age-old rhetoric of antisemitism could be heard:

Jews are dangerous people to have around in large numbers. By natural abilities, by their temperament, and by their training in business, they have succeeded in predominating and absorbing the people of places they settled. They are by nature ambitious and selfishly materialistic and are not anxious to help the country in which they live. [. . .] If the Germans, strong, well organized, and well trained as they are in all fields of human activities, find themselves unable to cope with the Jews to such an extent as to cause Hitler to expel them from Germany, how can we Filipinos expect to compete with the Jews? If cultured highly industrialized, strongly organized Germany could not stand the Jews, how can we expect primitive Mindanao to do so?88

Aguinaldo’s assessment of Jewish “abilities” that he felt endangered Filipinos were nearly the same virtues that Quezon believed would bless Filipinos.89 February 16, 1939, the Manila Bulletin published an official statement authorized by Quezon

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89 Similar attitudes existed among Japanese leaders and is explored in greater detail in chapter six, where this dissertation discusses the tenets of the Fugu Plan.
concerning the admission of Jews to the Philippines for settlement on Mindanao and reported that -

the policy on the matter declared that those to be admitted not only will be selected for their fitness for agricultural life and for their knowledge of farm technology but that they will be provided with funds in order that they could finance the development of the lands to be assigned them. With the knowledge these refugees of modern agriculture gained from experience in various nations of Europe they should prove of distinct help to Philippine farmers because of the example they will set.\(^\text{90}\)

Quezon’s enthusiastic support of the resettlement of Jews on Mindanao, for whatever his reasons, propelled it into the forefront of US intentions to facilitate an American contribution to relieving the plight of the Jews in Europe.

\textit{E: The Mindanao Exploration Commission}

Plans therefore progressed for studying, locating and purchasing suitable lands on Mindanao Island for Jewish refugee habitation. At a January 18, 1939 meeting in Washington, Charles Liebman of the REC informed Philip Frieder, who had just arrived from Manila, his brother Morris Frieder, and Jacobs and Achilles of the Office of Philippine Affairs, that he contemplated “sending a mission of experts to

\(^{90}\)“Benefits to P.I. of Admission of Few Jews Shown,” \textit{Bulletin}, February 16, 1939, Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center Archives, Jorge B. Vargas Collection, Office of the President Series vol. 27, Jan – Mar 1939, p. 57.
Mindanao composed of: a colonizer, a public health expert, an agronomist, an animal husbandry specialist, and an hydraulic engineer.”  

When Liebman inquired of Jacobs whether US government personnel could participate in this exploratory mission, he was advised that “with missions now being formed to make studies in British Guiana and the Dominican Republic, no assurance could be given that the Departments concerned would be in a position to furnish additional experts for a third mission.”  

Although Jacobs “strongly emphasized” that the Department of State was truly interested in settling the “largest numbers of refugees” possible on Mindanao, but still compatible with US State Department and Philippine interests, his excuses for non-compliance and “sound safeguards” resembled suppression rather than support.  

However, prior to this meeting on the January 18, 1939 the State Department enlisted the services of Dr Isaiah Bowman to present his expert opinion on the viability of settlement on Mindanao.  

Dr. Isaiah Bowman, then president of John Hopkins University and Director of the US Geographical Society, prepared a preliminary report at the behest of Theodore Achilles in the Office of Philippine Affairs that was delivered to George Warren of the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees on January 21, 1939. 

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91 Achilles, “Memorandum of Conversation,” January 18, 1939, NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/49. 

92 Ibid.  

93 Ibid.
Bowman’s conclusions stated that “Mindanao seems to offer sufficient possibilities to guarantee a successful future for selected groups of European settlers.” These initial findings determined that the southern island contained 31 per cent of the land area of the Philippines but only 10 percent of the total population. The general consensus of Bowman’s documentary sources maintained “that Mindanao possesses great agricultural possibilities because of its exceedingly fertile virgin soils.” The report further explained that most of the island lied below the typhoon belt so its climate favored new settlers better than any other location.

Bowman claimed that the province of Bukidnon in the north could become “the principal livestock-raising province of the Philippines.” The province of Lanao to the west offered plateaus of rich soil for extensive agriculture, and the province of Cabato to the south, Bowman asserted, could support commercial crops such as coffee and tea. Mindanao continued to get highly favorable reports as a viable site for mass resettlement.

As a result of Bowman’s initial report, a Philippine scientific mission formed, under the auspices of the President's Advisory Committee of Political Refugees, with

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94 Bowman to Achilles, January 18, 1939. NARA I, Record Group 59, General Records Department of State, Visa Division, Box 245, 811b .55, J/46.


96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.
Bowman as advisor. The scientific mission, named the Mindanao Exploration Commission, consisted of five experts, who began arriving in Manila during the first weeks of April, 1939. On April 21st, commission chairman O. D. Hargis and the other members of the committee, Dr. Stanton Youngberg, Dr. Robert L. Pendleton, Dr. Howard F. Smith, and Captain Hugh J. Casey, began their evaluation of lands in the Philippines for mass refugee resettlement. Hargis, chairman of the group, worked in the agricultural division of the Goodyear Rubber Company and had twenty-five years of experience in the Panama Canal Zone, in Sumatra, Java, and on the island of Mindanao itself. He had specialized in large-scale plantation operations at all these sites. Dr. Youngberg served as director of the Philippine Bureau of Agriculture from 1925 to 1932 and worked on the staff of the Philippine Governor-General in 1933 as an advisor on agricultural issues. Dr. Pendleton came to the commission directly from the US Department of Agriculture. Dr. Smith represented the Public Health Service and Captain Casey, from the Army Engineer Corps, went as the hydroelectric specialist. This commission of experts spent several weeks investigating all aspects of massive refugee resettlement and its plausibility in the Philippines.

While commission members began arriving in the Philippines, Alex Frieder, now the Frieder brother in charge in Manila, notified Liebman in New York of their arrivals. After informing Liebman of preliminary meetings he’d had with Dr.

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98 From Bowman to Achilles, March 16, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6.
Youngberg and Dr. Smith, Alex Frieder happily reported to Liebman in an April 6, 1939 communiqué that President Quezon had made yet another resettlement offer to the committee – “the whole island of Polillo which is due east of Manila.” Frieder explained that the island “has an area of four hundred square miles, inhabited by only seven thousand Filipinos.” Several aspects of Polillo made it a very desirable site of resettlement consideration.

Emphasizing the fact that Quezon had personal jurisdiction over the island, Frieder quoted Quezon as stating that “he would take great pride in seeing Polillo inhabited by our refugees and if we accepted, he would authorize the appropriation of a sufficient sum of money for the National Treasury for an adequate road system through the island.” According to Frieder, Quezon mentioned creating an independent municipality on Polillo with one of the members of the JRC as governor or municipal president. Even more surprising, Quezon related to Frieder that the Filipino inhabitants of Polillo implored Quezon, during a recent inspection trip, to “divert the settlement of refugees from Mindanao to Polillo as they felt they [Jews] could be immensely beneficial to their [Filipinos] progress.” Frieder further revealed that Quezon believed that “forty to fifty thousand refugees” could easily settle there. When asked if he intended settlement on Polillo instead of Mindanao,

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99 Alex Frieder to Liebman, April 6, 1939. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, JDC Collection 33/44, File #787a.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.
Quezon relied that they could consider “both Polillo and Mindanao.” Frieder’s communiqué to Liebman exclaimed that they now had the “wonderful prospects of settling both Mindanao and Polillo, which enlarges the quantity of refugees who can be settled.”

While the rest of the world prevaricated over taking in Jewish refugees, Quezon came up with offer after offer to populate his country with Jewish immigrants.

Commission secretary Stanton Youngberg informed Bowman via post on April 15, 1939 of their scheduled “inspection trip to the Island of Polillo” in the next week. Even though Polillo’s tropical rainy climate inspired discouraging early assessments from commission members, they desired to appease Quezon’s exuberance over Polillo and consented to a guided inspection tour as “a politic thing to do.” Copies of these communiqués concerning Polillo made it into the hand of Jacobs, who commented to Achilles his concern over Quezon’s proposal for settling “between forty and fifty thousand refugees on the Island of Polillo. [. . .what] white refugees would do there is a bit beyond my imagination. I would not, however, belittle its importance as a possible home for some refugees.”

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102 Ibid. Polillo Island lies about 18 miles off the eastern coast of Luzon.

103 Stanton Youngberg to Isaiah Bowman, April 15, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #787a.

104 Ibid.

105 Jacobs to Achilles, “Settlement of German Refugees in the Philippine Islands,” April 25, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #787a.
commission members all concurred, after a trip to the island on Quezon’s presidential yacht, that “Polillo Island offers no possibility for the settlement of European refugees.”\textsuperscript{106} The commission turned its attention to Mindanao immediately following their April 19\textsuperscript{th} excursion to Polillo. But even though Polillo offered no viable opportunity for mass resettlement, it remained open to any refugees wanting to settle there, as were all other potential places of habitat in the Philippine Islands.

Commission members arrived on Mindanao in the middle of May 1939, “making preliminary surveys” necessary in ascertaining “the areas that are neither available nor suitable” for mass resettlement so that they could concentrate their energies on viable locations. Youngberg remarked in a May 29, 1939 report to Bowman that the changes and improvements to living conditions on Mindanao since his last visit there six years prior were “really astounding,” mentioning advancements in “road building” and “land settlement.”\textsuperscript{107} After visiting all the provinces of Mindanao available for settlement and assessing the island with aerial surveillance, a supplementary commission report issued July 7, 1939 to Isaiah Bowman detailed certain private matters that commission members deemed inadmissible with their final, public report. One such item was the message by Jorge Vargas of the growing


\textsuperscript{107} Youngberg to Bowman, May 29, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
opposition in Philippine circles to refugee settlement in the Philippines. The report stated:

Frequent opposition has been expressed toward this settlement in the press and still more often to members of your commission in private, and no doubt more often still by influential people to various members of the President’s cabinet and quite frankly to the President himself. At least we can infer the latter from the statement that Mr. Jorge Vargas, the President’s secretary, made to Dr. Youngberg. The general sentiments expressed have been to the effect that the Philippines should be reserved for the Filipinos.¹⁰⁸

Commission members’ apprehensions concerning anti-Jewish sentiment among certain members of the Philippine Assembly tainted their expectations for achieving a successful resettlement program on Mindanao.

Alex Frieder, who joined the Commission members at a parting luncheon with Quezon in July 1939, reported to his brother Morris in Ohio on the Commission findings discussed at that luncheon and their apprehensions over the rising antisemitic sentiments they had encountered. Alex detailed the age-old rhetoric that has become all too familiar over the centuries, ranging from Jews being “schemers” who are out to “own the Philippines,” to the secret brotherhood of Jews who

¹⁰⁸ Hargis, Youngberg, Pendleton to Bowman, “Confidential,” July 7, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.
annually find a “Christian child to kidnap and drink its blood.”¹⁰⁹ But Quezon’s reactions to the several “influential persons” who had voiced these outrageous accusations to him reassured the Commission of his resolve to facilitate a peaceful refugee rescue:

He assured us that big or little, he raised hell with every one of those persons and made them ashamed of themselves for being a victim of propaganda intended to further victimize an already persecuted people; He immediately told us in unequivocal terms that we could have all the land we needed, not only for the 10,000 persons, but for 30 or 50,000 and that he would personally see to it that thousands of hectares more of private leased lands would be surrendered to us by transfer [. . .] He again repeated that he could see in this development a distinct benefit to the country as well as a haven for the refugees [. . .] and he asked me not to be depressed by any subversive rumors.¹¹⁰

The Commission felt confident that with Quezon’s personal assurances for the success of the operation that the Commission could, with “absolute certainty,” present Washington with a highly favorable proposal for refugee resettlement on Mindanao. Both Pres. A radiogram from the commission members in Manila to Ernest Gruening, Director of the US Department of the Interior, written immediately

¹⁰⁹ Morris Frieder to Morrissey, JDC, attachment “Mindanao Commission,” August 18, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #787a.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.
after their luncheon with Quezon, conveyed a brief summary of their initial findings. They maintained that “several hundred thousand acres” were available for “large scale European settlement” on the Bukidnon Plateau and they recommended “action be initiated looking towards acquirement by purchase of land leases Commission members left the Philippines the next week to finalize their report stateside prior to its official submittal to the State Department in October 1939.

In early August 1939, officials of the JDC, along with Morris and Philip Frieder, met to discuss the results of the Commission’s findings. Philip Frieder informed the committee that a 10,000 acre tract of land on Mindanao could be readied immediately for colonization. It contained nearly 3,000 head of cattle along with “large maintenance crops and citrus fruits. It could be leased from the government for 20 to 25 years” for $80,000. Philip further informed them that “300 families now in Manila could be transferred as soon as the barracks are built,” estimating that construction to cost another $45,000. Philip maintained that this site could “take care of 600 to 700 families, allowing about 40 acres per family.” While all agreed about the importance of the venture, they cautiously deferred any long range decisions until the October 1939 meeting of the IGC in Washington.

The official “Report of the Mindanao Exploration Commission,” forwarded on October 2, 1939 to James G. McDonald, chairman of the President’s Advisory

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111 Evelyn M. Morrissey, “Memorandum of Meeting at Office of JDC, Tuesday, August 8, at 10 am,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, file #787a.
112 Ibid.
Committee on Political Refugees, summarized the recommendation “that negotiations be undertaken at once “ to purchase lands on Mindanao for the “establishment of a refugee colonization project.” With report in hand, the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees met October 13, 1939 and discussed the viable settlement projects still pending. Topics included Mindanao, the Dominican Republic, and Guiana. However, memorandums of conversations between State Department officials prior to that meeting revealed some disturbing sentiments.

Robert Pell, from the European Division within the State Department, was advised concerning the upcoming meeting on the 13th by George Warren, the Acting Secretary for The President's Advisory Committee. Warren expressed to Pell how anxious Dr. Bowman was that the Philippine Project be given very serious consideration because Bowman felt that Jacobs, from the Office of Philippine Affairs, “was not very favorably disposed toward the enterprise.” Pell then had a conversation with Jacobs just five days later on October 9, 1939, at which time Jacobs expressed his wish not to attend the October 13th meeting because he felt his involvement in the matter didn't warrant his attendance. Jacobs’ explanation offered


recollections of events and conversations from December 1938 that contained some troubling misrepresentations.

**F: Mindanao: Paradise in Jeopardy**

Jacobs related to Pell on October 9, 1939 that when the IGC was hunting for locations for refugee settlement projects in 1938, he, Jacobs, had been directed by Welles to send inquiries to the Philippines per the IGC's request. Jacobs then stated that the Commonwealth Government had replied that there could be opportunity for the assimilation of about 1,000 persons in total and that Mr. Welles had considered the offer to be inadequate. Jacobs’ misstatements did not stop there. Apparently Welles had discussed refugee rescue in the Philippines at a Washington DC State dinner party with the Philippine Commissioner, where Welles explained “the interest President Roosevelt was taking in this matter and had urged him to inform President Quezon of the interest of the President and to express the hope that a better offer could be made than that of 1,000 persons.”115 Jacobs asserted to Pell that Quezon only inflated the immigration number to 50,000 when Welles urged Quezon through the Philippine Commissioner to the United States to make a better offer.116 This was a total misstatement of the chain of events. Quezon's offer to admit 2,000 refugee

115 Robert Pell, Memorandum of Conversation with Joseph E. Jacobs, October 9, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Lot 52D408, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Box 6.

116 Ibid.
families in 1939, and then 5,000 families annually until 30,000 or more families had been reached was deliberately squelched back in December 1938 by Jacobs and Sayre. Jacobs neglected to tell Pell that it was he, Jacobs, who had suggested a far more moderate number of even 500 refugees total over many years, to which Welles then responded that it was not enough.

According to Pell’s memorandum of his October 9, 1939 conversation with Jacobs, Welles had then called Jacobs into a meeting with Sayre to discuss the Mindanao Resettlement Project:

Mr. Sayer took a very strong line against the settlement project. Mr. Welles argued back heatedly and there was no definite conclusion. Mr. Jacobs then remarked that in his opinion the settlement of a large number of refugees in the Philippines could not be justified on social, economic, or political grounds. The major question of policy was whether the United States wished to remain in or leave the Philippines. Jacobs said that he believed that the United States should get out, hook, line and sinker. The settlement of these people, (italics added) who would be financed by a New York group, would mean a further call on the United States to stay in the Islands.”

Motivations for Jacobs' misrepresentations can certainly be explained by his obvious objections to any kind of refugee rescue in the Philippines that he believed would

\[117\] Robert Pell, Memorandum of Conversation with Joseph E. Jacobs, October 9, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6.
encumber the United States. But his lack of basic human compassion for the fate of thousands of stateless Jews, displayed in his characterization of their rescue as neither socially, nor economically, nor politically expedient, speaks volumes.

McNutt and Quezon had constantly urged higher immigration resettlement numbers than the State Department, namely Jacobs and Sayre, wanted to approve.

Pell noted the disavowal of the Mindanao Resettlement Project by these two State Department officials when he acknowledged to Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle the very next day on October 10, 1939 that “Welles had been very much in favor of going forward with a big project while Mr. Sayre and he [Jacobs] had opposed it.”

Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, one of FDR’s most trusted advisors and a long-time friend, advanced the project by giving State Department approval. The REC then proceeded with a plan to acquire the existing plantation on Mindanao. Replete with buildings, livestock, and fruit orchards it was ideal for the initial settlement of about 100 selected engineers, agriculturalists, and construction contractors, who could begin the implementation of the Mindanao Resettlement Project.

