

Statton Solak

3/31/25

H. World History

Young

White Rose Essay

The Holocaust was a terrible event in history that took place in Europe but also affected the entire world. This essay will discuss how the non-military actions and policies taken by the U.S. government affected European Jews. From 1933 -1945 Jews were persecuted and killed in Europe by the Nazis. European Jews were ousted from their homes and communities unfairly and had little hope of leaving their country safely. One reason for this lack of hope was told in a video testimony by Kurt Levi, a German Jew who escaped Germany in the 1930s.

Kurt Levi described his detailed experience trying to leave Germany after being disbarred as a lawyer due to his religion. He first went to Switzerland and a friend asked him to move to South Africa, only to learn that antisemitism was growing outside of Europe as well, including in Johannesburg. He lied to the German government, signing a document

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swearing he would not attempt to immigrate through another country into the United States. After being initially rejected in New York, he spent 3 months living and surviving in Havana, Cuba where he described the government official's "heart" to be the reason for his consideration for entry into the USA. His parents had an even harder journey. His father was imprisoned in a Nazi camp. Kurt stated by pulling strings he got his father out of the camp by giving the Nazis everything they owned, but they had to leave the country in 30 days. When they could not get into the U.S., he had to pay \$20,000 to England where his parents stayed for 3 years until the United States immigration quota allowed them to enter to be with Kurt. (MCHE Kansas City, 2021)

The Acquiescence Memo (1944) written by the Treasury Secretary officials revealed that the State Department was "using a variety of tactics to limit the numbers of refugees who could enter the United States as immigrants". One of those tactics was the Memorandum of Conference on Curbing Immigration (1940), which stopped issuing border

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crossing cards and severely limited the number of visas. This was written in 1940 which was the year after Germany invaded Poland and the same year Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. This was also the year Nazis established the Lodz Ghetto, packing 164,000 Jews into an area of less than 4 square kilometers (World Holocaust Remembrance Center, 2025). These immigration policies were put into place during the height of Nazi military aggression, so even before the US officially entered the war, our government policies were affecting European Jews and their ability to immigrate and escape the Nazis.

Americans in the 1930s did not agree with taking refugees. This is a piece of information from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: "A Gallup poll taken on November 24–25, 1938, (two weeks after Kristallnacht) asked Americans: 'Should we allow a larger number of Jewish exiles from Germany to come to the United States to live?' 72% responded 'no'."

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Based on this poll result, even though people knew how bad it was for the European Jews, they were not willing to help them come to America. This seems to be similar to some Americans' opinions based on recent policies for immigration in today's world.

It was interesting to learn that during WWII the US government delayed the approval of rescue effort funding to save the Jews from extermination camps. The acquiescence memo brought this up and caused President Roosevelt to create the War Refugee Board, helping organize rescue efforts (Report to the Secretary, 1944). But this was after the US had entered the war. The difficulties Kurt Levi and his parents encountered during their immigration to the United States during the war are examples of how the quota limitations and immigration policies made it nearly impossible for Jews to safely leave Germany or other parts of Europe during the war. Imagine having to pay today's equivalent of almost \$500,000 for your Jewish parents to go to England to escape the Nazis. Not many families could afford that amount of money.

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As a relatively safe country, the US is very popular with immigrants.

The US does have a responsibility to allow people to be safe, but there should be a way to make sure the people coming here are coming for the right reasons. Deciding on these types of laws seems easy when looking at it from one side, but you have to consider both the person coming in and the country allowing them to enter.

Hearing Kurt Levi's video, and thinking about areas currently in wartime, the strict immigration policies seem unfair when looked at from the immigrant's point of view. As someone born in America, you can never really understand the fear of living in war or the struggles that immigrant families face to leave their homes and start fresh in a foreign country. Looking back, it seems like the US should have saved all the Jews and had them come to the US to escape the Holocaust. But horrible things are happening in the Middle East right now too, and the US is still limiting immigration. Are we doing the same thing to them that the government did in the 1940s? It's hard to say, the world is not the same

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as it was. But what is important is not to judge people for wanting to leave an area of the world that is violent and scary, just like Germany was for the Jews in WWII.

Memorandum of Conference with State Department and Immigration and Naturalization Service Officials on Curbing Immigration; 6/27/1940; General Visa Correspondence, 1914 - 1949; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. [Online Version, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/conference-immigration>, March 31, 2025]

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Introduction to the Holocaust." Holocaust Encyclopedia.

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