A preliminary cost estimate, “premised on the purchase and colonization of approximately 100,000 hectares of privately owned or leased grazing lands to be

118 Robert Pell, Memorandum of Conversation, October 10, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6.

119 "Appendix, Composition of Initial Refugee Group For Mindanao Settlement" from office of President, John Hopkins University to Charles Liebman, August 29, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, file #787a.
settled ultimately by 10,000 refugees,” detailed expenditures such as land and equipment purchasing, shelter construction, agricultural costs, and forestry expenses to run a saw mill. The projected grand total over the long term for the settlement of 10,000 refugees over ten years came to just over six million dollars.120 Charles Liebman of the REC actively sought co-sponsorship for the Mindanao Resettlement Project from the Agro-Joint branch of the JDC. The Agro-Joint was an arm of the JDC founded in 1924 to promote agricultural settlements for indigent Jewish farmers in various states of the Soviet Union. Agro-Joint played a significant advisory role during the push for mass resettlement sites for Jewish refugees during the pre-WWII years, as well providing considerable operational funds and organizational manpower.121 But Liebman maintained that the REC should be the sole agency managing the distribution of all funds for the “colonization and rehabilitation of refugees” on Mindanao.122 This became a critical issue over the next two years in the Mindanao Resettlement Project saga.

With the go ahead from all corners, Liebman immediately formulated a budget for the first year of colonization on Mindanao and forwarded the completed projection figures to Dr. Youngberg in Manila during the first week of November,

120 “Appendix, Composition of Initial Refugee Group For Mindanao Settlement, from office of President, John Hopkins University to Charles Liebman,” August 29, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, file #787a.

121 Yehuda Bauer, My Brother’s Keeper, 57-104.

122 Charles Liebman to Paul Baerwald, September 29, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC, Collection 33/44, file #787a.
1939. While Liebman and the REC actively pushed forward with plans for the eventual resettlement project on Mindanao, JDC officers conversed often in an effort to ascertain for themselves the viability of a successful resettlement in the Philippines. One message from Paul Baerwald, Chairman of the JDC intended for James N. Rosenberg, a Board Chairman for the JDC hinted at potential problems over jurisdiction between the different organizations involved:

Mr. Rosenberg said that no Philippine reports are in the possession of Agro-Joint [. . .] It has been fully discussed by the Refugee Economic Corporation, President’s Advisory Committee, the State Department, Dr. Bowman, former Governor McNutt, present Governor Sayre and the brothers Frieder. Messrs. Ittleson and Rosenwald are informed, as members of the Refugee Economic Corporation, the matter should have been brought up by me to the J.D.C., but somehow it was not, and one of the reasons was that I wanted Mr. Rosenberg’s personal support in the first instance [. . .] My hope and expectation is that a substantial sum will be made available to the Refugee Economic Corporation for the furtherance of the Philippine plan.\(^{123}\)

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\(^{123}\) “Message from Mr. Baerwald to be conveyed to Mr. Rosenberg,” November 8, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC, Collection 33/44, file #787a.
Following weeks of official inquires and meetings by officials of the REC, the JDC and Agro-Joint, a sum of $100,000 “for the Philippine work” was appropriated by the Argo-Joint in early January 1940.\(^{124}\)

The REC proceeded with its plans to acquire the existing plantation on Mindanao, replete with buildings, livestock, and fruit orchards ideal for the initial settlement of about 100 selected engineers, agriculturalists, and construction contractors, who could begin the implementation of the Mindanao Resettlement Project.\(^{125}\) Liebman, of the REC, informed Pell and the State Department on November 29, 1939, that a deposit for the purchase of two pieces of property, called the Day and Worcester Ranches on Mindanao, had been made. He also stated that the central committee of the REC had asked the various countries to gather dossiers on prospective colonists to the Philippines.\(^{126}\) While waiting to obtain title on the Day and Worcester Ranches, some serious obstacles arose in the Philippine National Assembly of the Commonwealth Government.

These two properties were owned by family members of Dean C. Worcester, deceased, who was one of the first Americans to settle on Mindanao, working there

\(^{124}\) “Memroandum from Baerwald to Rosenberg, January 5, 1940,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC, Collection 33/44, file #787a.

\(^{125}\) “Appendix, Composition of Initial Refugee Group For Mindanao Settlement from office of President, John Hopkins University to Charles Liebman,” August 29, 1939, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, JDC Collection 33/44, file #787a.

\(^{126}\) Liebman to Pell, November 29, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines", Lot 52D408, Box 6.
for the US Government for many years. The Day Ranch comprised 3,150 acres, of which 2,000 were arable. The purchase of this ranch included 1,400 head of high-grade Indian cattle, twenty-two horses, ranch houses, corrals and fences. The Worcester Ranch encompassed 8,500 acres, half of which was arable, with a ranch house, 2,700 head of cattle, thirty-eight horses, fences, and various buildings. There was at the time a government lease of the Worcester Ranch, due to expire in 1959. The annual rental of these two properties was considered nominal.127

The Commission had estimated that these two ranches could ultimately accommodate between 600 and 800 refugees, handling cattle ranching, fruits, corn, and vegetable farming. But the transfer of title of these properties became complicated due to certain policies of Philippine landholding laws, which prohibited individuals or corporations from acquiring holdings that exceeded 1,064 hectares. The Philippine Legislature had set up a holding firm in earlier years, the National Development Company, which circumvented the landholding laws by acquiring title to the large tracts of land and then granting long-term leases to private parties. The REC fully intended to lease the ranches in this manner, with the intent that once the refugees obtained Philippine citizenship, they would purchase their farms as legal

127 Liebman to Pell, attachment general description properties on Mindanao, November 30, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines," Lot 52D408, Box 6.
landowners. But opponents of the resettlement of refugees within the National Development Company and the Philippine Assembly attempted to scuttle the plan. It would ultimately be this opposition that would stall the Mindanao project until it was too late.

**G: Mindanao: Paradise Lost**

On February 23, 1940, Dr. Stanton Youngberg, secretary of the Philippine Exploration Commission and engaged by the REC to be the general manager of the Mindanao Resettlement Project, informed Liebman that he had obtained some “disquieting” information that accounted for the “slowness of action on our Mindanao project.”  The Philippine National Assembly was in the process of drafting and passing a new immigration bill and there was “strong opposition to the annual national quota of 1000,” which was the proposed number of Jewish refugees to be allowed entrance yearly into the Philippines for colonization purposes. The opposition parties also noted that if Quezon wanted the bill to pass, he had better compromise with a much lower quota number of 500 based on national origins. When Youngberg inquired of an “old Filipino friend,” who had been a member of

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128 Liebman to Pell, attachment general description properties on Mindanao, November 30, 1939, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines," Lot 52D408, Box 6.

the Philippine Senate, if the opposition stemmed from anti-Jewish sentiments in the Assembly, the retired Senator told him “that there is and that it is deep, quite extensive, silent but powerful.”

According to this Senator, the opposition in the Assembly believed that Quezon had acted impulsively when he offered Mindanao lands for a massive Jewish resettlement plan because he had not sufficiently consulted with the leaders of the National Assembly. Youngberg attached an article with his communiqué to Liebman from the *Manila Daily Bulletin* of February 18, 1940. The article claimed members of the Philippine Assembly opposed high alien quotas, being “alarmed by prospect of a ‘flood of foreigners:’”

The high level quotas in the immigration bill now before the assembly’s labor and immigration committee, bringing up pictures of a “flood of aliens,” is understood to have aroused opposition within the committee. Informal discussion of the present draft of the bill disclosed alarm at such a quota of 1,000 annually for nationalities affected by the measure. Some committee-men argued that it would nullify the nationalization program, add to the unemployment situation and, after five or ten years, flood the country with more foreigners than could be absorbed. [. . .] Several committeemen were reported yesterday in favor of either abolishing the quota system altogether or


131 Ibid.
placing the quota at, say, 100 or 200 for each nation whose nationals would be subject to immigration rules. Another provision they propose is that if any quota is established, the immigration commissioner should be given ample power to suspend it if in his opinion further admission of the nationals of a particular country would endanger domestic security or create a problem, social or otherwise.\textsuperscript{132}

In light of these sentiments, Youngberg closed his letter to Liebman with his own misgivings about the future of the Mindanao Resettlement Project, recalling “one of the last admonitions you gave me the evening I left your office was to the effect that we must be sure that we will not create any nasty minority situation for the future . . . I have begun to believe that the High Commissioner is very likely of the same opinion,”\textsuperscript{133} who at that time was Francis B. Sayre, one of the original obstructionists to the resettlement rescue of Jews in the Philippines. Due to unfavorable sentiment in the National Assembly and those who viewed refugee resettlement as a violation of Philippine landholding policies, progress on the Mindanao Resettlement Project temporarily stalled until the final draft of the Philippine Immigration Laws were passed and proponents of resettlement rescue could proceed under the required provisions of the new laws.


\textsuperscript{133} Youngberg to Liebman, February 23, 1940, NARA II, Record Group 59, Intergovernmental Committee of Refugees, Country Files, "Philippines," Lot 52D408, Box 6.
Prior to June 1940, when the Philippine Legislature passed a final proposal for the new Philippine Immigration Act, the island nation had never restricted immigration into the country through any kind of a quota system. This was due in part to the extension of US Immigration Laws of 1917 to the Philippines, which, as discussed in an earlier chapter, regulated immigrant selection qualitatively but not quantitatively. After years of “scandalous conditions” in the Philippine Immigration offices, which resulted in a two-year investigation that yielded arrests, indictments, and department closures, the Philippine Assembly passed the Philippine Immigration Act of 1940. The Act provided a flat quota for the entrance of all nationals in an effort “to make restrictions nondiscriminatory.” Originally set at 1,000 immigrants per country annually, that quota number was later lowered to 500 during assembly meetings. This quota system could have significantly restricted the refugee rescue measures operating in the Philippines, were it not for the “humanitarian” clause of the Act. This special provision stated:

Sec. 47. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Act, the President is hereby authorized –

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135 Ibid.
(b) For humanitarian reasons, and when not opposed to the public interest, to admit aliens who are refugees for religious, political, or racial reasons, in such classes of cases and under such conditions as he may prescribe.\textsuperscript{136}

This exception to the quota restriction would therefore allow Jewish mass resettlement on Mindanao to operate as originally planned, rescuing 1,000 immigrants or more annually. Few knew the role the Frieder Brothers played in the inclusion of that provision:

The Commonwealth enacted a quota immigration bill which limits immigration to 500 persons per country annually. However, it empowers the President to permit extra-quota immigration for so-called social and humanitarian reasons [. . .] The bill has been approved by the President of the United States and becomes effective January 1, 1941. The Frieder Brothers are satisfied that the refugees will be permitted to come in as extra-quota immigrants, they [Frieders] having been instrumental in securing the inclusion of the provision in the law.\textsuperscript{137}

When the NY Times reported that Quezon had “signed a bill limiting immigration annually to 500 from any nation,” it also noted that political observers believed the

\textsuperscript{136} “General Information concerning Philippine Immigration Laws,” American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File-Philippine Immigration Laws 1940.

\textsuperscript{137} Robert Pilpel to Dr. Bernard Kahn, “Memorandum,” November 8, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File#787a.
quota was meant to limit “unrestricted immigration from Japan.” Quezon no doubt hoped that quota numbers limiting further Japanese incursion into Mindanao, along with resettlement programs for Filipino and European colonists would help secure Philippine control of the island in the future.

With this one obstacle to Jewish colonization successfully hurdled, all agencies involved in the implementation of the Mindanao Resettlement Project resumed their plans. Alex Frieder reported to the Board of Directors of the JRC prior to his return to the US in May 1940:

I am pleased to report that both the American and Philippine governments have agreed in principle to a resettlement project in Mindanao for 10,000 refugee immigrants. The Refugee Economic Corporation made possible a thorough and exhaustive survey by a highly competent committee of lands desirable for European colonization. The committee determined upon tracts located in the Province of Bukidnon, Mindanao. Negotiations with government entities necessarily involve long delays. This has been the condition which we have gone through. But I am happy to state that at a conference this week, all differences were ironed out and that contracts for all land under option to us and contracts for the utilization of these lands well be terminated within a few days. This project, when in operation, should mark

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138 “Philippines Curb Immigration,” NY Times, May 29, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File#784.
one of the great milestones in the history of the resettlement of our co-
religionists, necessitated by the terrible Diaspora of the Twentieth Century.139

Days turned to weeks and weeks turned to months as endless delays and
negotiations, along with the impending national elections in the Philippines diverted
attention elsewhere.

An August 13, 1940 letter from Kenneth Day, co-owner of the ranches on
Mindanao, to his friend Richard Ely in the Bureau of Philippine Affairs, attested to
the problems arising in the acquisition of his properties. Day related how just after
the papers had been signed and he was about to be paid, lawyers halted the
transaction until “the question of transferring Philippine lands to foreign owners”
could be settled. Important and powerful members of the National Development
Company (NDC), the government corporation that served as “landlord” over large
tracts of leased lands, “were not kindly disposed towards the project.”140 They
managed to stall the transaction for the acquisition of the Day and Worcester
Ranches by the REC for many months, until Quezon finally stepped in after his re-
election, with enough new political clout to demand the NDC finalize the contracts.
But as the saying goes, it was too little too late.

139 Alex Frieder, “Jewish Refugee Committee,” May 7, 1940, p.23-24, American Jewish Joint
Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #784.

140 Philip Hoffman to James N. Roenberg, “Memorandum re: Telephone Conversation with
Mr.Komlos Regarding REC – Philippine Project,” November 13, 1941, American Jewish Joint
Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File #787a.


**H: Summary**

Everything had been ready to go. The combined moneys of the REC and the Agro-Joint, $200,000, had been sitting in accounts, waiting to be dispersed. State Department officials no longer worked at trying to dissuade their superiors from enjoining the resettlement plans.\(^{141}\) Names of the first 1000 colonists had been selected and approved and the JRC stood ready to request their visas.\(^{142}\) As late as November 10, 1941 plans for refugee resettlement in the Philippines still continued:

Negotiations with the Philippine government have been going on for a long period due to the fact that the new immigration bill was pending in the Philippine legislature. With the passage of the bill, negotiations were resumed as to details, and recently President Quezon instructed the officials of the Immigration Department to follow through on the contract, and at the present time the various details are being discussed. It is expected that in a comparatively short time all outstanding questions will be resolved. However, the increasing gravity in the Far Eastern situation has naturally

\(^{141}\) Robert Pilpel to Edwin Goldwasser, “Memorandum re: Philippines,” November 7, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File#784.

\(^{142}\) “File Memorandum, Notes on Meeting Today at 10:00am Concerning the Refugee Situation in the Philippines,” June 21, 1940, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File#787a.
raised certain questions as to whether it would be desirable to undertake the settlement project at this time.\textsuperscript{143}

No one knew that by the end of that year the ability to bring Jewish refugees into Mindanao would be eliminated by the occupation of the Philippines by Japanese forces.

Mindanao was the last hope for a US mass resettlement strategy aimed at aiding the tens of thousands of Jewish refugees victimized by Nazi Germany. Hitler’s plan for massive Jewish deportation mutated into one of extermination, implemented from late 1941 until the end of WWII. With the failure of the west to provide a successful mass rescue operation for Europe’s Jewish population, “thousands of Jews entered the cattle cars bound for Auschwitz, under the impression that they were being resettled in the east.”\textsuperscript{144} An irony of the “Final Solution” lies in its reflection of the western world’s failed attempts to rescue through resettlement. “The decision to murder followed directly from the failure to resettle.”\textsuperscript{145} Indeed, Hitler mentions this failure of the west to take in Jewish emigrants as rationale for Nazi policies against the Jews in his famous January 30, 1939 Reichstag Speech:

It is a shameful spectacle to see how the whole democratic world is oozing sympathy for the poor tormented Jewish people but remains hard-hearted and

\textsuperscript{143} Miss Morrissey to James N. Rosenberg, Status of the Philippine Project, November 10, 1941, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives, JDC Collection 33/44, File#787a.

\textsuperscript{144} Feingold, \textit{The Politics of Rescue}, 90.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
obdurate when it comes to helping them – which is surely, in view of its attitude, an obvious duty. The arguments that are brought up as an excuse for not helping them actually speak for us Germans and Italians.\textsuperscript{146}

Mindanao joined the long “shameful” list of resettlement schemes considered at one time by the international community that failed to materialize.

\textsuperscript{146}“Extract from the Speech by Hitler, January 30, 1939,” in Documents on the Holocaust, 8\textsuperscript{th} Edition, Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot, eds. (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 1999), 132
VI. Japan & Germany, 1920s -1940s

A. Prologue: Japan and Germany: Unlikely Allies

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor propelled the reluctant United States into the war and ended all refugee rescue operations in the Philippines, while launching another era of terror and deprivation not only for the Jewish refugees from Europe, but for their American Jewish benefactors as well. The Jewish German refugees feared antisemitic reprisals from the conquering Japanese military, patterned after the Nazi-invoked violence against the Jews in Europe. What influence, if any, did Nazi propaganda have on the Japanese? As unlikely allies as Japan and Germany appeared to be, understanding the diplomatic history of these two fascist states, in particular during the decades preceding WWII, provides important contextual perspective to the handling of the “Jewish question” during WWII by Germany’s Asiatic ally. These two militaristic regimes shared little respect for each other, either politically or culturally, although that had not always been the case in the wider picture of their foreign relations.

Official diplomatic dealings between the two nations dates back to 1861 as a result of the January 24, 1861 Prusso-Japanese treaty, forced upon the Japanese Empire in conjunction with other treaties enacted by western nations in an effort to compel trade with the resistant Japan. Although forced into an economically-based compliance by the western powers, Japan sought to make the most of its compulsory
leap into modernity by seeking the services of Europe’s finest and most advanced technicians. In this regards, they used Germany as their “model of modernization” by employing the services of Germany’s most renowned scholarly and scientific minds.\(^1\) Japan called this army of foreign advisors the *oyatoi gaikokujin*, “hired foreigners” who numbered over 3,000, most fulfilling three year appointments. The Japanese Meiji Empire employed German agriculturists, medical and natural scientists, administrators in law and economics, military advisors, mathematicians, engineers, and various persons in the Liberal Arts and Humanities. This shifted Japan away from the influence of Britain, France, and the US, which alarmed these western powers considerably, especially when Japan fashioned its Meiji Constitution of 1889 after the Prussian model.\(^2\) This marked a brief apex in the era of German-Japanese relations, which then fell sharply with the advent of the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 when Germany joined Russia and France to protest Japan’s war of expansion in China. Called the “Triple Intervention,” this European interference in Asiatic affairs ended Japan’s philo-Germanic tendencies that had afforded Japan intellectual advancements in education, the military, law, and scientific

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technologies.³ Further aggravation by the Kaiser’s use of the discriminatory slogan, “Yellow Peril,” which slandered Japan while seeking to facilitate a rapprochement with Russia, festered Japanese acrimony to Germany for years to come.⁴

Germany’s own expansion plans in China added more fuel to Japan’s already simmering resentment against its mentor into modernity when Germany announced its new world foreign policy aims in 1897, Weltpolitik, an imperialistic foreign policy designed to keep Germany a player on the world stage of empires.⁵ Seizing on an incident against Catholic missionaries in Shantung, the German Imperial Navy occupied Kiao-Chow Bay in November 1897, much to the astonishment of Japan and the western powers. In an effort to abate any kind of action that could be viewed as an invitation to war, the western powers conceded Germany its newly acquired Chinese port.⁶

The race for land acquisitions in China by the other nations now pushed forward at full steam – a turn of events that angered Japan who had been summarily forced out of China in 1895. With the Russian occupation of Manchuria in 1900, Germany saw the rising tension between Tokyo and St. Petersburg as a welcome distraction that would pull international attention away from Berlin. Germany then inflamed the

³ Spang and Wippich, Japanese-German Relations, 1895-1945, 2.
already heated Russian-Japanese tensions by exacerbating a Japanese attack of the Russian naval base at Port Arthur in February 1904. Germany hoped to produce a future Russian state too weak to yield any sizable resistance against future German expansion plans in eastern Europe and Japan’s victory over Russia in Manchuria gave Japan new leverage in its own imperialistic ambitions in Asia.7

During this time, Britain and France ended their Asiatic colonial disputes with a détente that did not include Germany. The Reich could now find no other imperialistic power in the Far East with which to align itself and Germany’s international position declined. As Russia moved closer to alliance with Britain and France, Germany desperately sought a three-way alliance with Japan and the United States.8 In light of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s continued rantings about Japan as the “Yellow Peril,” serious negotiations for such an alliance never materialized. Germany then passed up several diplomatic opportunities to build bridges of rapprochement to Japan during the opening years of the 20th century, which made Japan’s overtures to open talks with Germany in 1912 all the more surprising. In response, the Kaiser broached the subject of initiating a military alliance with Japan several months later, only to have the idea rejected by the German foreign office. Add to this the deaths of the last of the pro-German diplomats in Japan and the

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7 Spang and Wippich, Japanese-German Relations, 1895-1945, 3-6. See also Barbara J. Brooks, Japan’s Imperial Diplomacy: Consuls, Treaty Ports, and War in China (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 118-120.

possibility of repairing relations between the two countries cooled, not to be re-kindled again until after WWI.\textsuperscript{9}

Open conflict actually ensued between the two nations shortly after the start of WWI, when Japan demanded that Germany remove its forces from Kiao-Chow. Armed fighting in 1914 resulted in the capture of German and Austrian POWs as Japan entered the war by routing Germany from the Chinese port. Kiao-Chow was only one of the many places of German hegemony lost in its defeat in WWI. As the conquerors stripped Germany of its colonies abroad and its territories at home, post-war burdens of moral guilt and financial reparations crippled its ability to negotiate in the international arena for years to come. Japan, once considered by Germany as an inferior power in international matters, now eclipsed its former mentor. However, in its post-WWI years, Japan realized that it lagged behind in the military technology of warfare and, once again, turned to its one-time tutor with secret negotiations for Germany’s military expertise, thus setting the stage for renewed diplomatic relations between the unlikely allies.\textsuperscript{10}

Germany too saw advantages in renewed relations with Japan, as it hoped that Japanese influence in the League of Nations might be manipulated in Germany’s favor. As Japan’s relations with its WWI allies waned, its affinity for Germany rose once again. At Germany’s entrance into the League of Nations in 1926, renewed

\textsuperscript{9} Spang and Wippich, \textit{Japanese-German Relations, 1895-1945}, 6-8.

diplomatic relations between Berlin and Tokyo peaked. But Japan’s fascination for the culture of the Weimar Republic was not reciprocated as German society showed little interest in the traditions of Japan. Such a condition of unrequited cultural love between the two nations did not sustain favorable diplomatic relations for long. As the situation worsened with the collapse of both nations’ economies as a result of the world-wide depression in 1929, Weimar’s democracy came under internal attack from both compass points of the radical political spectrums to the right and the left. Japan’s military capitalized on its own anarchy at home and instigated a surprise occupation of Manchuria in an attempt to ward off massive poverty by grabbing a land rich in resources. As both nations came under totalitarian regimes at about the same time, new ideologies with new imperialistic goals heightened a sense of diplomatic caution in each nation.  

Center, of course, to the policies of the rising fascist Nazi regime was Hitler’s racist ideology that claimed white Aryan supremacy over the “culture-bearing” and “culture destroying” races of the world. Although considered by the Nazis only marginally higher than the Jews, (the culture destroying race), the Japanese still regarded Hitler’s racial epitaphs as little different then the Kaiser’s “Yellow Peril” slurs.  

Couple this racial bias with Germany’s foreign ambitions that favored trade relations with China as paramount to its Asiatic strategy, and it is all the more

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astounding that post WWI alliances between Germany and Japan ever materialized at all. Japan viewed Germany’s swap of military supplies and support to Chiang Kai-shek in exchange for Chinese raw materials used for the manufacture of German armaments as western interference in eastern Asiatic concerns. It was okay for Japan to benefit from German military expertise, but not for Germany to offer its capabilities to China, Japan’s nemesis in its imperialistic designs on Manchuria. Indeed, it was Imperial China that first initiated negotiations with Germany in an attempt to broker a compromise between China and Japan. This would have then allowed the three nations, Germany, China, and Japan to present a united front against communism, which was plaguing Germany and starting to catch hold in China as well. Japan flatly refused any kind of rapprochement with China that would hinder its future expansion plans in the area. However, the overtures of German officials seeking a bi-lateral anti-Soviet arrangement with Japan were infinitely more attractive.  

It is evident that diplomatic negotiations between Germany and Japan always advanced when a common goal of the two militaristic fascist regimes seemed to converge at the same time, each seeking an alliance with the other as a means to furthering their own nationalistic policies of expansion. The rising presence of the Soviet Union from the ashes of the Russian Empire loomed as a reckoning force,

hindering both Japan and Germany, as the former had designs on further expansion in Asia, and the latter desired to eventually move against Poland. The German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, signed in Berlin on November 25, 1936, overtly guarded against interference from the Communist International but secretly aimed the intentions of the negotiations against the Soviet Union. Secret agreements provided for mutual approbation against aiding and abetting the Russians during any kind of confrontation with the other nation. They also agreed not to enter into any kind of treaty with the Soviet Union that was not in accord with the Anti-Comintern Pact. 14

Although neutrality seemed to lie at its core, each signatory of the Anti-Comintern Pact desired the propagandist nature of the pact as a cover for its own aggressive actions. No sooner had the ink dried sealing the provisions of the pact, than Japan attempted to bring China into an anti-communist accord as well. Japan’s pressures on China jeopardized Germany’s highly favored trade relationship with China and created a political conundrum for the Third Reich – in the event of another Sino-Japanese War who would Germany support? Agency heads within the

14 Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy, 1933-1939*, 339. In March 1919 leading members of the Communist Party in Russia founded the Communist International (later known as Comintern). The aim of the organization was the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and the creation of an international Soviet republic. The Comintern gained strength during the 1920s, but its efforts to foment revolution, notably in Germany, were unsuccessful. In 1936, Germany and Japan concluded the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact, ostensibly to protect the world from the Communist International. The pact was renewed in 1941 with 11 other countries as signatories. In order to allay the misgivings of its allies in World War II, the Soviet Union dissolved the Comintern in 1943. See Ikle, *German-Japanese Relations, 1936-1940*, 15-23. See also “Anti-Comintern Pact of The Avalon Project at Yale Law School,” (1997); [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/tri1.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/tri1.asp); Internet; accessed 19 February 2008.
Nazi government itself were at odds with each other over the China versus Japan problem. Germany’s worst fears in the matter came to the fore with the onset of the second Sino-Japanese war in July 1937.\textsuperscript{15}

Japan’s abrupt move against China jeopardized its German ally’s own interests in the region and it is remarkable that Germany still continued to favor an alliance with Japan – even seeking to expand certain provisions of the pact. The addition of Italy in November 1937 as a junior partner into the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan and Germany encouraged both Mussolini and Hitler to see the possibility of redirecting the provisions of the pact into an anti-western powers treaty rather than solely an anti-Russian directive. After repeated attempts to broker some kind of cessation of hostilities between the warring factions of China and Japan, Germany was left with no other option but to choose one over the other – trade with China that served the war industry at home, or the anti-Soviet alliance with Japan.\textsuperscript{16}

An article written in 1938 for the *Far Eastern Survey* of the Institute of Pacific Relations implied that a win for Japan in the Sino-Japanese War ensured that “Germany [could] reenter the Chinese market as Japan’s ally.”\textsuperscript{17} Thus Germany’s choice of Japan over China could still give Germany its war-industry imports from China, or so Germany hoped in any case. A pro-Japanese stance by Germany

\textsuperscript{15} Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy, 1933-1939*, 509.

\textsuperscript{16} Ikle, *German-Japanese Relations, 1936-1940*, 70-73. See also: Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy, 1933-1939*, 517.

\textsuperscript{17} Bloch, “German-Japanese Partnership in Eastern Asia,” 241.
benefited its foreign policy of the time as it presented an apparent threat to British and French interests abroad, which Hitler hoped would neutralize interference from these western nations in future German expansionist plans in Europe. Hitler’s new Asian policies, which immediately retracted German diplomats from the region and halted many German imports to China, while openly recognizing the Japanese puppet-state in Manchukuo, occurred almost simultaneously with Germany’s 1938 annexation of Austria and its invasion of Czechoslovakia. In spite of its open support for Japan in the Sino-Japanese standoff, Germany not only failed to attain the favored economic trade status with Japan that it had anticipated, but its companies were summarily dismissed from the region along with all other non-Japanese businesses. And yet in spite of this, Germany still continued to expand treaty negotiations with Japan.  

As Japan began to lose its advantage in the Sino-Japanese War, it too redirected its foreign policy in an anti-western direction when it turned its expansionist views toward southern China, bringing Japan into repeated conflicts with British, French and American interests in that region. Again, Germany and Japan shared common enemies as Germany sought to expand her borders in Europe, and Japan sought to do the same in East Asia, both butting up against the western powers. But prevailing powers in Japan continued resisting German pressure to augment the pact with a

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military alliance aimed against all western nations. Many in Japan continued to see communist Russia as the greatest imminent threat to its Asian domain and they had no desire to find themselves engulfed in a war in Europe.\textsuperscript{19}

Just as opposing factions in the German government had rendered divergent opinions regarding Germany’s alliance with Japan over China, so too rival powers in Japan fought over how to proceed with its alliance with Germany and Italy and argued over the proposed changes to the Anti-Comintern Pact. A series of diplomatic standoffs in Japan beginning in late 1938 and magnifying throughout 1939 resulted in threats of imperial recall of German-sympathizing officials from Japanese consular posts. The hotly debated triple-axis alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan against the world stalled repeatedly. Germany’s subtle threats to Japan that hinted at a German rapprochement with Russia in the event that negotiations with Japan failed appeared to have had its desired effect. But just as Japan became willing to agree to terms of the pact, with certain conditions that broadened Japan’s expected commitment to future military actions against the west, Germany declined to accept Japan’s conditions and the German-Russian Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 became the final kiss of death for the Anti-Comintern Pact, resulting in massive political upheavals in Japan.\textsuperscript{20}

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\textsuperscript{20} Ikle, \textit{German-Japanese Relations, 1936-1940}, 87-131. See also: Jansen, \textit{The Making of Modern Japan}, 625-630.
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The vehement responses in Japan to the German-Russian pact were as divided as had been the reactions to the German-Italian-Japanese alliance. The irony of the entire debacle in Japanese-German foreign relations cannot go unspoken – in resisting German pressures to join with the Reich in an uncompromising military alliance against all western aggression, Japan bit off its nose to spite its face, proverbially speaking. Japan only wanted Russian aggression as the sole focus of its military response guarantees and instead lost its only allies in that original directive of the Anti-Comintern Pact. In trying to preserve the Pact’s original nature, Japan lost it altogether. Cabinet and consular resignations within the Japanese Empire, all resulting from the failed negotiations with Germany and that country’s new alliance with Japan’s arch-enemy, Russia, crippled what little amiable accords may have existed between the two fascists regimes. In spite of German efforts to broker a rapprochement between Russia and Japan, yielding a tripartite arrangement that would have served German interests exceptionally well, the two powers remained aloof.21

Fascinating dialogues and arrangements between foreign diplomats of Germany and Japan, and Germany and Russia, illustrate just how far Germany desired to push ahead with its expansionist schemes, at the expense of other nations’ foreign policy affairs, especially Japan’s. What was once good for the goose was now good for the
gander as the reader should be reminded of Japan’s lack of diplomatic consideration for Germany’s predicament when Japan first initiated its war in China. Through back-door negotiations and front-door propaganda, attempts were made internally by the Japanese Army to move Japan towards a renewed German alliance with a specific aim against Britain and the US. All the while the new Japanese government, at odds with its army, publicly worked to end hostilities in China through some kind of peaceful arrangement with the western powers. Another upheaval in the Japanese government in early 1940 ensued when it failed to end the on-going Sino-Japanese War, which then loomed as the supreme ambition of each new Japanese talking-head. German efforts to pull Japan back into an anti-western alliance met with staid resistance until relations with Japan and the west collided once again in China, and Germany proved its superiority over the west in stunning European military conquests in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France in May and June of 1940.  

The Asama Maru incident in January 1940, when a British Blockade cruiser boarded a Japanese ocean liner in open waters between San Francisco and Yokohama and forcibly removed German nationals, offered conciliatory opportunities between Germany and Japan. Germany made diplomatic overtures once again to instigate a new German-Japanese alliance just as Japan strained its relations with the west even further by establishing a puppet government in Nanking,

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over British and American objections. Couple this with Germany’s acquisition of the
Netherland’s East Indies trading empire through military conquest over Holland in
May 1940, and Germany’s negotiating leverage over Japan heightened. Furthermore,
to advance its own imperialistic designs against the west, Germany overtly stirred-up
anti-American sentiments in Japan, hoping to enlist a Japanese alliance against the
western powers it had so tenaciously sought.23

When Germany stunned the world with its victory over France and its march into
Paris in June 1940, and sensing the tables had been dramatically turned, Japan now
actively sought out a Japanese-German alliance itself, recognizing the German-
controlled fate of the French and Dutch colonial holdings in Asia. Still rancored by
the 1939 Japanese with-holding of Chinese raw materials it desperately needed to
further its proliferation of military equipment, Germany now held the diplomatic
upper-hand over Japan and negotiated shrewdly. Dangling French Indo-China in
front of the covetous Japan, Germany set a high price on its Asian-market
accessions, while peppering Japan with a reprise of its prior lack-luster support of
Germany’s interests. Tensions in Japanese leadership resulted from an ideological
collision over its German-centered foreign policy between Japan’s militarists and its

23 Ikle, 149-50. See also: Francis Clifford Jones, Japan’s New Order in East Asia: its Rise and
diplomats. With the installation of a new cabinet sympathetic to Japan’s militaristic agenda, the island state moved closer to acquiescing to German interests.  

A July 1940 conference in Berlin between German and Japanese dignitaries revealed the full scope of Germany’s intentions in binding Japan into a new alliance, “to deter the United States from interfering in the last stage of the war in Europe and the expected post-war settlement.” Asking for Japan’s military support in a war with Britain, Germany felt certain this would keep the United States at bay. A reticent Japanese cabinet had no desire to antagonize the US and jeopardize its position in the Far East by embroiling itself in the European conflict. A Japanese counter-offer expressed these sentiments while proposing other concessions that tied up British interests in East Asia and afforded Germany its raw materials so vital to its war efforts. Vying Japanese factions that pitted pro-German militarists against distrustful Japanese cabinet members resulted in another collapse of the Japanese government. The prevailing Japanese militarists moved Japan quickly toward the Axis coalition that the pro-German faction heartily desired.


25 Ikle, German-Japanese Relations, 1936-1940, 159.

Over the next several weeks of July and August 1940, Germany and Japan engaged in a diplomatic dance, as Germany turned the tables on Japan and now waltzed around negotiations for the Tripartite Coalition, feeling secure in its expectation of a speedy win in the Battle of Britain without Japanese assistance. Japan interpreted Germany’s stalling actions as indicative of a future post-war new world order that would leave Japan bereft of spoils. Feeling an urgent need to secure its own self-interests in East Asia, Japan pushed south into French Indo-China, securing German acquiescence in a fait accompli. This, along with a waning British front and hints of Japanese treaties with western powers, spurred Germany into quickening its dance steps into the three power treaty between Germany, Italy, and Japan.27

The Tripartite Pact of September 1940 tied Germany, Italy, and Japan into a coalition of totalitarian regimes, which felt destined to victory and fated to command a new global world order. It became immediately clear that the signers of the pact implied one over-arching, silent intent with each articulated provision – nullification of US interference in their expansionist plans. At that time neither Germany nor Japan wanted to engage the US in war, and both felt that the formation of this alliance accomplished that aim. Cloaked in the public verbiage of world peace from orations emanating out of Tokyo and Berlin, lay both the anti-American enmity of the Japanese and the antisemitic hatred of the Nazis. Within a year, Germany

launched its invasion of Russia and Japan attacked US harbors and bases in Hawaii and the Philippines. So much for keeping the United States out of the war.  

B: Nazi Antisemitism vs. Japanese “Philo-Semitism”

So during these decades of convoluted negotiations between Germany and Japan leading up to the Tripartite Pact of 1940 and Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor near the end of 1941, what role, if any, did the Jewish question play in any of it? As the occupying force in the Philippines for three years, did Japan adopt any of the antisemitic practices championed by Nazi party adherents in Manila, whom Japanese delegates and military personnel must have encountered? We have already seen that Japan and Germany had an on-again, off-again diplomatic rapport for nearly a century preceding the 1941 invasion of the Philippines. A closer look at the heart of the “mentor” relationship that Japan favored with Germany in the last decades of the 19th century reveals that significant contributions to Japan by German scholars, scientists, and technicians originated from Jewish German mentors.

The exact number of Jews in the oyatoi gaikokujin team of foreign advisors may never be known, but perhaps the greatest and most influential German-Jewish advisor to the modernization of Meiji Japan was (Isaac) Albert Mosse. A Prussian-born German judge and legal scholar, he advised the visiting Japanese Prime Minister.

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Minister Hirobumi in 1882 that the Prussian Constitution lent itself as a perfect model for the Japanese style of monarchy. Mosse served in Japan as a foreign advisor giving invaluable assistance to the drafting of the Meiji Constitution. So well beloved was he in Japan that he lived there until 1890, fulfilling many government advising positions and being awarded the prestigious Order of the Rising Sun by the Emperor. Other Jewish German advisors also left a legacy of friendships and contributions that should not be underestimated in the overall scheme of Jewish-Japanese relations during WWII.\textsuperscript{29}

That being the case, understanding the history of Japanese and Jewish interaction in the first decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century becomes even more important, as they are foundational to later years. In 1904, when Japan stood on the verge of losing its war with Russia, a chance dinner meeting in London between Takahashi Koreckiyo, Japan’s Financial Commissioner, and Jacob Schiff, an American International Banking mogul, significantly changed the balance of power between the warring nations of Imperial Russia and the underdog Japan. Born into a prosperous Jewish family in Frankfurt, Germany in 1847, Schiff immigrated to America as a young man of eighteen, becoming a partner in a brokerage firm in New York City before turning twenty. His illustrious investment banking career progressed rapidly, instating him as the head of the firm of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., one of the most influential private international banking houses in the Western Hemisphere, at the

time of the fortuitous meeting with Prime Minister Takahashi. Schiff needed little encouragement from the US Government to participate in the nation’s new economic plan involving US and foreign investments in the Far East, the American Open Door Policy implemented after the acquisition of the Philippine Islands from Spain. Schiff recognized the potential for success by investing in Japan’s war with Russia – investments that would change the outcome of the war for Japan, and, Schiff hoped, for the Jews of Russia. 30

Schiff objected vehemently to the antisemitic persecution of his fellow Jewish religionists in Russia and this was no secret to Takahashi. In a memorandum written by him and included in the compilation of Schiff’s letters made by Cyrus Adler, Takahashi’s own words tell the motives of the two hundred million dollars in loans made to Japan by Kuhn & Loeb’s foremost executive:

     His sympathy was fully enlisted for Japan. At the same time, he had a grudge against Russia on account of his race. He was justly indignant at the unfair treatment of the Jewish population by the Russian Government, which had culminated in the notorious persecutions. [...] He felt sure that if defeated, Russia would be led in the path of betterment, whether it be revolution or

reformation, and he decided to exercise whatever influence he had for placing the weight of American resources on the side of Japan.\textsuperscript{31}

Takahashi further affirmed that he and Schiff became good friends and that Schiff enjoyed private audiences with the Emperor, from whom he also received the Order of the Rising Sun. Without these monies lent to Japan, which purchased necessary munitions to fight Russia, Takahashi felt certain that Japan would have lost the war and its footing in Asia: “His achievements will remain in the state records of the country and in the hearts of his Japanese friends.”\textsuperscript{32}

The success of Schiff’s foresight in mounting this very successful investment in Japan, which yielded a sizeable profit for the company, advanced not only Schiff’s international banking reputation, but it also furthered the propagandistic tenets of antisemitic rhetoric that claimed Jews intended to take over the world’s markets. Schiff’s financial acumen during the Russo-Japanese War “earned him Japan’s lasting gratitude and Russia’s lasting anger.”\textsuperscript{33} A journalist in 1911 documented this accusation made by the Russian minister of finance: “Our government will never forgive or forget what that Jew, Schiff, did to us. [. . .] He alone made it possible for Japan to secure a loan in America. He was one of the most dangerous men we had

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 230.

\textsuperscript{33} Cohen, \textit{Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership}, 134.
\end{flushright}
against us abroad." Schiff’s actions that favored Japan, impressed Japan, and saved Japan failed to bring any conciliatory benefits for the Jews suffering in Russia. Rather, it only provided more fodder for the effects stemming from the publication of the single-most damaging piece of antisemitic literature ever printed – The Protocols of the Elders – a literary hoax claiming to be the secret plot of a clandestine council of Jewish Elders to take over the world. First published in Russian in 1903, translations soon ensued and antisemites around the world used its tenets to indict successful Jewish businessmen, bankers, academics, lawyers, and scientists as members of the elitist Jewish plot. It is ironic that when Japanese soldiers, exposed to the doctrines of the Protocols, advanced the stereotype of the powerful and influential image of the ‘rich Jew’ back to Japan, that leaders of the island nation saw it as a virtue rather than a sin that Japan could eventually exploit to her advantage.35

The first Japanese translation of The Protocol of the Elders of Zion came nearly five years after the initial exposure of Japanese soldiers to the inflammatory text during their deployment in Russia as part of the Siberian Intervention of 1918-1922. The Siberian Intervention was a temporary military coalition of western forces, namely, France, Britain, US, Canadian, and Czech peace keeping troops, along with Japanese soldiers, who were all stationed in the coastal areas of Russia to secure the

34 Cohen, Jacob H. Schiff: A Study in American Jewish Leadership, 134.

maritime ports and western interests from hostile take-overs by the Bolshevik Red Army following the fall of the Romanov Dynasty in the Russian Revolution of 1917. After most western forces pulled out by 1920, Japanese troops stayed well into 1925. This brought close associations between antisemitic White Russians, in possession of required reading material, i.e. *The Protocols*, and Japanese soldiers, many who took the publication back to Japan with them. One such individual was Higuchi Tsuyanosuke, a Japanese professor of Russian who spent over three years in Siberia with the Japanese army. Higuchi lamented the demise of the Romanov Empire, having also been a convert to Eastern Christian Orthodoxy, and bought wholeheartedly into the antisemitic rhetoric that claimed Jewish complicity in Russia’s collapse.\(^{36}\) Upon returning to Japan, he published antisemitic lectures in Japanese based on *The Protocols, Yudayaka – The Jewish Peril:*

No matter how barbaric and bestial the Russians may be, if the Russian Revolution had been led by Russians, it would not have been as brutal as it was . . . when one learns that the leaders of the communist regime are all Jewish and then reads through the plans of the Jewish conspiracy, everything becomes clear.\(^{37}\)

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The complete translation soon followed in 1924, produced by Yasue Norihiro, one of
the first Russian-language trained Japanese soldiers to be assigned to Siberia during
the Intervention. He went on to become the Japanese Army’s foremost “authority”
on Jewish affairs.38

As the writings of early Japanese antisemites appeared, usually disseminated by
the ultra-nationalists, more rational “liberal” voices in opposition to the inflam-
matory rhetoric emerged as well. This is just another witness to the dichotomy of
intellectual thought that marked Japanese society in the late 1920s and early 1930s
and resulted in continuous turnovers of leadership, as already discussed. Even
though anti-Jewish sentiment in Japan remained a minority opinion, by WWII it had
spread like an infectious disease throughout the ultra-nationalist militarists of Japan,
who felt obliged to strengthen their alliance with Germany by adopting their
antisemitic doctrine as well. But the more rational liberals of Japan resisted the racial
ideology of the Reich, which, after all, categorized the Japanese themselves as
racially impure. Ironically, as early as 1933 Japanese newspapers editorialized about
the “inhumane” treatment of the Jews that was in accordance with Nazi policy that
advanced “extermination of the Jews,” an ideology often minimized in western
thought as hyperbole.39 These early critical voices of opposition to Nazi Party
tactics, represented in nearly every newspaper in Japan, soon became clanging bells

38 Goodman and Miyazawa, Jews in the Japanese Mind, 81.
39 Ibid., 89.
of alarm that few people heeded as Nazism began to establish an ideological hold in Japan. ⁴⁰

Societal views of Hitler and Nazism changed rapidly in Japan after 1935 as German antisemitic literature began to flood the country due in part to the rapprochement of diplomatic relations binding Germany and Japan in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936, discussed earlier in this chapter. Japanese intellectuals, in an effort to justify growing solidarity with its German ally, once again commended the virtues of German culture and principles, antisemitism included. Japanese publications legitimized German antisemitic propaganda while extolling the foresight of Hitler in waging a cultural war against its pervasive Jewish menace. The German Nazi Regime also promoted its pseudo-scientific racial agenda in Japan with “research” programs supported by reputable Japanese organizations. Couple these with the growing nationalism of the Japanese Empire that increasingly moved toward a one-party political system patterned after the Nazi Party System of the Third Reich, and the ability for any dissenting rational voices against the antisemitic agenda of Hitler to be heard in Japan was effectively silenced. That being said, it is important to remember that Japan lacked the centuries-old tradition of Christian anti-

⁴⁰ Goodman and Miyazawa, Jews in the Japanese Mind, 92.
Judaism. This distinction explains the peculiar idiosyncrasies distinctive to Japanese antisemitism of the 30s and 40s.  

The prevalence of Japanese antisemitism filled several socio-political purposes unique to Japan’s nationalistic fervor of its pre-WWII years. As mentioned, it helped to build solidarity with Germany by showing its one-time mentor a willingness to adopt Germany’s ideological rhetoric against world Jewry in connection to its alliance against world Communism. Antisemitism in Japan also became a unifying agent against the growing presence of politically active forms of Christianity, which voiced opposition to antisemitic sentiments in and criticism of Japan’s imperial aspirations. Japanese nationalism centered on its Emperor and his deification, which was religiously offensive to both Christianity and Judaism. Politically, Japan’s brand of antisemitism also rationalized the failure of the Japanese military in its Siberian campaign of the 1920s, claiming its defeat came about because of the capitalistic agenda of world Jewry perpetrated by the west. This aspect of Japan’s antisemitic stance lent added credibility to Japan’s anti-American posturing preceding its bombing of Pearl Harbor and declaration of war on the United States. Various journalistic diatribes linked international Jewish economic hegemony to American capitalism, which then justified Japan’s war with the US as it attempted to save Asia from the evil designs of American-led world Jewry. But perhaps the most utilitarian

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aspect of Japanese antisemitism lay in its once intended exploitation to Japan’s eventual advantage of world Jewry’s perceived financial syndicate.  

**C: The Fugu Plan**

A version of Japanese antisemitism, regarded by some historians as a “philosemitism,” began to emerge in the early 1930s, in conjunction with the rise of militarism in Japan and its rampantly growing nationalism. Jingoistic degrees of Japanese patriotism produced a group of ultranationalists who saw Japan’s future tied to their territorial rule of the Chinese provinces of Manchuria. This “Manchurian Faction” operated in opposition to other parties in Japan that favored southern expansion instead that would eventually instigate war with the US. It was within the Manchurian Faction that a pseudo-pro-Jewish philosophy developed, that was “not interested in eliminating the allegedly powerful and wealthy Jews, but rather in utilizing their great wealth and influence for Japan’s ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Policy’”.  

The Fugu Plan was a secret alliance that conspired to manipulate an imagined world confederacy of Jewish financial houses into granting millions of dollars to Japan for development of Manchuria. The following details of the Fugu Plan reveal yet another mass resettlement scheme that sought to take advantage of an already persecuted and stateless people, the German Jews.

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In a seminal work by Rabbi Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swartz in 1979, *The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews during World War II*, the amazing story of a secret scheme to create a semi-autonomous Jewish state in Manchuria illuminates the visage of Japanese “philosemitism” that could have changed world events and avoided the Pacific World War between the United States and Japan, therefore theoretically changing the outcome of the war in Europe. Conceptualized by members of the Manchurian Faction who had independently instigated the military assault on Manchuria in 1931 that gave birth to Manchukuo, the essence of the Fugu Plan envisioned the use of Jews to help develop this newly formed Japanese puppet state.\(^{44}\) If Jewish refugees fleeing Europe could be enticed to settle in Manchukuo then Japan could harness their creative energies, industrial skills, and wealth to develop the area, making it productive and lucrative for Japan. Jewish settlements in Manchukuo would thereby naturally produce sympathies with the communities of rich Jews in western nations, such as the US and Britain, who would then obligingly donate vast sums of money to assist their co-religionists in settling and developing Manchukuo.

In 1934, an article in a Japanese Foreign Ministry journal titled “A Plan to Invite Fifty Thousand German Jews to Manchukuo” promoted the Jewish mass resettlement throughout Japanese society, which offered little to no opposition.

Rabbi Tokayer quotes records from one of the key proponents who attended an informal meeting of the co-conspirators:

This plan is very much like Fugu [the Japanese blowfish whose deadly poison must be removed before it can be eaten]. If we are indeed skillful in preparing this dish – if we can remain ever-alert to the sly nature of the Jews, if we can continue to devote our constant attention to this enterprise lest the Jews, in their inherently clever manner, manage to turn the tables on us and begin to use us for their own ends – if we succeed in our undertaking, we will create for our nation and our beloved emperor the tastiest and most nutritious dish imaginable. But if we make the slightest mistake, it will destroy us in the most horrible manner.45

In what Kranzler described as a “love/hate relationship,” those ultranationalists perceived as the most influential antisemites in Japan advanced a plan that had the potential of saving maybe millions of Europe’s refugee Jews.46

The actual policies of the Fugu Plan started to emerge in 1934 and peaked by December 1938, just weeks following the Kristallnacht Pogrom in Germany, the

45 Tokayer and Swartz, The Fugu Plan, 52-53, quoting Koreshige Inuzuka, a naval officer from Tokyo who was stationed on a battleship during the Siberian Expedition in the 20s. After coming in contact with the antisemitic literature of the White Russians, Inuzuka became one of Japan’s leading “Jewish experts” and a self-proclaimed antisemite who lectured and published prolifically on the Jewish menace. One attendant at this meeting was Gisuke Ayukawa, industrialist in prewar Japan who eventually founded Nissan industries. He served the Manchurian Faction as a consultant for the future of industrial and mining ventures in Manchukuo.

internment of thousands of refugee Jews in Zbaszyn, Poland, and the renewal of negotiations for refugee mass resettlement schemes under the auspices of the IGC, the leftover humanitarian agency from the Evian Conference. While the western powers, which saw the onslaught of tens of thousands of refugees as an impending economic disaster, looked cautiously for potential sites of mass resettlement for Europe’s growing Jewish refugee problem, the Japanese furtively sought to woo the same refugees into mass settlements in Manchuria, anticipating hefty monetary help from the Jewish communities of the west. The irony of it is superb, especially when one considers how many Jewish refugees eventually found safety through the auspices of the allies of the Nazis rather than from the enemies of the Nazis.

We need only remember the rescue of refugee Jews in Shanghai from 1938 to 1939 as discussed earlier. Whereas the motivations of Chiune Sugihara in July 1940 in facilitating the rescue of thousands of refugee Jews into the already burgeoning community of Shanghai can only be properly described as altruistic, the rationale behind the Japanese policies that provided haven for thousands of Jews in the several different communities under Japanese jurisdiction can only be seen as deliberately self-serving. The Manchurian Faction “saw these Jewish communities as a potential weapon in their hand for utilizing the Jewish power.”

investment funds did not materialize in Manchukuo as anticipated, the focus of the Japanese exploitation of the Jews switched from Manchuria to Shanghai.

As the Japanese utopian vision of Manchukuo began to fade when Jewish residents actually fled from Harbin in the face of accelerated antisemitic violence from the White Russians, efforts to bind Jewish interests to Japanese territories accelerated. The Japanese granted communities of Jews in eight Asian territories under Japanese occupation to form the Far Eastern Jewish Council in 1937.\(^48\) Completely oblivious to Japan’s hidden agenda, the council conducted the first Far Eastern Jewish Conference in 1937 with delegates and spectators numbering over 700. Japan’s “Jewish Experts” spoke at the proceedings, superficially encouraging the Jewish attendees to facilitate resettlement of their co-religionists in Japanese territories to protect them in a racially tolerant environment, while secretly hoping they would build business interests that would bring in western monies. Tokayer records the contents of a resolution adopted by the Jewish communities at this conference – a document circulated to every major Jewish organization in the world at that time:

\begin{quote}
We Jews, attending this racial conference, hereby proclaim that we enjoy racial equality and racial justice under the national laws, and will cooperate
\end{quote}

with Japan and Manchukuo in building a new order in Asia. We appeal to our co-religionists.

A similar resolution went out from the conference the next year, but the massive development plans for Manchukuo never materialized as Europe’s Jews became more suspicious of Japanese intentions with the acceleration of Nazi violence against the Jews in tandem with growing negotiations between the German and Japanese governments. More and more refugees made their way to the International Settlement of Shanghai, a sector administered by a municipal council of British, Chinese, American, and Japanese officials, who had instituted open immigration into their sector of Shanghai.

As previously discussed, rival powers in Japan at this time clashed over its alliance with Germany and a series of diplomatic standoffs in Japan resulted in threats of imperial recall of German-sympathizing officials. These conflicting opinions included Japan’s intended policies regarding its resident Jews as well. Just as Japan’s army generals butted up against its naval admirals, so pro-Nazi sympathizers waged ideological battle with Japan’s Jewish supporters – the former believing in the elimination of the Jews and the latter in their control and exploitation. But eventually both factions agreed that they needed to utilize world Jewry’s political and economic powers to Japan’s interests, therefore an official

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statement of policy in December 1938 from the ministers of Japan openly detailed its Jewish policy:

1. Jews living in Japan, Manchuria, and China are to be treated fairly and in the same manner as other foreign nationals. No special effort to expel them is to be made.

2. Jews entering Japan, Manchuria, and China are to be dealt with on the basis of existing immigration policies pertaining to other foreigners.

3. No special effort to attract Jews to Japan, Manchuria, or China is to be made. However, exceptions may be made for businessmen and technicians with utility for Japan.50

As the Jewish population in Shanghai grew, “the entire focus of the Jew-utilization plans began to shift away from Manchukuo” and a settlement scheme for Shanghai presented itself by mid 1939.51

What started in early 1939 as a humble and tentative settlement proposition by a wealthy Manchurian Jew to open an industry in Manchukuo with European refugee Jews, ballooned into a Japanese immigration affair of huge proportions. By mid July of 1939, the backers of the Fugu Plan had produced a ninety-page proposal that detailed measures to attract Jewish financiers both in Shanghai and in the west. The report called for the formation of Jewish refugee settlements with proposals that

50 Goodman and Miyazawa, Jews in the Japanese Mind, 111.

outlined colonies ranging in size from merely a few thousand to nearly one million. The proposal detailed religious, cultural, and educational autonomy for Jewish settlers who would be ruled politically by the Japanese. Although the entire financing of the settlement plans would of course rest on the Jews themselves, the Japanese suggested an estimated figure of 100 million dollars for the settlement of 30,000 refugees. The Fugu Plan proponents saw their strategy thwarted from an unanticipated foe – the Jewish community of Shanghai itself, which suffered from enormous over-crowding and insisted on immigration restrictions. Having no practical insight into the idealistic Japanese vision of monies rolling in to support an even greater influx of refugees into Shanghai, the governing committee for the International Settlement officially restricted immigration into Shanghai to those who had a contracted job or financial support in the sum of four hundred American dollars. Although the influx of refugees into Shanghai nearly ceased, the Fugu Plan supporters initially saw this as merely a delay to their dreams of future Jewish dollars. They proceeded with plans to contact the US’s most influential Jewish citizen, Rabbi Stephen Wise, in hopes of generating anticipated support from what they perceived was the US’s rich and powerful Jewry.52

Rabbi Stephen Wise became the center piece of the Japanese plan to extort financial backing from US Jews for this massive resettlement scheme in Japanese territories. As a personal friend to President Roosevelt and a leading public figure

52 Tokayer and Swartz, The Fugu Plan, 68-74.
representing America’s Jews, Rabbi Wise stood in a position of power next to the American president in the minds of the Fugu Plan proponents. When a meeting in New York in 1940 between Wise and a delegate of the Fugu Plan utterly failed to sway Wise into supporting “a prearranged settlement area in either Manchukuo or China” in exchange for “trade arrangements with the United States” that would lift the moral embargo against Japan, the delegate of the Fugu Plan turned to the Joint Distribution Committee instead.\textsuperscript{53} Their investigation into the identity of the Japanese delegate revealed that he had no authority from the ruling Japanese military government to conduct any negotiations involving Japan. In just a matter of weeks, the new foreign minister of Japan led negotiations for the formulation of the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, which ended any hopes for the Fugu Plan, realistically or idealistically.

\textit{D: Summary}

After examining the historical record of 1939 and 1940, in which rapprochements between diplomatic factions in both Germany and Japan yielded official and unofficial alliances whose goals involved either the nullification of US power or the exploitation of it, study leads us to ask how these carefully constructed coalitions failed, resulting in the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the invasion of the Philippines, and the declaration of war against the US by the Axis powers. To

\textsuperscript{53} Tokayer and Swartz, \textit{The Fugu Plan}, 75.
answer that question, we need to back up to 1939 and the signing of the Tripartite Pact, which for all purposes ended the aspirations of the Fugu Plan and any hopes that its proponents had of acquiring some kind of diplomatic leverage that would end the moral embargos against Japan – embargos that greatly curbed its import of raw materials to support its warfare machinations. Japan changed its focus from development of Manchuria to the acquisition of territories in China further south in an effort to acquire resources it so badly needed. Such expansionist plans would precipitate engagements with British and American forces in Asia, and Japan rationalized that a surprise attack on US military installations at Pearl Harbor and the Philippines would cripple a US response to Japanese incited altercations in southern Asia. Confident in its ability to create its Far Eastern Asian confederacy of nations, Japanese ministers anticipated a future need to acquire funding for reconstruction purposes.

Japanese ministers, those sensitive to the perceived role of Jewish influence in the world’s capitalistic markets, vied with those factions of the Japanese Empire who fully swallowed the Nazi antisemitic rhetoric with its aspirations of Jewish eradication. When we look at the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and the fate of its Jewish residents during those years, both refugees and rescuers, knowledge of the details surrounding the Fugu Plan adds illumination to our understanding of their experiences at the hands of their captors.
VII. Japanese Occupation & US Repatriation, 1942 – 1945

A: Prologue – The Religious Section and the Christian Churches

Japan did not see itself as a combatant in World War II. In its view, it engaged in *Dai Toa Senso*, the Greater East Asia War, a dispute that began in 1937 with China as its central enemy. Therefore Japan’s attack on US bases in the Pacific was but an extension of its efforts to win its Sino-Japanese conflict, which really began with Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931. As discussed earlier, Japan entered the triple alliance with Germany and Italy in hopes that such an alliance would assist Japan in its expansionist aspirations against the colonial holdings of the western powers in China. When Britain and the US retaliated by freezing Japanese assets abroad and boycotting its much needed oil imports, Japan desired to move against the Dutch East Indies in order to grab those oil fields and thereby acquire the resources needed to continue its Sino-Japanese conflict.

Japan believed one thing stood in their way – the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. With visions of Asiatic grandeur, Japan believed that if it took out the US installations in Hawaii, the Philippine Islands, and other places in the Pacific, nothing could stop the formation of the empirical Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, with Japan as its destined leader. Therefore, the only obstacle in Japan’s imperialistic dream to control the entire arena of the Pacific Islands and China was a
few ships and planes at Hawaii and the Philippines. The proponents of the Fugu Plan never realized their vision of untold amounts of Jewish wealth pouring into Japanese territories providing havens to refugee Jews before the outbreak of WWII. However, the question arises as to what influence, if any, Japanese “philosemitism” for Jewish exploitation had on Japan’s treatment of the Jewish residents of the Philippines when the Japanese invaded that US territory during the opening days of 1942. The jurisdiction over issues of religion and the churches in the Philippines during the occupation came under the purview of the Religious Section of the Propaganda Corps of the Japanese Military Administration (JMA).

Just hours after the Japanese entered Manila, the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Armed Forces advised the Commonwealth authorities that Japan wished only the best for its fellow Asians, the Filipinos, and valued their alliance in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. With a history of Christianity in the Philippines going back three hundred years, Japan no doubt realized that most Filipinos belonged to the Catholic Church or some other form of Christianity. The 1939 census reported that of the sixteen million inhabitants of the Philippine Islands, 78.8 percent belonged to the Catholic Church and in total 91 percent of the

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population identified themselves as Christians. The Philippines were an island of Christian Asians in a mixed sea of Buddhists and Muslims, the predominant religions of the other Asian nations of the Far East. The Japanese military knew that it must court the favor of the Christian Churches in order to secure peaceful Philippine assent to Japanese occupation, therefore the Japanese High Command announced a policy intending “secured religious freedom for all” that would be administered by a special “Religious Appeasement Operations Section” organized by the Japanese Army General Staff. A.V.H. Hartendorp, editor of the *Manila Times* and the Philippine Magazine who kept a clandestine diary of events in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation at the behest of Pres. Quezon, related how “the Japanese from the first made a big play for the cooperation of the churches in the Philippines.” The Religious Section within the Propaganda Corps of the JMA operated tirelessly in the first year of occupation in an effort to promote Japan’s “spirit of universal brotherhood.”

The Religious Section personnel included clergy, seminarians, and laity from both Catholic and Protestant communities in Japan, thirteen members of the task

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6 Ibid., 227.
force being Catholics and twelve being Protestants. They were hired as civilian employees of the Army for one year and had been sought out and employed as early as August 1941, showing full well the intentions of the Japanese Army in occupying the Philippines. The commander of the Religious Section, Lt. Col. Narusawa Tomoji, had only a passing familiarity with Christianity due to his wife being a practicing Catholic, while he himself was Buddhist. The members of the Religious Section arrived in Manila on the heels of the military invasion. According to Hartendorp, Narusawa immediately distributed a leaflet that declared:

> It is the desire of the Imperial Japanese Army to foster freedom of religious worship and it seeks to do everything possible for the protection of the Christian Churches and therefore does not anticipate activities harmful to the progress of its task. The Imperial Japanese Army addresses all Christians and asks the full cooperation of spiritual leaders and laymen worshippers in the establishment of that mutually prosperous sphere in Greater East Asia and of a just peace throughout the civilized world.

Narusawa and his staff then began to make personal visits to the clergy of the Catholic and Protestant churches. Although the Religious Section treated the

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predominant Catholic community of leaders with delicate diplomacy, they were much less conciliatory with the minority Protestant denominations, and hardly knew how to handle the community of Jews. At a conference of Protestant leaders in the Philippines held in late January 1942, Narusawa pressured the various Protestant denominations into signing a declaration of alliance to the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. American and Filipino Protestant leaders who declined to comply found themselves summarily interned in civilian detention camps.\(^{10}\)

Narusawa had categorized Japan’s East Asian quest as “Japan’s holy war” that stood on a spiritual plain similar to that of Christianity’s war against evil, with Japan’s eternal enemies being communism and capitalism.\(^ {11}\) Even though such stereotypes went hand in hand with the widespread antisemitic rhetoric of Europe, most of Japanese society knew little to nothing about modern Jews and Narusawa appears to have come with a preconception of old stereotypical ideas about Jews that were quickly dispelled. With residency records in hand and an old picture of an even older portrayal of an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, Narusawa officially visited the home of Rabbi Schwarz. Momentarily nonplussed by Rabbi Schwarz’s modern demeanor, Narusawa informed the spiritual leader of the Jewish Community that the supervision of the Jewish synagogue now came under complete jurisdiction of the Religious Section of the JMA. Narusawa further demonstrated his naïveté regarding


the true nature of Judaism in another meeting with Rabbi Schwarz and, to his credit, responded favorably to Schwarz’s illuminating discourse on the history of the plight of the Jews in Germany. Narusawa also garnered Philippine esteem when he expelled Japanese soldiers from local churches on several occasions. In light of the Japanese policy of religious tolerance meant to earn the favor and cooperation of the Christian Churches, it would have been dishonorable to discriminate against refugee Jews, in violation of their own policy of religious tolerance. However this policy only secured “free worship of religion” as long as it was compatible with Japanese rule.

The Religious Section, which operated during all of 1942 as a mouthpiece for the interests of the religious communities in the Philippines, was disbanded in December 1942. In 1943, when anti-Japanese guerilla movements arose in the Philippines and the war in the Pacific turned against Japan, jurisdiction over religious affairs defaulted to the Japanese Military Administration itself. Nazi sympathizers within the Japanese military command tried to enact antisemitic actions against the Jewish Community of Manila at different times during the occupation, but for the most part, the Jewish members of the Philippine community suffered relatively little at the

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12 Ephraim, *Escape to Manila*, 93. Frank Ephraim, survivor of the Jewish Community of Manila, relates this story in his book *Escape to Manila* as he heard it personally from Rabbi Schwarz on many occasions.

hands of the Japanese during the occupation, at least in comparison to the plight of their coreligionists in Europe.

**B: Japanese Invasion and Civilian Internment**

By the time the Japanese entered Manila in January 1942, the Jewish community of Manila had swelled with European refugees beyond all expectations, reaching its maximum population of about 2,500 members. Samuel Schechter, president of Temple Emil Congregation, noted on September 1, 1940 in a board of directors' communiqué that “our community has increased about eight fold since the advent of Jewish persecution in many countries of Europe.”\(^{14}\) During the height of its immigration years, the Philippines benefited from the arrival of such renowned Jewish refugees as Dr. Herbert Zipper, who became conductor of the Manila Symphony Orchestra, and his wife Trudl Zipper, who taught modern dance to many well-known Filipino performers.\(^{15}\) Dr. Eugene Stransky, a specialist in blood disorders, and Ernest Kornfeld, an accomplished architect, augmented Philippine life with their professions. Joseph secured an additional position as a music professor at the Catholic De La Salle College in Manila and developed a reputation for his


\(^{15}\) For the story of their rescue and survival, see Paul F. Cummins, *Dachau Song* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 1992).
classical vocal training, performing for President Quezon on numerous occasions. Eberly recorded the testament of Paula Brings, who arrived from Austria in March 1939 with her husband, Dr. Theodor Brings, who became a professor of physics at the University of the Philippines. According to Brings, “you could never find as generous and solid a group of people anywhere else in the world. They gave [...] unstintingly in times of crisis; they have never neglected the needs of the destitute and the sick.” This once American-dominated Jewish community that had saved the lives of over 1300 European Jews from potential extermination faced an unexpected persecution of their own. An amazing turn of events put the fate of the American and British Jews into the hands of the German refugee Jews when the Japanese, after entering Manila in January 1942, summarily interned all “enemy alien” civilians in Santo Tomas University.

The Japanese entered Manila without encountering any resistance when General MacArthur retreated with the American forces and declared Manila an “open city” on December 26, 1941. Three weeks prior, the “day that will live in infamy,” Japanese forces devastated the US Fleet at Pearl Harbor and prompted the US to enter into war with Japan and with its allies in Europe, when Hitler simultaneously declared war on the US. Few people realize that the naval base at Honolulu was not

16 For assorted performance programs, see JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC01.06.


the only US military base destroyed that day. The events on December 7, 1941 in Hawaii were December 8, 1941 in the Far East. On that day numerous US installations in the Philippines were attacked from the air by the Japanese: Davao City in Mindanao, Camp John Hay at Baguio, Clark Field in Pampanga, the airfields at Iba, Zambales, and Nichols Field near Manila. Unlike Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces made shore landings on all four sides of Luzon, the island home of Manila. With forces outnumbered and military installations destroyed, MacArthur had little choice but to retreat in order to fight another day. McArthur left Manila at the mercy of the occupying Japanese forces.¹⁹

On January 2, 1942, three battalions of Japanese soldiers entered Manila from the north while another battalion and a regiment entered from the south. The Japanese immediately set up points of registration and ordered all civilians to file their nationalities. Within a matter of days, the Japanese began busing American, British, British Commonwealth, Dutch, Polish, Belgian, or other citizens of any country at war with Japan or Germany, to Santo Tomas University for immediate internment.²⁰ Established by Spanish Dominican Fathers in 1611, the University consisted of several sizable buildings with sixty large classrooms and many smaller offices set off from spacious foyers, all situated within a fenced compound of about fifty acres. Before the opening of Los Baños Camp, which received several hundred


internees from Santo Tomas, the University had been the temporary residence of nearly 5,000 civilians, held in worsening conditions of disease, filth, starvation, and torture.\(^2\)

The Japanese Imperial Government incarcerated nearly 5,000 American noncombatants at various locations in the Philippines during WWII.\(^2\) This marked the first time in US History that American civilians were captured by an alien power and interned on American soil and subjected to three years of systematic starvation. Of the three main civilian internment camps from 1941 to 1945, the largest numbers of internees (85%) were held in Santo Tomas University, designated by the Japanese as Internment Camp #1.\(^2\) In 1943, one-third of these internees were transferred to the second largest internment camp, Los Baños, in the Laguna Province area, 35 miles south of Manila, designated as Internment Camp #2. Other smaller sites,

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\(^2\) Ibid., 988.
classified as Internment Camp #3, were Baguio on the island of Luzon, and places on the islands of Cebu and Mindanao.24

When the US forces pulled out of Manila declaring it an “open city,” announcements over the radio directed all Americans in the outlying areas to relocate into the city proper. In previous months, concerned American businessmen in Manila had formed committee intent on preparing for the possibility of war and occupation by the Japanese. Plans had already been made that secured sites for possible internment of civilians in the event of an invasion. Santo Tomas University and other such sites were chosen by the committee and submitted to the High Commissioner’s office at the US Embassy in Manila. When Japanese forces entered Manila, those locations along with lists of all the names and addresses of civilian aliens in the Philippines were voluntarily handed over to the occupying forces. The Japanese immediately designated Santo Tomas University an internment camp for civilian nationals from countries at war with Japan, Italy or Germany, the member nations of the Tripartite Pact. On January 4, 1942, approximately 300 civilian enemy alien men arrived at Santo Tomas Internment Camp (STIC), bused in from their point of registration at Rizal Stadium in Manila. Martin Meadows, son of an American businessman in Manila and member of the Jewish community in the Philippines, remembered that event:

When the Japanese arrived, we listened to the announcements of what to do. The Americans pulled out declaring Manila an open city so the Japanese would stop bombing. Anyway, as the Japanese approached, the radio announcement by local authorities came that Americans should move in from the outlying districts. [. . .] So we moved in with this German [Jewish] family, the Rechters. Until the Japanese came, we stayed with the Rechters in their apartment. [. . .] Then the announcement came early in January 1942 that all males, enemy alien males, should show up at Rizal Stadium with enough stuff for three days. So my father went to Rizal Stadium and they were then taken to Santo Tomas. My mother and I continued to stay with the Rechters and we used to take trips to Santo Tomas by horse driven caretellas and take him stuff through the line. We could see him on the other side of the fence – there were certain hours you could do that. Now that went on for three weeks. We stayed with the Rechters and then my mother and I went into the camp exactly three weeks to the day after my father.  

Hyman Meadows was part of that first incarceration of enemy civilian males on January 4, 1942, along with Joseph Cysner, who held a Polish passport, Samuel Schechter, Morton Netzorg, and other American and British Jewish businessmen.

The Japanese did not perceive a difference between German nationals and German Jews so the majority of the Jewish Community at Manila, which had been

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augmented with over one thousand German-Austrian Jews during the last few years, did not face internment at STIC. However, about 250 other members of the Jewish community were immediately incarcerated.\textsuperscript{26} Having spent five years freeing refugees from Nazi oppression, the Manila American Jewish community now faced its own dire threat. As mentioned, Joseph held a Polish passport, which accounted for his incarceration as an alien enemy civilian. Already familiar with forced internment in Zbaszyn, Joseph drew on past experiences to sustain himself and others in the civilian detention camp. Survivors of Santo Tomas have willingly shared their stories, as did Martin Meadows, resident of Washington DC, one of the Jewish American civilians incarcerated by an enemy during WWII.

Martin could actually claim dual citizenship, as he was born in Manila in December 1930. His father, Hyman Medvedowski, a naturalized citizen of the United States, descended from a long line of Russian rabbis. As a child with his family, Hyman made several migrations in the early 1900s that took his family to Nagasaki, Seattle, Portland, and finally to Jerusalem. Hyman served in the British army during WWI and participated in the recapture of Jerusalem from the Turks. After that supposed war to end all wars, Hyman returned to Portland, changed his name to Meadows and joined the US Army in 1927, which then stationed him in the Philippines. There he met and married Dacha Rebekah Ritter, a Jewish Pole who left Europe in the 1920s to live with her aunt in Shanghai. After falsifying her age to buy

\textsuperscript{26} Stevens, \textit{Santo Tomas Internment Camp}, 172.
passage on a boat from Italy to the Far East, Dacha continued on her voyage to
Manila from her original destination of Shanghai, after learning that her aunt had
pre-arranged a marriage for her to an Asian national. Dacha hired out as a nanny to a
prosperous Philippine family in 1928 and met Hyman at Temple Emil Synagogue in
Manila. Martin, their only child, was born ten months after their wedding in
February 1930. This family’s story is typical of the varied histories of Jewish
families that came to the Philippines in the early years of the 20th century.27

In recounting his childhood growing up in Manila, Martin recalled attending the
American school and for all practical purposes, identified himself as an American
first and as a Jew second. Although raised in an observant Jewish household on Taft
Avenue not far from the synagogue, the dominantly secular nature of their life in
Manila had a greater influence on Martin than did his parents’ Jewish roots. Martin’s
father ran his own business, importing many makes and models of Swiss business
machines, calculators, typewriters, etc., a business that his father revived after the
war and repatriation of the Philippines. Before the arrival of the refugees, Martin
remembered the Jewish community being small but somewhat close in friendships,
visiting other families such as the Königsbergs and the Netzorgs. Once the refugees
started arriving, Temple Emil was cleaned up and refurbished and a fairly vibrant
Jewish life began to unfold. Martin remembered his mother sewing the new curtains
for the Ark that held the community’s Torah scrolls. He also remembered well

Joseph Cysner, who came to their home to teach Martin Hebrew and piano lessons, as a gentle, pleasant man with an easy disposition. This idyllic life of the Meadows family, a type for the lives that Manila’s residents enjoyed, came to an abrupt end with the occupation of the Philippines by the Japanese.28

Life in the Philippines, both inside STIC and without, changed forever in those early days of January 1942. From the very first day of internment, the organization and care of the prisoners became the concern of a central committee of internees. Earl Carroll, chairman of that committee, tells of his appointment to the job in a 1945 newspaper:

> It was sheer chance that made me a leader at Santo Tomas. [. . .] I had come back as production manager for my insurance company [. . .] The day after my arrival in Manila I went to a luncheon where Francis Sayre, United States High Commissioner, was speaker. At that luncheon the Americans were making plans to evacuate their womenfolk and children to the country in event of war and bombings of Manila. I was appointed District leader for the Malate district, a section of Manila made up of apartment houses, residential hotels and fine homes. Then came Pearl Harbor, the Lingayen Gulf landing, MacArthur’s evacuation of Manila and the entry of the Japs. On January 4, 1942 Jap soldiers rapped at every door in the Malate district and ordered Americans and British to assemble at once in Rizal Memorial Stadium with

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food for three days. We obeyed of course. There were 300 of us. They took us to Santo Tomas University and informed us it was our place of internment for the moment. Late in the day I was standing at the end of a hallway in the main building of Santo Tomas looking down into a palm-fringed patio and wondering when if ever I would again hold my wife or tousle the cropped blond hair of my six year old Robert. Standing behind me was a small group of Americans, lost in the same gloomy thoughts that held me. Footsteps approached and, without turning, I recognized the voice of a Jap as he spoke in English to one of the American group. “Who is your leader?” he demanded. Someone, remembering I had been Malate district leader, pointed to me. The Jap stepped over and tapped me on the shoulder. I turned. “Well, you’re it,” he said. “What do you mean, by ‘it’?” “We’re making you the general chairman of the camp,” he said. “You are going to take care of your own internal problems. The commandant will be in tomorrow afternoon. We are withdrawing. We’ll have the gate open and no guards. If anybody leaves or anything happens, you are responsible.”

Committee organization ensued with members from both the American constituency of prisoners as well as from the British.

It is especially worth noting here that the different religious affiliations of camp internees came under their purview from the very first day of internment:

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On the morning of the first full day in Santo Tomas I called a meeting of fifteen of our Manila businessmen, mostly young executives like myself [. . .] We sat down in the second floor offices of a Santo Tomas college dean to establish some kind of organization. We knew we had to organize our own people. An executive committee was established, with me as general chairman [. . .] Committees were created for sanitation, policing and all the other functions of a small city [. . .] Those of us who were there that morning recall with pride that religion was one of the first matters we attended to, and we did it in the good old American manner. We were Protestant, Catholic, and Jew. We were determined to have no religious intolerances dividing us in the site of the enemy. And we did not have. Not ever.30

Several firsthand accounts about the details of camp life have been written over the years, but few of them discuss specifics concerning the experiences of the Jews in camp. Morton Netzorg, representative of the National Jewish Welfare Board in the Philippines and member of the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manila, immediately took a role in camp life by serving on the camp religious committee.31 Samuel Schechter, president of the Jewish Community in Manila, authored the chapter on Judaism in the larger work by Frederic Harper Stevens, who also wrote a firsthand


account of life in STIC. Based on the testimony of these leaders, we can only assume that the general state of affairs at the camp pertained to all.

As a member of the Department of Religion in STIC, Netzorg participated in formulating the policies of the committee that put together the “Ten Commandments for Santo Tomas.” As Stevens recounts, they were posted throughout the camp as follows:

I. Thou shalt have no other interest greater than the welfare of the Camp.

II. Thou shalt not adopt for thyself, or condone in others, any merely selfish rule of conduct, or indulge in any practice that injures the morale of the Camp. Thou shalt not violate the procedures agreed upon by the authorities or by the majority, for punishment can surely be visited upon all – innocent and guilty alike – because of the misdeeds of a few.

III. Thou shalt not betray the ideals and principles which thou wast taught, so that in the future thou wilt not be condemned for neglecting the heritage.

IV. Remember the work of the Camp, to do thy share. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work assignment, and also, as on thy rest day, refresh thy mind and heart with worship. For thy work will be satisfying and effective only when it is done in the right spirit.
V. Honor thy forefathers by recalling vividly their struggle for better things, that thou mayest contribute now and in the days to come to the realization of their ideals.

VI. Thou shalt not hinder the best development of youth in the Camp.

VII. Thou shalt not break down family relationships.

VIII. Thou shalt not steal.

IX. Thou shalt not injure thy neighbor’s reputation by malicious gossip.

X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s shanty or his room space. Thou shalt not covet they neighbor’s wife, nor his fiancée, nor his influential position, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s.32

While appearing both practical and somewhat amusing to the uninformed reader, these camp rules reflected some of the greatest social challenges faced by the inmates at STIC.

As already mentioned, about 250 members of the Jewish Community of the Philippines were interned at Santo Tomas at that time. Schechter recounted to Ephraim a very brief recollection of the general events concerning the small Jewish population in STIC. Not all were Americans, as Schechter recalled that there were strict observant Orthodox Jews from Poland along with students from the Mirer Yeshiva who were later sent to the internment camp at Los Baños.33 Internment was

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especially hard for these Jews who would not compromise the requirements of their dietary laws of *kashrut* (kosher). Refusing all cooked food prepared in the kitchens at Santo Tomas, they prepared their own rice and vegetables passed onto them by the members of the Jewish community not interned at STIC. They prayed daily, wearing their tallithim and tefilim, and held Minyan on Shabbat. For the general population of less observant Jews, there were occasions when Minyum for Jahrzeits were held, as well as assemblies for the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Schechter noted that Pessach observances with matzoth for the Seders occurred in 1942 and 1943, but the traditional observance of this day of deliverance had to be abandoned in 1944. Schechter poignantly observed that ritual fasting for Yom Kippur bore little difference to the daily state of starvation in 1944.  

Hartendorp’s authoritative and definitive two volume account of life under Japanese occupation stems from his personal experiences as an inmate at STIC. He was appointed camp historian by the internee executive committee headed by Carroll and kept a clandestine typewritten account for the entire three years that the camp was in operation. He recorded that the most pressing problems of camp life addressed by the committee in the beginning months were sanitation and health, food, lodging, and discipline. The Japanese left the camp members to their own designs to solve these and other problems. The Central Committee of the camp

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organized work details out of basic necessity to provide for the immediate needs of
the incarcerated, placing everyone in some kind of job, without bias of gender, age,
or income. From working in the kitchen, either cooking or washing dishes, to
sanitation and pest extermination details, or to gardening and laundry duties—
everybody worked. School was set up for the children and teenagers who were
interned with their parents – being incarcerated in a university with a library, there
was no shortage of books, however inappropriate the level of difficulty may have
been.

When the Japanese began bringing entire families into STIC for internment,
women and men were assigned to different rooms on different floors, disrupting the
basic bonding of families’ lives. Men had already been assigned classrooms on one
floor and women and children were assigned to different floors, and sometimes
different buildings. Martin remembered his mother being assigned to a classroom on
the first floor of the main building, close to the main entrance doors. Martin joined
his father in a classroom of the third floor of the same building, already overcrowded
with about forty to fifty men. A camp infirmary was set up with the many trained
doctors and medical personnel who were also prisoners in the camp. Martin recalls
that the medical care in the camp’s infirmary eventually surpassed the hospital care
outside the camp. Life inside the internment camp turned immediately dreadful for
Martin just after he and his mother joined his father in STIC. He contracted
dysentery and spent three weeks in the camp infirmary. Martin’s overall memory of
life in Santo Tomas, being only 11 years of age when he entered the camp, is one of constant hunger and overcrowding. The inmates at Santo Tomas vied for floor space on which to sleep, cramming 40 or 50 persons in a classroom and sleeping across desktops when available.

In the 2006 documentary, *Victims of Circumstance – Santo Tomas Internment Camp* produced by Lou Gopal, internees described the annex, a separate structure behind the main building where women with small children were housed, as “a crying, sick, vomiting mess for two months at least.”36 Others told how all their cots were crammed together with no space between them. Each person had twenty-eight inches you could call your own and if you moved even an inch out of your space, your neighbor was right at your back.37 Joseph was housed in the gymnasium, another structure separated from the main building, where single men were housed. Internees tell sometimes humiliating and yet oft times amusing stories about the total breakdown of privacy in the overcrowded conditions that very soon, after the first months of 1942, housed upwards of 5,000 people when internees were brought in from outlying camps in Bacolod, Cebu, and Davao.38

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All firsthand accounts from prisoners of the Santo Tomas Internment Camp describe the distinct differences of Japanese administration over the camp in the first two years as compared to the last and final third year. It is important to note that the civilian camps in the Philippines, at the other sites as well as at Santo Tomas, were not like the POW camps, which were set up for combatant military personnel. POWs were usually young, fit men in otherwise good health who underwent horrible abuses and mistreatments at the hands of their jailers.

Civilian internees came in all shapes, sizes, ages, and genders. From the outset, the Japanese camp administrators of Santo Tomas were much more humane than were the administrators of the POW camps, at least in the beginning. That is credited to the fact that the first Japanese camp overseers at Santo Tomas were appointees of a civilian administration not under the auspices of the Japanese military. The first camp commandant, Lt. Hitoshi Tomoyasu, a retired Japanese military policeman, died from para-typhoid in the first month of civilian internment at Santo Tomas. He was succeeded by a Japanese diplomat named Tsurumi. While these first camp overseers were certainly not as sadistic as some who came later under the auspices of the Japanese military command, life in Santo Tomas under the watch of these administrators was anything but easy. Carroll, selected by Tomoyasu to organize the civilian camp, recalled in his 1945 newspaper article the first execution of STIC

internees in February 1942. Three young British nationals who had escaped from STIC on February 11, 1942 were arrested and executed in Carroll’s presence:

Tomoyasu sent for Stanley [fluent in Japanese] and me and the room monitors shortly before noon. They piled us into cars and put a squad of soldiers into a bus. Then off we drove while the camp watched silently. We went to the San Marcelino jail in Manila and the three prisoners were brought out. When they saw us they began smiling. They thought they were to go free. When we drove to the Chinese cemetery north of Manila, and stopped near a large, freshly dug grave, they knew. “Why, we haven’t even been tried!” exclaimed Laycock. And that was that. The stuff we had been given about a court martial was a Jap lie. Tomoyasu asked me if I had anything to say to the men. I do not recall all that I told them. But I remember saying this: “Your names will not be forgotten at Santo Tomas. You are dying as martyrs to freedom.” Takahashi [2nd in command] seated the three on the mound of earth beside the grave with their feet dangling in [. . .] Then the Jap detail took up positions 15 feet in front of the men and took out their side arms. Takahashi was grinning when he gave the order to fire. Those pistols were small bore, and would kill a man only if the bullet struck a vital spot [. . .] They fired and fired. I counted 13 shots. Week’s body fell in last. Then the Japs stood over them, firing down into the grave. Groans still were coming from that grave when the Japs began to shovel dirt into it. The Japs
were still shooting when Tomoyasu turned away, mumbling to himself. He went behind a clump of bushes and looked the other way. Stanley told me Tomoyasu was saying, “It’s butchery. They should have the proper instruments.” Maybe he meant swords. Before the Japs were driven from Manila they killed nearly 4,000 people at the cemetery. And most of the dead were beheaded. The next day the executive committee read this into the minutes: “All three men faced their end bravely and heroically without faltering. And the committee wishes to record its admiration for their superb courage.”

No doubt performed in such a manner as to impress upon the civilian committee members the seriousness of their internment at STIC, Carroll and the other members of the organizing committee met every morning and worked very hard at representing the interests of all camp internees.

Within the first ten days of internment at STIC, over 3,000 prisoners had been dumped on the site: “some 2,000 people were lodged in the main building, 400 in the annex, and 700 in the gymnasium, the third building to be occupied,” where Joseph eventually stayed. In a short time, the initial three days worth of supplies that internees had brought in with them ran out, and thereafter the imprisoned depended

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primarily on the local Red Cross for supplies and food. The package line became the
camp umbilical cord for the imprisoned, its initialization occurring on January 15,
1942. Families, friends, and former employees of the interned lined up outside the
front gates from 8:00-8:20 am and 3:00-3:20 pm every day to pass food and other
necessities to waiting hands. Those who had no benefactors on the outside were
provided meals in camp by the Red Cross, which had been granted privileges to
establish a kitchen inside STIC. Without the assistance of the non-interned Jewish
refugees in Manila, the interned Orthodox Polish Jews, including Joseph, would not
have had the ability to keep their religiously observed dietary laws. Rabbi Schwarz
and others gathered, prepared, and passed along kosher food items to their fellow
observant Jews and the Mirer Yeshiva students. The package lines continued with
intermittent closures at the whim of the Japanese until early 1944, when the Japanese
military “locked us in, took over the feeding themselves, and placed us on a
starvation diet.”\footnote{Earl Carroll, “The Secret War of Santo Tomas, Chapter 5,” \textit{Los Angeles Examiner}, 23 August, 1945, sec. 1, p.8.}

Carroll’s memoir of the first six months of internment reveals the little known
operation of the underground black market trafficking that he and others organized
in an effort to stave off the systematic starvation of both the STIC internees and the
POWs at Cabanatuan. Apparently the Japanese invaders presumed that all the assets
of the rich American businesses were still securely held in the vaults of the
 Philippine banks. Unbeknownst to them, all paper currency had been burned in
anticipation of the Japanese occupation and “daring American subs had shipped out with the securities and bullion.”\textsuperscript{43} Anticipating that the rich Americans and Brits could pay amply for their own food and supplies while interned, the Japanese captors “gave us not one grain of rice, not one peso of money, not one ounce of medicine” during those early months of confinement. With the instruction to “buy your own food,” Carroll conducted purchasing forays with what money was carried into the camp by the internees, as it had been pooled to benefit all interned. But that money soon ran out and once the Japanese learned that the retreating American forces had left the Philippines penniless, the Japanese Foreign Office, in charge of the civilian internment, had no other recourse but to grant a spending allotment of 25 cents per person per day for food and other necessities. In a highly inflated war-torn market, this amounted to next to nothing. Carroll felt he was left with no other choice but to enter the underground world of black market racketeering.\textsuperscript{44} Carroll explained how the black market operated:

We could starve slowly or we could go into the money black market and trade IOUs – American promises to pay if and when – for [Japanese] occupation pesos. The [Japanese] money was called “Mickey Mouse” by the Filipinos. . . .So I became a trafficker in Mickey Mouse currency. The penalty if caught was confinement at infamous Fort Santiago, where many


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
were tortured and few emerged alive. This Mickey Mouse currency provided just enough margin to keep us on a plain but sufficient diet. We simply added the black market money to the [Japanese] allotment and went on buying in the open market.  

Carroll wore a red arm band labeling him an internee of STIC while on special leave from the camp, an item Carroll described as a “priceless possession” that acted as a “passport at the gate” enabling him to “roam Manila in pursuit of [his] secret life” as a black marketeer. This clandestine operation brought him into contact with Israel Königsberg, “a scholarly Russian Jew who opened his heart and pocketbook to those among us who were destitute.”

As already mentioned in an earlier chapter, Königsberg and his wife came to Manila from Shanghai in 1924, eventually establishing a successful bookstore in the Philippines. Having been a prominent member of the Jewish Community and the Philippine business world for many years, Königsberg lost no time in giving any help he could to the imprisoned. Carroll described the clandestine encounters they shared:

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47 Ibid.
A Russian Jew with Filipino citizenship, [Königsberg] ran a bookstore and felt he owed his prosperity to Americans. When I walked into his shop he smiled and said, “Let’s see now. You came in today to buy ledgers for your camp records, didn’t you?” And I nodded. That gave us a story to stick to if caught . . . We went to a back room and he handed me sheaves of Mickey Mouse for my IOUs. I had IOUs signed by our poorest people, and I told him frankly his chances of recovering on them were slight. But he took them. When we finished our transaction he handed me an extra sheaf of pesos. “Get this through to the men of Cabanatuan,” he said. . . . I don’t know what hands it passed through to reach our starving troops at Cabanatuan, but I know it got there.48

Eventually Königsberg’s black market activities that provided both money and medicine to American POWs were discovered by the Japanese when a missionary and fellow conspirator’s papers were found after her arrest and torture. Königsberg spent the remainder of the occupation imprisoned at Muntinlupa Prison east of Manila, “barely surviving on starvation rations.”49 He was not reunited with his wife and daughter until after escaping his own execution shortly before the liberation of Manila.


49 Interview conducted with Rebecca Berman, Königsberg’s daughter, by Frank Ephraim. See Ephraim, *Escape to Manila*, 121.
Life in Santo Tomas moved forward with increasing difficulty as the internees’ health and stamina gradually declined. With the fall of Corregidor, the only surrender of America’s Armed Forces in US military history, came the notorious Bataan Death March, which gave the Jewish Community in the Philippines its first casualty of the occupation – David Netzorg, son of Morton Netzorg. David had joined the US Army shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. After surviving the 65 mile “Death March” that killed thousands along the way and eventually brought maimed and tortured POWs to Camp O’Donnell and Cabanatuan, David died shortly after his arrival at Cabanatuan in April 1942.\footnote{George Perry, “The Miracle of a Synagogue in Manila,” \textit{Jewish Floridian}, 23 September 1960, sec. F, p. 4. See also “Morton I. Netzorg,” \textit{NY Times}, 22 October 1946, p. 24.}

Both Schechter and Netzorg remained interned with the other Jewish internees for the full three years of their incarceration, but Joseph obtained an early release after eight months. Rabbi Schwarz, who took over the leadership of the Jewish community in Manila after the occupation by the Japanese, convinced Narusawa of the Japanese Religious Section that Cysner's elderly mother, who was not interned, required her son's support, and the religious services at the synagogue could not continue without their cantor.\footnote{Herb Brin, “Cantor Cysner's Survival Story,” \textit{Southwest Jewish Press}, No.4, 13 October 1960, 1.} Cysner’s release was eventually obtained and he resumed his life of service to both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities of Manila, while assisting Rabbi Schwarz and the other German Jews in their efforts to
aid the imprisoned Jews at Santo Tomas with food and approved provisions. While such releases were rare, they were not unheard of.

In the first published account based on stories from the survivors of the Jewish community in the Philippines, *Escape to Manila* by survivor Frank Ephraim, the author remembered an incident at the synagogue shortly after Cysner’s return to the community. Ephraim’s family was one of the rescued refugee households with Austrian passports not interned in Santo Tomas. Ephraim recounts how services continued at the synagogue after the occupation with only thirty to fifty people in attendance, due to travel and curfew restrictions imposed by the Japanese. Following his release in September 1942, Joseph organized a male choir to prepare music for the High Holidays. Temple Emil celebrated Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, on September 22, 1942, nine months into the Japanese occupation of the islands. Ephraim recalls the events of that afternoon:

> About 1 P.M. there was a flurry of whispered voices and subdued commotion inside the sanctuary as Joseph, facing the Ark of the Covenant, which stood at the head of the temple, was chanting the early afternoon prayers. Suddenly the double door of the sanctuary began to slowly open, and there appeared Morton Netzorg, the former secretary of the Manila Jewish Refugee Committee. He was followed by more than fifty of the internees, including Samuel Schechter, former president of the congregation. They had been

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allowed to leave the internment camp to attend Yom Kippur services. The atmosphere was electric. The choir could see what was happening because they faced the congregation, but Joseph, fully absorbed in his liturgical passages, turned his head . . . he immediately saw what was happening, and with a nod here and a hand signal there, the most holy services were interrupted to an emotional welcome for the interned brethren. 53

Martin recalled the occasion when his father and mother left camp in the company of armed Japanese guards for the High Holiday celebration. Their stay was all too short, only a few hours, before they returned to their imprisonment. For those observant Jews who would not violate their travel restrictions on a holiday, services were held in a room on the fourth floor of the main building in STIC. This scenario was repeated for the High Holidays of 1943 as well. 54 Ephraim remembered the Jewish internees being “fewer and much thinner” than the year before. 55 Cysner continued conducting classes for refugee school children in his home, along with piano and Hebrew lessons for children and adults. He also resumed his teaching at the Catholic De La Salle College, advancing to the post of choirmaster. As Ephraim describes it, Cysner's house was a “beehive of activity,” as he labored to maintain


54 Stevens, Santo Tomas Internment Camp, 172-173.

55 Ephraim, Escape to Manila, 113.
some kind of normalcy in the lives of his congregants during the harshest conditions of the occupation.  

In December 1943, Martin turned thirteen while interned at STIC, the age when young Jewish boys participate in bar mitzvah, the coming-of-age Jewish ceremony marking their passage into adulthood. Desiring their son to become a bar mitzvah and being long time members of the Jewish community in Manila, the Meadows family petitioned the Japanese camp commandant for a special release, which was granted only to father and son. Martin and his father left his mother behind and ventured out into the city, the first time Martin had left STIC in nearly two years of imprisonment. They both wore the required red armbands that designated them as STIC internees. Joseph called together a minyan, an assembly of at least ten Jewish men, and performed the ceremony for his former Hebrew student who then had to return to his imprisonment with his father. This would be the last reunion of Jewish internees with any of their fellow religionists in the city until the liberation of Manila in 1945. As the calendar turned over to 1944, the harshest year of internment at Santo Tomas began.

Carroll described early 1944 as the moment when the Japanese army “marched back into Santo Tomas and set about deliberately starving us to death.” Nearly

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56 Ephraim, Escape to Manila, 103.

every account written by survivors of STIC call it the “Year of Starvation.” By January 10, 1944, the Japanese War Prisoners Department had complete supervision of STIC, initiating “drastic changes” in camp life, closing the package lines, forbidding vendors on site, and essentially taking over complete control of the prisoners’ food rations. Only through ingenious and potentially deadly deceptions, was Carroll able to maintain lifelines with the outside world that barely managed to stave off starvation of the entire camp. Survivors recounted stories of inedible rotten food being provided by the Japanese, which was eaten by the malnourished and systematically starved prisoners. Diseases associated with diet deficiencies raged through the camp. According to Martin, as many as six people died daily towards the end of their imprisonment. Martin, as an adolescent boy aged eleven to fourteen, lost forty pounds during his incarceration, and his mother weighed only about eighty pounds at their liberation. The average weight loss among the men was fifty pounds, with some losing nearly half their body weight. Death statistics show that of the 435 deaths recorded in the 37 months of STIC’s operation, 95 died in the first three months of 1945 alone.

58 Johansen, *So Far From Home*, 93.


It is evident in the various testimonies of Jewish survivors of Santo Tomas that an organized Jewish group did not exist in STIC. When asked specifically about that, Martin could not recall any special organization of Jews in camp. The autobiography of Esther Robbins Hutton, a young Jewish girl caught up in the invasion of Manila with her mother and brother as they were in transit from Shanghai to the United States, never once mentioned knowing other Jews in camp or of being aware that there was a Jewish community in Manila at all. Esther shared the story of how their camp family, augmented by the presence of their protector Edgar Bruce Green, a Jewish businessman from China also caught in the war while passing through the region, had improvised a bar mitzvah for Esther’s brother while in camp in January 1945. Had they known about Rabbi Schwarz or Joseph and Temple Emil they might have petitioned for a temporary release for the event, as did the Martin family, or at least asked other Jewish internees to hold a minyan in camp for the ceremony. One must assume that the family was unaware of other Jews in Manila, either in camp or without.

C: Europe’s Refugee Jews under Japanese Occupation

While camp inmates battled malnutrition, disease, and exposure (many built shanties on the campus grounds in order to have some kind of family residence),

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citizens of Manila tried to adapt to life under Japanese occupation. In addition to trying to assist their friends and family who had been interned, residents of Manila also struggled to find work and to pay for basic staples of life. American and British companies, the largest employers on the islands, went out of business when their owners and executives joined the food lines in camp. Houses and businesses were searched and seized without warning, providing lodging for the Japanese forces while making their owners homeless as well as jobless. Japanese soldiers looted stores, homes and farms, wantonly destroying property and possessions that they did not steal. The pillaging Japanese targeted US and British holdings systematically, without thought to religion or social distinction. But according to the testimonies of German refugee Jews, they suffered relatively little from the hands of the Japanese because their status as “Germans” identified them as allies.

Lotte Holzer Bunim, who arrived in Manila as a very young girl with her older brother and parents, recalled living a life of depravation but relatively peaceful until the battle for liberation. Lotte remembered the Japanese army as a mass of poor, ragtag hungry soldiers who stole food and hid to eat it. She recounts:

The Nazis were intelligent, cultured people and they killed our people while the most beautiful classical music was playing. The Japanese were very barbaric, because if they caught someone stealing food, like the Filipinos stealing, they would hang them right there on a tree, but they did the same...
thing to their own [. . .] I remember them as being cruel people but cruel to their own and not just the enemy.63

Lotte remembered returning to school to find the curriculum altered by the Japanese. Not only did they have to learn to read and write Japanese, but to this day she still remembers the words to the Japanese national anthem.64 Lotte recounted how her father dealt with the Japanese:

My father’s passport was a German passport with a big red ‘J’ on it, which means Jew, and when the Japanese would stop him and ask for his papers, his passport, he would put his thumb on the ‘J’ so that all they would see is German – so they didn’t really bother us.65

Another survivor of the German refugee Jews in the Philippines, Ralph Preiss, remembered pages of their text books being glued together, the Japanese manner of censorship of all historical materials pertaining to the British and the Americans.66 Ralph can still today speak the Japanese phrase “I’m your friend,” which they repeated over and over as they bowed to the soldiers. He remembered how important bowing became and the penalties inflicted indiscriminately when “Gaijins” (foreigners) disrespected the Japanese by failing to bow. For the German Jews, and

63 Lotte Holzer Bunim, interviewed by Bonnie Harris, 18 June 2006, Lawrence, New York, videotape recording.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

for youth like Ralph and Lotte, Jewish life and culture continued unmolested. Joseph continued to bar mitzvah the German boys just as he had bar mitzvahed Martin Meadows. Hebrew classes resumed and Joseph had returned to the Catholic Boys School of De La Salle College, where he taught music classes and organized Catholic Boys Choirs. Jewish families observed Shabbat and the High Holidays. As a practicing Orthodox Jew observant of kosher laws, Lotte recounted her family abstaining from meat for the entire eight years they lived in the Philippines. But attendance at synagogue declined significantly under the Japanese occupation with restrictions on travel and the posting of sentries in strategic locations.67

The Japanese censored all media and press, rationed basic commodities, and punished all infractions of their multitude of regulations swiftly. Therefore, non-interned refugee Jews suffered as indiscriminate victims of Japanese brutality along with all other non-Jewish residents of Manila. Suspicion and fear became a part of everyday life as informant organizations, under firm Japanese orders, reported violations of mandatory restrictions. Punishable offenses included use of typewriters, listening to overseas radio broadcasts, stealing, and teaching concepts other than the “propagandized” Japanese versions of academic subjects. Japanese penalties were administered through beatings, hangings, imprisonment, starvation, torture, and executions.68 Within two weeks after their initial invasion, the


commander-in-chief of the Japanese Expeditionary forces identified seventeen acts deemed punishable by death, ranging from espionage, rebellion, murder, and stealing to disturbing the peace and spreading rumors.  

President Quezon fled Manila at the urging of General MacArthur prior to the Japanese invasion and left his Executive Secretary, Jorge B. Vargas, as mayor of Greater Manila in charge of negotiations with the Japanese. Urged emphatically to cooperate with the occupying forces, Filipino leaders under Vargas presented a proposal to organize the Philippine Executive Commission according to Japanese demands for a central government compatible with the forthcoming New World Order. With political reorganization completed, officials of the Philippine Executive Commission “had to give speeches to their countrymen to explain the side of the government and urge cooperation.”  

Support among commission members for the JMA ranged from full collaboration to passive resistance. Since the Japanese held absolute power, all actions by Commission members had to pass Japanese approval. Conditions of life in Manila proper, dictated directly by the occupying Japanese forces, varied significantly from life in the provinces.

Firsthand accounts from refugee survivors outside of Manila reveal the many dangers life posed at that time and the many tactics Jewish families implemented to

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70 Jose, World War II and the Japanese Occupation, 111-113.
survive. Otto Emmerich, his wife Lisa and their three sons, Ernest, Helmuth and Alfred survived for three years “living in the forests and fields” on Mindanao, using their wits to outsmart their Japanese invaders. Recorded testimony of the youngest son, Alfred, reveals that the family worked at times as civilian informants of Japanese troop movements on the southern island. Alfred recorded the words of his father:

> Everyone will remember the [Japanese] invasion of Davao [. . .] so do I. To make it short, after nine hours of fighting we had to run into the mountains. I had no idea of the whereabouts of my family but after 17 days we assembled one by one in the Davao hospital. My wife and youngest son were hurt by bombs, the others were sick on account of starvation in the mountains. I don’t even remember how many ailments I had. In the hospital the [Japanese] didn’t bother us at all. They had never seen a Jew, and accepted us as “Nazis.”

Emmerich recounted their fears that someone in town would reveal that they were Jews and disclose their “work” on the island of Mindanao, which “meant corta civisa, beheading.”

> After an adequate time of recuperation, the family returned to their abandoned farm in Licanan on Mindanao, where they began cultivating and eating papaya and

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71 Alfred Emmerich, “The Chicken Tree,” *Kvutzat Chaverim Newsletter*, Purim 1946, Manila, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.03.

72 Ibid.
trading with other farmers for vegetables and other staples. According to Emmerich, the Japanese “invented” a new business practice unique to the invaders called “party-party,” meaning 50/50. Japanese officials came to the Emmerich farm and demanded that half the planted and cultivated farmland be given to them, and it was. Everyone who passed by the Japanese squatters on the trails and roadways near the farm was required to hand over half of what they were carrying, no matter what it was. The Japanese “tenants” who lived in a storehouse on the Emmerich farm began to accumulate a nice brood of chickens from their “party-party” business. As Alfred Emmerich recounted, necessity being the mother of invention and the Emmerich family being hungry for something other than papaya three meals a day, they built a clandestine chicken hutch in their attic and sprayed a path of corn kernels leading up to the attic. There chickens would roost, lay contraband eggs for the Emmerich family and then return to the yard of their Japanese overlords.73

Stories such as these reveal ingenuity born from desperation. But the fate of the imprisoned was never far from their minds as Alfred told how they would give what produce from their harvests they could spare to “trustful Filipinos to deliver to the civilian camp where captured Americans were starving.”74 It wasn’t long before the Japanese 50/50 practice became 100/0 and the Emmerich family had to leave their farm and turn it completely over to the Japanese. Deciding not to return to their

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73 Alfred Emmerich, “The Chicken Tree,” Kvutzat Chaverim Newsletter, Purim 1946, Manila, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.03.
74 Ibid.
house in the city of Davao, which had been completely ransacked by the Japanese earlier, the Emmerich family took to the neighboring farmlands, being evicted two more times by the Japanese, living a hand to mouth existence in the jungle-like region for the next three years, until the liberation by US forces.

**D: Germans and Nazis in the Philippines**

January 1943 brought a new, and yet an old, threat to the Jewish refugees in the Philippines as antisemitic rhetoric targeted the non-interned German Jews. To fully understand how this Nazi-inspired diatribe can only be seen as a momentary aberration in the history of Jews and Germans in the Philippines, a careful examination of the history of the non-Jewish German community in the archipelago is warranted. Ironically enough, the first Germans to ever set foot on the islands came with the same wave of Spanish explorers that brought the Philippines its first Jewish inhabitants in the 16th century. Even though Spain isolated the Philippines from world markets and foreign settlement from 1593 to 1815, German Jesuits accompanied the non-Castilian Jesuits who labored to evangelize the Philippine natives. German pharmacists, physicians, and scientists were also granted a presence in the islands during the centuries of Spanish rule. But the existence of an organized German community did not occur until Spain opened Manila to world commerce in

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In 1849, after trade with German companies had been well established, German consulates began to appear. Over the next several decades, German scientists, educators, scholars, and historians sought new horizons and exciting opportunities in the Spanish colony.\footnote{Krohn, \textit{The German Club Manila}, 4-10.}

With the onset of the Spanish-American War in 1898, European countries vied for commercial and colonial footholds in the Far East and the Philippines topped the list for most favored colonial possession. German Foreign Office documents reveal that German intentions for imperial hegemony in the Philippines inspired a naval standoff in Manila Bay between the US and German navies at the end of the Spanish Colonial Era.\footnote{Ibid., 15-21.} Germany’s plans for its own colonization of the Philippines failed with the annexation of all the islands by the US. But under the Americans, international commerce flowed into Manila, along with foreign executives, workers, missionaries, military personnel, and politicians. By 1903, 368 Germans resided in the Philippines, with over two-thirds of that number living in Manila. WWI then brought an era of uncertainty in diplomatic relationships in the Philippines as in the world, but Manila was “the only safe neutral port for German merchant vessels trading along the China coast.”\footnote{Francis Burton Harrison, \textit{The Corner-Stone of Philippine Independence a Narrative of Seven Years} (New York: Century Co., 1922), 171.} The US Governor General in the Philippines, Francis B. Harrison, granted the German Consul safe passage on an American
transport when recalled from his post. Harrison reflected that “the Philippines was singularly free from incidents of warlike import” during the WWI era – certainly not the case during WWII.\textsuperscript{79}

During the years between the wars, numerous German companies opened offices in Manila, contributing to the Philippine economy and supporting a cosmopolitan sophistication of colonial life. With the rise of Nazism in Europe came difficult years for the German community. The social organization of the Philippine German community, the German Club, reported significant resignations of club membership in the early years of Hitler’s Chancellery.\textsuperscript{80} The German Club had always adopted the policy of non-political involvement and this annoyed Nazi Party members in the Philippines. With the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939 and the alliance of Germany with Japan, came another wave of German Club resignations, cresting in 1940 and 1941 as the clouds of a Pacific War caused many to flee the islands when the US closed the German Consulate in Manila and froze all German assets. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the Philippines with Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States precipitated the arrest of civilian German nationals and their incarceration at the National Penitentiary at Muntinlupa. When the Japanese invaded Luzon and advanced into Manila unchallenged, the tide turned for the alien civilians

\textsuperscript{79} Harrison, \textit{The Corner-Stone of Philippine Independence}, 180.

\textsuperscript{80} Krohn, \textit{The German Club Manila}, 41.
as the Japanese freed the Germans and interned American civilians, along with others from Allied nations now at war with Germany and Japan.81

The history of the German community in the Philippines during the 30s and 40s does not necessarily equate with the history of the Philippine Nazi party, which had organized a branch called the *Ortsgruppe* Manila. The History Committee of the German Club in Manila maintains that membership in the Nazi Party was completely voluntary with “no compulsion or intimidation employed to persuade German residents of Manila to become members.” However, the 1938 arrival of the German Consul E. Sakowsky, a Nazi party member adamant in recruiting new party members from within the community, caused severe tension between the German Club and the German Consular Office when Sakowsky declared the German Club to be an “enemy of the Third Reich” and demanded that all party members sever their association with the Club.82 Edgar Krohn, member of the History Committee in 1996, maintains that those few who did join the Party “conducted themselves at all times in a very correct manner, were never vindictive or overbearing, and never committed any unlawful acts.” 83 This tension deflated significantly when Sakowsky returned to Germany in 1939, replaced as the German Consul in the Philippines by


82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 57.
Dr. H. Lautenschlager, who never once tried to promote Nazi practices of compulsion, discrimination, or persecution.

Such attempts appeared in the Philippines in 1943 with the arrival of Franz Josef Spahn, a new leader for the Ortsgruppe Manila. Spahn carried an arrest warrant for the President of the German Club, seeking its execution by the Japanese Military Police. But its rejection by the local members of the Ortsgruppe Manila seemed to indicate their unwillingness to conform to their Nazi Party’s expectations. It should be noted that the first episode of a dangerous antisemitic presence in the Philippines came not from the German Community but from the Japanese Military Administration.

Without prior notice, in January 1943 the JMA began running notices in the local papers, warning that Jews in the Philippines would “be dealt with drastically.”\textsuperscript{84} The Tribune’s headline for January 26, 1943 read: “Jews Given Stern Warning.” The age-old rhetoric described the Jews as “people without a motherland . . . a wandering race . . . parasites of the countries in which they live.”\textsuperscript{85} It went on to outline trumped-up charges of hoarding commodities to raise prices, exploiting native women, and even acts of espionage. It is unclear whether any members of the Nazi Party incubated the diatribes or if the JMA acted of its own volition. But one year


\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
later, in January 1944, rumors about forcing the German Jews into a ghetto began to circulate. Spahn called for the immediate internment of aliens guilty of “acts inimical to the peace, security, and interest of the Republic of the Philippines.”

By falsifying the facts concerning the abandonment of the Mindanao Resettlement Project and claiming that the Jews sabotaged the plan with the intention of dominating the Philippine urban economy, the Nazi Party Leader in the Philippines deliberately targeted the Jewish community of refugees in the Philippines.

Griese maintained that this imminent danger to the German Jews was averted by the more influential leaders of the Jewish community, including Rabbi Schwarz and Joseph, who negotiated with the JMA. While the Japanese could not be bothered with Nazi plans to establish a Jewish ghetto in the Philippines, they did not object to episodes of abuse randomly waged against members of the Jewish community by Japanese soldiers. Ephraim recounts the torture and death of a Jewish German who was arrested for “aiding the enemy” when he gave an American prisoner a pack of cigarettes. This and another dozen incidents of Jewish German suffering at the hands of the Japanese illustrated the horror of the time. In June 1944, news that

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87 Ibid.

88 Griese, “The Jewish Community In Manila,” 32.

89 Ephraim, Escape to Manila, 124.
American forces had landed on Saipan, 1500 miles west of Manila, gave renewed hope to all.

**E: Repatriation & Destruction of Manila**

From June 15, 1944, when the American forces first landed on Saipan, it was another nine months until the final release of the Philippines from Japanese control. Those were the most destructive months of the war. During that time, exiled Philippine President Quezon died, having never seen the fulfillment of his efforts to advance colonization on Mindanao with Jewish refugees. As American forces began bombing raids in October 1944 on strategic Japanese locations in and around Manila, Japanese troops seized and expelled all Jews from their synagogue and social hall and converted the buildings into ammunition depots. Various members throughout the city rescued the holy artifacts, the sacred lamp, prayer books, pulpit coverings, and the Torah Scrolls. The homes of Joseph and Rabbi Schwarz became new religious centers for the community.  

As war in the Philippines persisted, the situation in Manila deteriorated rapidly. The Japanese viewed all civilians as subversive guerillas and many fled the city into the mountains to escape retaliation. The “Battle for Manila,” which officially began

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on February 3, 1945 and lasted for one month, left the city in total ruins. Retreating Japanese forces destroyed everything in their wake, including Temple Emil and Bachrach Hall, as well as the residence of Joseph and his mother. Temple Emil was “the only synagogue destroyed in battle on American territory during World War II.” A pattern of Japanese massacres ensued, in which they machine-gunned citizens trying to save homes and buildings from the fires. Historian William Craig described the scene: “For nearly one month, into late February, Manila was a slaughterhouse, the scene of multiple atrocities, as Japanese marines fought insanely to defend the strategically unimportant city.” Random shootings killed without discrimination of age or gender—many children were murdered and brutalized. On February 10, 1945 Japanese soldiers massacred eight Jewish refugees along with numerous others in the Red Cross building, mistakenly leaving one wounded Jewish survivor as a witness to the atrocity.

Carnage continued unchecked as Americans advanced closer and closer to the heart of the city. Eberly recalls a “fear of mass execution by the Japanese as the

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92 Personal documents from his life in Manila that Joseph was able to retrieve are now housed in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Society of San Diego, including documents from Poland, German, San Francisco, and San Diego.


liberating armies approached Manila.”\textsuperscript{96} Lotte Bunim remembered the day of their liberation:

What happened was when the Americans came back and they were fighting, the civilians were in the middle so we were getting it from two sides, from the Japanese and from the Americans. We were in a bomb shelter [. . .] and we knew the Japanese were told to kill all white people, whoever is white, just get rid of them. We were in an air raid shelter for two or three people and we ended up with six or seven people and it was stifling [. . .] I remember a soldier putting his foot down on one step, coming down into the air raid shelter and my father started saying the prayers you say when you are about to be killed. But as he was saying it, he started looking up to see who was coming down – we thought it was the Japanese ready to kill us all – and it was the first American we coming back, and he looked up and said, “blue eyes, blond hair” and he yelled out “God Bless America” and we started to cry.\textsuperscript{97}

Civilians fled to elude the destruction and many died in the process. Lotte recounted that “it was hell – we ran and got shot at but we survived.”\textsuperscript{98}


\textsuperscript{97} Lotte Holzer Bunin, interviewed by Bonnie Harris, 18 June 2006, Lawrence, New York, videotape recording.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Over one thousand Jews escaped the holocaust of Manila by crossing the Pasig River to the north, leaving sixty-seven of their members dead and more than two hundred wounded.\(^99\) When the inmates of Santo Tomas Internment Camp and the prisoners of other camps, who had been freed by the American forces, rejoined their community, the sight of the destruction was overwhelming. Ninety percent of Manila's Jews were homeless, along with most of the city's population.\(^100\) William Manchester, biographer of General Douglas MacArthur, stated that “the devastation of Manila was one of the great tragedies of World War II. Of Allied cities in those war years, only Warsaw suffered more.”\(^101\) Ephraim records the testimony of Jewish army chaplain Dudley Weinberg, in a letter written to the Frieders: “I have never seen such sadness, such destruction and such desolation. Pick up your bible and read the Book of Lamentations and you will have the story.”\(^102\)

**F: Summary**

The Japanese occupation ended violently with the liberation of the islands.

The returning internees of the civilian concentration camps joined with the

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\(^100\) Griese, “The Jewish Community In Manila,” 33.


remaining refugees to try to rebuild their devastated community. All had
been terrorized by the retreating Japanese forces. Since their liberation, three
more members of the Jewish community died, bringing the total dead during
the liberation to seventy. 103 The upcoming Passover season of March 1945,
celebrating Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, carried a new
meaning for the Philippine survivors. The American military took
extraordinary steps to assist the Jewish community in its recovery. US
soldiers provided food, water, supplies, and medicine for the victims. Joseph
restored cultural activities, religious services, and youth group meetings. On
March 23, 1945 a posting on the US Army bulletin board announced a
Passover Seder to be held in conjunction with the surviving members of the
Jewish community in Manila. Jacques Lipetz, a Belgian Jew who arrived in
Manila as a young boy with his family in May 1941, remembered how US
Army jeeps provided “bumpy and dangerous” transportation back and forth
from the Seder for the Jewish civilians. 104 On March 28, 1945, the racetrack
bleachers, capable of seating thousands, were filled with US military
personnel and all the Jewish civilians who were able to attend. Ephraim
describes that night:

103 Ephraim, Escape to Manila, 168.

104 Jacques Lipetz, "Witnesses" part of a Holocaust remembrance website, created by Cybrary
To the liberated Jewish refugees, the event was truly staggering. Mingling and talking to the thousands of Jewish soldiers, sailors, and airmen was a thrilling experience – something we had never dreamed of. The servicemen and women were equally surprised to find Jews in this part of the world. They gave us all their C-rations and K-rations, their cigarettes, and the ubiquitous small bars of Hershey “tropics proof” chocolate [. . .] Down on the racetrack, Joseph sang into a micro-phone over the din of thousands of conversations, his rich voice penetrating above the noise.105

Lipetz also remembers Joseph, “the wonderful chazzan,” and this memorable Seder service: “I doubt however that anyone since the Exodus had so sweet a Pesach.”106

During the reconstruction period of the Philippines, hundreds of American military personnel augmented Manila's Jewish community and donated $15,000 for the rebuilding of Temple Emil synagogue. On November 9, 1945, Joseph conducted a memorial service in the bombed out ruins of the old synagogue to commemorate the planned reconstruction.107 But the devastation was so severe that many who could no longer earn a living in the ravaged city immigrated to the United States. After the destruction of the synagogue and the Catholic De La Salle College, Joseph joined the ranks of the hundreds of Jews who again sought a new life in a new land.

105 Ephraim, Escape to Manila, 165.

106 Lipetz, “Witnesses.”

107 Cysner, Photographic Collection, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.
With the departure of the American Jews, who wanted only to return to their home country, and the European refugees, who had counted on the American-held businesses for most of their livelihood, the community membership decreased by 30% by the end of 1946. Fewer than 250 European Jewish refugees could be counted among the estimated 600 Jews who remained in the Philippines by the end of 1948.\textsuperscript{108} By 1954 the Jewish community of Manila counted a total of 302 members. And while this ends the story of the rescue of European refugee Jews in the Manila, it begins a new era in the story of Jews in the Philippines in the post WWII decades with the emergence of a new cultural and religious community of Filipino Jews.

Hundreds of Filipino Jews today, descended from forefathers of various Jewish Diasporas, seek identification and validation of their Jewish heritage. Since 2007, a new memorial has been taking shape in the outskirts of Tel Aviv in the suburb of Rishon le Zion. Titled “Open Doors,” it commemorates the rescue of refugee Jews in the Philippines and provides a memorial site of pilgrimage for all Jews having connections to the Philippines, both genetically and socially.\textsuperscript{109} Its official unveiling on June 21, 2009 coincides with the completion of this dissertation. New scholarship on the personal stories of Filipino Jews, their genealogies, and how they came to embrace their Jewish heritage waits to be written.

\textsuperscript{108} Griese, “The Jewish Community In Manila,” 35.

\textsuperscript{109} For more information of this monument, see the website for the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines in the State of Israel at http://www.philembtelaviv.co.il/.
Epilog

*Joseph Cysner’s Story Ends*

This closes Joseph’s odyssey that highlighted the remarkable story of how one small community of Jews in the Far East managed to do what so many more capable nations of the world were reluctant to do – save Jewish lives. It is remarkable because they managed to circumvent the inclination of US State Department officials’ propensity to obstruct Jewish rescue and more than quadruple the population of their Jewish community. By rescuing 1,300 refugees, plus Joseph, this US Commonwealth saved them from the fate of the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. While 1,300 refugees, when compared to twelve million victims of Nazi atrocities, are not so many, to those hundreds who found a haven in Manila, each individual life was significant, as was Joseph’s.

For over seven years Joseph shared his “golden voice, personal warmth, and infectious spirit”\(^1\) with the members of the Temple Emil Congregation, touching the lives of its members through his unique abilities as a teacher, director, and mentor. Joseph and his mother left Manila for the United States in the spring of 1946, where he accepted a position with Temple Sherith Israel in San Francisco. Having emerged from Zbaszyn confinement, Santo Tomas imprisonment, and the Japanese destruction of his home and synagogue, his story of deliverance merged with that of

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his childhood friend from Bamberg, Sylvia Nagler. Fifteen year old Sylvia escaped Germany in December 1938, while, unbeknownst to her, Cysner was interned at Zbaszyn. She spent the war years in England. They reunited and married in San Francisco in August 1948. Final release came for Joseph with his death in San Diego on March 3, 1961 at the age of 48. Communities around the world mourned his death: Bamberg, Hildesheim, Hannover, Hamburg, Manila, San Francisco, and San Diego. Rabbi Schwarz had delivered these words to the congregation at Manila when Joseph first arrived in 1939—they are fitting words still: “Blessed shalt thou be, when thou comest in. May your prayers edify our Congregation, may they inspire our people, may they heal the wounds inflicted by these times.”\(^2\) The greatest legacy of both Joseph and the Holocaust Haven he helped create will always be this—they healed wounds inflicted by the worst of times. As Cysner wrote in his memoir upon his departure from Zbaszyn: “My brothers and sisters I head for a new world.”\(^3\)

\(^2\) Schwarz to Mr. Cysner, 1939, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC01.03.

\(^3\) Cysner, Zbaszyn Memoir, English Version, p.10, JHSSD Archives, Cantor Joseph Cysner Collection, CJC02.01.
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